

# CLASS-HABITUS IN KOREAN POLITICS TOWARDS A MODEL OF CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

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## ABSTRACT

Despite a long time's trial for accomplishing democracy, the Korean politics is far from its goals. The main obstacle is that the class-politics do not exist in Korea. It means that the dominated people do not support the radical party as theoretically expected. The political behavior is somewhat different from the reasonable pattern of democracy theories. Therefore, we should search for the reason. Traditionally, the political actor formed its self-identity in relation to the social class; however, such constitution of self-identity (individualization) no longer holds. Understanding political action through individualization requires a process far more complex than political action based on interest, for individualization must take into account components unfamiliar to the field of politics, such as motivating desire and emotion. However, the study of individualization does not mean complete disregard of the pre-established social class model; the proposed task is to revise the classical model of class to a more realistic one and apply it to the current situation of Korean politics. We propose in this article to remake Class-Habitus from the Bourdieu's concept of Habitus. I define this new perspective on the social classes as "cultural class analysis." Three problems of current Korean politics should be addressed and resolved through cultural class analysis; overcoming the limits of subjectivism and objectivism, the separation of the objective social status and political consciousness, and the possibility of cultural democracy in Korea.

**Keywords:** Class-habitus, Korean politics, Bourdieu, cultural democracy, *Phenomenologie*

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## I. KOREAN POLITICS: REVISING THE CLASS FROM THE BOURDIEU'S CONCEPT OF HABITUS

Modern Korean politics can no longer be explained through the classical model of class. The turnout of votes won by the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) presidential candidate in 2002 was extremely low given the composition of the Korean social classes, including the number of laborers in South Korea.<sup>1</sup> The working class constitutes over a third of the entire Korean population. Yet results of Presidential or midterm elections rarely reflect the voice of the working class. The classical model of class is not equal to explaining such paradoxes in terms of theory. Korean politics today is undergoing a rapid change. A revised class model has an unavoidable mandate to explain these changes.

At the core of the change lies the progress through which a political actor constructs his self-identity. Traditionally, the political actor formed his self-identity in relation to the social class; however, such constitution of self-identity (individualization) no longer holds. Understanding political action through individualization requires a process far more complex than political action based on interest, for individualization must take into account components unfamiliar to the field of politics, such as motivating desire and emotion. However, the study of individualization does not mean complete disregard of the pre-established social class model; the proposed task is to revise the classical model of class to a more realistic one and apply it to the current situation of Korean politics. I define this new perspective on the social classes as "cultural class analysis." Three problems of current Korean politics should be addressed and resolved through cultural class analysis<sup>2</sup>.

1 According to the statistics of the Korean Central Election Commissions (2002), candidate Kwon Yong Gil won 3.9 percent of total votes as a candidate of the DLP Changwon and Ulsan, cities with a relatively higher number of workers; each yielded 9.2 percent and 11.4 percent to Kwon. Why do laborers vote for candidates supported by parties other than the labor party? The votes won by Roh Moo Hyun (winner of the 2002 presidential election) and candidate Lee Hoe-chang clearly show that the Korean voters are heavily influenced by regionalism rather than social class.

2 So far, analysis of politics and the democratization model addressed class interest on political and legal grounds. But the suggested cultural analysis is an attempt to explain the conditions that differentiate individual political actions, given the same economical situations and the relation of production. Cultural analysis will serve as a minor part of the foundation for achieving political democratization. Since the military regime, Korea has gone through two civilian administrations – "the Munmin Chongbu" (civil administration) led by former president Kim Young Sam (1993-1998), and the Kungmin Administration led by former president Kim Dae Jung (1998-2002) – and has succeeded in attaining democratization at a legal and systematic level. However, Korea is now faced with the task of achieving substantial and practical democratization. The goal of cultural analysis is to detect the factors that determine the behaviors of the representative political actors

First is the problem of perspective; in other words, **overcoming the limits of subjectivism and objectivism**. Among those analyzing the social class system has been a tacit assumption that social (occupational) status is achieved through economic means. But modern Korean politics requires explanations for behavioral results that do not match the expected political behavior of class. Most scholars of the working class have assumed that the increasing influence of the laborers stemmed from their effective solidarity based on economic and occupational status. Why are no congressmen, then, elected from Ulsan, where the largest campaigns for workers' wages take place<sup>3</sup>? The conventional class model offers no explanation. Rather than search for a direct correlation between socio-economic status and political actions, we should look for a new explanation or critical viewpoint to define the cause-effect relationship.

Second is the problem of individualization: **the separation of the objective social status and political consciousness**. The influence of an individual's political disposition or decision making on social classification is undeniable despite the fact that individualistic political actions cannot be directly reduced to social class. The complete disregard for this causal relationship makes analysis of social class impossible. Therefore we are left with the problem of explaining both the similarities and differences between one's individual political actions and his social status. This would require accepting the interrelation between the processes of social-class formation (class objectivism) and consciousness (class subjectivism), and the difference between the process of interiorization of class consciousness (individualization I) and its political expression (individualization II).

