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Working Paper Series
Centre for Asian Pacific Studies

No. 171 (Aug 06) CAPS

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Recent Political Development in Korea

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Hong Kong

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August 2006

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Power Structure and Recent Political Development in Korea*

Lew Seok Choon⁺

Abstract

Democratic government is still comparatively young in South Korea. This paper outlines the development of the constitutional and political structures since 1948, noting in particular the complex history of political parties, which are often closely tied to prominent politicians. The paper then reviews the current political situation under the Roh Moo Hyun administration and examines the broad array of presidential candidates hoping to succeed him. Crucial to an understanding of modern Korean politics has been the conflict between the industrialization generation and the democratization generation, which is still relevant today.

1. Introduction

The year 2006 marks the 58th anniversary of both the adoption of the Constitution and the establishment of the Republic of Korea. As a constitutionally based, democratic government is still relatively young, debates regarding major government changes, like the adoption of a parliamentary system, are still ongoing. Prior to the establishment of the

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Conference on Korea's Future: Visions and Challenges, hosted by the Centre for Asian Pacific Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, 10-11 May 2006. I would like to express my appreciation of the help from Wang Hye Suk, Doctoral student at Yonsei University, in preparing this manuscript, as well as the financial support from the Korea Foundation.

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Republic in 1948, Korea experienced thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) followed by three years of American military rule (1945-1948). The Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 placed Korea under a foreign rule for the first time in its history.

Since its transformation into a republic, the Korean government, except for a brief period between August 1960 and July 1961 when a parliamentary system was in place, has maintained a presidential system, wherein the President is the head of state and chief executive. Under the present system, government power is shared principally by three branches: the legislative, judicial and executive. In addition, two other constitutionally-based institutions, the Constitutional Court and the National Election Commission, also perform governing functions.

The legislature consists of a single-house National Assembly, whose 299 members serve four-year terms. The organizational components of the National Assembly are: the individual members, the presiding officers (the Speaker and two Vice Speakers), the plenary, the committees (16 standing committees as well as special ad hoc committees), the negotiation groups, and the supporting administrative organs. Besides deliberating bills concerning general legislation, government budget, and ratification of international treaties, the National Assembly is also empowered to inspect and audit the administration, and to approve the appointments of the Prime Minister and the Director of the Board of Inspection and Audit. The National Assembly may, according to law, impeach public officials, and may adopt motions recommending to the President the removal of executive officials, including the Prime Minister.

The judiciary consists of three tiers of courts: the Supreme Court; the high courts or appellate courts; the district courts. Currently, the judiciary is exclusively a central government function; no provincial or local government may

establish its own court or prosecution system. The Supreme Court consists of thirteen Justices and a Chief Justice. High courts are placed in five locations which serve as regional centers. Besides the three-tier court system, the judiciary also operates a family court, an administrative court and a patent court.

The executive branch, headed by the President, consists of the Prime Minister, the State Council, seventeen executive ministries, seventeen independent agencies, the Board of Inspection and Audit, and the National Intelligence Service. The President, elected by popular vote for a single five-year term, has absolute power needed for operating the executive branch and leading the country. The Prime Minister, appointed by the President with the approval of the National Assembly, supervises the ministries and independent agencies. The Prime Minister performs this function under the supervision of the President, and in this sense he/she is the chief assistant to the President.

2. Changes in Korea's Constitution and Presidents

The Constitution of the Republic of Korea was first promulgated on July 17, 1948. Since then, it has been amended nine times, with the 27 October 1987 amendment being the last one (Table 1). The focus of the amendments has generally been on the President's powers and the method of election, and, to a lesser extent, the structure of the legislature. Until the coming of democratization in 1987, every president had launched his own constitution. After the last amendment, however, four presidents, Roh TW, Kim YS, Kim DJ, and Roh MH, had been elected under the same constitution. As the next Presidential Election (December 2007) approaches, there are some political voices calling for a revision of the constitution.

Table 1: Presidents with a Summary of Constitutional Amendments¹

<p>1st~3rd President</p> <p>Rhee Syngman</p> <p>1948-1960</p>	<p>The Constituent Constitution (July 1948)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - President election by the single-house National Assembly.
	<p>The first amendment (July 1952)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct election of the President by popular vote. - a bicameral legislature.
	<p>The second amendment (Nov 1954)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a provision for the Vice President to succeed the President in case of his/her death or incapacitation.
<p>4th President</p> <p>Yun Bo Seon</p> <p>1960-1962</p>	<p>The third amendment (June 1960)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the adoption of a parliamentary system, wherein the Prime Minister served as chief executive, while a popularly-elected President served as the head of state and commander of armed forces.
	<p>The fourth amendment (Nov 1960)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a special provision to the Constitution which enabled the National Assembly to enact retroactive laws aimed at punishing those directly involved in election fraud, or punishing those responsible for the killing or wounding of people protesting such frauds.
<p>5th~9th President</p> <p>Park Chung Hee</p> <p>1963-1979</p>	<p>The fifth amendment (Dec 1962)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - putting the presidential system and the single-house legislature back in place.
	<p>The sixth amendment (Sep 1969)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a provision to relax restrictions on the number of consecutive terms a president could serve.
	<p>The seventh amendment (Dec 1972)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - eliminating restrictions on the number of terms the President could serve. - indirect elections of the President through a newly-created electoral college. - the President was truly all-powerful, with the authority to fill one-third of the seats in the National Assembly, to dissolve the National Assembly, and to issue emergency decrees.

