

YAYIN TANITIMI / BOOK REVIEW

Contemporary History of South Korea - 60 Years

Beste ALPAY JEONG*

Künye: SEO, Joong Seok (2007), Contemporary History of South Korea - 60 Years. Seoul: The Korea Democracy Foundation.

Introduction

In the book Contemporary History of South Korea - 60 Years, the author Seo Joong Seok focuses on the democratization movement that South Korea has followed and the difficulties that it has gone through in this process. The book begins with a foreword written by Ham Sei Ung, the former president of the Korea Democracy Foundation. He stresses that South Korea's democratization was not an easy process because democracy did not start in the early modern age unlike Western countries, and it encountered many problems such as the Korean War, national division, and the position of the Korean peninsula during the Cold War. He argues that the South Korean case is worth studying because of its unique characteristics considering the fact that it was able to achieve peaceful democratization in spite of difficult conditions it faced.

The book was written mainly for the purpose of informing the readers outside Korea about the democratization process in South Korea but also the young Korean generation who does not know much about the dictatorial rule and stress the importance of democracy. Since the young Korean generation and foreigners are not well informed about Korean history before the 1960s, the book begins with a brief introduction to Korean history prior to the democratic movement. Understanding Korean history is important in terms of grasping how Korean society and domestic politics were shaped in relation to international events. For example, the fact that

* PhD Candidate, Hanyang University, Department of Korean Studies, bestepay@hanyang.ac.kr,
ORCID: 0000-0001-9899-1508

Gönderim Tarihi: 23 Kasım 2021, Kabul Tarihi: 13 Şubat 2022

Önerilen Atıf: Jeong, B. A., (2022). Kitap Tanıtımı: Contemporary History of South Korea - 60 Years, *Doğu Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5(9),s.122-137.

Korean War was an ideological war between capitalism and communism led to a war legacy in both Koreas that contributed to the single-party systems in both governments. In other words, the political authorities did their best to prevent any kind of pluralism in the society and culture in North and South Koreas. The Cold War ideology prevailed, and South Korea did not tolerate different political ideas due to the fear of North Korean threats. The same was the case in North Korea where no other political forces other than Kim Il Sung's regime were allowed (Seo, 2007:60). These historical processes could be considered in terms of their effect on the domestic situation in South Korea, most significantly in relation to how the ideological confrontation was used by Rhee Syng Man to mobilize the groups and reunite the country against North Korea. The author argues that this mobilization actually helped to strengthen Rhee's political power while the United States also supported his policies (Seo, 2007:61). Considering the international political history and its effects on domestic politics as well as the dynamics of Korean society could be beneficial to understand the process that led to the democratization of South Korea. The fact that the author mentions how the legacy of war brought out the "silent war" (Ibid) that shaped both the inter-Korean dynamics and domestic politics helps the reader understand the process that made South Korea build a strong authoritarian system and attach an important role to the military. Undoubtedly, the reasons for the establishment of authoritarian regimes were not only outside forces. It is also necessary to look at factors such as political culture in Korean society and the leaders whose decision-making was affected by the traditional political culture. With the purpose of relating the content of this paper with the concept of "political culture", I have used Hong's (1998:100) definition of this concept which defines political culture as a "dynamically changing set of values, beliefs, and attitudes about politics widely shared among Korean people".

I would like to stress the significance of the authoritarian political culture in South Korea which resulted in three dictatorships that put constant pressure over a society that desired democratic rule. When I was reading the book written by Seo Joong Seok, the question that appeared on my mind was; despite the 30 years of struggle made by Korean society, what was the factor that stopped the democratization process from taking place? Each time I thought

the Korean society had finally won the war against the authoritarian rule and received a chance to establish a well-functioning democracy (such as after the events like the April Revolution and the assassination of Park Chung Hee) I found out that this chance was repeatedly hampered by a new dictatorship. Hong (1998) answers this question by stressing the authoritarian political heritage in South Korea, which has its roots in Japanese colonial rule and Confucianism. Park Chung Hee's authoritarian and military-oriented tendencies are also linked to his past in the Japanese army (Eckert, 2016:321). The 60 years of contemporary history of South Korea is about the struggle between this authoritarian political culture, and the democratic political culture which wanted to establish itself - after the change brought by industrialization - through a constitutional democracy, free press, protected labor rights, student rights, free elections, and direct presidential elections.