Third is the **possibility of cultural democracy in Korea**. As mentioned above, social-class research is not possible without the model of democracy. Consequently, we must recognize the significance of this revised class concept in the democratic model of Korea. Since the working-class controversy of the 1980s was put to rest by "popular democracy," and the controversy of the middle class of the 1990s was concluded through "civil democracy," it is logical to relate the twenty-first century's social class debate to the theory of what I would call "cultural democracy." The theory of popular democracy and the theory of civil democracy both focused on gaining political influence for the working and middle classes. However, the cultural democracy theory is founded on a hypothesis that the characteristic of social classes cannot be firmly fixed, and is constantly changing depending on current political issues. The

in Korean society, and to fulfill the requirements for complete democratization and encourage political participation and consolidation of Korean citizens.

3 In the 2002 basic regional election, Ulsan elected two candidates (Yi Gam Yong and Yi Sang Bop) from the labor party.

current model of Korean democracy established an interest-based relationship between the working class and the middle class. But politics of cultural democracy will comprehensively concentrate on the effects of various political issues on individualization and in turn how individualized people create important political issues. In the era of cultural democracy, the politics of identity formation – recognizing how the identity of each actor transforms depending on social circumstances – will become more important than interest-based politics.

While it is clear that the classical model of class (per Marx) is a political-economic model based on the mode of production and wage labor, a study of the microscopic behaviors of a political actor is essential to explain today's Korean politics. The study includes various motives of individual actions as explanatory variables. Such factors are exceedingly difficult to visualize or measure by simple statistics, for they are unfamiliar subjects to the logic of production and are related to the individual's habits and the unconscious. Naturally, this does not mean that the inner motives of individual behavior have no dealings with social production, nor that the social-class model is completely ineffectual.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class will bring more light to this subject. In other words, the logic of production and individual motivation should be simultaneously explained. Bourdieu's theories can provide insight toward the academic resolution of this task. Bourdieu's theory of class is most clearly explained in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of *La Distinction* (1979a). In these chapters, Bourdieu shows how individual behavior related to consumption can be categorized according to the social class structure. Moreover, he states that the different inclinations of classes, rather than possession of the means of production, better mark the distinction of the classes. However, Bourdieu's theory of class as applied to individual consumption does not directly relate to the topic of the relationship between an individual's political consciousness and his behaviors. Chapter 8 of *La Distinction* proves more relevant to the issue I wish to address in this work.

In Chapter 8, Bourdieu focuses on the formation of political opinion. In contrast to the traditional democracy based on the expression of individual opinion through a representative, he claims that the voters' political decisions are influenced by a distorted communication system that connects them with their representatives. This creates a "misappropriation effect" (*effet de détournement*) on the meaning of the communicated content. Bourdieu is especially skeptical of polls on public opinion that currently serve as the basis for political decisions. He claims that, along with the campaigns led by the political candidate, the candidate's mystic image exerts even greater influence on the decision of the voters than the voters' own

knowledge and opinion. At this point, a closer examination of the relationship between the "deputy effect" and "political fetishism" is necessary. The "oracle effect" (*effet d'oracle*) (1979a: 52) is one of the many metaphors Bourdieu uses to explain the modern characteristics of political fetishism.

The role of language in the construction of the mystery of the deputy should not be overlooked. If politics is an expression of individuals' everyday lives through an officially organized language, the process by which experience is transformed into language becomes the focal point of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is executed only when political organizations dominate other political opinions by making their own opinion legitimate (by force). One may compare this phenomenon to the constituents of the non-ruling class who are subject to the official language of political spokesmen while also unable to free themselves from the boundaries of that everyday language. In addition, the political character explains the mysticism created by the bestowal of authority on political action<sup>4</sup>.

Terms such as "false identification" and "the mystery of the deputy," prove significant to the absurd phenomenon among Korean laborers who vote for the conservative party, apparently forgetting their social class identity. However, it is difficult to apply Bourdieu's analysis directly to Korean society because of the following issues.

First is a concern related to Bourdieu's sociological definition of emotion. In explaining the concept of "false identification," he consistently emphasizes the emotional consent that the political representative (*mandataire*) must obtain from the public. Taking a more adventurous approach, one may even conclude that the process of emotional identification with others is the source of symbolic violence in modern politics.

But what does Bourdieu mean by this emotional element? Can emotions become basic variables in sociological analysis? If so, are all emotional experiences components of self-identification? While Bourdieu's definition of an emotional element in the case of prestige in primitive tribal societies (1972) has a cultural quality in terms of Max Weber, the definition of the emotional element in the analysis of modern politics (1979a) is closer to the unconscious in the psychosocial or Freudian sense. In short, Bourdieu's work on the sociological concept of emotion is extremely arbitrary, and the level of his analysis is descriptive rather than definitive. Whether the self-image truly reflects the self-identity of an individual depends on how the

4 As symbols such as a judge's robe or a flag play an important role in today's politics, a successful execution of political authority requires expression through an officially recognized symbol and a process through which the people accept the rulers' political representation.

emotion and the self-identity are brought together within the framework of social systems and psychological impulses. Hence in order to correctly determine the role of emotion within society, one must assume emotion as a skill factor on a systematic level and study its influence on individualization.

