

EAI-NDI Democratic Resilience Workshop

- Democratic Resilience: Stories of South Korea -

- Date and Time : 25th March, 2020 9:00 ~ 10:30 AM
- Type : Zoom Meeting
- Participants :
 - [EAI] Sook Jong Lee, Jung Kim, Juhyun Jun, Junghye Suh
 - [NDI] Lauren Van Metre, Kurt Bassuener, Adam Nelson, Madiha Farhan, Savannah Shih, Alex Nguyen

■ Case Discussion

[Case 1] Sook Jong Lee, Political Crisis Case: Impeachment Movement

[Case 2] Jung Kim, Health Crisis Case: K-Quarantine to the COVID-19

■ Key Talking Points

1. NDI Resilience Framework

Q. Lauren Van Metre: We would like to open the discussion with an assessment of the democratic resilience model. Were there any immediate responses or potential areas of improvement?

A. Sook Jong Lee: We found the model very simple but catchy. Interactions between citizen participation and institutional capacity are recurring themes in democratic resilience studies. However, the concept of democratic resilience is understood differently in various studies – in public administration studies, it is understood as a form of recovery power from natural disasters or man-made disasters; in political movement studies, the concept has not been circulated enough. However, the concept of resilience has been used to describe political protests in Washington DC recently. On the managerial side, there is more room for the public and private partnerships for the sake of risk management; on the political side, the concept is usually used in the context of anti-government, oppositional movement against government decisions, and corruption. It carries a confrontational meaning rather than being cooperative.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: We have also used the concept of resilience around violence in regards to questioning which communities are more resilient to violence. The concept is very ambiguous and not clearly defined. There are some conceptions of resilience which revolve around returning to the status quo. This model of resilience is different – it revolves around building change and adaptation. What can be said about the democratic conception of resilience, in terms of how democratic systems function, what the basis of resilience is, whether it is citizen-led, and how it can be applied to democracy?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Resilience can be applied in terms of interactions between the civil society and the political society – if institutions are resilient to adjust to public demand, it will open paths for evolution to enhance the democratic governance capacity.

A. Jung Kim: Adaptation is important in explaining democratic resilience. The core of democratic governance lies in lessons learned from mistakes and the adaptive learning process. In terms of COVID-19 response studies, we can raise questions such as: how has the government learned from its own errors from the MERS pandemic at the time? It is important to learn from past mistakes and accumulate knowledge.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: I agree that there is a problematic aspect of resilience, in that it is perceived limited to the qualities of a person or a society. I agree with the rhetoric of adaptation and community learning and that is important to take the experience of a particular *shock* and apply it to a future *shock*. We prepared three lines of questions in this regard. We'd like to (1) conduct a deeper inquiry into the democratic resilience case; (2) how it translated into the future, and what it means for Korea's democratic consolidation; (3) and inquire how this case might translate and be applied into international contexts and how we might turn these resilience stories into dynamic and compelling ways as entertaining and publicly acceptable stories – how can these stories grab the attention of the everyday person?

2. Impeachment Movement

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Were there any preceding movements? How can we situate this in Korean political history?

A. Sook Jong Lee: There was a long history of democratic struggle in South Korea – there were the student revolutions in 1960, series of demonstrations by labor activists and students during the Park Chung-hee era, and the June struggle of citizens in the transitional period to democracy in 1987. The participation from the middle class and white-collar workers was crucial in persuading the ruling power to restore direct presidential elections. Korea has a strong