The dynamics behind the democratization process are complex. However, in the South Korean context, it could be possible to assert that the democratization movement was a result of a change of political culture in relation to the emergence of a heterogeneous society with industrialization. This paper first presents a summary of events that mainly portray the struggle of democratization in South Korea and shortly discusses the dynamics of political change in South Korea.

Rhee Syng Man Regime and April Revolution

Rhee Syng Man, the first president of South Korea is the first example of a dictatorial rule that South Korea experienced. In his book, Seo defines Rhee as a dictator with greed for permanent rule and emphasizes that the Liberal Party was different from ordinary political parties in that it always blindly followed Rhee's rules without questioning him, and even "worshiped him as a single absolute leader" (Seo, 2007:65-66). The first chapter explains the misconducts of Rhee Syng Man and the Liberal Party to remain in power in a detailed manner. It is discussed that Rhee engaged in whatever he could to sustain his regime. He presented a constitutional amendment for direct presidential elections to the National Assembly and when the amendment did not pass, he arrested assemblymen and finally managed to pass the bill (Seo, 2007:67-68). He promoted politicians who were loyal to him to the higher ranks in the party, used the police to bring his party victory in

general elections. He created an anti-communist atmosphere to pass a constitutional amendment that would allow him an unlimited number of terms. The bill was rejected but was interpreted as passed, and therefore nicknamed as "Rounding Off Amendment" (Seo, 2007:69-70).

The author underlines the illegal interferences in the elections through various ways by public officials that resulted in the victory of the Liberal Party candidates in presidential and vice-presidential elections. In the 1960 presidential elections, the opposition party's only candidate died and Rhee who was the only candidate got elected as the president in an early election. Rhee also used the public officials successfully in the elections to get his preferred candidate Yi Gi Bung elected as the vice president. (Seo, 2007:82-84).

Rhee's reign did not last any longer owing to the democratization movement that began on February 28th, 1960. The author of the book mentions the role of the students as demonstrators even before the 1960 student movement and emphasizes that the student movement after 1960 was different from the various student demonstrations in the 1950s in their nature. In the time of the Japanese colonial rule, students had taken the lead in the movements of workers and peasants against the Japanese. During the Rhee Syng Man regime, students were often mobilized by the government and led demonstrations with the themes like anti-communism, reunification by the invasion of the North, and defense against Japan. The author emphasizes that the student movement in 1960 was very different in character, because it was not mobilized for the regime, and rather it was directed against its authoritarian rule (Seo, 2007:85). Perhaps, the reason behind the difference in the nature of these movements was the social changes that began to take place in the 1960s (Hong, 1998:116). The ideas and values of Korean people had been changing from that of an authoritarian culture to a democratic culture. Whereas the former was characterized by *kwanjon minbi* (respect for the government and scorn for the people) which ordered obedience to the leaders and the idea that the leader is always right because he wants to protect the national security the latter was introduced to the society through modern education, media and strengthened by the emerging pluralization in the society after the 1960s (Hong, 1998:105-108). This change could be the reason

why the young generation's perceptions and reactions to a dictatorial regime were very different in two different periods.

As the author of the book expresses, South Korea indeed has an unprecedented history in that it experienced a student movement that lasted for more than 30 years (Seo, 2007:9). The first student demonstrations started in Daegu and spread all around South Korea (Seo, 2007:84). The students mainly demonstrated against the elections that were expected to be rigged by Rhee's police forces. After Rhee Syng Man was elected the third time as president, the public knew that he had been using all kinds of voting fraud to get elected. The Masan Demonstration was followed by the April uprising which was strengthened by the involvement of the middle, high school, and university students as a reaction to the death of student Kim Ju Yeol (Seo, 2007:87,88). On April 19th thousands of students engaged in a bloody confrontation with the police which is also known as the April 19th Uprising or Bloody Tuesday. The author states that a demonstration that was started by university professors on April 25th became significantly influential in bringing down Rhee's regime. Consequently, President Rhee's resignation was inevitable (Seo, 2007: 94-98); the will of the students, shoeshine boys, newsboys, and unemployed people proved to be stronger and succeeded to bring an atmosphere of freedom even for a short period of time until the coup d'état on May 16th, 1961.

