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What is This?

Cultural Performance and Political Regime Change*

Thomas Kern

Heidelberg University

The question about how culture shapes the possibilities for successful democratization has been a controversial issue for decades. This article maintains that successful democratization depends not only on the distribution of political interests and resources, but to seriously challenge a political regime, the advocates of democracy require cultural legitimacy as well. Accordingly, the central question is how democratic ideas are connected to the broader culture of a social community. This issue will be addressed in the case of South Korea. The Minjung democracy movement challenged the military regime by connecting democratic ideas concerning popular sovereignty and human rights with cultural traditions. The dissidents substantiated democratic values by (1) articulating an alternative concept of political representation against the authoritarian regime, (2) increasing the cultural resonance of their concept by linking democratic ideas to traditional narratives and practices, (3) developing a rich dramaturgical repertoire of collective action, and (4) mobilizing public outrage by fusing the above three elements within historical situations.

The question concerning how culture shapes the possibilities of successful democratization has been a controversial issue for decades. Since the end of World War II, the debate has been dominated by two paradigms: the normative paradigm of classical modernization theory stresses the importance of a favorable political culture (Lipset 1959:92–93; Huntington 1984:207); the rationalist paradigm of conflict theory accentuates the distribution of economic and political power (Przeworski 1991; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). The main difference between the two paradigms is the way they conceptualize the relation between values and actions. While the first assumes an almost deterministic effect of values, the latter neglects them. However, as Joas (1996) and Eisenstadt (1979) pointed out, cultural values actually give actors an orientation, but they are too general to bring about a specific institutional outcome. From the perspective of a theory of creativity, "an adequate understanding of values in human action has to conceptualize instead the interaction between values embodied in prereflective aspirations and the situation where we establish which course of action accords with our values. This concretization or specification of values is an exercise in the creativity of action" (Joas and Beckert 2002:274). Accordingly, the question is not whether a given set of cultural values is compatible with democracy or not but rather *how* creative actors more or less succeed in specifying basic democratic ideas of popular sovereignty and human rights.

Referring to current discussions about the "performative turn" (2006) in sociology, this article develops a model to analyze the cultural dimension of regime changes on the empirical case of South Korea. Given that the legitimacy of a political system

depends on the collective belief in the legitimacy of an order, the cultural resonance of democratic values depends on four elements: (1) the articulation of an alternative concept of representation that challenges the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime, (2) the connection of democratic ideas and values with traditional narratives and practices, (3) the development of a rich dramaturgical repertoire of collective action, and (4) the mobilization of public outrage by successfully fusing the latter three elements within historical situations.

POLITICAL POWER AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Parsons (1969) and Luhmann (1979, 2002) considered power a medium of communication that is inherently instrumental *and* symbolic. As power is based on the credible threat of sanctions, the power holder must convince the target persons that he or she is willing to use coercive means to maintain his or her power. If the power holder fails to communicate his or her determinate will to enforce orders, he or she provokes resistance. From this point of view, the application of sanctions signals a lack of power.[1] Consequently, despite the asymmetric structure of their relationship, the power holder and the people who are under his or her control are equally interested in avoiding the use of coercion. Nevertheless, the capacity to use coercion has to be made visible through constant symbolic efforts by the power holder.

The symbolic quality of power gains importance when a society develops a relatively autonomous political system. As the link between ruler and ruled cannot be described anymore in terms of a simple bilateral power relationship, the political system needs an independent base of legitimization that reflects both sides as parts of a social unity. At this point, the idea of *representation* comes into play. Representation means that an actor "is recognized as representative to the extent that he simultaneously incorporates and mediates the whole of a divided symbolic order" (Soeffner and Tänzler 2002:21, translated by Thomas Kern). In this context, the concept of representation refers not only to two positions of a social system, the representative and the represented, but also to a third position—the collective identity—that includes both sides. Consequently, the representative function of political authorities is part of a comprehensive symbolic order, which mediates between the political system and the society and provides the cultural foundation for its stability. If the rulers fail to perform their symbolic function, the stability of the order will be threatened in the long term. Thus, successful democratization depends not only on the distribution of political interests and resources, but to seriously challenge a political regime, the advocates of democracy require cultural legitimacy as well. Against this background, the central question is *how* democratic ideas and values are connected to the broader culture of a social community (Edles 1995).