The second flaw involves the recognition of the other, due to the obscurity of Bourdieu's explanation of the concept of *habitus*, the formation of subjectivity. While Bourdieu claims that a certain group comes to recognize another group through their own habitus during the stage of empathy, he does not explain how the habitus itself is created. In other words, Bourdieu fails to explicate how the political actor is subjugated to symbolic violence. The status of subjectivity has been a constant over the history of Marxism, and remains unresolved even after the post-Marxist controversy<sup>5</sup>. As much as Bourdieu takes confidence in his work from integrating the problem of the political actor and its systems through dialectic, a Marxist approach to this issue is necessary, not only for a frank evaluation of Bourdieu's sociology, but also to recapitulate the theoretical value of Marxism, which is slowly deteriorating in modern politics.

Bourdieu's stance on the political actor (subjectivity) is revealed through the object of his criticisms. The position of the political actor he is searching out through the concept of habitus is neither Lukacs' idealistic Marxism nor Althusser's structuralistic Marxism (Bourdieu, 1980: 70). Yet his definition of the human being remains extremely vague. Besides the single mention that humans "are beings made at the core of the political actor and in front of the existence of the others, (1992: 174)" Bourdieu's works do not show sufficient philosophical analysis of human nature.<sup>6</sup>

The next section, will attempt to set a new framework of analysis for the political actors in Korea, while exploring and effectively using Bourdieu's concepts.

5 Perry Anderson states that the problem of the political actor and its systems is epistemologically the key point of the post-Marxism controversy. For more, see P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983).

6 Yet it is not difficult to presume its reason, for Bourdieu's interest is focused only on the concrete fields of sociology. He emphasizes that one must dive into society in order to comprehend the human being. Therefore, he uses terms such as "taking position" (*prise de position*), "game sense" (*sense de jeu*), "strategy" (*stratégie*), instead of human reasoning, practice, and liberation. He uses the terms to detect how activities of individuals are divided within the social space. The focus of the problem has now shifted from human nature to the category of collective behavior. Hence, to understand the meaning of the human being to Bourdieu, who rejected philosophical language and pursued actual proof of concrete sociology, one must study the difference between the traditional concept of the social class and Bourdieu's new definition.

## II. A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

### 1) Overcoming the Limits of Subjectivism and Objectivism

Accurate understanding of the first problem requires an examination of epistemology as the foundation of Marxism. Marx's concept of social class falls under the socio-economic category, which sets forth the idea that the structure and characteristic of the mode of production regulates the materialistic life and mentality of all members of society. Also, he explains that the gap between the classes is derived from the particular socio-economic situation to which the individuals are exposed. Based on this concept, we can conclude that Marx's definition of social class is analogous to a contemporary perspective founded on the model of the rational individual. Consequently, the misunderstanding of their own interest is a pathology that needs to be addressed from the Marxist perspective. On the other hand, a political consciousness incongruous with the objective status within the social class is "false consciousness." But such pathological phenomena and false consciousness are conceived even more naturally in the case of Korea's political reality, which requires accepting such incongruity as inherent characteristics of Korean politics, rather than as a temporary aberration and of consciousness. This kind of shift in viewpoint requires a thorough examination of Marx's view on human nature.

Interestingly, French philosopher Merleau-Ponty provides a deep insight into the topic of a new perspective on humans in relation to social class. His work, *La Phénoménologie de la Perception* (1993), introduces a great possibility for a new comprehension of human existence, one that sheds light on the epistemological error created by the Marxist class model. The vocabulary of Marxism cannot sufficiently elaborate on the focus of this essay, which questions the reason for the discrepancy between social-class status and political action. Therefore, an active academic pursuit is required to overcome the boundaries of fields of study and rely on the vocabulary of philosophy.

Merleau-Ponty explains that the protagonist of history is not the producer human, but the human capable of living life through emotions such as love and hatred. He states that class, defined through the medium of production, is based only on material interest, which excludes the possibility of other interpretations. According to Merleau-Ponty, Marx fails to illustrate the holistic totality of the human entity. Revising the concept of class according to Merleau-Ponty's existential perspective on human existence requires consideration of the economic interest as well as emotion in the categorization of the social classes.

I would like to modify the term “habitus” advocated by Bourdieu to propose a new concept of a “class-habitus” to advance the revision.<sup>7</sup> Thus, class-habitus will help explain the political phenomenon in which an individual’s accumulation of experiences and emotions creates peculiar political inclinations despite an objective social status established on an economic basis. This phenomenon strongly reflects the fact that the theoretical class does not sufficiently correspond to the real class; in this context, the expression of political action is a cultural result of individual judgment and practice according to the game-sense created by society. This reconceived concept now allows us to theoretically explore beyond the limits of class subjectivism and objectivism.