The author argues that the freedom of speech about the reunification issue was an important change that the April Revolution brought about (Seo, 2007:116). Since Rhee's regime did not let any pluralism in the society, the people had been expected to follow the same ideas with the regime about reunification (Seo, 2007:62, 115). The democratic environment after the revolution led to the students' organizing meetings and public discussions about reunification (Seo, 2007:117). The activities made by the students from various universities posed an example of how a democratic environment could allow free ideas to flourish. Nevertheless, different ideas for reunification were frightening for anticommunists because of the communism threat. The author emphasizes that this became an excuse for conspirators to plan a coup d'état (Seo, 2007:121).

The Era of Park Chung Hee and the Democratic Struggle

The author of the book indicates that the fact that the military was not controlled strictly by the Second Republic as opposed to the tight control during Rhee's regime finally resulted in the military taking power with a coup on May 16th, 1961 (Seo, 2007:125). Military Revolutionary Committee (later named as Supreme Council) was granted the status of the highest ruling body and the newly created Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) technically gained power over the Supreme Council (Seo, 2007:129). The coup leaders Park Chung Hee and Kim Jong Pil emphasized a strong need to strengthen anti-communism that had been softened with April Revolution. The military regime severely punished progressive nationalist students and activists and enacted the Anticommunist Act which would limit freedom of thought and political activities (Seo, 2007:130-136). With the help of the KCIA the surveillance over those activities became very strong. The author names KCIA as the "government within the government" due to its vast surveillance abilities, which he argues, helped the Park regime's anti-communist elements to become very consolidated (Seo, 2007:135-136).

The following pages of the book discuss other efforts by the coup regime such as the amendment of the constitution through a referendum which led to the creation of a presidential system and unicameral legislature (Seo, 2007:139). The author also explains that the Park regime announced a list of disqualified politicians and excluded them from the National Assembly for two terms. The Political Activity Purification Act was passed by Supreme Council on March 16th, 1962, and excluded 269 civilian politicians from the National Assembly (Seo, 2007:140). The Republican Party was registered as a political party on May 27th and Park Chung Hee was elected as the president with a small difference of votes from Yun Bo Seon, and the Republican Party acquired most seats in the National Assembly (Seo, 2007:143-144).

The book further elaborates on Park Chung Hee's rule which started on December 17th, 1963. Park's era was called the Politics of Intelligence because it depended mainly on KCIA surveillance to counter any opposition, also it was named the Politics of the Executive since the executive branch was the main ruler and the military officers and high-ranking generals took the most important posts in the government (Seo, 2007:144). In the next election, which was made in 1967, Park did not have a strong opponent and was

elected as the president with a big difference of votes (Seo, 2007:159). In 1969, Park aimed to amend the Constitution in a way that would let him be elected for a third term. As a result of the fact that the Republican Party had already received enough seats to pass a constitutional amendment in the general elections, despite the student protests the parliamentarians passed the amendment secretly from the opposition parliamentarians (Seo, 2007:162-163). Although Park's regime continued after the 1971 elections, there were always reactions against the anti-democratic regime. The student movement during 1971 mainly demanded fair elections and the abolishment of the strengthened military training and recruiting of students by Park's regime. Judges were also another sector of society who were struggling against the regime. Judges from several regions resigned as a reaction to the subordination of the judiciary (Seo, 2007:173-174).

In the following pages the book covers the Yushin System that enabled the Park regime to monopolize power. The Yushin coup is mentioned as a "palace coup" that drastically weakened the parliament (Seo, 2007:181). The Yushin constitution which was confirmed by a referendum on November 21st allowed President Park to appoint one-third of the National Assembly, the Justices, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In other words, Park secured his power over the three main branches of government. The Yushin constitution also guaranteed him the power to declare emergency provisions, dissolve the National Assembly, and veto bills. The president would be elected by an institution called the National Congress for Reunification, of which the Chair would be himself (Seo, 2007:181-183). This meant that the president would have rule over the people electing him and the power over all the ruling bodies of the government. The author indicates that although Park called this "Korean style democracy", it was "nothing but a de facto suspension of democratic constitutionalism" (Seo, 2007:182). In order to justify the Yushin Coup, Park used the reunification issue. He claimed that his efforts were for building up national forces to realize the peaceful reunification of Korea. In reality, he gave a strong war against North Korea and communism (Seo, 2007:185). The idea of "invasion by the North" was used everywhere and often, a strong anti-communist education system and anti-communist propaganda were prevalent in the Yushin system as well as strict regulations and surveillance in most spheres of social life (Seo, 2007:187).

