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Civil Society in Post-Transition South Korea

How Does Civil Society Contribute to Democratic
Consolidation?

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Abstract

This paper examines in which ways civil society can contribute to the consolidation of democracy in post-transition societies. The theoretical groundwork draws on Caroline Boussard's framework for analysis from her book *Crafting Democracy*, which distinguishes four functions of civil society for post-transition democratization (agenda setter, educator, counterpart, source of new political alternatives). Civil society's democracy-building potential is constrained by mainly two factors, namely the internal level of democracy and the political context.

Applying the framework to analyze civil society in post-transition South Korea yields the result that civil society in Korea has been filling all four functions outlined in the framework and has contributed to democratic consolidation in multiple ways.

Examining some civil society organizations' activities in detail, a distinction can be made between successful and unsuccessful efforts to promote change towards more democracy. The decisive factor is found to be in what way the calls for democratic reform are culturally framed.

Key words: Civil society, transition, democratic consolidation, framing, South Korea

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1 Introduction

“It is now widely believed that the existence of a vibrant civil society is an important factor, if not the single most important one, in the transition to and the consolidation of democracy.” (Park/Shin 2005: 64).

A transition to democracy is likely to be an emotional and dramatic event that engages the formerly repressed population. In comparison to that, post-transition problems of democratic consolidation do not seem equally dramatic and often do not attract as much international interest. However, it seldom happens that a transition ends with the emergence of a full-fledged democracy. Typically, new democracies are fragile, poorly institutionalized and low-performing. Huntington tells us that each wave of democratization has been followed by a reverse wave back to authoritarian rule (1991). A new democracy faces the challenge of moving forward to become a well-functioning political system that is perceived as legitimate among both the political elite and the broader mass public (Boussard 2003: 3).

1.1 Purpose

In this paper, I focus on civil society’s role in the post-transition democratization process. What can civil society contribute to democratization and democratic consolidation? Democratization literature often states the importance of a functioning civil society for democracy without specifying *how* civil society can help build democracy.

Boussard suggests looking at four defined roles of civil society in a post-transition democratization process, namely civil society as an agenda setter, an educator, a counterpart, and a source of new political alternatives (2003). These functions and how each of them can contribute something to consolidation will be examined in detail on the theoretical level. To do that, it is also necessary to clarify first what is meant by democratic consolidation.

Then I will apply the theoretical findings to the empirical case of civil society in South Korea. The case is famous as one where civil society played a crucial role in initiating the transition to democracy (Boussard 2003: 99). It is therefore interesting to analyze how civil society developed after the transition and whether it has been able to make any contributions to deepening democracy since then.

Questions to be answered are: what does civil society contribute to democratic consolidation? In what ways does civil society help build democracy? How has South Korean civil society developed since the transition to democracy? In which cases has civil society in South Korea had an impact on political decisions and

brought about changes that can be considered to have deepened democracy? Moreover, I will briefly look at what determines success or failure of civil society efforts to promote democratization. This section might seem to be heading in a different direction, but it does introduce some more case-specific information and opens up another interesting angle for the analysis of civil society.

1.2 Theory

The focus will be on clarifying what researchers in the fields of civil society and democratization have found out so far, I will not try to develop theory myself.

My sources probably do not all come from the same theoretical background, so what can be said briefly is that one of the main sources, Caroline Boussard, takes an actor-structure approach to the study of transitions and democratization, and does not want to situate herself as clearly belonging in either the positivist school or the hermeneutic approach in social sciences, but instead takes a middle stance between explaining and understanding. The conceptual framework she develops cannot be regarded as a complete theory, but could be seen as a preparatory construct to a theory (Boussard 2003: 10).

1.3 Method and Material

I will conduct a literature study and use secondary sources to arrive at an understanding about civil society functions in democratic consolidation. This means that I have not conducted any empirical study myself.

The sources I cite have made use of multiple research designs, notably a single case study based on written and interview material in the case of Boussard. The sources on my case of South Korea mainly rely on written material such as newspaper articles and website material, and on interviews to a smaller extent.

1.4 Outline

After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 follows, consisting of a discussion of the theoretical background. The concepts of civil society and consolidation of democracy will be explained.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical core of the paper and draws heavily on Boussard's framework for analysis presented in her book *Crafting Democracy*. It presents the functions civil society has in a democratization process and describes civil society's democracy building potential with its restricting factors.

Chapter 4 then introduces the case of South Korea and makes statements about what can be expected for civil society when looking at the democratic transition.

Chapter 5 gives a description of civil society in South Korea and analyzes its role in democratic consolidation.

The last chapter provides the conclusion.

2 Theoretical Background

In this chapter I will present the theoretical background for the analysis. The framework of analysis, which will be presented in the next chapter, mainly draws on two concepts: civil society and post-transition consolidation of democracy. These will therefore be closely examined in this chapter.

2.1 Civil Society

What is civil society? It has become a paradigmatic concept in the field of development policy and practice. Critics have condemned the concept for being ambiguous and too empirically diffuse, and therein lies some of its success till the present day: it can be claimed by most anyone (Howell/Pearce 2001: 1).

The idea of civil society¹ is not new but has a tradition in political thought that begins in modern philosophy with thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, who speak of a ‘political society.’ In the 18th and 19th centuries, a sphere of social activity which is distinguished from the state was described by Tocqueville. Contemporary theorists describe it as a sphere within which citizens may freely organize themselves into groups and associations in order to make the formal bodies of state authority adopt policies consonant with their interest and demands. It is to be located somewhere in between the spheres of the state on the one hand and the individual’s family on the other (Pietrzyk 2003: 39).

Civil society is a realm of organized social life. It is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. It differs from “society” in general in that citizens act collectively in a public sphere, expressing their interests, preferences, and ideas, exchanging information to the purpose of achieving collective goals and making demands on the state. Those goals can be to improve

¹ The terms ‘social capital,’ ‘civil society,’ ‘political culture,’ and ‘associational life’ are sometimes used interchangeably or in a not clearly delineated manner. In order to keep them apart, I will only use the term ‘civil society’ here. Social capital has been used to help explain a variety of political and economic outcomes (Brehm/Rahn 1997: 1000). The concept has gained popularity in the fields of democratization and development in the 1990s, when cultural factors were increasingly incorporated into models of development and economic growth (Fukuyama 2002: 24). It is seen as a means to build democratic processes and strengthen democratic participation (Smith 2006: 320). Social capital refers to connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 2000: 19).

the structure and functioning of the state and holding state officials accountable (Diamond 1999:221).