Yet social science requires a more specific vocabulary for a concrete social analysis. So at this point, I will divide “class-habitus” into two sub-concepts to explicate the productive individual versus the emotional individual. The first sub-concept is “interest,” which has been used in the Marxist class model, and the second is the category of emotion, a concept that so far has been rather neglected.<sup>8</sup>

The 2002 presidential election shows that the public momentum for expressing emotional actions has become more powerful than interest-based action. While the labor and student movements, which were progressive movements from 1960 to 1980, resisted Korea’s

7 Bourdieu was a sociologist who was deeply influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy; cf. P. Rabinow and H. Drefus, “Can There Be a Science of Existential Structure and Social Meaning?” eds.C. Calhoun, et al., Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Sung-min Hong, Habitus, Corps, Domination. (Paris: Harmattan, 1999). See especially Chapter 2.

8 I have several concerns regarding the term “emotion”: One may use the term “passion” instead of “emotion,” as in Hirschman Passion and Interest (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977). My choice of terminology has been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. But in further justification of my decision, while: passion: is a modern political concept related to civil morality (Rousseau’s Emile focuses on this concept of passion, including sympathy), I have concluded that “emotion” is the term more in line with contemporary political identity. For example, feminism, homosexuality, anxiety, and solitude are regarded as key subjects of the existence of modern human beings in Modernity and Self Identity (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991) by Giddens, and thus I believe “emotion” is the appropriate term to address such issues.

One may use the term “prestige” in terms of M. Weber instead of emotion. The concept of status by Weber is focused on prestige, which is beyond production. Hence, it is possible to consider Weber as the first scholar to scientifically conceptualize “emotion” in the political context. However, the social status of Weber is based on market logic, which does not go beyond the level of interest, thus lacking reflection on the internal dynamic of the human being. I base my concept of emotion on that of A. Tocqueville. According to my analysis of the political interpretation of Tocqueville, the political change of 1848 in France is in striking contrast to that of Marx, whose main focus is on the class conflict of interest. Though Tocqueville never mentions the term “emotion,” I would like to assume that he emphasizes a kind of political factor such as emotion as motive for political change.

authoritarian regime, Rohsamo’s<sup>9</sup> progressive campaign during the presidential election tried to suggest an alternative politics for the future. These observations enable us to form a graphic framework for analysis of class-specific behavior in recent Korean politics. In the following table, interest and emotion form the columns, and resistance and project form the rows, enabling us to define the model of Korean politics and classes through four quadrants (see Table 1).

Korea’s political situation is currently shifting from the first to the fourth quadrant. The victory of President Roh’s supporters during the election results from the combination of emotional solidarity and projectional political movement (fourth quadrant), while candidate Ri Hae-chang’s<sup>10</sup> election campaign still remains close to the resistance-interest field (first quadrant). The outcome of the presidential election indicates the Korean voters’ strong preference for the emotional-projectional class behavior.

<Table 1>

	Class-habitus	
	Interest	Emotion
Resistance	1 *	2
Project	3	4 *

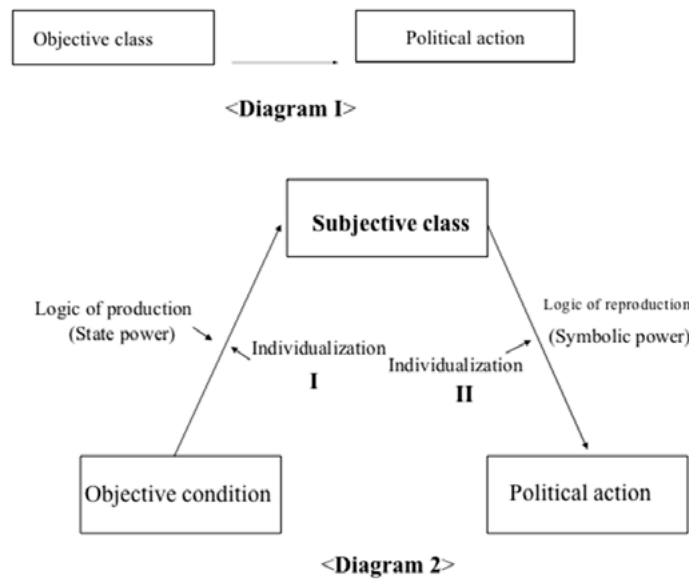
**2) Individualization: Separation of Objective Social Status and Political Consciousness**

To approach the second problem, we must question why objective social classes do not match the expected outcome of political action. Understanding this phenomenon requires acceptance of the possibility of a discrepancy between the objective social status and the individual political expression. At this point, it is possible to hypothesize the concept of a subjective social status in relation to materialistic foundation and political action, illustrated in the following diagrams (1 and 2).

9 Rohsamo: The title of the private group that supported Roh Moo Hyun as presidential candidate during the 2002 presidential election.

10 Ri Hae-chang was Roh Moo Hyun’s opposing candidate in the 2002 presidential election.





<Diagram 1> is a visualization of the existing social-class model, which predicts similar dispositions and systems of values, as well as similar political expressions, among people of the same objective social status. The study of the Korean social-class system during the 1980s corresponds to <Diagram 1>. However, the political actors’ social status alone does not accurately reflect the general behavioral tendencies of the entire class. Social classes are more frequently established upon social relationships than on materialistic foundations. So in order to explain the mechanism of individual political expression within the boundaries of the social class to which he or she belongs, I will elaborate on several variables that may influence this behavior.