legacy in its movement towards democratization – the civil society organized it to lead new movements. Citizen activism manifested through candlelight protest movements since 2002 and these movements had consequential impacts. In 2002, over the protests following the acquittals of American soldiers who accidentally killed two schoolgirls during an armored vehicle training exercise, the government tried to renegotiate Status of Forces Agreement. The so-called “madcow diseases” protests of 2008 pressed government to change their import policy of American beef. These experiences of generating consequential impact have made citizens to develop confidence into their activism. The accumulated experiences encouraged citizens to light candles again in 2016. This time, public anger based on the popular perceptions of Korean society as a unfair and unjust system drew unprecedentedly many citizens to the streets. There were 20 protests; some claim that we mobilized 16 million citizens. Regardless of the number, protests showed unprecedentedly high participation of the civil society towards the scandal of power abuse and corruption.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Since 2016, has this powerful civic movement for injustice to end injustice and corruption been maintained? Has it propelled in other ways?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Before and after the movement in 2016, there were attempts by the government to set up an independent agency to investigate corruption of high-ranking public officials and judges and prosecutors. This reform measures are related to reducing the strong investigative and indicting power of prosecutor’s office – the prosecutor’s office has been in public eye for being selectively exercising its power. Due to the government’s regulatory power, there have been structural incentives for the collusion of a powerful government and big businesses. The impeachment movement engulfed many Korean conglomerates into the scandal – CEOs had to appear at public hearings and some got imprisoned. Inside the business sector, the need for strong reform for better governance has been raised so that they can monitor top leaders for their politically correct relations with government. This drive for reform has continued but cannot prevent continuous corruption scandals. Korea is yet again facing a big scandal, this time involving a public corporation in developing land and building public housing – employees used the classified information for personal gains amidst rising land and housing prices with their families.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: To what extent has such succession of civic action infiltrated the consciousness of political leaders? To what extent are bottom-up civic movements part of the democratic scene in Korea?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Two ex-presidents are in prison. It is a shame for Korean democracy. Korean presidents somehow, think that they can change the system for better but often end up abusing their power and get involved in scandals. They should be humble. One single 5-year term presidency tends to encourage presidents and surrounding advisors to use their power to

quickly generate policy impact before they face a lame duck period. In so doing, horizontal accountability among government agencies is compromised and ruling institutions continue to fall into misuse their influence.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Impeachment occurred twice in the U.S., but weaknesses lied in the ruling party. Part of our model revolved around changing agents that influenced democracy rather than the political outcomes. Was the impeachment of President Park processed by the ruling party for the sake of preserving democracy? What was the impulse? Were the politicians who made this decision punished?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Korean politics is as equally divided as U.S. politics – if 2/3 of the national assembly vote to impeach the president, impeachment is processed. There were prior attempts (for President Roh Moo-hyun), but Park’s impeachment was successful due to too much public demand. The composition of the assembly was also neck and neck (Ruling 122, Opposition 123). Only 56 from ruling party voted against the impeachment. The ruling party after the impeachment was divided over the issue – those who voted for impeachment left the ruling party and set up the Bareun party (third party) but overall failed in the 2018 local elections. Before and after local elections, the conservatives who impeached Park returned to the previous ruling party. Some face stigma from the conservative force having ousted the incumbent president as the impeachment is a scar to the conservative party.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Was there public punishment for those who went against their own party?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Almost eight out of ten Koreans believed that the impeachment was right. But there are other voices as wells – the far-right (Taegukki Budaе) who attacked them as betrayers. In the Korean setting, it is difficult to survive as a middle party between two major parties representing progressives and conservatives because the election laws favor the two strong parties. The conservatives were in disarray after impeachment; Progressive President Moon Jae-in got elected in 2017 and, later in April 2020, the progressive ruling party took the absolute majority in congress.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Is the Korean model of civic confidence and citizen struggles something that can be offered to international society? What lessons can be learned?

A. Sook Jong Lee: This depends on the political legacy. The current Myanmar situation is seen parallel to the Gwangju case. Unfortunately, people in Myanmar will face much tougher and violent military. After the post-consolidation period, we can apply Korea’s candlelight movement, but it should be held under peaceful conditions. The institution should be empowering, enforcement agencies should not oppress citizen protests, the scale must be huge,

and political leaders should be able to recalculate their thinking and understand why it is better for them to accept public demands. You cannot achieve democratic consolidation only with civic movement; you need counterparts, neutral institutions, political leaders, and government officials who take public demands seriously and change their policies.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: South Korea seems to have been under similar conditions—it was under very authoritarian rule. The citizen movement succeeded in eroding such institutional barriers.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: Was there a slow erosion/cooptation of the existing institutions that would make them less confrontational with their citizens? Does that change over time? There must have been a breakthrough in which it shifted.

A. Sook Jong Lee: The idea of successful erosion of anti-democratic constitutions is attractive, but it comes at sacrifices and costs of dissidents and activists who struggled for democratization. We need a critical juncture – even when authoritarian rule in Korea ended abruptly in 1979, with the assassination of the President. Nice transition did not happen right away. New military leaders seized power during the power vacuum and resisted democratic transition violently oppressing citizen uprisings in Gwangju. It took another eight years after the assassination for the society to regain a popularly elected presidency. Erosion can come but at a lot of tragic costs you have to endure.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: The lesson has applicability in a lot of places, including Myanmar. In Myanmar, the protestors are determined.