Civil society is located in between the private sphere and the state. Neither parochial society, i.e. individual and family life and inward-looking group activity, nor economic society, i.e. the profit-seeking enterprises of individual business firms, are part of civil society. Political society, meaning those organized actors who are seeking to win control of the state or an individual position in it (in a democracy, mainly political parties and campaign organizations), are likewise not a part of civil society (Diamond 1999: 221).

Actors in civil society are essentially market-oriented and recognize the principles of state authority and the rule of law. To be secure and able to prosper, they need the protection of an institutionalized legal order. In this way, civil society restricts state power, but simultaneously legitimates state authority based on the rule of law (Diamond, 1999: 222).

Civil society is made up by a multitude of formal and informal organizations in various fields such as economics, culture, information and education, interests, development, issues (such as environment protection, women's rights etc.), and civic topics (improving the political system and making it more democratic). It consists of "all the voluntarily formed non-profit collectivities that seek to promote or to protect an interest and that are part neither of the state nor of the family sphere." (Boussard 2003: 81).

Importantly, civil society is not inherently virtuous or pro-democratic. It can also be "uncivil society" in that it is not necessarily civic minded or conducive to democratic virtues.

2.2 Consolidating Democracy

To start with, we will concur with Diamond's normative statement that democracy is the best form of government and the establishment of a liberal democracy (a political system in which individual and group liberties are well protected and in which there exist autonomous spheres of civil society and private life, insulated from state control) is taken to be the ultimate goal of any transition to democracy. The principal consequence of consolidation is the stability and persistence of democracy. Consolidation, then, is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimacy, so that all significant political actors believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any realistic alternative. Democracy has to become "the only game in town," its rules, norms, and procedures have to become internalized to a degree that the commitment to democracy is deep, unquestioned, and routinized. Democratic consolidation encompasses a shift in political culture (Diamond 1999: 65).

We can only speak of consolidation when no significant collective actors challenge the legitimacy of democratic institutions or regularly violate its constitutional norms, procedures, and laws. In any democracy, there will still be

extremists who reject democratic ideas, but in a consolidated democracy, these antidemocrats must be truly marginal (Diamond 1999: 66f.).

There are three generic tasks that all new and fragile democracies have to handle in order to become consolidated: democratic deepening, political institutionalization, and regime performance.

2.2.1 Regime Performance

Performance includes the political outputs and character of the regime, as well as the material conditions it generates. It appears as an intervening variable that mediates the effects of other factors on regime legitimacy. The relationship between legitimacy and performance is reciprocal. The more successful a regime is in providing what people want, the greater its legitimacy, and the deeper the belief in the regime's legitimacy, the more efficacious is the regime to formulate policy responses to society's problems (Diamond, 1999: 77).

Looking at performance it makes sense to distinguish between economic and political performance. Economic performance refers to a regime's capacity to produce and distribute improvements in living standards. Much research has been done on the relationship between economic development and democracy, the majority of which has shown a sturdy positive influence of affluence on the chances of democratic survival (Vanhanen 1989, Diamond 1992, Rueschemeyer/Stephens/Stephens 1992, Lipset 1994, Ersson/Lane 1996, Przeworski et. al. 2000, among others). However, favorable economic circumstances do not in themselves ensure consolidation. Conversely, in the case of economic crisis, political performance will be crucial in determining whether democracy can survive or not.

The other facet of regime performance that citizens value most is dubbed political performance and includes citizens' safety and security, and peace (Diamond 1999: 89). Democracy presumes the notion of a *Rechtsstaat*, it requires law and order. Combating corruption is a major performance challenge for democratic consolidation.

2.2.2 Political Institutionalization

In order to be consolidated, three types of political institutions need to be strengthened: the state administrative apparatus (the bureaucracy), the institutions of democratic representation and governance (political parties, legislatures, the electoral system), and the structures that ensure horizontal accountability, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, such as the judicial system and auditing and oversight agencies.

Strengthening the bureaucracy requires the establishment of a professionalized, meritocratic bureaucracy with relatively good pay, competitive standards of recruitment, and ideally, an *esprit de corps*. A reorganized police force is especially important since the police often are the agents of state authority

with whom ordinary citizens are most likely to interact in daily life (Diamond 1999: 93ff.).

Even if diverse civil society organizations are more important to the representation of interests than ever before, the need for political parties is undiminished, since interest groups cannot aggregate interests as broadly across social groups and political issues as political parties can. Only parties can provide the necessary discipline to form and maintain governments and pass legislation. Only parties can transform diverse identities and interests into laws, policies, and coalitions (Diamond 1999: 96f.).

Elected legislatures need to have resourceful organizational structures so they can engage, challenge, and check executive officials and state bureaucracies. This requires legal and technical skill in writing legislation and reviewing budgets, functional committees with professional staffs, a library and information service, and a means to promote citizen access to the legislative process (Diamond 1999: 98).

2.2.3 Democratic Deepening

Deepening democracy – making it more liberal, accountable, responsive, and representative – overlaps with several of the challenges discussed above, but it also entails new ones. Power has to be decentralized and transferred to lower levels, autonomous groups and media in civil society need to develop capacities to check the abuse of power and form additional means for interest representation. Importantly, the military has to be firmly subordinated to civilian control and committed to the democratic constitutional order, which poses a great challenge for many new democracies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

3 Civil Society and Democratic Transitions

“Civil society advances democracy in two generic ways: by helping to generate a transition from authoritarian rule to (at least electoral) democracy and by deepening and consolidating democracy once it is established.” (Diamond 1999: 233).

The argument’s starting point is that civil society fulfills different functions during and after the transition phase. Civil society’s most important function during the transition seems to be a countervailing power function, whereas its functions in the post-transition period has multiple facets of both state supporting and countervailing powers (Boussard 2003: 97).

A transition is regarded to be completed when the first democratically elected representatives have formed a government. Because even a successful transition does not guarantee a flawless democracy to emerge, the functions of civil society in a post-transition setting have to do with supporting the new democratic regime are more explicitly democracy-building than before and during the transition. Still, civil society can play the role of countervailing power after the transition as well, but this function is more problematic as it might harm the new democracy by demanding reforms that reach too far (efficiency-legitimacy problem) (Boussard 2003: 101).

3.1 Functions of Civil Society

The most basic democratic function of civil society is to provide the basis for the limitation of state power, hence for the control of the state by society, and hence for democratic political institutions as the means of exercising that control (Huntington 1984, cited in Diamond 1999: 239). Checking, monitoring, and restraining that exercise of power by formally democratic states and holding them accountable to the law and public expectations of responsible government are examples of what this function involves after the transition. The democracy-building functions civil society fulfills in a post-transition state are diverse. Diamond distinguishes as many as thirteen different roles (Diamond 1999: 241-250). Boussard opts for a simpler and probably more useful set of four functions of civil society in the post-transition period: an agenda setter, an educator, a counterpart, and a source of new political alternatives. Every one of these categories includes elements of civil society both in the version of countervailing power and the version of civility-generator (Boussard 2003: 101f.).

