

# POLITICAL DEMOCRATIZATION AMID PERSISTENT COLD-WAR CONFRONTATIONS: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA

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*Süregelen Soğuk Savaş Çatışmaları Ortasında Siyasal Demokratikleşme:  
Güney Kore Örneği*

## Özet

Bu çalışma dünya sistemi düzlemine ait siyasal sorunlar ve bu sorunların siyasal demokratikleşme üzerindeki etkilerini açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Bu konuya, sosyal bilimciler arasında bugüne kadar gerekli ilgi gösterilmedi. Bunun nedeni varolan çalışmaların pekçoğunun demokratikleşme sosyolojisi (demokratikleşmenin içsel faktörleri) ya da demokraikleşmenin ekonomi politiği (ekonomik büyüme ve demokrasi ilişkisi) üzerin yoğunlaşmasıdır. Bu çalışma, Güney Kore'nin siyasal demokratikleşmesinin büyük ölçüde soğuk savaş dönemi dünya sistemi koşullarından etkilendiğini savlamaktadır. Dünya sisteminin soğuk savaş koşulları bölgede hala etkinliğini sürdürmektedir. İdeolojik olarak bölünmüş ulus-devlet (Birleşik Kore) içinde kalıcı bir istikrar, ancak, çatışan aktörler arasında dünya süstemi düzleminde sağlanacak bir uzlaşmayla gerçekleşebilir.

## Abstract

This study is an attempt to clarify the linkage between system-level political issues and their impact on political democratization. Scholars have not paid enough attention to this topic, because most existing studies focus on the sociology of democratization (endogenous factors of democratization) or the political economy of democratization (the relationship between democracy and economic growth). I argue that political democratization in South Korea is heavily affected by the cold-war world system that is still operating in the region, and without any system-level compromise between conflictual actors, a stable polyarchy is hard to come by in this ideologically divided nation-state.

# Political Democratization amid Persistent Cold-War Confrontations: The Case of South Korea\*

## Democratization and Its Discontents

Political democratization in South Korea invited a myriad of studies that either tried to explain its causes or evaluate its progress (see *inter alia*, CUMINGS, 1989; KOO, 1991; CHOI, 1993; LIE, 1998). Given the gargantuan volume of studies so far produced by both Eastern and Western scholars, another stab at it, like this one, might not add anything particularly fresh to the study of what some called "democratization in a developmental authoritarian state" (KOO, 1991; CHOI, 1993: 292-3).

The purpose of this paper, thus, is not about sociology of democratization (i.e., studying the causes of political democratization) or political economy of democratization (i.e., studying the relationship between democratization and economic growth). Rather, my intention is to initiate some provisional discussions on the relationship between major political issues, or what we call, system-level issues, and democratization. I posit that system level issues constitute the discontents of domestic democratization in a divided nation, and future solutions to the system level issues would not only consolidate domestic democracy but invite a peaceful unification of a divided nation as well.

In the study of Western democracies scholars pay little attention to either national or international political issues, as if they had no significant bearing on the future development of their democratic systems. When democracy is taken for granted, as in many Western European and North American countries,

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political issues are believed to be resolved within the system through democratic procedures (see DAHL/LIDBLOM, 1953; DAHL, 1956, 1971; MANN, 1970; SARTORI, 1987). Only in recent years did Western scholars pay particular interest to the relationship between political issues (and/or public policies) and the fate of democracy itself. For example, extreme economic liberalism is often regarded as the retreat of political democracy (e.g., BLOCK, 1990). The tenacious imposition of bureaucratic norms of instrumental rationality on the overall political process was also taken as dangerous to democracy (e.g., DRYZEK, 1990:4-5).

In the process of political democratization in most newly democratized countries, however, certain political issues that find their way into politics due to new aperture are critical in shaping the overall institutions of post-democratization politics. Some national and international political issues provide political actors with catalysts with which they can exploit opportunities of power mobilization and struggles whose results either reverse or promote democratization. Although procedural democracy has already been institutionalized, or in Przeworski's (1991: 10-12) term, uncertainty has been institutionalized in these countries, the content of democracy, which we can roughly refer to as the substantial definition of democracy, still awaits solutions that cannot be brought about without changing the pluralistic democratic system itself.