In <Diagram 2> the arrow pointing from the objective social status to the subjective social status is labeled ‘individualization I,’ while the arrow pointing from subjective social class to political action is ‘individualization II.’ Then individualization I and II are each divided into “life world” (private space) and “political domain” (public space) for differentiation between internalization of external factors and exteriorization of internalized values, which provide an explanation for the discrepancy between an individual’s social status and his expected political actions. In other words, individualization is the focal point of the new approach to the Marxist social-class model. Using this approach, then what is the meaning of individualization in modern politics? Among recent studies, Ulrich Beck’s works (1998; 2000) on cultural research are the best known for addressing the issue of individualization; however, scholars have been

consistently interested in individualization since 1968, when Western European academics raised concerns about the collapse of class politics. Among the members of this academic force were postmodernists including Herbert Marcuse (1987), Daniel Bell (1966), Christopher Lasch (1991), and Gill Lipovetsky (1983), who shared a common interest in explaining the process of individualization, a topic difficult to explain by Marxism alone. Their studies also surpass the boundaries of social science by including psychoanalytical and cultural concepts such as desire—i.e., emotion in the Marxist tradition. Such concepts, along with a new class model, will help explain the newly surfaced problems within Korea’s new generation, the so-called the “N Generation.”

Moreover, individualization is intimately related to cultural power in Korea. A comprehensive study needs to be mounted on the influence of information spread through cultural media (educational institutions, the press, and the Internet) on political inclinations and values of the individual. This will require various forms of analysis ranging from microscopic analytic techniques like semiotics to the genealogy of political theories imported from foreign countries following national independence, which continuously serve as the model for the politics of Korean society. This logic is based on an intuition that language plays a critical role in shaping individual political decisions.

**A. Individualization I: Life World**

1. In the social class model, the individual’s identity was determined by the relation to production. But consumption becomes the more important variable in the process of cultivating identity in Western societies during the 1960s, when people began to recognize the influence of cultural products on the life world of individuals. Unlike in the (productivity) past, social identity as a parent, worker, or student now changes depending on the role and tendencies of consumption. For example, the class status of an individual is determined by such factors as the possession of a luxury car, the style of one’s favorite restaurant, and one’s vacation destination. In the past, social inequality created by the relation to production was limited within the public sphere, but today the power of capital has made consumption the cause of social inequality within a new dimension. This is the phenomenon defined as “distinction” in Bourdieu’s concept, as that which spreads and reproduces through individuals’ subconscious habits to create a lifestyle (1979a).

Unlike political ideologies, it is difficult for individuals to intuitively recognize the reality of their life world as being dominated by the cultural hegemony of the bourgeois. This is because

class-habitus, which is closely related to subconscious lifestyles, is a sort of cultural custom (“*doxa*”); unless each individual maintains a reflective attitude, the class-habitus is nearly impossible to notice or analyze. This difficult recognition of the class-habitus is the primary reason the objective social status and the expected political behavior do not correspond. For instance, considering the laborers’ level of salary in the relation of production, laborers should rightfully resist current politics and press for a new relationship between the capitalist and the laborer. However, their immodest consumption habit gives them the delusion that they belong to the middle class by creating a gap between self-image and realistic social identity. Generally, since the 1990s, South Korean society can be viewed as having embraced the Western consumption style; such lifestyles are the cause of distortion of political consciousness.

2. A prime factor in explaining political behavior of social classes is the analysis of the ratio of capital composition within the class. So far the classes’ economic capital ratio was the only measure of consideration in determining the objective status of the working, middle, or bourgeois class. But incorporating the fact that the formation of individual identity depends on both economic and cultural influences, I would like to borrow the term “cultural capital” from Bourdieu for the following analysis. The concept of cultural capital includes academic capital. Since various political opinions are expressed through language, the individual process of gaining political status is internalized through language as well. Consequently, even within the same economic range, individual political inclinations will vary by their share of academic capital. There is a marked difference in political vocabulary between a high-school graduate and a college graduate. Based on this observation, it is possible to infer that those with more available linguistic resources—more cultural capital—are also more resistant to mainstream ideology.<sup>11</sup>

3. While weighing the proportion of cultural capital, it is important to remember that an individual’s class identity can change in the course of time. For example, let’s compare the following two cases. One is a member of the middle class, whose parents are working class, and the other is middle class, whose parents are upper-bourgeois class. The status of these two does not correctly exhibit the expected deviation in the objective statistical data. The political

inclinations of a current middle-class member are likely to sprout from values learned from his working-class parents, which will differ considerably from those of a current member of the working class with bourgeois parents. The change of political inclinations within social classes over the course of time is not limited to family relations but also to the process of schooling and work environment. There are many cases of members who participated in progressive college groups who later become more politically conservative as they grow older. Several reasons for this change include the forms of experience received after college, the types of tests encountered for jobs, and the attitude demanded by the working environment. Hence, in a survey on the political consciousness of young employees, it is possible to expect a certain difference between employees of major companies, such as Samsung (a major corporation in Korea), and those of smaller industries. Also Korean government officials who obtained their positions by passing the advanced examination for bureaucrats will have substantially different political dispositions from other white-collar workers within a similar age group.