3.1.1 Agenda Setter

This function includes a variety of activities that civil society can undertake to set priorities for political agendas. Observing and identifying democratic deficits, bringing them to public attention and demanding reform are examples of what civil society may do to challenge the existing system and contribute to political institutionalization. This includes informing citizens about the state of democracy, dealing with politicians, or campaigning to make potential flaws and problems of democratic government an issue (Boussard 2003: 102).

In the role of agenda setter, civil society can represent and articulate interests and thus create public opinion. The latter can sometimes overlap with political parties' function in a democracy, which includes aggregating and representing interests. The important difference between political parties and civil society is that civil society does not seek to attain formal power. In a post-transitional society the parties might be associated with the former non-democratic regime or have no popular base. In these cases, civil society might serve as a substitute for parties in the meaning of aggregating and expressing interests.

If civil society functions well in the role of agenda setter, the result can be improved political institutionalization and eventually also increased legitimacy for the democratic regime (ibid.: 102f.).

3.1.2 Educator

Quite straightforwardly, this function includes civil society activities such as educating citizens politically by spreading information about the democratic system, informing about citizens' rights and duties, and helping people to build up a trust in the democratic system without losing a healthy skepticism. This learning process can take place in informal ways such as through learning by doing within CSOs (civil society organizations). This of course would require that the organizations in themselves are democratically structured and civil, so they can become the "schools of democracy" Tocqueville speaks of (Boussard 2003: 103).

Not only citizens are potential receivers of education through civil society efforts. Politicians and civil servants can profit from civil society as a pool of competence in matters such as leadership training, organizational management, or specific topics like human rights or environment issues.

Civil society as an educator can provide the democratic competence that is necessary to participate in the political process for citizens on the one hand, and help increase competence among politicians and civil servants, which may in turn lead to better regime performance and increased legitimacy for the regime, on the other hand.

3.1.3 Counterpart

This function refers to civil society helping to improve regime performance by providing advice to the political society by means of partnerships and coalitions. These can take the form of joint projects with CSOs cooperating with governmental institutions. By participating and monitoring, civil society can ensure the efficient implementation of policies, thus increasing public accountability and regime performance. It can be said that while CSOs have the advantage of having more contacts, knowledge, and field presence than state agencies do, they can only fulfill the role of counterpart as long as they remain autonomous from the state. At the point where CSOs receive funding to implement government policies civil society's democracy-building potential is in danger of being undermined.

As seen before with both previous roles, this function of civil society can lead to increased legitimacy of the new democratic regime by contributing to increased efficiency.

3.1.4 Source of New Political Alternatives

This function includes possibilities such as a transfer of leadership from civil society to political society. Also, administrative staff may be recruited from the ranks of CSOs. Since there is often an accumulation of knowledge within civil society that stems from taking over state tasks such as the delivery of welfare services during the authoritarian regime, political society can profit from skills in organizational management to receive insights about modernizing the party structure, for instance (Boussard 2003: 105f.).

In some cases, civil society movements may even transform themselves into political parties. With existing parties possibly entangled with the old regime, this could increase pluralism and improve representation.

Civil society as a source of pluralism can open up new perspectives, inspire debates, and provide political alternatives and thus contribute to democratic deepening by bringing along increased regime performance and heightened legitimacy, much like the previous civil society functions rendered here.

Surprisingly, Boussard does not point to the inherent contradiction arising with this function: if CSOs were to turn into political parties to a larger extent, one can no longer speak of autonomy from the state or truly separate spheres of civil and political society. Similarly, transfer of leadership may be associated with the same problem of co-opting civil society. There might have to draw a line as to how much of civil society can be absorbed by political society without the extinction of civil society as a consequence. This line would be an arbitrary one in any case, so for now I will settle the matter with this cautionary remark.

3.2 Civil Society's Democracy-Building Potential

Civil society's democracy-building potential in the post-transition period is dependent on and constrained by several factors. There may be others as well, but let us focus on the three most important aspects here. These are: the civil society organizations' internal level of democracy, the political context (including the prior non-democratic regime's legacy) and the international dimension (development assistance).

3.2.1 Internal Level of Democracy

The wording "civil society" sometimes evokes the picture that civil society in itself is always something good and virtuous. Of course, this impression is wrong. CSOs' internal structure can be undemocratic, uncivil, and particularistic. Boussard therefore distinguishes between civic community and civil society. Civil society is an analytical category (as opposed to a normative category) that may include organizations with undemocratic goals, but only contains organizations with public objectives, while civic community most often includes organizations with nonpolitical ends as well (Boussard 2003: 88).

What internal level of democracy an organization displays and whether it confirms to criteria of openness and accountability, matters most for the educational function of civil society. Concerning its function as a countervailing power, it is not as important whether the organization is democratic and civil or not. To serve as the "free schools for democracy" Tocqueville spoke of, CSOs need to adhere to democratic processes of decision making and leadership selection. Members should be encouraged to participate actively (Diamond 1999: 228).

Problems are likely to arise with organizations that have formal democratic structures but use undemocratic methods in their informal practice. These could be patron-client relations, repression of dissidents within the organization, hierarchical leadership ideas, among others (Diamond 1999: 229f.).

Stretching the concept of "internal" democracy a little bit, but still important to civil society as a whole, is the nature of inter-organizational relations. The idea of civil society as a source of pluralism does not allow for organizations with undemocratic or uncompromising ends. No single organization should claim to represent the interests of society as a whole (Boussard 2003: 91).

On first glance, what was just said appears to go against our definition of civil society as including all kinds of organizations as long as they have political objectives. If we now say CSOs 'should' not be undemocratic internally and discriminate against other CSOs externally, this does not mean that we are introducing civil society as a normative category through the back door. What it means is that in order to be able to make a statement about how civil society can promote democracy by providing civic education, we can only consider organizations that follow democratic norms and procedures as the distributors of

this kind of civic education. Nevertheless, in our model, even undemocratic organizations can function as antidote or countervailing power to the state, and hence contribute to democratization in another way.