A. Sook Jong Lee: The essential difference lies in that during military mandated authoritarian rule in Korea, the government ran by a civilian government and the military was controlled. The military did not have economic interests like that of Myanmar today; it was much easier for the political leader to control the military and send them back to the barracks after democratization.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: If the process were to be a drama, how would you tell it so that it would be engaging? Who would be the heroes?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Citizens are the heroes. NGOs, CSOs organize umbrella organizations to mobilize citizens, but the voluntary spirit of civil participation was a key. The way they ran it was also peaceful and festive. They restrained any violence because violence would give the powerful an excuse to oppress demonstrations. Our civil society is divided, but citizens put aside their political differences under constitutionalism. But popular movement has also drawbacks. It can be coopted by partisan politics. When the majority of citizens are sure of

their moral authority, it is easy to accuse and compromise the procedural aspect of democracy – we can deprive right speak different voices and undermine the norms of plurality and procedural justice for quick fixes.

3. Covid-19 Response

Q. Kurt Bassuener: A collaboration of public compliance and participation voluntarism in dealing with a health crisis requires tracking citizens electronically. There has long been civic suspicion of authorities that they had to set right over time repeatedly. Was privacy part of the discussion at the outset?

A. Jung Kim: At a time of crisis politics under the Covid-19 pandemic, many citizens in Korea felt that there is a high level of threat, time pressure, high level of uncertainty. There are, undeniably, trade-offs between public safety and individual privacy/civil rights. During the earlier moments when government formulated an optimal response balancing between the health concerns and the economic opening and between public safety and individual privacy, there was discussions about the consequences of the deprivation of privacy. Civic organizations pointed out the danger of sacrificing privacy in favor of public safety. The government was responsive to the concerns and implemented transparency protocols. Therefore, many civic organizations accepted the government's guidance and tracking system even if it was imperfect. The most important factor is that the government tried to be transparent in how they would use and dispose of collected information and protect individual information anonymously. The South Korean government and citizens deliberated over the danger and concerns over the trade-offs between public safety and privacy but managed to solve them. There has not been visible resistance regarding the usage of information because the government tried to be transparent. Adaptive learning was applied to mitigate the trade-offs.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: After Covid-19, will the crisis response be revisited?

A. Jung Kim: I don't think that the contingent policy about information will be institutionalized in favor of the government, As Professor Lee said, Korea has a strong civil society that can check and balance the government's abuse of power and we have historical legacy rectifying government abuse by mobilizing the society. The government and institutions will recognize the strength of the civil society.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: Was public noncompliance manifest among the public? Was it marginal or nonexistent?

A. Jung Kim: Overall, during 2020, around 70% of the citizens strongly supported government response despite the fact that Korea is politically polarized – the pandemic has never been a partisan issue. One of the important factors that can explain the high level of voluntary compliance is strength of the weak parties. Korea has a two-party system but unlike that of the U.S., political parties are not penetrated into the civil society. Even if the parties try to exploit the pandemic in favor of their partisan interest, a large number of non-partisan voters will try to neutralize the issue. Furthermore, people approached the quarantine issues as science not politics. When facing national emergencies, people tend to cooperate for the same collective goals of returning to normal

Q. Lauren Van Metre: From a religious angle, were the restrictions put on the religious organizations considered a violation of religious rights and inappropriate?

A. Jung Kim: In the earlier phase, the government had to contain potential super spreaders – there was some issues between the government trying to limit the size of gathering for a church service and protestant churches which regard congregation more important than other religions. Extreme right-wing religious organizations tried to reduce interventions of the government but could not gain public support. After that, the government tried to optimize their policy response to religious organizations. In terms of pandemic policy. Korea was successful in the sense that we can learn from overreactions and underreactions to emergency situations and thereby optimize mid-level policy responses to potential violence of the government's guidelines. Adaptive learning is at the core of democracy.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: What are the roots of *policy agility* in Korea's democratic practice?

A. Jung Kim: The roots are not exclusively cultural factors. Instead, Korea has developed a capable bureaucratic state, instrumental for economic development and national security. Koreans are fearful of this strong state, but expect a high level of government performance. Expectations are nurtured by the capable bureaucratic state, creating a positive feedback loop. This ability is structurally inherent in a capable bureaucratic state and is a precondition for policy agility. The MERS experience was important for the public health authority – it reorganized public health organizations, coordinated inter-agency information system, etc. Policy agility, structurally, requires a capable state. Through the adaptive learning process, we can adjust our bureaucratic state to optimize policy for the pandemic.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: Civil voluntary compliance was built on social trust based on what the government represented and how responsive and accountable it is. Is there a connection between the maintenance of a healthy economy and the gold collection movement after 1997 financial crisis?