#### B. Individualization II: Political Domain

1. According to Ulrich Beck, the current reproduction of individualization differs from that of the industrialized society of the past, and the difference indicates a new era of social integration in Korea. In sociology, individualization generally focuses on the inappropriateness of class and a new mechanism for the formation of identity as it occurs in the life world. Yet the reason for this special categorization of individualization is to emphasize that contemporary individual political behavior does not correspond to the conditions of the social-class system.

For instance, although Rohsamo’s rallies were the most characteristic of the 2002 presidential election, it is difficult to say that the group retains its specific political agenda in contrast to that of the past social movements. The various members of Rohsamo range from intellectuals to the working class, but the group lacks the political configuration to consolidate these members from different social classes. I suspect that its members were able to adequately communicate despite this lack because the group initially was perceived as an extension of a social club where all members had equal opportunities to express opinions.

Likewise, today’s political expression has a tendency to begin in the private space such as special-interest clubs and slowly extend its influence into the public sphere rather than being based on groups or parties with clear political programs as in the past. Voter turnout in regional, general, and special elections of the past few years has been dismal. On the other hand, the numbers of online groups, mainly consisting of members in their twenties and

11 This should be the appropriate place to explain why the owner of a tiny liquor store assumes an opposing stance on the strike of the subway labor union in Korea. Although the liquor store owner is technically in the same class as members of the subway labor union, he might lack the linguistic ability to make political decisions or declarations with his vocabulary, due to the absence of cultural capital. Thus, he will explain the subway labor union strike with the only linguistic capital that originates from the bourgeois cultural hegemony – public responsibility of the subway labor union in Korean society. Therefore, the liquor store owner can be interpreted as being subjugated to the hegemony of the ruling class.

thirties, has been increasing exponentially. An unofficial survey reports at least 30,000 online groups and clubs in Korea. In other words, the range of the public political stage is decreasing while at the same time private behavioral space is rapidly expanding.

The fact to be noticed at this point is the enormous political change frequently brought about by solidarity created through these cyber political groups. The Kwanghwamun<sup>12</sup> candlelight protest of December 2002 is a prime example of cyber solidarity. President Roh's election was also a result of solidarity among the younger voters under age forty, which indicates a significant change in Korean political dynamics. When such groups become involved in political power, the results are relatively unpredictable and beyond direct official control.

2. Peculiarly, the ideology of achievement within the workplace plays a significant role in the Korean individual's expression of political opinion. The motto "Competition and Efficiency," which has been leading the society's economic logic since the modernization of Korea, has been exerting pressure to extremes within classrooms and the work setting. This is one of the main factors for confusion of political identity among ordinary people. Especially white-collar workers, whose objective class status is closer to the working class, are often disillusioned by the actual versus advertised possibility of promotion within the company. The company's propaganda ("Everyone can get a promotion") plays a large role in mystifying one's objective social status. It is in this case that a "false identification" effect is working between a person's **actual status** in the social class and the **title** the person occupies within the workplace (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975). Moreover, competition to show more loyalty to one's supervisor is not uncommon inside Korean companies. When an important political issue is raised that will affect not only the workplace but also society as a whole, the employees voluntarily compete to accept the supervisor's views rather than weigh the pros and cons of their own interests. In order to explain the discrepancy between objective social status and political expression, the workplace (logic of production), the life world (logic of taste), and political expression (logic of public space) must all be linked in a comprehensive analysis. The postponement of this kind of analysis has been due to the strict boundaries between each department of the social sciences. Now is the ideal time to advocate a cultural analysis able to interrelate the three domains.

3. Although the formation and expression of individual class-habitus takes place in the life world (private space), the class-habitus is still influenced by the "ideological apparatus of state," in schools, media, or the work environment. In France and Japan, nations that

experienced modernization before Korea, the middle-class formation is generally the process of maximizing personnel within an enterprise or bureaucracy (Boltanski 1982; Min 2000). It also seems academically logical to analyze the formation of the Korean middle class in relation to the field of production, which functions according to the logic of globalization and economic efficiency, along with the intervention of government and administration policies. This scope allows one to newly perceive the role of the state as allocating symbolic resources, contrary to the classical definition of monopolization of authority and force, as defined by Max Weber (Bourdieu 1995; Steinmetz 1999). But the new perspective would require a close observation of the training of influential elites of the society – professors, writers, government officials, et al.– to see how, through their speeches and writings, they impact the worldviews and political opinions of the Korean middle class.

This is because the middle class is the exemplification of the civil society, and the solidarity of the middle class plays an important role in advancing the democratization of Korean politics. But thus far studies on the Korean middle class have been generally focused on determining whether the middle class should be defined as a politically progressive (Han 1991; Koo 1991) or conservative (Kim and Cho 1986) group, but lack explanation for its split political behavior. Han Wan-sang's study (1991) provided an acute observation of the discrepancy of the middle class but failed to identify its cause. I believe applying the factors listed above to current situations will facilitate finding the reasons for such incongruity between objective status and political expression.