3.2.2 Political Context

The idea that it matters for the present what happened in that past is the centerpiece of the path-dependency argument that is well acclaimed in democratization literature as well as peace and conflict studies (Kreuzer/Pettai 2004). Path-dependency suggests that the paths available for democratic transition and the prospects for democracy in the future depend on the character of the prior non-democratic regime. The idea of a structured-contingency approach, as Boussard calls it, is that structural conditions become manifest in political institutions and rules which, during and after regime changes, shape the preferences and capacities of actors.

Linz and Stepan (1996) distinguish four types of non-democratic regimes (authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian, and sultanistic) formed along four dimensions that are: pluralism, ideology, leadership, and mobilization. Since the case of South Korea mostly is categorized as an authoritarian regime, I will leave out a description of the other types here.

Authoritarian systems are usually characterized by limited political pluralism and extensive social and economic pluralism. Leadership is based on more or less predictable norms, the leaders are seldom charismatic. Ideology does not play a great role. There is normally no particular political mobilization (Boussard 2003: 108).

According to Linz and Stepan the different regime types prior to the transition affect post-transition development towards consolidation in five arenas. These are political society, civil society, rule of law, a working state apparatus, and economic society. Here we are interested in civil society only, and what influences civil society in the post-transition setting is the degree of pluralism in the preceding non-democratic regime. In an authoritarian society, civil society can exist and be quite lively (ibid.: 109).

The final important factor in terms of a legacy that is left over in the post-transition society is the mode of transition. Gunther et al. (1995) and Schmitter (1995) speak of mainly three modes of transition: transition by means of transaction, by means of extrication, and by means of replacement. The transition in South Korea appears to be a case of a transition by means of extrication, so I will leave out a description of the other types here. A transition by means of extrication refers to a joint action between the governing elite and the opposition.

What is also important, perhaps more obviously so, is the current political context. The state provides the political-legal framework that is a pre-requisite for civil society and can therefore be seen as its enabler. By setting up institutions and granting legal protection and financial support the state can facilitate civil society's work (Boussard 2003: 93). Conversely, the state can also use these means to restrict civil society.

The state might use different strategies to undermine civil society's functioning as a countervailing power. Co-opting, or including, strategies are a way for the state to control civil society and weaken its autonomy by subsuming it into political society.

3.2.3 International Dimension

The fact that we can speak of a third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991) starting in the 1970s suggests that what causes states to undergo a transition to democracy does not only have to do with domestic factors. International dynamics that are likely to influence democratization processes are, first and foremost, aid payments by donors made directly to or channelled through CSOs, and international networks of NGOs as well as transnational social movements creating a global civil society. The practice of building up and sustaining local civil societies through development aid cannot be neglected when studying civil society's democracy-building function in newly established democracies. However, this appears to be more important when looking at democratization in Third World countries, whereas South Korea is not labelled a developing country any more, so I will leave out a discussion of development aid for this case.

4 The Korean Democratic Transition

To begin with, I will briefly summarize the political history of South Korea (after this: Korea) as far as it is relevant to the following analysis. Next, a closer look at the Korean transition to democracy will draw on some of the concepts of the framework for analysis. Thereafter I will turn to the analysis of civil society in Korea.

4.1 Brief Historical Overview

In 1987, mass demonstrations were a clear sign that Korea was on the brink of major economic and political upheaval. The protests had been triggered by president Chun's decision to hold the forthcoming presidential election under existing rules designed to favor his nominee, Roh Tae Woo. On June 29th, 1987, Roh Tae Woo's Democratic Declaration put an end to 26 years of military-based authoritarian rule. Democratization triggered a wave of labor unrest and a united democratic opposition seemed to be destined for victory in the upcoming December presidential elections. However, the opposition fragmented and lost, so Roh defeated the country's two best-known dissidents, Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung (Armstrong 2007: 41). The ruling party of the authoritarian era eventually merged with two of the opposition parties. Economic and political development followed a graduated path of reform paying attention to the legacy of authoritarian industrialization (Kong 1997: 91ff.).

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 hit Korea hard. Kim Dae-Jung was elected president in 1997 and became the first opposition candidate to win an election. During his term the country's economy rebounded to become one of the most robust in Asia (Freedom House 2007).

In 2003 Roh Moo-Hyun took office as president. He survived a political crisis in 2004, when the opposition brought a parliamentary motion to impeach him. His popularity is on the decline and his Uri party suffered losses in provincial elections in 2006 (Freedom House 2007).

Korea's economic development since the 1960s has been very fast; it gained the status of developed country and is now defined as a high-income nation by the World Bank (World Bank 2007). It became a member of the OECD in 1996, and its Human Development Index is rated as High at 0,912 (Human Development Report 2006).

4.2 Political Rights and Civil Liberties

The Freedom House Index rated Korea as “not free” or “partly free” until 1987, and has been rating it as “free” since 1988 (Freedom House Index 2007). Although democratization started relatively late, its pace has been fast, today Korea has successfully completed the first stage of democratization, and the twin goals of economic prosperity and political pluralism have been accomplished, while still being among the most militarized nations in the world. The country has now entered the second stage of democratization, democratic consolidation (Im 2000: 21).

Korea is an electoral democracy with regularly held free and fair elections on the basis of universal suffrage. The 1988 constitution vests executive power in a directly elected president, who serves a single five-year term. The National Assembly consists of one chamber with 299 members and is elected for a four-year term (Harenberg Aktuell 2007: 622f.). Korean politics shows robust political pluralism with many parties taking part in the competition for power. Major parties include the Uri party, the MDP (Millennium Democratic Party), the GNP (Grand National Party), the ULP (United Liberal Democrats), and the DLP (Democratic Labor Party) (Freedom House 2007).

Although the political system is considered overall healthy, bribery, influence peddling, and extortion by officials do still occur in politics, business, and everyday life.

The National Security Law (NSL) has been in effect since 1948. It assumes an antagonistic relationship with North Korea and combines legitimate counterespionage measures with prohibitions on “anti-state activities” and “benefiting the enemy,” and restrictions on expression, movement, and the media. The law was a major issue in 2006, retaining support among a section of the public and Parliament, while the opponents were divided between advocates of reform and of total abolition. No consensus could be found, so the law remains unchanged (Freedom House 2007). Surprisingly, the level of incarceration under this law has not diminished since political liberalization. Since 1988, over 1,600 people were arrested under the NSL, the conviction rate being over 99% (Steinberg 2000: 220).

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and academic freedom is also unrestricted with the exception of limits in pro-North Korean or pro-Communist statements. Freedom of association is granted, although the police must be informed of all demonstrations or rallies in advance. The judiciary is considered independent; the police are generally well-disciplined and uncorrupt (Freedom House 2007).