The author discusses the anti-Yushin struggle in a detailed manner, indicating that the first movement was started by the Christians during an Easter service at Namsan Stadium in April 1973. The reactions against Kim Dae Jung's abduction by the Yushin regime which wanted to get rid of its biggest opponent who had been engaging in anti-regime activities in the United States and Japan formed the continuation of the anti-Yushin struggles. The student demonstrations on October 2nd were the strongest since the April 19th Uprising (Seo, 2007: 188-189). The author gives the following events as examples of the struggles among the regime and its opponents during the Yushin years. The opposition of the students inspired other people and led to events such as a petition campaign by Jang Jun Ha to which Park answered by issuing Emergency Decree Number 1 according to which the people opposing the regime could be sentenced up to 15 years in prison. Several people including Jang Jun Ha were sentenced to 15 years in prison (Seo, 2007: 190). Park issued Emergency Decree Number 4 and claimed that the offenders involved in the National League of Democratic Youth and Students should surrender to the police, otherwise they could be executed. The regime claimed that this organization was an extension of the former communist the People's Revolutionary Party and the pro-North Korean Japanese Communist Party. The investigations and trials resulted in several people being executed in relation to their activities regarding those organizations (Seo, 2007: 191-193). Catholic Priests' Association for Justice which was formed as a reaction to the government's unjustifiable activities such as the kidnapping of Bishop Ji Hak Sun by KCIA became the strongest anti-Yushin organization. The anti-Yushin struggle had already reached a broader scope during November 1974 as religious circles, the press, political parties, and dissident leaders were actively participating to condemn the Yushin system. The pressure finally forced the regime to release some of those arrested under the emergency decrees. One of the anti-Yushin movements was pioneered by the anti-regime Dong-A Ilbo, whose reporters the government got dismissed. However, these reporters formed another committee in order to continue their struggle (Seo, 2007:194-196). The student demonstrations also accelerated and sometimes slowed down at specific times during the Yushin regime. For instance, in March 1975, after the discharge of the reporters, the students were agitated again. This time, the government reacted by closing Korea University with

Emergency Decree No. 7. This was followed by the execution of the seven convicts of the People's Revolutionary Party incident and the suicide of a Seoul National University student (Seo, 2007: 196-197). Emergency Decree No. 9 was much more restricting. The author argues that the peculiarity of this decree was that not only it prohibited all activities against the Yushin Constitution but also it banned reporting information about such activities. Those who violated the provisions would be arrested and imprisoned immediately (Seo, 2007: 198). The suspicious death of dissident leader Jang Jun Ha led some religious leaders and politicians including Kim Dae Jung to sign the Declaration for Democracy and National Salvation and declare it to the public on March 1, 1976, in order to trigger an uprising to end the government rule. This resulted in eleven leaders including Kim Dae Jung being arrested (Seo, 2007: 199-200).

Kim Young Sam, the newly elected president of the New Democratic Party which had managed to receive more votes than the Democratic-Republican Party in 1978 general elections (Seo, 2007: 202), declared that he would lead the national resistance by uniting the people, defeat the unlawful regime and restore democracy (Seo, 2007:207). After Kim criticized the regime in an interview for the New York Times, he was immediately expelled from the National Assembly by the ruling party parliamentarians without the participation of the opposition. The author emphasizes that such decisions were given because Park was unable to control his emotions, being "obsessed by the impetuosity of a Japanese soldier" (Seo, 2007: 208).

The following pages of the book inform the reader about the mass uprisings against the Yushin regime that started in Busan and Masan on October 16th and October 18th, 1979. The uprisings which were led by students, blue-collar workers, office workers, and clerks were very substantial that the police and military forces could not succeed to stop them (Seo, 2007: 210-212). Finally, the end of the Yushin regime was brought about by the assassination of Park Chung Hee by KCIA director Kim Jae Kyu (Seo, 2007: 213). The author argues that the reason for Park's assassination was probably his ultra-hardline policy, Busan and Masan uprisings, and the negative economic situation of the country. Park's latest hardline policy was based on authoritarian and militaristic characteristics. The

author indicates that instead of interpreting and understanding the mass uprisings or the result of the 1978 general elections, the only thing Park could think about was how to suppress the uprisings and control the society through surveillance. He emphasizes that Park's assassination prevented more sacrifices and opened the way to democratic constitutionalism (Seo, 2007: 214-217). However, after the assassination, there emerged a competition between the factions in the army for power. Chun Doo Hwan who desired to follow a system based on the Yushin constitution seized the power over the military on December 12nd and became the Director of KCIA on April 14th. He finally seized power in a coup with the support of the United States and Japan on May 17th (Seo, 2007: 228,231,235).