### III. THE POSSIBILITY OF CULTURAL DEMOCRACY IN KOREA

Let us now explore the direction of Korean politics based on the new class model proposed in this essay. The goal of democratization pursued in the 1980s and 1990s in Korea requires a modification according to the societal changes; thus, I would like to define the modification of the democratization model as the 'cultural democracy model.' Although I cannot fully explicate the contents of the new cultural democracy model, I will explore past works on the democratization of Korean politics and indicate necessary changes, while providing evidence for my hypothesis by comparing the old democratization theory to the current reality.

The studies of Korea's leading theorist, Professor Choe Chang-jip, are focused on

<sup>12</sup> Kwanghwamun is one of the main streets in Seoul, known as the venue for various social rallies.



an exploration of the identity formation of the political actor in the process of Korean democratization, the primary focus of this essay (1994). Therefore, his book will provide a good starting point in the search for the structure of the new cultural democracy model. I will discuss the merits and limits of Choe's theory to explore the significance of the cultural democracy model.

In his work, Choe elaborates on the reasons for the problem of applying the standards of traditional liberal democracy to Korean society. He states that in addition to the visible outcomes of democratization, such as economic development and absence of political corruption, the Korean case must include the restoration of cultural and ethical reformation as well (1994: 371-376). Choe also emphasizes the necessity of cultural democracy and modification of the existing class model while focusing on the problem of identity constitution. Above all, Choe rejects traditional Marxist theory, which views classes as objectively existant within the basic relation of production. Namely, he assumes an existential change of class nature and divides the classes into "class I of the economic relation of production" and "class II of the relation of politics and power," because capitalist class in the objective relation of production does not correctly correspond to class in civil and political society (1994: 381). Choe's understanding of the class concept is nearly identical to my argument about the delicate relationship between objective social status and political awareness.

"Class II" is not a reflection of a given economical process. It is not a product of cause and effect process, but is directly related to political participation and behavior that is expected to produce this economical process and the process of social politics and organization. Considering this fact, "class II" can be constructed and dissolved independently of "class I." The issue of class conflicts is centered on the formation of the conflicting classes rather than objectively existing class conflicts on the political/social level. Adam Przeworski is correct in stating that class struggle is a struggle for the formation of a class and not a conflict between the classes (1994: 383-384).

The change from "class I" to "class II" proposed by Choe coincides with the objective and subjective classes in this essay. However, the political practice, which plays an important part in proving Choe's hypothesis about the transformation from class I to class II, remains unclear. According to Choe, the laborers' movement in the domain of production should be pursued along with the social movement in the domain of civil society in order to assert the working

class value against ruling class hegemony. For the success of Choe's social plan, solidarity between the labor union, farmer's organization, and the professional class is necessary. Choe also believes that for the dominated class campaigns to enter the political field, the stance of party politics must assume a more progressive attitude.

Choe's strategy is still valid in today's Korea; however, the political climate has changed since the publication of his book. These changes should be examined for the portents of success of new social movements in Korea. First of all, one must recognize that Korea's national authority is no longer dictatorial. Until the late 80s, Korean politics was focused on the democratization of civil society in opposition to the existing dictatorship. In the past twenty years, intellectuals and students have fervently led an anti-dictatorship movement, and Korean politics have achieved a certain level of democracy. Now the significance has shifted from the confrontation of state and political (civil) society to confrontations within civil society itself, such as the opposition of the progressive and the conservative factions, which are abstract political conflicts that go beyond legal democratization. The so-called "South-South conflict" constantly raised in the past five years regarding North Korea policies is an example that shows the potentially stronger conservatism of the civil society *vis a vis* the state. Ideologies such as nationalism or anti-communism in Korea have propagated to the extent that the state can no longer enforce them. Mainstream politics, in failing to organize a system to reflect and accommodate the multi-dimensional political spectrum, can be seen as the main source of the increasing confusion of Korean politics today.

In such political situations, which one may define as the conservatization of politics--or the backwardness of party politics--the result of the power struggle between ideological groups in civil society will ultimately transform the character of Korea's existing political structure. As some individuals question the autonomy of civil society from the basis of political power or capitalist control, the direction of change in civil society into a realm of political struggle has become a significant debate in determining the coming character of Korean political life.

Second, although Korean politics has met the systematic and legal formalities, as yet the country remains in confusion in implementing the essence of democratization. Every politician and scholar declares liberalism and democracy to be the ideological foundations of Korean politics; yet upon studying the occasions on which such ideologies are expressed as political reality, one realizes the serious incongruity between the political theory and the political reality that remains. For example, some view the liberalism in globalization projected by former president Kim Dae Jung as a form of "public market-ism," and others, as an effective

capital-prioritization policy. The difference of perspective sparks an unavoidable controversy about the problem of identifying that political actor who will serve as the head of liberalism. Though Kim's government claimed to be a government of the people with laborers and the middle class at its core, it attempted to apply the drift of globalization to the economic situation of Korea while disregarding the interest of the working and middle classes. This caused considerable damage to the legitimacy of government policies. Such confusion between the slogan and the policy is observed often in the government's recognition of the strikes of the working class, because the Kim Dae Jung's administration has failed to take any clear stance between market efficiency and social justice. If the laborers and the capitalists look to a process of democratic discussion to resolve the strikes in this context, the outcome is an ironic situation in which the laborers suffer even greater disadvantage than in the past under government intervention.