4.3 The Korean Democratic Transition

This section will examine the Korean transition to democracy using some of the ideas laid out in the framework for analysis above. We will examine what theoretical predictions about the prospects of civil society after the transition can be made, so that in the next section we can see how these correspond to the actual development of civil society.

4.3.1 Mode of Transition

The Korean transition to democracy is an example of a transition from an economically successful authoritarian regime. It was caused by a “crisis of success,” meaning that the authoritarian regime had accomplished its historical mission of economic development and rendered itself obsolete in the process. New historical necessities such as greater freedom and welfare for the masses arose, which needed to be met by a new form of government (Im 2000: 24). Coming out of a “crisis of success” is a favourable starting point for consolidation. The state is not bankrupt, the bureaucracy is relatively efficient. Unlike democracies born out of a “crisis of failure,” they do not face the difficult tasks of political and economic transformation at the same time (ibid.: 24).

Im (2000) characterizes the transition in South Korea as close to Samuel Huntington’s “transplacement,” Donald Share’s “transition through transaction,” Karl and Schmitter’s “transition by pact,” and Przeworski’s “democracy with guarantees.” The transition emerged out of a protracted and inconclusive stand-off between the authoritarian regime and its democratic opponents. The June 29 declaration and the ensuing constitution were a political pact, in which authoritarian power holders were guaranteed their incumbent status in exchange for democratic concessions (Im 2000: 25).

The collapse of the Chun regime was much due to the tremendous popular resistance organized by civil society groups such as student activists, labor activists, and middle-class moderate political reformists, not so much due to a split in the authoritarian regime between soft-liners and hardliners (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 4). From late 1983 to June 1987, protests against the regime were so enormous that the regime changed its hard-line repression strategy into a soft-line surrender and (forced) compromise course (Seong 2000: 89).

Civil society groups initiated and directed the entire process of democratization through a pro-democracy alliance within civil society, creating a grand coalition with the opposition political party, and eventually pressuring the authoritarian regime to yield to the popular upsurge from below (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 5).

The implications of the mode of transition in this case should not be negative for civil society. The experience of success in initiating the transition would presumably strengthen civil society.

4.3.2 Path-dependency: Korea's Legacy from the Past

The democracy in Korea came out of a “market authoritarian regime,” i.e., an authoritarian regime that stressed market rationality and economic liberalization. A market authoritarian state provides a better foundation for market-oriented economic and structural reform than do other types of authoritarian regimes. Also, the state-society ties in a market authoritarian regime are typically weak, which is an advantage because there are no strong links between the authoritarian state and social organizations. The state tries to demobilize and depoliticize civil society, and when popular sectors rise up, they cannot build an organized base of support. Chun Doo-Hwan's market-oriented policies meant the disappearance of rents furnished by the state (subsidies, protection from foreign competition) for big business. By strengthening market principles, the state lost big business as a partner to form a strong authoritarian coalition with (Im 2000: 24).

As mentioned before, the existence of pluralism during the authoritarian period bodes well for civil society's prospects to build democracy after the transition. However, a successful economic modernization under the authoritarian regime can also entail a phenomenon called the “paradox of success.” The collective memory of the authoritarian period is not as negative as it is in cases where the rulers have been brutal and destroyed the economy to enrich themselves. With economic success and a low degree of repressiveness, the authoritarian regime may not seem to have been that bad in hindsight. If such perceptions are common in society, that poses a problem for democratic development in new democracies (Boussard 2003: 110).

Because the transition was made through pacts, guarantees, or negotiations among elites, continuity with the authoritarian past prevailed in the policies of the new democratic governments. Democracy in Korea has been anemic and conservative. The legacies of the authoritarian past have hindered the institutionalization of democratic rules of the game and the expansion of democracy from the political to the social and economic areas (Im 2000: 25f).

A democracy heavily based on a compact of elites and which state-based elites, most importantly the military, were still very powerful, imposes limits on the broadening and deepening of democracy. Even if the balance of elites has shifted as the power of the military was reduced and the *chaebol* played a more direct and assertive role in politics, this constellation contains the seeds of future conflict between the state and social forces and among social forces which threatens the stability of democracy (White 1995: 63).

5 Civil Society in Post-Transition Korea

Under the authoritarian regimes from Syngman Rhee to Chung Doo-Hwan, an almost omnipotent state based on overwhelming force had ruled over society without popular consent. The lives of ordinary people were under quite firm state control. Basic civil rights, such as freedom of association, freedom of speech and expression, and political rights such as voting and running for public office were denied or distorted. During this time, Korean society was passive and submissive, though occasionally rebellious. For example, during the high time of Chun's military regime, between about 1983 and 1986, some highly politicized groups made up of student and labor activists, were extremely militant. Their aim was to overthrow Chun's regime by all means, even revolutionary ones, and replace it with a socialist or populist regime. Therefore, the relationship between state and society was inherently antagonistic (Seong 2000: 88). However, one should not exaggerate civil society's pre-transition strength. Civil society's density, scope, and level have increased after June 29, 1987; it has become thicker, wider, and better organized vertically and horizontally. Also, its role has changed from anti-statism and democratization of the authoritarian regime to reforming state policies and deepening and consolidating democracy (ibid.: 89).

5.1 Configuration of Civil Society, 1987-Present

Since 1987, two trends have characterized civil society in Korea: the first is the emergence and expansion of new social movement groups called "citizens' movement groups," the second is the transformation and adjustment of the existing people's movement groups (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 106). The number of newly founded civic organizations pursuing public interests increased dramatically since 1987. The organizations that existed pre-1987 were rarely public-oriented or civic, but more often large protest organizations like student movement organizations, organizations with specific interests such as labor unions, and groups of dissident intellectuals, all together forming a resistant and contentious civil society, but only in an embryonic form (Koo 2002: 42).

Following a tentative transition period during the Roh Tae-Woo presidency (1988-93), when state repression of civil society reappeared, civil society has been flourishing. The 1990s saw a rapid expansion of citizens' movement groups, exemplified by the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), and the Korean Federation of

Environmental Movements (KFEM), which are now recognized as the most representative NGOs in Korea (Kim Seung-Kyung 2004: 466).

The issues advocated by those movements mushrooming in the 1990s differ from the issues that were on the agenda in earlier decades. Whereas the Grand Democracy Movement of 1985-87 united in the struggle against Chun's authoritarian regime campaigning for democratization, reunification and against American imperialism (Kim Sunhyuk 1996: 91), today's movements address a wide range of issues of a broad social character, such as environmental protection, women's rights, consumer protection, and economic justice (White 1995: 63).