Salient nowadays in South Korea and potentially explosive in the near future is the political issue of unification. Unification, unlike that in Germany, contains formerly forbidden political and social issues of class cleavages and the debate on the nature of the capitalist state in a democratic setting (see HABERMAS, 1996; PAIK, 1993, 1996, 1998). As one of the two last remaining divided nations in the post-Cold War era (the other being Taiwan), the problem of unification in South Korea requires a paradigmatic change in building democratic institutions, because the absorption of North Korea by South Korea is unlikely (WANG, 1996:200; HART-LANDSBERG, 1995: 72; PAIK, 1998: 68). In this sense, the question of the state in a newly unified political entity demands a fresh understanding of what democracy should be. In a similar vein, the unification of North (socialist) and South (capitalist) entails a preliminary compromise between the right and the left, including such arduous, if not unlikely, compromises as expanding the participation of the labor, socialist, and communist parties all in a new democratic institution.

Without fundamental agreements on the content of a democratic state, the task of overcoming the post-1945 world system of ideological division through mere transplantation of Western institutions of pluralistic democracy would be fraught with difficulties. This is why democratic adjustment during the last ten years in South Korea has been mired with party system instability, intra-party

factional bickering, and exchanges of fists in most inter-party haggling within the parliamentary setting. Notably, South Korean democratic transition has shocked many domestic and international observers due to the semi-routinized arrests of former presidents and/or their immediate relatives, such as sons. As we will show below, the participation explosion in a hot house fashion is based on the new political niche these overly appetent political actors discovered through opening up the very issues of class compromise on the one hand and unification on the other. Thus, class compromise and unification constitute the core of the debate on the substantial definition of democracy (PRZEWORSKI, 1985; PRZEWORSKI/SPRAGUE, 1986; PAIK, 1998: 37).

Added to this fundamental political disunity toward the substantial definition of South Korean democracy is the issue of ethnic and/or regional disintegration. Ethnic and regional cleavages, like the currently celebrated issues of the environmental and feminist movements, are not unrelated to existing class confrontation. The post-1960 South Korean politics has systematically discouraged people's participation from the Cholla province, reducing them to second rate citizens within a divided country. Since this marginalized population also make up a substantial proportion of the entire workforce, class politics, which is central in the post-democratization politics, overlaps ethnic and regional issues.

By no means democratization occurs overnight. Nor does it demand a simple materialistic class compromise within a parliamentary electoral system. In newly democratized countries, most political issues that find their way into the state institutions, the political arena of issue resolution, are not haggled out in a freely competitive way. They cannot be, because the issues of class compromise and unification are too macroscopic for a young democracy, even if the uncertainty of future political outcomes is always guaranteed. However, as we will show below, these system-level issues often sneak into politics, repeatedly paralyzing the entire democratic institution.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, domestic institutional and international system level compromises are necessary in consolidating democracy in South Korea and Taiwan. As we see it, this institutional contingency constitutes the main discontent and/or hurdle of the domestic democratization in these two countries, and they have to be resolved to initiate and consolidate another democratization in a unified nation.

1 I distinguish system-level and institutional-level issues throughout this paper. System-level issues require system-level solutions, while institutional-level issues demand institutional-level solutions. I take the definition of the "system" from Wallerstein (1979: 5), and "institution" from Elster (1989: 147).

The rest of this paper deals with, first, the nature of the system level issues that may mar domestic democratic institutionalization and its consolidation in South Korea. I then analyze South Korean democratization and its discontents, explaining why system-level issues were the main culprit of the discontent (or the one that has discouraged democratic consolidation). Finally, I discuss ways of engendering resolutions for domestic class cleavages and international ideological confrontations in these two countries. I conclude that "the end of history" would not occur, at least in East Asia, unless these two countries overcome the post-1945 world system of ideological conflict that is still live and well.