Third, Korea has accomplished a considerable level of democratization with the expansion of civil society, but the general voting population is becoming increasingly disengaged in politics. The results of regional and general elections show extremely low levels of participation in voting, the typical expression of political interest. There are two explanations for the lack of participation of the voting public. First is the conservatization of Korean party politics that is incapable of accommodating the exponentially increasing demands of civil society; second is the tendency of each political actor to neglect public responsibility in favor of their own private interests. While the former is still an issue connected to the reformation of political systems or recruitment of political elites, the latter is more an abstract cultural issue and requires further explanation in terms of the critical approach of this essay. I would like to emphasize that the abdication of the political actors' public responsibility is not only the fault of the individual, but also the result of control by political and capitalistic power. Despite the difficulty of analyzing this invisible control, one must seriously consider its effects on new social movements in Korea—in other words, to recognize the connection between the individual's emotional factors (life world) and political expression (public domain). The transplantation of the life world to the public domain is the core issue in the study of Korean politics.

In Korean politics, the circulation of language through the media plays a critical role in this conversion of the life world to the public domain. The private field contains individual taste or inclinations, and thus is apolitical. One must understand the process through which such conversions occur as one in which the intervention of language plays a critical role. Regionalism is one of the biggest issues in Korean politics, and intricately related to the structure of the

circulation of language. If the phenomenon of disliking those from other regions becomes projected onto the public domain of politics at election time is part of the character of Korean politics, then this extension inevitably involves the circulation of language through the media.

## CONCLUSION

Thus far I have based my essay on the assumption that the shape of Korean politics is facing massive change. I claimed the modification of the classical model of class to be necessary to understand that change, and explored the urgent political definitions and concerns that must be addressed to form the theory of the modified model. Since the 1980s and even until now, political democratization has been top among the tasks of Korean politics, culminating the twenty years of struggle to achieve democratization at the "systematic" level. Yet the instability of Korean politics, with the continuous attendance of corruption, are due to insubstantial democratization, despite successful accomplishment at the level of legal institutions. (I, among others, am not currently in the position to define the exact constitution of "substantial" democratization.)

However, it is clear that today's Korean politics is expanding beyond legal and systemic borders. Now an explosion of psychic emotion and human relations is becoming the new political factor. At work is a peculiar social mechanism that cannot be explained by the classical model of class underlying current changes in Korean politics. While the class analysis suggests a program for a visible political revolution centered on the relation of production (e.g., working-class democracy), the political revolution program provided by cultural analysis can be labeled as cultural democracy. Observing and explaining this matter in detail is no simple task, but one may divine the direction of cultural democracy by looking at the works of Anthony Giddens. He emphasizes through his concept of "life politics" that improving the quality of individual life has great political significance (1991). An upcoming project is to apply Giddens' ideas to Korean politics in the near future.<sup>13</sup>

Last, I would like to reiterate the importance of basing concrete policy from the

<sup>13</sup> Giddens claims that it is very necessary to change eating habits of the Western society in order to resolve worldwide problems of food production (Giddens, *Ibid*, Chapter 7). In this example, one can understand the meaning of life politics suggested by Giddens. In addition, several recent socialists emphasize the importance of body-habit training for social change. One can find the theory of body-habit training also in the Confucius tradition, such as *yeron* (politics of manner). Such examples can be contents of cultural democracy.

assumption of cultural democracy. Korean politics no longer requires a universal formula of democratization. The universal theory of democratization can no longer be directly applied to Korean politics, because of repeated occurrences of exceptional phenomena in the civil society. The solidarity of community in the past, such as social classes or family units, is slowly losing its central functions; but current Korean society has yet to create a new form of solidarity. Also, while the military regime unilaterally controlled the political actor for their own needs, the identity-formation of the political actor has greatly diversified since the political democratization of the Kim Young Sam administration in 1993, even while resulting in very unstable political results.

As discussed above, the invisible dominance of capital and the distorted circulation of political language are the active causes of unstable political situations. And it is not an overstatement to apply terms such as “era of political anxiety” or “era of identity crisis,” because the individualization process can easily lead to confusion of civil society. Beyond the dichotomy of dictatorship/democracy, an appropriate model of democracy should be rooted in the Korean society and culture. In this process, a new platform of identity formation is critical. Korean society is simultaneously facing the task of overcoming a pre-modern and post-modern crisis in the context of identity formation. The pre-modern problem consists of the society of class; the post-modern problem involves transcendence of the class society. These tasks will be fulfilled only through a theoretical investigation of the history of Western individualism, along with the pursuit of individualism within the unique cultural context of Korea.

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