The expansion of the scope of social participation not only allows civil society to play a disciplinary role in relation to the state, notably the military, but also in relation to key social elites, first and foremost the *chaebol* (White 1995: 74).

The bifurcation of civil society into citizens' and people's movements is visible in the composition of members, the issues addressed and the methods employed. Citizens' movement groups are mostly made up of middle-class citizens such as white-collar workers, professionals, religious leaders, and intellectuals. They emphasize gradual institutional reforms and rely on legal and nonviolent methods such as publicity campaigns, lectures, and the distribution of pamphlets. The issues range from fair elections and the fight against corruption to consumers' rights, the environment and gender inequality. The people's movement groups, on the other hand, are mainly made up of blue-collar laborers, peasants, the urban poor, students, and local residents. Pursuing fundamental and structural reforms, they prioritize overcoming various forms of political and economic inequalities. Their methods often include illegal and violent measures such as strikes, demonstrations, and sit-ins (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 107; 129).

The most important factor that brought about such a fundamental social transformation was democratization. The democratic transition made available a free and safe public space that triggered the upsurge of civil society. People were provided basic civil rights, with some exceptions (see ch. 4.2 above), and political rights. This made it possible for people to organize in independent civil organizations and movement organizations (Seong 2000: 87f.).

5.2 Civil Society's Role in Consolidating Democracy in Korea

An institutionalized civil society can contribute to democratic consolidation in various ways. NGOs can supervise, control, and restrict the elected representatives' execution of power. This "control from below" adds to the transparency of politics and puts pressure on politicians to care about citizens' interests. Especially since mistrust in politicians and dissatisfaction with politics in general are quite present in Korean society, it seemed like politicians and the parliament were a major obstacle on the road to reform. In 1999, 40 NGOs got together to form an association to monitor the parliament. They supervised

parliamentarians at work and held interrogations to make clear that the representatives owed their positions to a mandate and should be concerned about the citizens' interests.

Likewise NGOs can have an eye on illegal financial activities of the *chaebols*, big business trusts (such as Samsung, Hyundai, LG etc.). In this vein, the PSPD (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy) examined the business practices of SK-Telecom and Samsung Electronics and criticized them in public.

Civil society can articulate problems locally and set up service programs. *Local Agenda 21* is a program that was started at the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. NGOs as a contact point for citizens voiced locally specific problems in making the plans and implementing them. This way, they made work easier for the government and private enterprises (ibid.: 12).

NGOs also worked in partnerships with the government and private firms to help alleviate unemployment and implement the economic reform. Environmental organizations took on tasks of controlling whether environment protection standards were followed or security standards at the workplace were adequate.

In 1997 thirteen NGOs joined to form the *Forum for Civic Education in Korea*. Several workshops were held and a law to support the democratic education of citizens was drafted.

CSOs are also a source of personnel for leading roles in politics and the administration, especially since the Kim Young-Sam presidency (1993-97) many NGO leaders have advanced to hold important positions in parties and the government (ibid.: 13).

In January 2000, as many as 473 NGOs from all over the country formed the *Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 elections*. Civil society saw the biggest obstacle to reform in old politics and the paralyzed parliament. Regionalism and cronyism, intransparent or closed parties and the nomination of candidates according to monetary or personal relationships were identified as the main causes for voter dissatisfaction. A list with 114 names of politicians who were found unsuitable to be nominated was the main point of attack. Much research was done to find out whether candidates had been guilty of corruption, breaking the election law, violating the democratic constitution or human rights. Based on the findings on these points and other facts about the person, candidates were "de-nominated" and listed on the Alliance's homepage (ibid.: 18).

This movement was prohibited by the election law. The Alliance's demands led to an amendment of this law, but mass demonstrations remained illegal. The parties' reaction was to largely ignore the Alliance's blacklisting of candidates and 46 candidates on the list were nominated nonetheless. The Alliance kept up the movement and campaigns were made in every district with a new "non-nominated"-list of 86 candidates. The results were visible. Despite the low voter turnout of 57.2%, 59 candidates out of 86 on the list were not elected. 41.8% of incumbent parliamentarians were voted out, and 106 new candidates were voted in.

Next, I will give examine the activities of civil society in its various functions stated above in chapter 3.1.

5.2.1 Agenda Setter

Civil society organizations that have started to pursue general and public interests have come to be more important than the traditional interest organizations which serve narrower special interests (such as employers' associations and labor unions). Ordinary Koreans consider civic organizations the most trustworthy and influential groups in dealing with important public issues. The reason seems to be that civic organizations focus on the broader public and its concerns with the quality of life, whereas traditional interest groups only cater to specific groups' or classes' interests (Seong 2000: 92).

Environmental protection, corruption, welfare, efficient traffic control, educational reform, and crime control are issues that cut across class and sectoral concerns and were ignored or neglected during the protracted struggles with the authoritarian regimes (ibid.: 92). As the authoritarian regime ceased to exist, such issues were taken up by CSOs who also formed broad networks and nationwide associations connecting groups with similar objectives, for instance KFEM (Korea Federation for Environmental Movement), gathering over 40 environmental groups in 1993, or KCCM (Korean Coalition of Citizens' Movement), a network of 36 individual CSOs from various fields (Koo 2002: 42).

An example of successful agenda setting can be seen in the CCEJ's demands for a "real-name" system of bank accounts and real estate registration. The CCEJ publicized its demand widely through public conferences, petitions, and press reports. Though not adopted by the Roh Tae Woo government, the measures called for were finally implemented by the Kim Young Sam government soon after its accession in 1993. The CCEJ had thus linked popular demands with its reformist goals and moderate strategy on the one hand and the government's reform policies on the other hand to set this issue of corruption control on the public agenda (Seong 2000: 93).

The impetus for a clear break with the authoritarian past (an important instance on the road to consolidation) came first and foremost from political society. The new composition of the National Assembly after the 1988 elections empowered the opposition to push for investigations into irregularities of past governments (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 113). Roh Tae Woo was often characterized as "Chun with a wig" and was the greatest beneficiary of the past authoritarian regime, so his ability to liquidate the past was very limited. His regime seemed to be a liberalized authoritarianism at best, so the need for civil society to continue its pro-democracy struggle appeared vital (Kim Sunhyuk 1997: 1141). With the installation of the Kim Young Sam regime in 1993, more serious efforts to break with the past were made. Kim reshuffled the top command of the military, and the Board of Audit and Inspection began to investigate illegal acts or misconduct committed by public officials in the past.