### **Political Democracy in Divided Nations**

South Korean democratization took very different paths and steps. Although they all began displaying what Przeworski (1986:55) calls the signals of opening at around the same time, South Korean democratization involved mass rallies that were similar to revolutionary movements (LIE, 1991; CHOI, 1993). Although less top-down and peaceful than say the Taiwanese case, Korean democratization was an outcome of elite planning (LIE/OH 1991).

The 1987 democratization in South Korea was based on a compromise between incumbent government elites and the enraged pro-democratic forces of the society (IM, 1989; OH, 1994). The compromise led to the revelation of the elite blue print of democratic transition that incorporated the idea of electoral transition toward democracy (LIU, 1990:4). Elections were to be held in both central and local levels for the first time since the fall of the previous democratic regime in 1972.

Elections, however, were still under the purview of the cold war ideology and its state institutions, including the notorious National Security Law, which prohibits any political activities that the law sees as beneficial to North Korea and any other socialist regimes. This means that electoral participation by the radical factions of the pro-democracy movement was legally banned. Indeed, as we will detail it below, arrests of radical students continues even today.

Democratic transition in required a transplantation of the western institutions of pluralism, including free elections and the parliamentary system with limited local sovereignty. Although these new post-democratization institutions were equipped with means of resolving domestic issues, they nevertheless were ill-equipped with solving system-level issues. In this sense, democratization in a divided nation is incomplete as long as such system-level issues as the military confrontation of ideologically divided nations persists.

Therefore, the above system-level issues are different from such a local

political issue as environmental politics, ethnic cleavages, and the feminist movement. Normal political issues, albeit complex, can still be debatable and resolvable within the given democratic political system. The issue of unification, however, involves more complex problem-solution structures than normal political issues. Unification, therefore, defeats the institutions.

The reason is two-fold. First, on a system-level, political actors involved in the resolution of the system-level issues are not confined to domestic parties. Narrowly speaking, resolution requires the participation of both North and South Korean political actors. Broadly speaking, it necessitates the participation of Japan, China, and the U.S. The U.S. still deploys more than 35,000 soldiers on the Korean peninsula, which is in and of itself a major concern to China and Japan.

Pro-North Korean groups in South Korea, notably, those radical factions of the democratization movement would never have any legal access to politics without any system-level compromise between these regional and international actors. As long as North Korea remains an enemy nation, defined by the South Korean constitution, these pro-North Korean groups will remain as traitors. In this sense, system compromise is hard to earn, unless the socialist regime in North Korea disappears from the international political scene.<sup>2</sup> This regional peculiarity was not present in the democratization of other nation-states.

Second, on a domestic level, North Korea is not democratic, making it hard for the two unparallel sets of political entities to reunite. A newly unified state, even if it came true, would not tolerate two separate political systems, despite the trendy idea of "one country-two systems." The absorption of one system by another, as was the case in the unification of Germany and the victory of the North in the U.S. civil war, required either a voluntary dissolution of the East German leadership or the military subjugation of the South by the North. Neither precondition to unification through absorption is likely in the case of South Korea.

Thus, the idea of further democratizing South Korea (i.e., resolving the system-level issues) through an international compromise requires a birth of the new world system that must accommodate Asian socialism and capitalism in one political boundary. This new compromise between concerned actors (the U.S., Japan, China, North Korea, and South Korea), if it resolves the system level issues, will create domestic institution that can resolve both normal and system-level political issues.

2 This means that the absorption of North Korea by South Korea is impossible. The widely circulated anticipation will crumble automatically due to its internal problems and will be absorbed into the South Korean system is no longer an option, as the South Korean economy is suffering a great deal from the Asian financial crisis.

However, the picture is not as simple as the above assertion may imply. We strongly argued that such a world system-level compromise is an implausible political outcome, given that a military strike against North Korea or the automatic collapse of the Stalinist regime is more utility maximizing than drawing out a compromise among all concerned actors. Nonetheless, we can still assume that all actors are risk taking, and, hence, want a costly compromise. However, even then no one can be sure of the political outcome of the compromise. Simply, there is no guarantee that the unified political entity with both socialism and capitalism can be politically democratic. This is the irony of democracy in South Korean case, which many scholars have so far overlooked.