A. Jung Kim: Koreans are good at responding to crises – there is a continuity between the gold collection movement and civil voluntary compliance. On the other hand, however, there is discontinuity – in 1997, Korea was a high growth economy, but now that it is a mature economy with rising inequality., Individual citizens bear more social risks when they are hit by the pandemic compared to an economic crisis. One of the important factors that can explain a high level of voluntary compliance is that Korean society is becoming more competitive and it is increasingly difficult to seek social protection from family and welfare networks. Such a competitive society was an important factor that helped citizens cooperate with guidance at this time of crisis

Q. Kurt Bassuener: Social cohesion in Korea is better than that of other democracies – there is a stronger acceptance of political authority, and a popular perception of the legitimacy of the government. Are the citizens’ investment in making the government more accountable, assistance in the overall change in government, and popular adherence to these roles all part of the same story?

A. Jung Kim: The government in the earlier moments was successful in containing the pandemic. If the government failed to contain the pandemic at the time, there might have been a negative feedback loop. Fortunately, the Moon government was successful in containing the first wave, which marked the start of a positive feedback loop. Citizens showed a high level of confidence in government policies towards the pandemic. This loop is still continued. In this sense, successful pandemic containment requires an agile government, high level of civic voluntary compliance, and luck.

Q. Lauren Van Metre: Has Korea had a lot of requests for pandemic diplomacy?

A. Jung Kim: The Korean government, policy-makers, and citizens have been successful in containing the pandemic, striking a delicate balance between health and the economy. This may be possibly exportable to developing countries and advanced countries, but there are important structural preconditions: (1) an agile, transparent, capable state and (2) a depoliticized civil society especially during a crisis.

A. Sook Jong Lee: Regarding the issue of popularity, the management of COVID-19 in Spring of 2020 boosted the ruling party’s popularity and confidence in the Moon administration. This led to ruling party’s victory in the April general elections last year. However, successful management has been somewhat eroded – in terms of vaccine rollouts, Korea has been unsuccessful in preparing vaccine to shot to its population. Other policy failures like the real estate price hikes and the scandals of public servants using restricted information for personal benefits are causing the same government recently very unpopular. On Lauren’s question on pandemic diplomacy, Korea has been praised for its successful pandemic response. The “K-

quarantine” was known for its widespread tests and successful contact tracing while keeping the country open without long lock-downs. It was the first time that the foreign ministry used domestic health management models for international cooperation and public diplomacy.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: What would you say a descriptor for Korea’s pandemic response that might have resonance and assert soft power abroad?

A. Jung Kim: “Democracy is a learning process.” Observing prior errors and outcomes is important not only in the process of government policy-making, but also in the process of large-scale action of citizens. Citizens can learn from the agile guidance of the government and the government can learn from the demand of the voluntary activities of citizens – an interactive adaptive learning process is key. Resilient democracy can handle an emergency situation like the COVID-19 pandemic better.

Q. Kurt Bassuener: What aspects unique to Korean democracy to not translate abroad? Are there also aspects that translate everywhere and would engage others from the standpoint from Korean democracy? In terms of democratic resilience and resonance, what are the best tools?

A. Sook Jong Lee: Korea is part of the Asian developmental state model. You need capable state bureaucracy for democratic resilience – a mixture of democracy and a smart government. Japan is also democratic and has an able government but collaborative governance has been somewhat limited to local governance. Citizens do not challenge public authority for its wrongdoings with massive protests. . The most similar case with Korea is Taiwan, which share an active civil society and a centrally organized, bureaucratic, democratic government. Among Asian models, the nature of civil society in its relations to government brings differences.

■ Discussion Materials

[Introduction] Citizen Activism in Korea's Democratic Development

- A long history of democratic struggles under authoritarianism: April 19 student revolution against autocratic Lee Seung-man government in 1960, dissidents/students/labor activists against Park Chung-hee government's Yushin system
- Transitional period: Gwangju Uprising in 1980, popular protest to restore a direct presidential election in 1987
- Consolidation period (1987 – present): consequential 'candlelight protest movement' → SOFA revision protests during Nov. 2002–early 2003, madcow disease protests during May – July 2008, impeachment movement of 2016
- Apart from these oppositional political movements, many cases of citizen participation toward natural disasters and economic and pandemic crises
- Narratives of three crises of economy, politics, and health are presented here: the gold-collecting movement during the Asian financial crisis of 1998, the impeachment movement in 2016, and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis of 2021–.