¹ Contents on Constitutional amendments are from www.asiainfo.org

<p>10th President</p> <p>Choi Kyu Hah</p> <p>1979-1980</p>		No Change
<p>11th~12th President</p> <p>Chun Doo Hwan</p> <p>1980-1988</p>	The eighth amendment (Oct 1980)	- a single seven-year term for the President, while maintaining the system of indirect elections through an electoral college.
	The ninth amendment (Oct 1987)	- The restoration of popular elections for the President, who was henceforth restricted to a single five-year term.
<p>13th President</p> <p>Rho Tae Woo</p> <p>1988-1993</p>		No Change
<p>14th President</p> <p>Kim Young Sam</p> <p>1993-1998</p>		No Change
<p>15th President</p> <p>Kim Dae Jung</p> <p>1998-2003</p>		No Change
<p>16th President</p> <p>Roh Moo Hyun</p> <p>2003-2008</p>		No Change as of July 2006

3. National Assembly and Political Parties

3-1. Composition of Korean National Assembly

Legislative power is vested in the National Assembly, a unicameral body. The organizational components of the National Assembly are the individual members, the presiding officers, the plenary, the committees, the negotiation groups, and the administrative organs for legislative assistance.² The Assembly is composed of 299 members, 236 elected from single-member electoral districts and 56 shared by their parties in proportional representation. All members serve a four-year term.

In the elections for the 17th National Assembly, held on April 15, 2004, out of a total of 299 seats, the ruling Uri Party won 152, the main opposition Grand National Party 121, the Democratic Labor Party 10, the Millennium Democratic Party 9, the United Liberal Democrats 4, and others 3 (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of Latest National Assembly Election (April 2004)

Parties	Number of Votes Obtained (%)	Seats (Elected + Proportional)
Uri Party	8,145,824 (38.3)	152 (129 +23)
Grand National Party	7,613,660 (35.8)	121 (100 + 21)
Millennium Democratic Party	1,510,178 (13.0)	9 (5 + 4)
Democratic Labor Party	2,774,061 (7.1)	10 (2 + 8)
United Liberal Democrats	600,462 (2.8)	4 (4 +0)
National Alliance 21	119,746 (0.6)	1 (1 + 0)
Independent	(2.3)	2 (2 + 0)
Total	(100.0)	299 (236 + 56)

*Source: the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea (www.assembly.go.kr)

² www.asiainfo.org

3-2. History of Political Parties³

Korean political parties have largely been organized around a particular leader instead of being based on a party platform or policies. Since each party is operating around a political boss, political parties were not able to represent all sectors of the society despite their claims to the contrary.

The 1987 Constitutional amendment was a milestone in the history of Korean democracy in that it reinstated the principle of direct, popular election of the President for the first time in 20 years. Inspired by the long-sought-for Constitutional amendment, many politically-minded people created political parties under a truly democratic system. Buoyed by the democratic process of the 1987 election, people seemed to believe that democracy was here to stay.

In October 1987, Roh Tae Woo of the Democratic Justice Party (DJP) was elected President by gathering 36.6 percent of the votes. His election was attributed to the fact that the opposition camp failed to put up a single candidate in a unified fashion. Other candidates in the election were Kim Young Sam of the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), Kim Dae Jung of the Peace and Democratic Party (PDP), Kim Jong Pil of the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP), and others from splinter parties. The Korean people who had just recovered their political freedom foresaw the possibility of a genuine change of governmental power looming in the not-too-distant future.

In the 13th-term National Assembly elections that were held in April 1988, the ruling DJP managed to win only 125 of the 299 seats. The remaining 71 went to the opposition PDP, 60 to the RDP, 35 to the NDRP, and 8 to independents. For the first time in the history of the Republic, a government party failed to obtain a majority of seats in the Legislature.

³ Contents on the political changes from 1987 to 1997 are from www.asiainfo.org.