Gwangju Popular Uprising and June Democratic Uprising

Gwangju Popular Uprising that emerged as a massive reaction against the May 17th coup involved various members of the society such as students, taxi drivers, clerks, self-employed, white-collar and blue-collar workers, housewives, waiters, peddlers, shoeshine boys, and juvenile vagrants (Seo, 2007: 245). It began on May 18th and lasted ten days. The author discusses Gwangju Popular Uprising in relation to the history of discrimination against the Jeolla-do Province. He argues that Jeolla-do had been economically and politically discriminated against. When the assassination of Park was hope for democratization and an end to the exclusion of Kim Dae Jung who was representing the region, sudden coup and the arrest of Kim Dae Jung was the final straw for the Gwangju citizens (Seo, 2007: 245,246). The Gwangju Uprising is also known as Gwangju Massacre because of the fierce opposition of the government's forces that resulted in too many casualties (Seo, 2007: 239,252). The author emphasizes that Gwangju Uprising was a turning point for democratization and although Korea faced great casualties the democratization movement never ended and continued in many aspects of life. Students continued their struggle by continuously forming new student associations to lead the student movement in unity, holding students from many universities under the same umbrella (Seo, 2007: 245,256).

After those events, Chun Doo Hwan officially became the president on August 27th,1981 and the Democratic Justice Party was founded and won the March 25th elections. Chun's neo-military regime was similar to Park Chung Hee's military regime in many

aspects. The new constitution was also drafted based on the Yushin constitution (Seo, 2007: 250). Workers and unions which were also suppressed by Chun's regime started a labor movement in 1984 that was mainly ruled by taxi drivers. Although the activities such as demonstrations and strikes were faced by punishments such as blacklisting, arresting of union leaders by the regime, workers continued to struggle for labor rights (Seo, 2007: 269). The death of university student Park Jong Cheol by water torture by the police on January 14th, 1987, triggered demonstrations in February and March (Seo, 2007: 275). When it was revealed that the report about the student's death was falsified, a demonstration took place on June 10th in Seoul, which started the great June Democratic Uprising (Seo, 2007: 278). Hundreds of thousands of students, opposition leaders, and citizens got involved in this uprising which claimed to get back the democracy through the abolishment of the dictatorial regime and the establishment of a democratic constitution. The uprising continued in an increasing spirit until June 29th when Chun Doo Hwan finally realized that he would not be able to control the nationwide protest of 1.5 million South Koreans (Seo, 2007: 279-285). June 29th Declaration proposed by Roh Tae Woo, the presidential candidate of the Democratic Justice Party consisted of the democratic changes that the country needed. The author indicates that the June Democratic Uprising significantly contributed to the democratization of South Korean society and politics (Seo, 2007: 293). However, he argues, because of the prolonged one-man regime, the emergence of the civic consciousness was suppressed and not achieved (Seo, 2007: 288).

Progress of Democracy and South-North Reconciliation

The last section of the book is devoted to exploring the further progress of democracy and the reconciliation between North and South Korea after the June Uprising. The author argues that the working class had been suffering under unrighteous working conditions. After the June Uprising, they began to struggle for their own rights through a workers' movement that started with the campaign of the taxi drivers in Seongnam and spread around to other cities such as Ulsan, Changwon, and Masan and to all industries. It is emphasized that this was the largest workers' movement in Korean labor history (Seo, 2007: 293-295).

The book also focuses on the democratization and liberalization of literature, art, and the media after the June 29th Declaration such as the lifting of the ban on songs and books which had been prohibited as well as the abolishment of the Basic Press Act and forming of press unions (Seo, 2007: 297-298). The author also turns the attention of the reader to the issue of regionalism, which may turn an election into a “dirty fight”. After the constitutional amendment, the opposition leaders were not able to decide on a single presidential candidate and they decided that all four presidential candidates competed (Seo, 2007: 299-300). The author argues that this turned the elections into a regional competition since each candidate was popular in specific regions, and this prevented the election from focusing on debates about policy (Seo, 2007: 301).