[Case 1] Sook Jong Lee, Political Crisis Case: Impeachment Movement (Oct. 2016 – March 2017)

- Choi Soon-sil Gate emerged in July 2016 by media reports raising the issue of her involvement with Blue House in raising fund for two sports foundations.
- Soon, media outlets competed to produce break stories about the relationship between this publicly unknown woman and President Park Geun-hye.
- Many favors that Choi's daughter received for entering and studying in university caused youth to criticize the system as corrupt and not just and college campus got involved in demonstrations.
- Cable TV outlet JTBC reported on October 24 that they had discovered Choi's tablet PC, which became the smoking gun of her involvement in the fundraising scandal and other public affairs. This prompted people to hold candles on streets (about 16 million people participated in the total of 20 candlelight protests).
- The protests soon developed into a movement calling for Park's impeachment for taking a bribe for Choi and abusing her power. Faced with the popular pressure, the legislature voted to impeach her on December 9 and the Constitutional Court upheld the parliamentary decision on March 10, 2017. Early election held in May 2017 and progressive candidate Moon Jae-in got elected.
- Supreme Court upheld the 20-year prison sentence for Park in January 2021.
- Unprecedented case of impeaching incumbent President in Korean history. Also, the

most massive mobilization of people so far.

〈Factors of Democratic Resilience〉

- Peaceful protests for social justice and system reform
- Constitutionalism and rule of law prevailed (final authority of Constitutional Court)
- Respect for people's will by the ruling party segment

**[Case 2] Jung Kim, Health Crisis Case: K-Quarantine to the COVID-19
(Feb. 2020 – present)**

- On 18 February, 2020, a sixty-one-year-old Korean woman known as “Patient 31” tested positive for the virus in the city of Daegu, South Korea’s epicenter of coronavirus cases, and triggered off the rapid transmission of the virus in the rest of country.
- The government’s agile response to the crisis, through measures that fruitfully strike the balance between security and privacy without invoking the anxiety of lockdown.
- Public health agencies set up a testing protocol two weeks after the first case was confirmed, enabling the government to test more than 5,000 people per million by 15 March, retrace the movements of patients, isolate the infected, and disseminate real-time information to the public in collaboration with provincial and local authorities.
- Korea Centre for Disease Control and Prevention coordinated inter-agency work, and guaranteed cooperation from the general public through television broadcasts, public transportation announcements and smartphone alerts, which reminded citizens of social distancing requirements.
- Voluntary civic compliance with government non-pharmaceutical interventions policy recommendation was the political foundation of successful pandemic policy optimization between health and the economy.
- More than 70% of citizens have consistently supported the government’s response to COVID-19 pandemic since the outbreak, perceiving the issue as collective rather than partisan.
- The government’s policy agility on testing and quarantine implementation and citizens’ voluntary compliance with personal hygiene and social distancing recommendation have jointly produced pandemic policy optimization between health and the economy.

〈Factors of Democratic Resilience〉

- The government’s policy agility on testing and quarantine implementation
- Citizens’ voluntary compliance with personal hygiene and social distancing recommendation
- Democratic resilience manifested in civil collaboration with public authorities in responding to pandemic

[Closing] Democratic Resilience of South Korea

- Citizen participation in critical junctures has been effective in preserving and consolidating Korean democracy. Factors of upholding democratic values and uniting for public interest are critical for citizens to engage in a major crisis in a constructive way. Social justice and fairness are the recurring themes of recent citizen movement.
- There are some differences of citizen engagement depending on the nature of crisis. Political crises such as corruption scandals or power abuses are igniting popular protests. But Korea's civil society is also ideologically divided like the political society. Some political issues invite conflicts and division hurting democratic unity. A public consensus for subjecting differences under constitution and the rule of law lessens conflicts and tends to restore democratic resilience.
- In the case of economic crises, people tend to get united under the banner of nationalism. Economic policy failures like the real estate policy are judged by election rather than popular protests. Labor unions and other interest groups are not drawing popular interest. Consumer issues and a worker's rights in a power hierarchy generate more public engagement.
- In the case of natural disasters and health crises, government is leading collaboration with citizens. Many programs are developed to form the public-private partnership in order to allocate resources quickly and properly. Trust in government is critical in resolving collective problems with the cooperation from the private sector. Government trust hinges on its transparency, accountability, and institutional capacity.
- Issue-specific and new right-based battles related to gender and LGBT issues are making citizens involved.

South Korea's democratic resilience led by the rule of law, institutional capacity, and citizen participation. ■