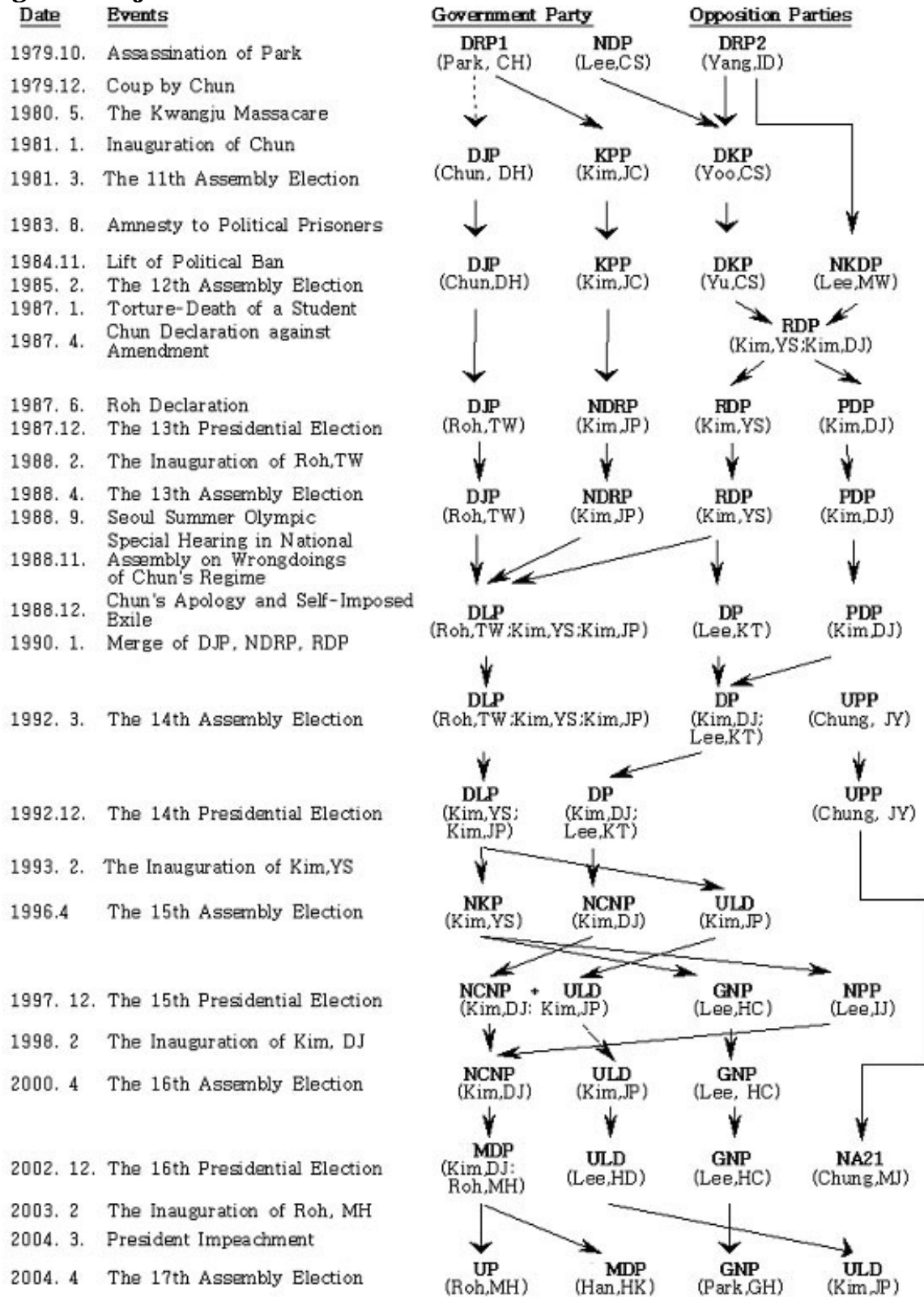
Because of its minority status in the National Assembly, the government had a hard time in pushing its agenda. But the government's difficulties did not last long as the governing DJP merged with the opposition parties RDP and NDRP in January 1990. The giant coalition, comprising two-thirds of the total membership, called itself the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP). Some RDP lawmakers protested against the merger and formed the Democratic Party (DP).

In 1991, politicians were moving fast in preparation of the 14th-term National Assembly elections scheduled for January the next year. Faced with the prospect of a showdown with the ruling coalition, the opposition PDP headed by Kim Dae Jung merged with the DP led by Lee Ki Taek. They actively sought the support of various civic groups.

However, the opposition was dealt a devastating defeat by the ruling coalition in the local elections held in March and June 1995. This was the first time such local elections were held since 1961 when they had been abolished by Park Chung Hee.

In early 1992, Chung Ju Yung, founder of the Hyundai conglomerate and his allies, created the Unified People's Party (UPP), a middle-of-the-road reform party. The UPP lost in the December presidential election, but won 31 seats in the National Assembly election in March of the same year, a decent performance for a party only a few months old. In the 14th-term parliamentary elections, the ruling coalition of DLP ended up winning one seat short of a simple majority. This was a substantial setback for the government party that had previously boasted a two-thirds majority. The major opposition Democratic Party won in 97 districts. In the December election, Kim Young Sam was elected President by winning 42 percent of the votes.

Figure 1: Major Events and Political Parties in Korea⁴



⁴ Until 1993, contents are cited from Kim and Lew (1995).

In May 1995, the United Liberal Democrats (ULD) was organized by Kim Jong Pil, who had broken away from the DLP. In the local elections in June of the same year, the ruling DLP suffered a major defeat. Of the 15 provincial governors and metropolitan mayors elections, the government party wound up winning only five seats. The opposition took eight and the remaining two went to independents. In the smaller cities, counties and districts elections held in 230 electoral constituencies, the government party won only 70 seats, compared with the opposition's 107 seats. Independent candidates took 53 seats. In this election, each of the major parties won in only certain regions, deepening worries about provincialism.

In the 15th-term National Assembly elections of 1996, the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP)'s hopes were shattered when it ended up getting only 79 of the 299 seats. The NCNP had hoped to win a majority based on the excellent performance of the opposition camp in the local elections held just months before, even though it had to break away from the DP prior to the elections. The ruling New Korea Party (NKP) won 139 seats, the ULD took 50, the Democrats got 15, and the remaining 16 seats went to independents. What worried the opposition camp particularly was that they failed to take a majority of the Seoul and Gyeonggi-do seats for the first time in the history of parliamentary elections. The ruling NKP took 54 of the 95 Seoul and Gyeonggi-do seats.