While scholars failed to discuss either democratization in a divided nation or future democracy in a unified nation that overcame political division along the ideological line, conservative reaction in South Korea, amid participation explosion, reinforced the ongoing system of division. Reactionary policies, for instance, used the North card as the *raison d'être* for pressing cold war politics. As we will detail below the so-called democratic state has maintained a contradictory policy of suppressing domestic pro-unification movements ever since the 1987 democratization, while simultaneously pursuing peace talks with the North (CHOI, 1993:185-188).

The regression of domestic political development in terms of left-right politics in South Korea on the one hand led to the explosion of other social issues on the other. Although labor and pro-unification movements received an exorbitant amount of repression from the state apparatus, new social movements, including environmental, human rights, feminist, and gay movements could establish the so-called "movement industries" without much intervention from the state. This, however, does not mean that these new social movements are independent from the class and pro-unification politics, although some scholars may disagree.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, a cogent observation of the South Korean social movements may be that normal issues themselves are leading movements to a more radical confrontation with the state.

Democracy in South Korea is imperfect. No democracy in this world is substantively perfect. However, system-level issues in South Korea cannot be debated and resolved within the current institutions of polyarchy, which make its democracy very different from the Western polyarchy. Post-democratization politics, thus, has become quite precarious with tumultuous ups and downs within the parliamentary system. What follows next is an analysis of the South Korean politics of post-democratization, focusing especially on the politics of resolving the system-level issues.

<sup>3</sup> A leading scholar in South Korea who argues that all these new social issues are related to the system-level issue of unification is Paik (1998).

## Permanent Separation vs. Federalism: The Logic of the Korean Solution

The road to full-fledged procedural democracy in South Korea since the 1987 democratization is paved with pandemonium. Starting from the death of Kang Kyung Dae by the police in 1991 to the 1997 crackdown of Hanchongryun and to the current imprisonment of Youngnam labor union members, incidents relating to labor and pro-unification movements filled the daily headlines. Simultaneously, former dictators were prosecuted for their military coup d'etat and served prison sentences. The 1995 military crisis with North Korea, where the U.S. almost ordered a bombing sortie on the nuclear site in Youngbyun, should not be ruled out from this context. Most recently, the entire South Korean state is suffering from economic crisis on the one hand and unwanted economic reforms on the other, a tragic aftermath of the IMF standby agreement.

Underneath these shocking revelations of post-democratization politics is the half-century long division of the nation into North and South Korea. South Korean democracy, which was first introduced and institutionalized in 1948 by the U.S., had to be postponed or altered due to the Korean War (1950-53), until Rhee's dictatorship was toppled by the 1960 student rebellion. The first military coup d'etat in 1961 and its military junta, at the request of the Kennedy administration, continued the democratic tradition of its political institutions, although it banned all forms of democratic political participation in 1972. Other factors aside, the 1972 Yushin [political reform] system with its egregious martial law was to counter North Korea's stable system of Stalinist one-man rule. It was obvious that the then dictator, Park, thought that democracy was always weaker than a Stalinist regime (KIM, 1995). Chun's second military coup in 1979 perfected the Yushin system by massacring more than two thousand Kwangju citizens the next year (CLARK, 1988). The Kwangju pro-democracy movement was labeled by Chun as a communist insurgency.

While it is safe to attribute the breakdown of democratic regimes in South Korea to the North threat (or the dictators always tried to cash in on the North threat), the freely elected presidents of the democratic South Korea also relied on the North Korean card to curtail further democratization. President Roh's era was symbolized by routinized student demonstrations that demanded immediate unification with the North. Roh replied to it with Yushin-style repression, arguing that the student leaders were none other than North Korean proxies (CHOI, 1993:247).