Also, civil society became active in representing those who had been underrepresented before, for example, the urban poor, handicapped, elderly, homeless, jobless, street vendors, abused women, orphans, alcoholics, and other marginal groups who had been largely neglected by the government and private

organizations during the authoritarian era. After the democratic transition, new associations formed and existing organizations began to pay more attention to representing the rights and welfare of these groups. This is also an instance of agenda setting, as the protection and representation of the socially weak by civil groups does help ameliorate suffering and puts pressure on the government to listen to the demands of the weak. This in turn helps to keep those marginalized groups within the framework of democracy. Thus, civil society engagement on behalf of the neglected enhances democratic legitimacy and contributes to democratic consolidation (Seong 2000: 96f.).

5.2.2 Educator

If democracy is to sink deep roots, ordinary people have to become habituated to democracy at the level of voluntary associations. Democracy will remain superficial and fragile if people only practice it in the election booth (Seong 2000: 95).

Increasingly, democracy is being used actively in other arenas in Korea. Democratic principles and procedures are now applied in almost all significant civic organizations, movement organizations, and interest organizations. The CCEJ practices “committee democracy,” which means that major decisions are made by the committee members and those decisions are implemented by full-time or part-time staff. It is still possible that staff members identify critical issues, suggest proposals to the committees, and participate in committee meetings to explain their proposals. But the core principle of associational operation is that all major decisions are made collectively by the committee members. This way, internal democracy is practiced and institutionalized in the CCEJ, as well as in other organizations (ibid.: 96).

Strikingly, even those organizations that were previously under state control have been largely democratized. For example, the Central Association of Farmers’ Cooperatives had its top executive appointed by the president during the authoritarian period, but this undemocratic practice was eliminated and the association’s procedures have been fully democratized since 1990. Similar internal democratization has been experienced by other organizations, too (ibid.: 96).

5.2.3 Counterpart

So-called vertical cooperation or coalition building, i.e., cooperation between the government and civil society, is an instance of civil society acting as a counterpart for the state. During the Kim Young Sam presidency, the government needed strong support from civil society for its comprehensive reform policies (among others, anticorruption campaigns and labor reform) that inevitably brought about resistance from vested interests. With support from civic organizations, movement

organizations, and the press, reform policies could be implemented effectively (Seong 2000: 98).

This type of cooperation has laid a foundation for democratic consolidation by enhancing regime performance. However, it is not yet solid enough and problems remain. For instance, coalitions are not built on political doctrine and programs, but rather on regionalism and personal ties.

5.2.4 Source of New Political Alternatives

Supplying political leaders to the parties and the government is another way in which an active civil society contributes to the consolidation of democracy. Through their work in CSOs, people learn to deliberate, coordinate, and represent the interests of their members or the general populace. They practice the organization of collective actions to achieve common goals. Ideally, they acquire the habits of discourse, tolerance, and compromise. The merits of such people are a sense of public interest, morality, professional skills in organization and representation, democratic habits, and popularity. These make them very eligible to become leaders of political parties or government officials.

Since the democratic opening in June 1987, many civil society leaders have been recruited as candidates by political parties, advisers, bureaucrats, or local leaders of parties, or for posts in the presidential office and other government agencies (Seong 2000: 97).

This is a very new phenomenon, since political elites used to be recruited from the high ranks of the military, the state bureaucracy, business, and academia.

Some critics (including Kim Sunhyuk 2000) argue that this kind of vertical co-optation of its leaders has weakened and depopulated civil society. Seong claims that this is not true in the case of Korean civil society, as it rests on strong organizational and human resource bases (Seong 2000: 97).

Kim fears that the disappearance of the conflictual civil society-state relationship also means that civil society is becoming vulnerable to the attempt by the state to incorporate and “statize” civil society. He provides some examples: the CCEJ, several prominent leaders of which joined the government during the Kim Young Sam presidency, which jeopardized the existence and activities of the organization, and more recently, the KFEM lost one of its co-representatives when he was appointed as the Minister of Environment in May 1999. The Kim Dae Jung government’s Second-Nation-Building Campaign is characterized as an attempt by the government to “statize” as many civil society groups as possible to expand the mass base of the ruling party. He sees a serious threat to the consolidation of democracy in these developments (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 131f.).

5.3 (Un)Successful Framing of Civil Society Calls for Reform

Damron (2007) examines the contributions civil society can make to deepening democracy. So far, scholars have failed to consider the reasons some groups in civil society are successful in promoting reform, while others fail. To be able to identify exactly which contributions the groups make, scholars should address both negative and positive outcomes of civic activism.

His most important finding is that how civic groups frame their protest helps determine success. The concept of collective action framing gives us a better theoretical understanding of the relationship between civil society and democratic deepening (Damron 2007: 143).

As Diamond also notes earlier, even an active, pluralistic, resourceful, and institutionalized civil society does not ensure that every civic group will be successful in bringing about democracy-deepening reforms (1999: 260). Until now, we must assume that each civic group makes an equal contribution to (or is equally deficient in contributing to) the deepening of democracy.

Looking at some of the major players in Korean civil society, Damron finds that they are equally well-organized, but have varying success pushing for democratic reform. His point is that the groups' grievances and identities have to be socially constructed and communicated, and this process is crucial in explaining success and failure. Appropriate cultural frames are the key to social movement success, "even if those cultural frames are not grounded in liberal democratic values" (ibid.: 148).

The criteria he makes for success in promoting democratic reform are: (1) promoting change in government behavior or policy (successful); (2) increasing government discussion of the National Security Law (NSL) and other problem laws and policies (somewhat successful); (3) sparking government efforts to channel and monitor civic group protest activities in better ways (marginally successful).

As mentioned above, the NSL has been an ever-present hot topic in Korean political discourse. Many of the civic groups in Korea have pushed for reform of the NSL. Two of them who did so successfully, the CCEJ (Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice) and Minbyun (Minbyun – Lawyers for a Democratic Society, argued how the thinking justifying the use of the NSL compromises state priorities of national unity, traditional Confucian moral order, and reunification within Korean society. When their advocacy for reform fell within these cultural frames, their efforts were generally more successful (ibid.: 151).

CCEJ and Minbyun argued that the state priority of national union was broken because of government use of the NSL, and the state should "execute the law more rationally and justly." (Kim 1998, cited in Damron 2007: 151). Rather than advocating liberal democratic principles such as freedom of speech, these groups sought to maintain the existing framework for reform and appealed to traditional moral order, the state's duty and privilege to exercise paternal patience and

correct wrong ideological trends through education. So, while the actual problem with the NSL is that it compromises freedom of speech, those civic groups managed to frame this grievance in a way that invoked familiar traditional cultural images that both the government and the masses seem to adhere to. As a result of these and other efforts, the government began considering amending the NSL, so these groups were successful in promoting discussion of genuine reform in the National Assembly (Damron 2007: 152).