The year 1997 saw another milestone in the Korean party politics as there was a genuine transfer of power between a ruling and an opposition party for the first time in the fifty-year existence of the Republic. In the national election, Kim Dae Jung of the opposition NCNP was elected President by winning 40.3 percent of the votes, 1.6 percent over the ruling Grand National Party (GNP)'s Lee Hoe Chang. President Kim was inaugurated on February 25, 1998.

In the 16th Presidential Election (Dec 2002), Roh Moo Hyun of MDP was elected President, by winning 48.9 percent of the votes, beating the opposition GNP's Lee Hoe Chang. However, in 2004, the opposition-dominated Parliament voted to impeach Roh on the grounds of having violated election laws. He became the first President in South Korea to be ousted by the National Assembly. At the same time, protests against the impeachment of Roh were spreading nationwide among civic groups and voters. The elections for the 17th National Assembly (April 2004) were held during the period when the nation was awaiting the Constitutional Court's ruling on the suspended President Roh. Ironically, the impeachment movement actually worked in favour of the Uri Party, which had been created by President Roh in November 2003. In the elections for the 17th National Assembly, out of a total of 299 seats, the ruling Uri Party won 152, the main opposition Grand National Party 121, the Democratic Labor Party 10, the Millennium Democratic Party 9, the United Liberal Democrats 4, and others 3.⁵

The election had the following results: the Uri Party secured a majority of seats, shifting party dominance from the opposition camp to the ruling camp; the Democratic Labor Party won its first-ever seats in the National Assembly in Korean constitutional history, thanks to the 'proportional representation system', a newly-adopted election system; and 211 out of 299 elected candidates were first-term members. Finally, the proportion of elected members in their 30s and 40s rose by 43%, while the proportion of female members rose by 13%.⁶

⁵ Refer to the Table 2 on page 6.

⁶ Cited from the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea (www.assembly.or.kr)

4. Current Political Landscape and Recognized Leaders

4-1. The 2007 Presidential Hopefuls

Park Geun Hye (born in 1952), the former Chairperson of the Grand National Party, is the daughter of late President Park Chung Hee. Park graduated from Sogang University in 1974, earning a degree in electronic engineering, under the firm conviction that national priorities should be placed on the electronics industry in order for Korea to increase exports and become more competitive during its modernization period. In that same year, the First Lady was assassinated by a terrorist, leaving Park with the duty of accompanying her father to all major national functions in her mother's place. Park's own career began in earnest when she was appointed as Honorary President of Girl Scouts Korea, also in 1974.⁷

After her father President Park Chung Hee passed away on October 26, 1979, Park devoted herself to helping the poor and the marginalized through her management of the Yukyoung Foundation and the Saemaeum Hospital. Park served as Director of the Senior Citizens' Welfare Center, and subsequently went on to assume the position of Director of the Korean Cultural Foundation in 1993, and Director of the Jeongsu Scholarship Fund in 1994. Park has also been an active member of the Korean Literature Association since 1994.

The 1997 financial crisis was a shock to Park. As a person who only wished to see the country prosper, Park was prompted to enter politics - something to which she had consistently said no. In 1998, Park ran for office as a candidate of the Grand National Party and was elected to parliament in Daegu. She was reelected to the National Assembly in the April general elections in 2000. In the same year, Park gained the Grand National Party vice presidency and came to receive

⁷ Cited from www.koreasociety.org.

nationwide recognition as a representative politician, just three years after first entering politics.

Park was the Chairperson of the Grand National Party from 23 March 2004 to 11 July 2006. Now she is said to be one of the strongest candidates of the opposition Grand National Party for the next Presidency.

Lee Myung-bak (born in 1941) is the immediate former mayor of Seoul and is considered a major contender. He is also a member of the Grand National Party. As mayor of Seoul he was known for his innovative policy initiatives and especially for the restoration of the Chonggyecheon stream. He is regarded as a conservative and has called for South Korea to take a harder line on North Korea and for a greater emphasis on free-market solutions.

The 65-year-old's life path has been known, after all, as one of the best success stories of a salaried man in the era of economic development in Korea. Starting out as an ordinary employee at Hyundai Engineering and Construction in 1965, he shot up to become company CEO in just 12 years, at the age of 35. Entering politics in 1992, Lee was elected as a lawmaker twice on the ticket of predecessors of the conservative Grand National Party. He won the Seoul mayoralty in 2002 as the Grand National Party candidate and finished his term on 3 July 2006.⁸

Kim Geun-tae (born in 1947) is the current Chairperson of the ruling Uri Party and the former Minister of Health and Welfare (April 2004 ~ December 2005). Along with the former Unification Minister Chung Dong-young, he is said to be one of the strongest candidates for the next presidency from the ruling party side.

⁸ Cited from *Korea Times*, 24 Jan 2006.

Born in Bucheon on the outskirts of Seoul, Kim majored in economics at Seoul National University. During his college days, he jumped into pro-democracy movements and was arrested on treason charges along with a number of Seoul National University student activists in 1971. He was jailed several more times in the 1970s and 1980s for his involvement in various pro-democracy movements and campaigns. He also underwent severe tortures during imprisonment.

For such activities, he was given the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 1987. He first became a lawmaker in 1996 as a member of the National Congress for New Politics, the predecessor of the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), and has been elected to the National Assembly for the third consecutive term. He joined the breakaway Uri Party in 2003 with President Roh.