President Kim Young Sam, the first civilian to be elected since 1960, did not tinker with the national security state. In 1992, the year of his election, Kim ordered the police to arrest 1,145 student, labor, and other pro-unification movement leaders. In 1997, the year of his term's end, the number went up to



1,376. It means on an average 3.8 people were arrested daily on charges of violation of the National Security Law (*Munhwa Ilbo*, 12/16/98). The year 1997 marked a massive crackdown on the Hanchongryun, the only pro-unification student movement organization left unscathed until then.

The current president is no exception from this overall alliance of conservatives and reactionaries who want to protect the National Security Law. Although he released a myriad of the so-called "prisoners of conscience," he required the would-be released to write a letter of intent that they would never involve themselves in any activities that would violate the law (*Ingwon Harusosik* 7/4/98). Despite this gesture of ideological liberalization, the Kim administration continued the daily arrests of student and labor leaders, epitomized by the Youngnam Labor Union Association incident, where the Association leaders were arrested on charges of pro-North Korean activities, a violation of the National Security Law (*Ingwon Harusosik*, 1/30/99). Kim also denied the demand of Amnesty International that moved the state ease the notorious law (*Ingwon Harusosik*, 2/9/99).

The IMF system, a term South Korean journalists prefer to use to depict the current economic status of the country, revealed the impossibility of the South Korean desire to absorb the North in a German fashion. The fall of the developmental system that successfully boosted the economic affluence on the South, a political economic system that many believed would shorten the time of an automatic collapse of the regime in the North, uncovered the deep-seated problem of the South Korean economy-viz., it cannot feed not only of its own people, but their Northern fellow citizens as well, once united (CUMINGS, 1998; PAIK, 1998:68).

A fundamental compromise between labor and capital, a precondition many think critical in the formation of a mature and stable capitalist democracy has been lacking even in the democratic South Korea.<sup>4</sup> This lack of class compromise persists amid the financial crisis and is constituting a major obstacle to swift economic reform. The state so far has responded with suppression to the union rallies that protested corporate mergers and acquisitions, a core part of the state-driven reform package for the ailing South Korean economy. While the unemployment rate is soaring over 10%, the state is feeding less than 30% of the total unemployed (*Hankook Ilbo*, 2/4/99). In this sense the current financial crisis is linked to this old politics of the class confrontation and the lack of the institutional means of conflict resolution.

On top of this annoying issue of class politics is the presence of persevering North Korea. Officially, North Korea is an independent political

4 For the preconditions of democratic stability see Deutsch (1962) and Lipset (1981). For class compromise in a mature capitalist democracy see Przeworski (1985).

unit, a member of the United Nations. However, North Korea is one of the U.S.-defined terrorist states, along with Iraq and Libya. The South Korean state, which recognized North Korea as a separate state when it joined the UN simultaneously with the latter, nonetheless defines its territory to encompass both South and North Korea. Similarly, North Korea insists on reclaiming South Korea, because its constitution, too, takes the latter as its territorial part. This contradiction between international laws that govern the membership of the UN and Korean constitutions is but one layer of a more complex problem.

The problem is the shortage of repertoire. When there is an apparent contradiction between the changing global system, from the cold-war ideology to a more global free market exchange, and the unchanging inter-Korean situations and domestic political institutions, it means the repertoire of alternative systems is very limited. Just as alternatives to authoritarian regimes were few, except the popular western style procedural democracy, so is the option for a new system of unifying two undemocratic regimes into a democratic confederation. The dearth of the means of peaceful unification forced many to side with two existing options for the resolution of the North-South confrontation: permanent separation or confederacy.

The permanent separation option, often advanced by middle class South Koreans, has been the dominant opinion within the government itself up until the election of the President, Kim Dae Jung, in 1997 (KIM, 1996:83). It is congruous with the option of maintaining the status quo, a strategy most countries that are heavily involved in the Korean division would also agree, including the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia (MACDONALD, 1992). Permanent separation is also congenial with the international legal norms, given the recognition of both North and South Korea as a nation state by the U.N. Albeit popular, permanent separation would not resolve any of the existing system-level problems on the Korean peninsula.