The author states that the June Uprising also paved the way for the reunification movement. After Roh Tae Woo was elected as the president in 1987, South Korean organizations were demonstrating a growing desire to conduct multilateral meetings, conferences, and sports events with North Korea (Seo, 2007: 305,306). In such an atmosphere, Roh decided to normalize the relations with communist bloc countries and pursue engagement with North Korea. Roh announced “Special Statement for National Self Respect, Reunification, and Prosperity” on July 7th promising future exchange and cooperation with North Korea and socialist nations. As part of his North Diplomacy, he improved ties with China, Russia, and Eastern European nations such as Hungary and Poland (Seo, 2007:307-308).

The following pages of the book address the Korean teachers’ movement which aimed for the democratization of education and established the Korean Teachers’ Union in 1989 (Seo, 2007:312-313). Labor activists for the democratic union movement also formed the National Council of Trade Unions in 1990 to counter the government-controlled Federation of Korean Trade Unions. The National Council of Trade Unions gained the support of international labor organizations and organized the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions in 1995 (Seo, 2007:314-316). Peasants’ movement is another issue mentioned in this part of the book. Peasant activists formed the National League of Peasants’ Associations in 1990 and their struggle was mainly against the imports of rice and other agricultural products (Seo, 2007:320-321).

In the following pages the author discusses the Kim Young Sam government, which was the first civilian government in three decades, and criticizes it for having authoritarian tendencies. He argues that Kim who became president in 1993, implemented reform policies without regard for the consent of the National Assembly. He removed the members of Hanahoe that was a secret faction within the army that had monopolized its power since the Park era and reduced the power of the Defense Security Command. The author argues that in this manner, the military fell under the control of the civilian government (Seo, 2007:324-325). The author also writes about the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis that coincided with the end of Kim's rule which, according to the author, had pushed an immoderate globalization policy since 1994. South Korea whose economy was vulnerable, received a heavy blow from the financial crisis and it was decided that its economy would be managed by the International Monetary Fund. The author argues that one of the fundamental reasons for the crisis in South Korea was the privileges granted to the chaebols. The chaebols received excessive loans and investments, and this resulted in vulnerability and non-transparency in their financial structure (Seo, 2007:331-333). However, Kim Dae Jung government which came into power in 1998 began efforts for ameliorating the financial situation of the country immediately. For this Kim aimed for the liberalization of the market and privatization of the major public enterprises and reforming the management of chaebol. (Seo, 2007:336-337).

The author also mentions Kim Dae Jung's notable Sunshine Policy and gives a summary of how inter-Korean relations were dramatically improved during this era. He touches upon the Geumgangsán tour which was made possible with the efforts of the Chairman of the Hyundai Group, and the inter-Korean summit that took place between the leaders of the two Koreas and the Joint Statement which was signed on June 15th. After the summit, the relations between the South and North ameliorated rapidly and the two sides engaged in a process of cooperation and reconciliation (Seo, 2007: 339-341).

The author indicates that the 2002 presidential election was unique; "a plain-spoken politician from a poor working-class family suddenly rose to be elected president" (Seo, 2007: 343). Although he lacked a political background, Roh Moo Hyun's presidency

contributed to the improvement of democracy. The author emphasizes that eventually, South Korea was able to achieve democratization and economic development in a simultaneous manner. He argues that South Korea came a long way over the years. For instance, the authority of the parliament became stronger, the judicial system improved, the democratization of the society became possible, women achieved a better status in the society. South Korea also became a major exporter of electronics, automobiles, and ships and hallyu (the Korean wave) gained a lot of popularity around the world (Seo, 2007:346-347).

Discussion and Conclusion

Korean political culture can be defined as a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes about politics that are widely shared among Korean people (Hong, 1998:100). Political culture is not static, but dynamic, changing slowly over time (Ibid). One of the traditional characteristics of Korean political culture used to be a strong authoritarian tendency (Hong, 1998:102). This authoritarian characteristic in domestic politics changed slowly and gave way to a democratic political culture over time (Hong, 1999:109).