Kim is a long-term political colleague for President Roh. Kim competed for the presidential candidacy of the MDP in January 2002 but withdrew from the race two months afterwards. In September 2003, he became the Uri Party's floor leader and served in the post until May 2004.⁹

Chung Dong-young, born in 1953 in Sunchang County, North Jeolla, was the former Chairperson of the ruling Uri Party until May 2006 and the Minister of Unification from April 2004 to December 2005. Before holding that post he served two terms in the National Assembly with the National Congress for New Politics and the Millennium Democratic Party, respectively. He was considered a strong contender to succeed Roh as president from the ruling side, but, after the Uri's defeat in the local elections in May 2006, he went to Germany for what seemed like a period of political silence.

He has a bachelor's degree from Seoul National University and master's from the University of Wales, and

⁹ Cited from *Yonhap News* 30 June 2004 and <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

before entering politics he was a journalist and anchor with the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation. He is a strong supporter of the Sunshine Policy, and his tenure as Unification Minister was controversial for what critics saw as his overwillingness to avoid criticism of North Korea, and his rhetorical clashes with the United States have contributed to the weakening of the two nations' alliance. He was even accused of attempting to distract reporters from a meeting of activists for human rights in North Korea.¹⁰

Lee Haechan (born in 1952) was a former Prime Minister of South Korea under President Roh, from June 2004 until April 2006. He is a member of the Uri Party, and was elected five times for the National Assembly.

He also served as the minister of education under former president Kim Dae-jung from 1998 to 1999, presiding over controversial education reforms including revamping the college entrance process and lowering the retirement age of teachers. The first reform in particular, which at the time was summed up in the slogan that being good at one thing was enough to get into college, was criticised for allegedly lowering dramatically the scholastic competence of the so-called 'Lee Hae-chan generation' of then-high school students. His nomination as prime minister met some resistance due to his record as minister of education.¹¹

Goh Kun (born in 1938) is an independent politician. He served as Prime Minister of South Korea from 1997 to 1998 and from 2003 to 2004. In his more recent term, he assumed the role of interim head of state from 12 March 2004, following President Roh Moo Hyun's impeachment, to 14 May 2004,

¹⁰ Cited from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chung_Dong-young

¹¹ Cited from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Hae-chan and http://www.korea.net/korea/html/C/01/cabinet_1.html

when the South Korean Constitutional Court overturned the impeachment decision and restored Roh's powers as president.

He was a minister during the 1980s, and then Mayor of Seoul from 1988 to 1990(appointed) and in 1999(elected). Goh resigned from the office of Prime Minister on 24 May 2004 after refusing to comply with the President's request to replace cabinet members. He is known as a solid, hardworking civil servant. One of Goh Kun's nicknames is 'Mr. Stability', reflecting his ability to survive changes of government and other political upheavals.¹²

4-2. Current Political Landscape

President Roh Moo Hyun's support ratings have currently plunged, compared to the early months of his presidency, according to several public surveys conducted by media outlets.¹³ This may be because Roh made many people stare in disbelief at his utterly indiscreet public speeches after his presidential powers were restored by the Constitutional Court ruling against the parliamentary impeachment. Roh's so-called 'great consolidation policies' – giving only lip service to the aim at narrowing gaps among regions, political groups and other social segments by executing radical measures - have failed to do the job so far, widening instead the ideological differences and conflicts among clashing interest groups. Moreover, his administration's series of measures aimed at reviving the economy, which has been faced with a low employment rate, volatile labor-management relations and constringent domestic market sentiment, have failed to stir any recovery.

According to an article of *Chosun Daily*,¹⁴ in an opinion poll announced on 15 September 2005 by a local opinion

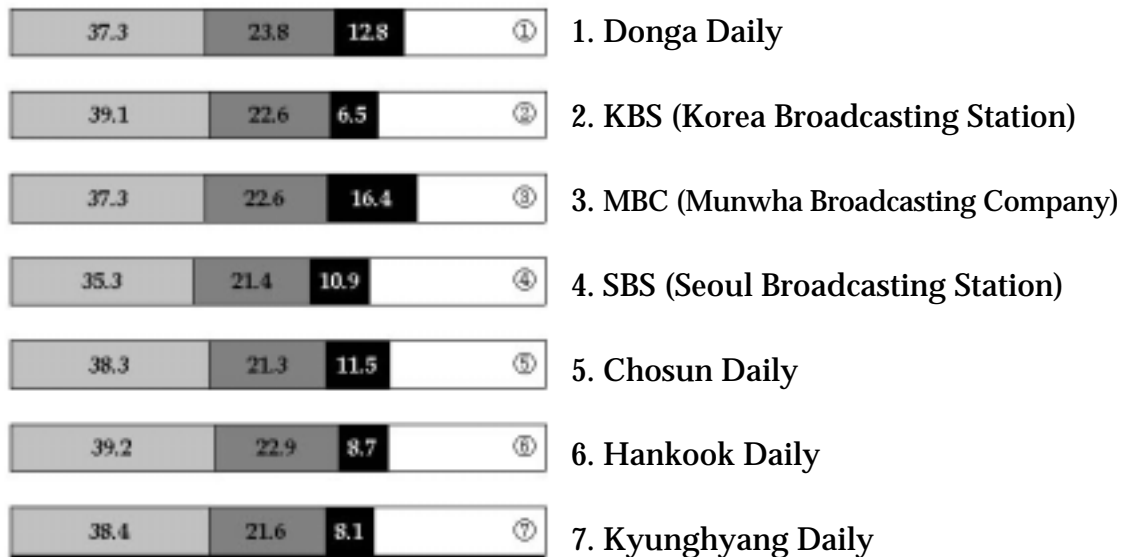
¹² Cited from (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

¹³ *Korea Herald*, Aug 25, 2005.