Damron mentions other groups who had identical goals, but framed the need for reform as a result of state failure to ensure that conditions exist where a marketplace of ideas can thrive in society. Rejecting the traditional values of national unity, preservation of a traditional moral order, and reunification (values that the state defines and controls), these groups tried promoting democratic reform by using frames like democracy-as-competition and individual rights. There is nothing wrong with these frames per se, but it seems they met with less success because they did not acknowledge state priorities and differed dramatically from traditional political culture (ibid.: 154).

Another example of unsuccessful framing is the human rights film festival on the initiative of Sarangbang Group for Human Rights in 1997. The organizers refused to submit films for pre-censorship. The director of Sarangbang was arrested, accused for violation of the NSL by showing films that “praised” and “benefited” North Korea. Their confrontational approach failed in getting the NSL amended and the group’s efforts were buried in the government’s legal wrangling. In its all-or-nothing attempt to force the government to retreat (scrapping the NSL and repealing the censorship law), Sarangbang left the government practically no choice but to enforce the NSL (ibid.: 157).

Another civil society group, the AFPP (Association of Families of Political Prisoners), has also been charged for violating the NSL. This group tried to provide a competitive source for information on human rights in Korea and engaged in more confrontational forms of protest that were occasionally illegal, although mostly not violent, but highlighted the illegitimacy of the state. Their protest activities were often blocked by the riot police. Through these measures, the police ultimately deflated AFPP’s power to disseminate information and mobilize for repeal of the NSL (ibid.: 155f.).

Returning to the frame of analysis (ch. 3.1), we can most clearly identify civil society in the role of agenda setter in the examples above. All of these groups have certainly identified democratic deficits (government enforcement of the NSL; curtailed freedom of speech), brought them to public attention, and demanded reform.

As for civil society’s democracy-building potential (ch. 3.2), it is probably safe to say that the CSOs mentioned above are not necessarily champions of internal democracy in their organizations. Damron does not delve into an analysis of their level of internal democracy, but reading between the lines one can assume that some of the organizations’ leaders are rather charismatic, and that the traditional Confucian, hierarchic order the CCEJ and Minbyun invoked towards the state may have been a feature of the organization within as well. The less successful organizations, including Sarangbang and AFPP, also went for more

confrontational tactics in their protest actions, which points to a generally questionable attitude towards violence within these organizations. Though tentative, we can imagine that these groups therefore would not function well as schools of democracy. But, as we have seen in the above examples, using culturally appropriate frames can still contribute to democratization, even if the frames in themselves are not necessarily 100 percent democratic. It appears that the internal level of democracy is not a decisive factor for civil society's function of agenda setter.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined how civil society contributes to democratization and consolidation of democracy theoretically and given some empirical evidence from civil society in South Korea to analyze how civil society's functions can be filled and what the outcome of civic activity can be.

The relationship between civil society and democratization could be made more comprehensible on the theoretical level; and empirically, we have seen that all four roles of civil society which are important in a post-transitional setting, namely agenda setting, educating, counterpart, and source of political alternatives, have been realized by civil society in Korea. In many areas, civil society contributions have made an impact that was very noticeable and clearly attributable to civil society. The examples of civic activity provided here were by no means exhaustive and there are certainly many more important organizations and movements that I have failed to mention.

The Korean case supports the widely held claim that civil society is an essential element in bringing about and in completing the democratization process in all new democracies (Koo 2002: 44). Comparing the country with other new democracies in Latin America or Europe, Korea is neither in a process of protracted unconsolidation nor in a process of authoritarian regression. The factors working for democratic consolidation are overwhelming the countervailing obstacles, so there is reason to be cautiously optimistic about the prospect of democracy in Korea (Im 2000: 45f.).

The most important contribution of civil society to the consolidation of democracy is the growth of civil society itself. The size and quality of civil society today make it impossible for any democratically elected government to abolish or suspend democracy to prolong its power. Civil society has the capacity to mobilize tremendous popular resistance across a wide range of social sectors and classes that could frustrate an antidemocratic attempt. Even if the military tried to wage a coup, civil society would be likely to withstand because the situation is entirely different from what it was in 1961 or 1980. Being vigorous and elaborately organized, civil society has grown strong enough to deter any attempt to overthrow democracy. Also, the economy is highly diversified and quite vital, and there are no fundamentally divisive social conflicts (Seong 2000: 95).

We have seen that civil society indeed becomes more active when the political context provides legal protection for civil society's activity, as was the case after 1987 in Korea. One of the most important issues in the politics of democratization since the democratic transition has been the liquidation of the authoritarian legacy. Although the initial impetus to pursue the perpetrators came from political society, civil society came back into the picture in 1997, when Chun and Roh

were amnestied and released, which was harshly criticized and protested by many civil society groups. However, the arrests and imprisonments of the two former presidents on various charges of insurrection and corruption served to establish a clear demarcation line between the authoritarian past and the democratic present, becoming an important symbol of a new era of democracy and the end of authoritarianism. Civil society groups played a very crucial role in democratic consolidation, and, as a result, an authoritarian regression has become extremely unlikely, if not unimaginable, in Korea today (Kim Sunhyuk 2000: 117).

However, some light could also be shed on the problem of what determines success or failure of civil society efforts. Also, being able to distinguish between individual groups' contributions to democratization is certainly an important progress in theory-building. It was said that any action contributes something in terms of agenda setting, raising awareness, and gaining public or even international public attention as long as it is just noticed by enough people or is covered in the media. Even so, those activities that reach a more tangible aim, such as a policy change, a law amendment, or a change in the composition of the National Assembly, are viewed as truly successful. I find Damron's work about the importance of framing grievances and identities in an appropriate way for the society and polity one is addressing very convincing.

Of course, civil society also has its weaknesses. Its power to influence government and politics is limited by the regionalism and party boss domination that pervade party politics and also by the highly centralized, personalist, and delegative nature of power in Korea's presidential system. The internal weaknesses of civil society lie in an excess of self-interests and the fact that voluntary participation on part of ordinary citizens is broad, but not based on a firm commitment. The former entails interest conflicts between associations seeking a maximalist strategy, or also regional conflicts. The latter means that problems with free-riding can harm civil society. In the case of the CCEJ, the share of members paying fees is only 10% of all members; similar figures exist for other organizations (Seong 2000: 101).

Overall, however, the achievements of Korean civil society are much more important than the problems it faces. The long-standing imbalance between a strong state and a weak society has begun to be redressed.

7 References

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