The authoritarian political heritage and the Confucianism, legacies of Japanese colonial rule, and the division of the country all created obstacles against the development of democracy in Korea. The so-called “Korean-style democracy” looked like a liberal democracy from the outside however it was autocratic in nature (Hong, 1998:104). As Seo argues in his book, presidents mostly changed the constitution to strengthen their political power. The practices of the authoritarian regimes finally caused distrust and opposition by the people and resulted in the student movement which lasted for 30 years from the 1960 uprisings until the 1990s. The student movement was not only exercised by students, but many other sectors of the society also participated in the demonstrations. Authoritarian leaders did not tolerate opposition and demanded loyalty from their followers (Hong, 1998: 104). Hong (Ibid) argues that the reason for the authoritarian nature of these leaders was, the fact that political leaders and government bureaucrats were not equipped well enough to accomplish democratic goals. In other words, they were born and trained under Japanese rule and affected

by the authoritarian political culture. The government bureaucrats obeyed loyally to those leaders and the leaders' actions were also shaped by this authoritarian culture (Hong, 1998:116).

It was not only the leaders who had been affected by an authoritarian political culture. The traditional mode of thinking in the form of *kwanjon minbi* was also one of the factors which postponed the emergence of a democratic culture in Korean society (Hong, 1998:105). Hong (Ibid) stresses that Korean society's perception of democracy had not developed adequately because of the traditional way of thinking. According to representative democracy, the government is the servant of the people. However, the traditional thinking made Korean people regard the president as a monarch to be respected, obeyed, and whose efforts should be accepted in the name of national security.

Except for the authoritarian political culture, another reason that prevented democratization was the politicization of the military that had not been realized until the military coup in 1961 and the politicized KCIA which was actively surveilling the society and engaging in torture during investigations (Ibid). Moreover, the politicized national police were another instrument used by the three authoritarian regimes. Together with the military, the police were the power that was wounding and killing people during the demonstrations. They were the main tools that were used by the dictators in order to rig the elections in their favor. These factors made it difficult for democratic institutions to emerge in South Korea (Ibid).

According to Hong (1998, p.106), "economic modernization fosters social and political diversity, which in turn stimulates political competition, a requisite for a democratic political system". Poor economic conditions in South Korea changed after the 1980s. The emergence of civil society was one of the reasons for democratization in Korea (Yang, 2008). Capitalist development led to the formation of new social forces and challenge the exclusion made by the regime (Yang, 2008). This can be seen in the strong labor movements, strikes, and rallies made in 1987. The student movement continued for 30 years by increasing capacity, involving more and more civilians, different parts of the society such as taxi drivers who played an important role in the struggle and newly established organizations to its structure. The emergence of a modern industrial society led to a

heterogeneous society and this led to the consolidation of the democratic culture that had been emerging (Ibid). Increasing urbanization also made people exposed to modern ideas and values. The increase in the number of students getting enrolled in education affected their political culture as they acquired democratic values and finally led the democratic movement. Expansion of mass communication was also another factor that affected the political socialization of Korean people (Yang, 2008 & Hong 1998, pp.107-109).

In sum, the plural Korean society that began to emerge in the 1960s due to Park Chung Hee's successful export-oriented industrialization policy developed a democratic culture which got stronger gradually and spread from the students to other parts of the society until it got so strong that it could demolish the tyranny in 1987. It was a long and difficult war for the Korean society that can finally enjoy well-established democratic institutions and representative democracy with a civil society that is gaining more power day by day.

Seo Joong Seok's book will be of interest to scholars interested in the history of the democratization movement and political changes in South Korea. It is a well-organized book that covers most of the events that had a significant impact on the process of democratization. The book explains the historical events that took place in the 60 years period in Korean domestic politics. It is beneficial for a reader who wants to learn about the contemporary history of Korea in a chronology of events. However, it is not a book that discusses or analyzes the dynamics behind the democratization process comprehensively. In order to understand or question the process that Korea has been through, it is recommended that the reader also benefits from other resources to understand the events thoroughly.

List of References

ECKERT Carter J. (2016), Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea The Roots of Militarism 1866-1945. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Yayın Tanıtımı /Book Review: JEONG, Contemporary History of South Korea...

HONG, Nack Kim (1998), Change and Continuity in Korean Political Culture an Overview, *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol 2, No 1, p. 100-120.

SEO, Joong Seok (2007), *Contemporary History of South Korea - 60 Years*. Seoul: The Korea Democracy Foundation.

YANG Seung-ham (2008), 'The Forces that Drove Korea toward Democracy', In *Korea Herald*, the Korean Political Science Association (ed.) *Political Change in Korea*, Seoul: Jimoondang, pp. 11-26.