¹⁴ *Chosun Daily*, Sep 15, 2005.

research agent, only 20.6 percent of respondents said the president was handling national affairs well, while 60.8 percent felt he was running things poorly. The remainder offered no opinion. With the exception of the Jeolla provinces, Busan and South Gyeongsan Province, Roh's approval rating was in the teens. In the Jeolla provinces it dropped drastically from 49 percent on 30 August to 34.2 percent. Support for the ruling Uri Party stood at 16.3 percent, about half the main opposition Grand National Party's 30 percent. The Democratic Labor Party stood at 10.3 percent, and the Millennium Democratic Party at 3.6 percent. A substantial 39.3 percent said they supported no party. Compared to the survey two weeks earlier, the Uri Party's support dropped 3.6 percentage points while the Grand National Party's climbed 1.9 percentage points.

Figure 2: New Year (2006) Poll on Top Three Parties Preference (%)



Grey: Grand National Party, Dark Grey: Uri Party, Black; Democratic Labor Party

* Source: Donga Daily, Jan 2, 2006.

As shown in Figure 2, several polls on party preference carried out at the beginning of 2006 reveal the preferences toward the ruling party and the opposition have been

reversed.¹⁵ It reflects the unceasing chaos the nation has experienced during the past 3 years under this administration.

Such a situation was clearly reflected on the result of local elections carried out on 31 May 2006, which is summarized in Tables 3 and 4. The main opposition Grand National Party won the local elections by a landslide, sweeping 12 of 16 metropolitan city mayor and provincial governor seats, apart from Jeolla provinces.¹⁶ The ruling Uri Party took only North Jeolla Province.¹⁷ It was the second time for the party to win so many cities and provinces since the 2002 elections.¹⁸

The Grand National Party also won 155 of 230 seats for mayors of smaller cities, county governors and district chiefs. The opposition party was poised to win all 25 elections for district chiefs of Seoul, and almost 90 percent in the 66 constituencies in the metropolitan area.

The Uri Party suffered a resounding defeat in local elections, in the strongest indication yet that the party in charge at the national level has lost the trust of the country. It was the Uri Party's second defeat after the April 30 by-elections last year, where the opposition parties took all of the 23 posts up for grabs. The results are tipped to generate furious finger-pointing

¹⁵ *Donga Daily*, 2 January 2006.

¹⁶ The Grand National Party candidates for city mayors and provincial governors whose include Oh Se-hoon as Seoul mayor, Kim Moon-soo as Gyeonggi governor, Ahn Sang-soo as mayor of Incheon, Chung Woo-taek as governor of North Chungcheong Province, Lee Wan-koo as South Chungcheong Province governor, Hur Nam-sik as Busan mayor, Kim Beom-il as Daegu mayor, Kim Gwan-yong as North Gyeongsang Province governor, Kim Tae-ho as South Gyeongsang Province governor, Park Maeng-woo as mayor of Ulsan and Kim Chin-sun as governor of Gangwon Province.

¹⁷ *Chosun Daily*, Jun 1, 2006.

¹⁸ Voter turnout was estimated at 51.3 percent, 2.3 percentage points higher than in the 2002 local elections (48.9 percent) but lower than in the 2004 general elections (60.6 percent) and the 1998 local elections (52.7 percent). Those aged 19 and foreign residents who have lived here for more than three years were for the first time entitled to vote. Out of 3.7 million eligible voters, some 19 million went to polls (*Chosun Daily*, Jun 1, 2006).

between President Roh Moo Hyun and the Uri Party leadership and are expected to bring a sea change in the nation's political landscape. Furthermore, the outcome of the elections could greatly affect the dynamics of the presidential ballot in 2007 in that they strongly show the changes in the trend of public opinion.

Table 3: Number of Seats by Parties, Local Elections, May 31, 2006.

		The Uri Party	The Grand National Party	The Millennium Democratic Party	Democratic Labor Party	The People First Party	Others **	Independent	Total
Metropolitan Mayor/ Provincial Governor (%)		1 (6.3)	12 (75.0)	2 (12.5)	-	-	-	1 (6.3)	16 (100.0)
Smaller Cities Mayor/ County Governor/ District Chief (%)		19 (8.3)	155 (67.4)	20 (8.7)	-	7 (3.0)	-	29 (12.6)	230 (100.0)
Metro- politan City/ Province Council Members	Elected (%)	33 (5.0)	519 (79.2)	71 (10.8)	5 (0.8)	13 (2.0)	-	14 (2.1)	655 (100.0)
	Proportional (%)	19 (24.4)	38 (48.7)	9 (11.5)	10 (12.8)	2 (2.6)	-	-	78 (100.0)
Smaller Cities /County /District Council Members	Elected (%)	543 (21.6)	1,401 (55.8)	233 (9.3)	52 (2.1)	56 (2.2)	-	228 (9.1)	2,513 (100.0)
	Proportional (%)	87 (23.2)	220 (58.7)	43 (11.5)	14 (3.7)	11 (3.0)	-	-	375 (100.0)
Total (%)		702 (18.2)	2,345 (60.7)	378 (9.8)	81 (2.1)	89 (2.3)	-	272 (7.0)	3,867 (100.0)

* Source: National Election Commission.