First, the North would never liberalize its half a century old Stalinist one man dictatorship, garbed with Juche ideology. There is no need for it, because a separate nation in the South is still an enemy state, even if two states in one nation agreed to recognize each other as a separate polity. Second, given that the North would not budge toward political and economic opening, unlike Russia or China, the South would not loosen its ideological control of the masses. The political outcome of the above two will be the continuing tension between the left and the right in South Korean politics. Third, therefore, permanent separation is not a "permanent" solution for the system level issues that have already surfaced in South Korea during the last ten or so years, although it could be a temporary resolution to ease the tension between the North and the South.

Limitations apparent in the first option for the resolution of the Korean political problems, radical factions of pro-unification and pro-democratic movement organizations contend that confederacy is the only solution for a peaceful resolution of the left-right issues, which would realize the dream of national unification on the one hand and enhance democracy in both North and South Korea on the other (CUMINGS, 1998: 66-67; PAIK, 1998:27). The federalism option, which originated from North Korea, resurfaced recently in South Korea as an aftermath of political liberalization and the financial crisis. Both governments seem committed to this staged development of confederacy as a way of unification (CUMINGS, 1998:66). The backbone of this pro-unification and pro-democracy blueprint derives from an unrealistic assumption that both North and South Korea can live together [kongsang] under one political roof with a different set of economic systems.

Proponents of this idea would argue that the North now can believe that the South has no intention of absorbing the other. The economic crisis made it transparent that South Korea lacks such capacity (PAIK, 1998). It must rely on the resources of North, especially, cheap labor, if the South wants to recover its comparative advantage in the international trade. North Korea would then have sufficient leverage on the control of the South Korean penetration into North's newly opened up economy (CUMINGS, 1998). Living-together thus simply denotes a new form of regulated exchange between the two states of one nation: An exchange of capital and labor, an exchange of military and police personnel and knowhow for matters of mutual concern, and an exchange of technocrats who would regulate new forms of exchanges.

Proponents of this idea would also argue that politics of both states would be further democratized because the new federation would include both capitalist and socialist means of production in its founding principle. Elections on a federal level will select a symbolic figure head who will then impose on and oversee democratic procedures in both North Korean and South Korean federal political units (CUMINGS, 1998: 67). In theory, therefore, each federal political unit can be overtaken in a democratic fashion (i.e., through elections) by its former opponents.

Would all this be possible, if and only if there is a mutual assurance of nonaggression between the North and South? The feasibility of the federalist option is minimum, although it may be a better solution for Korean democracy than the separation option. For one thing, taking the current South Korean economic crisis as a point of departure for the federalist logic grossly neglects the fact that the separationist idea is becoming more popular than ever before, especially among the middle class. Self-interest among South Korean middle class counts more than fraternity with the Northerners. As some commentators rightly notice, pro-unification movements are now few and far between (PAIK,

1998). The disintegration of the Hanchongryun proves this point, while hundreds of ex-prisoners of conscience remain consciously silent about their cause. After all, the federalist logic fails to take into consideration the necessary condition of a great compromise between concerned actors for the unification and democratization of Korea. The great compromise requires more than a mutual understanding between the North and the South; it requires participation of the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia, just to name a few.

Amid silence grows a more sinister logic of absorption. As South Korea slowly recovers from the recession, and as North Korea finds no way out from its economic disaster, the feasibility of taking over the North by the South waxes. Without achieving full democratic potential within the South itself, a unified Korea will be a dangerous place of free market experimentation at the expense of democracy. Extreme reliance on the market ideology, simultaneously suppressing century old class cleavages, would bring in the old political confrontation between the left and the right once again, making the future of Korean democracy very precarious.

Given the obvious limitations apparent in the logic of South Korean democratization and, thus, unification, I contend that system-level issues will continue to paralyze the post-democratization political institutions. The existing political institutions are simply not capable of devising means of resolving the system-level issues, of which the left-right issue is most exigent. Are there any other ways of resolving these exigent system-level issues?