** Others include The People First Party, The People's Party and The Great Korea Society.

Table 4: Number of Votes Obtained by Parties, Local Elections, May 31, 2006.

		The Uri Party	The Grand National Party	The Millennium Democratic Party	Democratic Labor Party	The People First Party	Others **	Independent	Total
Metropolitan Mayor/ Provincial Governor (%)		5,106,984 (27.1)	10,418,021 (55.2)	1,709,452 (9.1)	1,099,592 (5.8)	345,295 (1.8)	11,978 (0.1)	166,284 (0.9)	18,857,606 (100.0)
Smaller Cities Mayor/ County Governor/ District Chief (%)		4,277,001 (23.1)	9,396,305 (50.8)	1,530,908 (8.3)	648,353 (3.5)	403,464 (2.2)	4,658 (-)	2,250,127 (12.2)	18,510,816 (100.0)
Metropolitan City/ Province Council Members	Elected (%)	4,329,794 (23.7)	9,291,686 (50.8)	1,602,034 (8.8)	507,157 (2.8)	408,610 (2.2)	6,039 (-)	2,143,480 (11.7)	18,288,800 (100.0)
	Proportional (%)	4,056,367 (21.6)	10,086,354 (53.8)	1,863,239 (9.9)	2,263,051 (12.1)	436,774 (2.3)	57,293 (0.3)	-	18,763,078 (100.0)
Smaller Cities /County /District Council Members	Elected (%)	3,544,024 (19.3)	8,317,356 (45.4)	1,575,921 (8.6)	1,072,826 (5.9)	390,755 (2.1)	5,352 (-)	3,410,937 (18.6)	18,317,171 (100.0)
	Proportional (%)	4,196,455 (24.1)	9,422,971 (54.0)	1,792,908 (10.3)	1,655,305 (9.5)	376,675 (2.2)	-	-	17,444,314 (100.0)

* Source: National Election Commission.

** Others include The People First Party, The People's Party and The Great Korea Society.

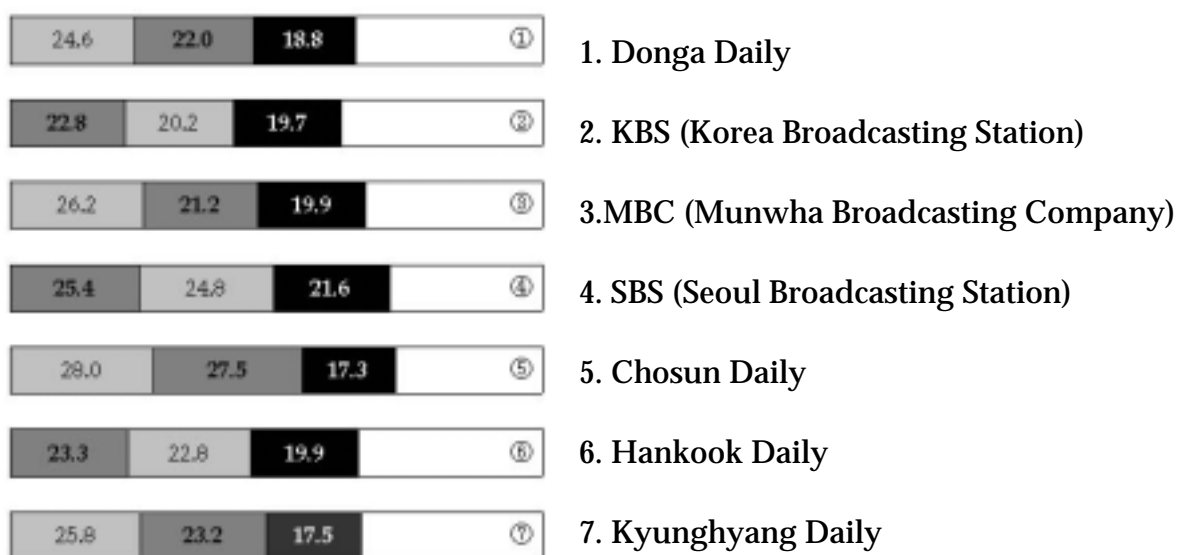
4-3. Opinion Polls on 2007 Presidential Candidates

Albeit a bit old, considering the fluctuating nature of public opinion, *Donga Daily* report,¹⁹ featured in a special edition on the 'presidential hopefuls' for the 2007 election, offers a good source to catch up on what is going on in the peoples' minds. As shown in the Figure 3, Goh Kun, Lee Myung-Bak and Park Geun-Hye stand firm as three leading presidential aspirants. Unfortunately, all these three belong to the opposition side or, at least, are independent. The ruling side is not able to find any significant candidates up to now.

¹⁹ *Donga Daily*, Jan 2, 2006

According to a *Korea Times* article,²⁰ the latest poll conducted on May 20-22 2006 by MBC, shows Park placed first with 21.5 percent, followed by former Prime Minister Goh with 21.1 percent. The unexpected assault on Park during the local elections campaign lifted not only the popularity of the main opposition Grand National Party but also Park's approval ratings as a leading presidential hopeful in next year's election.²¹

Figure 3: New Year (2006) Poll on Top Three Presidential Candidates (%)



Grey: Goh Kun, Dark Grey: Lee Myung-Bak, Black: Park Geun-Hye

* Source: Donga Daily, Jan 2, 2006.

Seoul Mayor Lee Myung-bak, who ranked first after the successful restoration of the Chonggyechon stream in downtown Seoul late last year, was placed third with 18.1 percent. Lee's approval rating plummeted after allegations were raised in March that he had been given free use of a

²⁰ *Korea Times*, May 24, 2006.

²¹ A 50-year-old man, Ji Chung-ho, slashed Park's face with a box-cutter during a street campaign in downtown Seoul. Park has been recovering after a surgery at Yonsei University's Severance Hospital. The cut required over 60 stitches but did not threaten Park's life, according to doctors.

public tennis court in return for business favors. The assault against Park seems to have led many people to be sympathetic to the opposition leader, and her calm attitude and leadership after the incident also contributed to her surging popularity. The knife attack has also impressively boosted the approval ratings of the Grand National Party. According to a recent poll by Gallup Korea after the incident, the Grand National Party enjoyed a 44-percent approval rating, which was more than twice that of the Uri Party's 20.1 percent. In a February 2006 poll, the Grand National Party garnered about 35 percent, ahead of the governing party with 22.8 percent.

5. Conclusion

Modern Korean politics can be summarized as the confrontation between the 'industrialization generation' and the 'democratization generation'. In 1997 the financial crisis hit the Korean society as well as economy. It was a critical moment in politics because at the same time the first peaceful turnover of political power to the opposition happened. The new government of Kim Dae Jung - and later his successor, Roh Moo Hyun - came into power, winning popular support based on criticisms of the past industrialization generation's authoritarian rules and distorted economic policies. However, 10 years of restructuring processes by the democratization generation have been far from successful, aggravating the crisis and spreading uncertainties across the entire society.

In this situation, ideological topography and political structure are changing rapidly. The re-evaluation on the industrialization generation (Right-Conservative) and the democratization generation (Left-Progressive) is being actively undertaken among intellectuals of Korean civil society. The appearance of the so-called 'New Right Movement' reflects this. This movement started as a reaction to recent regimes' maladministration and incompetence, aiming at defending the

democracy of Korea from the left-leaning and pro-North Korea administration.

In particular, the New Right Movement, dedicated to 'reformative conservatism', is taking an active role in the nation's political spectrum. As a responsible social organization, it denounces the misgovernment and also criticizes the Grand National Party for its failure to perform its mission as an opposition as well as alternative party.

If the New Right Movement enlists support from the Korean public and the Grand National Party-envisioned alliance materializes, it could give an upper hand to the party in the next presidential election, which then will be turned into a left vs. right battle, political analysts have predicted.²² This movement is expected to play a critical role in upcoming major elections: the Presidential Elections in December 2007 and National Assembly Elections in May 2008.

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Glossary

Parties

DJP: the Democratic Justice Party	민주정의당 (민정당): 전두환/노태우
DKP: the Democratic Korea Party	민주한국당 (민한당): 유치송
DLP: the Democratic Liberal Party	민주자유당 (민자당): 노태우/김영삼
DP: the Democratic Party	민주당: 이기택/김대중
DRP1: the Democratic Republican Party	민주공화당: 박정희
DRP2: the Democratic Reunification Party	민주통일당: 양일동
GNP: the Grand National Party	한나라당: 이회창/박근혜
KPP: the Korea People's Party	한국국민당 (한민당): 김총철
MDP: the Millennium Democratic Party	새천년민주당: 김대중/한화갑
NCNP: the National Congress for New Politics	새정치국민회의: 김대중
NDP: the New Democratic Party	신민당: 이철승
NDRP: the New Democratic Republican Party	신민주공화당: 김종필
NKP: the New Korea Party	신한국당: 김영삼
NKDP: the New Korea Democratic Party	신한민주당: 이민우
NPP: the New People's Party	국민신당: 이인제
PDP: the Peace and Democratic Party	평화민주당 (평민당): 김대중
RDP: the Reunification Democratic Party	통일민주당: 김영삼
ULD: the United Liberal Democrats	자유민주연합(자민련): 김종필
UN21: the National Alliance 21	국민통합 21: 정몽준
UP: the Uri Party	열린우리당: 노무현
UPP: the Unified People's Party	통일국민당: 정주영

Persons

Chun, DH: Chun, Doo Hwan	Chung, JY: Chung, Ju Yung
Chung, DY: Chung Dong Young	Chung, MJ: Chung, Mong Joon
Goh, K: Goh, Kun	Han, HK: Han, Hwa Kap
Kim DJ: Kim, Dae Jung	Kim, JC: Kim, Jong Chul
Kim JP: Kim Jong Pil	Kim YS: Kim, Young Sam
Lee, CS: Lee, Chul Seung	Lee, HC: Lee, Hoe Chang
Lee, HD: Lee, Han Dong	Lee, IJ: Lee, In Je
Lee, KT: Lee, Ki Taek	Lee, MB: Lee Myung Bak
Lee, MW: Lee, Min Woo	Park, CH: Park, Chung Hee
Park, GH: Park, Geun Hye	Roh, MH: Roh, Moo Hyun
Roh, TW: Roh, Tae Woo	Yang, ID: Yang Il Dong
Yoo, CS: Yoo, Chi Song	