### **Engendering System-level Compromises**

System-level issues that mar the democratic viability of South Korea have to be resolved through a new world system that can incorporate North Korea into the same system. North Korea survived the collapse of the Socialist World System (SWS), indicating their less involvement in it than other ex-socialist regimes. It could establish political legitimacy without much foreign assistance, unlike Taiwan or South Korea, where the U.S. assistance was pivotal.

This U.S. involvement, or to be more precise, the ever strengthening Capitalist World System's (CWS) involvement, in South Korea is one of the key factors that prohibit the resolution of the system-level issues. The CWS is also posing a great threat to North Korea, which has more a shaky basis of economic self-subsistence than say China. A double-whammy of economic troubles and a military threat from the CWS apparent, North Korea resorts to violent means of self-defense that directly causes further suppression of the system-level issues in South Korea, an indirect way of postponing political democracy. The nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula will thus continue, unless the U.S. withdraws its forces from the South (OGURA/OH, 1997).

If North Korea had never been in the epicenter of the collapse of the SWS, thus not even flinched at the event, it is not incorporated in the new global capitalist system, either, where the U.S., Japan, and EU play both regional and global hegemonic roles. This can be gleaned from the fact that the CWS is putting pressures on North Korea to weaken its Stalinist institutions and elites. Ultimately, the CWS want North Korea either to be absorbed by South Korea, or to be self-destroyed due to internal contradictions, although such outcomes will be unlikely.

In other words, just like the Cold-War world system, a newly emerging world order is equally unequivocal about the remaining socialist regimes on the earth. It wants to dismantle them, instead of incorporating them into the system as equal partners. A paradigmatic conversion, as we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, is thus necessary in the building of a new world system that should promote political democracy all over the world, instead of the perfection of global capitalism. Both socialist and capitalist economies should be able to participate in the global democratic system, where political democracy, not capitalism, should be the governing norm. This movement toward the global democratic system is what we might call bringing politics back in the global capitalist system.

When democracy is the governing norm in the regulation of the global democratic system, economic systems of socialism or capitalism, along with its many regional variations, must remain a regional institution, not espousing to be a global institution. Defects of the current world system are obvious: The current world system we are living in requires sacrifices from ideologically divided nations that cannot be united, because economic systems matter more than cultural, ethnic, linguistic, social, and historical homogeneity.

The global democratic system would then resolve the system-level issues in South Korean politics. Global democracy would induce South Korea to open up political institutions to incorporate both the left and the right to hammer out political outcomes at every important juncture of its political development, while unification with North Korea is based on a federalist idea of universalizing political democracy on a national and global level and of regionalizing the institutionalization of economic organizations.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed why post-democratization politics in South Korea has been eruptive and precarious. We identified the existence of system-level issues that are distinctive from normal political issues that may clear without much farce the pluralistic political institutions. System-level issues are critical in democratization, in that they can paralyze democratic political

institutions that are heavily under the influence of global capitalism. The situation is worse in the case of South Korea, where newly established democratic regimes are still operating within the context of the Cold-War ideology. Ideological and military confrontations with North Korea are basically withholding any system-level issues to be discussed within the given institutional arrangements, forcing pro-democratic and unification segments of society to take their issues to the street.

I noted that the political bottleneck these system-level issues cause is the reflection of the limitation of the existing repertoires of democratic institutions. In South Korea the only set of alternatives to the status quo includes options of (a) permanent separation (or independence) with illiberal democracy in the South (South Korea) and Stalinist dictatorship in the North (North Korea) and (b) absorption with illiberal democracy. We discussed why these options are unrealistic and fraught with difficulties, despite the formation of dominant national and international groups toward either option.

I then suggested that the system-level issues be resolved through a new world system of global democracy. Global democracy, we argued, would induce these nations to pursue political unity through federalism with local autonomy in selecting their own economic systems. It goes without saying that people will have to choose their own economic institutions through their democratic processes. In this sense, I argued that politics will have to govern the economy, either local or global, not vice versa.

Our case study and findings have not been systematically dealt with by other scholars, mainly because they thought that political issues are not germane in the democratization process. I want to close my argument by calling for a wider participation by scholars in the discussion on the relationship between the system-level issues and political democratization.

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