Every concept of political representation necessarily encloses the idea of a collective identity. Alexander (1992) argues that the construction of this identity is influenced by commitments to binary symbolic codes that are composed of a positive and a negative value. The positive value is attributed to those deserving the legitimate membership of a social community; the negative value refers to outsiders. By doing so, the code delineates the boundaries of a collectivity and shapes the distribution of power and authority. The major codes of collective identity are those of primordiality, traditionality, and universality (Giesen 1999:24–69). The code of

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[1]"Coercion means the surrender of the advantages of symbolic generalization and of guiding the partner's selectivity" (Luhmann 1979:112).

primordiality focuses on allegedly naturally given attributes such as gender, generation, kinship, origin, ethnicity, or race. The boundaries of the collectivity can neither be moved nor crossed as basically every contact with outsiders entails a threat of *pollution*. The code of traditionality "is constructed on the basis of familiarity with implicit and explicit rules of conduct, traditions, and social routines that define and demarcate the boundary of the collectivity" (Eisenstadt 2007:207). The common past of the collectivity is considered to be the core of its self-image. The code of universality regards all outsiders as potential members who are though not yet on the road to salvation (Giesen 1999:34–35). The boundary line of this code corresponds to the distinction between "true" and "false" consciousness. In principle, every person is able to cross the boundary, but to this end, he or she has to be enlightened, educated, or converted. The three codes are, of course, ideal types. They can be found in all societies and within each may develop many cultural variations (Baiocchi 2007; Ku 1998; Smith 1999).

The codes of collective identity determine the ideological angle from which the challengers of a political regime (more or less) publicly articulate protests and demands. In this context, their persuasiveness greatly depends on how much they succeed in bringing background culture, political situation (and experiences), and audience in accordance (Alexander 2004:550). As the persuasive power of a text depends on the extent to which the audience is familiar with its background meanings, the codes of collective identity must be closely connected to the narratives and myths that compose the cultural heritage of a collectivity (Snow and Benford 1988). Myths and narratives are "stories which tell who we are through recounting where we came from. They form master frames and are passed on through traditions, in rituals and ceremonies, public performances which reconnect a group, and where membership is confirmed. In this process 'we' are remembered, and 'they' are excluded" (Eyerman 2004:162). Myths have a legitimating effect, regardless of their historical authenticity, because they represent "a truth of a higher order, which is not only true, but makes normative claims and exerts formative power" (Assmann 2002:76, translated by Thomas Kern). They make the presence appear meaningful, necessary, and irreversible. However, many myths also have a great potential to challenge a social order. While legitimizing myths describe the present social order as meaningful and necessary, delegitimizing myths refer to alternative realities and stress the breach between present and past social orders (Assmann 2002:68–70).

In the next step, the idea of a collective identity, which is connected to the myths and narratives of a community, has to be turned into a "social fact" that confronts the dominant political regime. From a Durkheimian point of view, this function is performed by rituals: "In their most elementary form rituals do not just describe or imitate an order of the external world . . . . Instead, the ritual performance is the poesis of order and this order exists only because it is performed" (Giesen 2006:340). Rituals are socially regulated and collectively performed actions referring to transcendent objects and ideas.[2] By drawing a distinction between insiders and outsiders, participants and nonparticipants, rituals execute the codes of collective identity and make the external boundary of a community for the participants visible. They give meaning to events (or situations) by relating them to other (mythic)

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[2]Rituals and symbols refer not only to "other" realities, but also turn "other" realities into actual reality. This effect is based on the fact that rituals and symbols make no distinction between utterance (Mitteilung) and information. According to Luhmann (1998:72), communication comes about only when the three components of information, utterance, and understanding are synthesized. Accordingly, rituals are a highly condensed form of communication.

events (Eliade 1961). The primary medium of rituals is the human body. By singing, moving, marching, or even killing, the participants "experience themselves as mirrored by others—individual differences are disregarded and even banned from the ritual performance" (Giesen 2006:342). In the process of political change, violent protest rituals often play an important role as the bloody sacrifice of the victim symbolizes the purification of the community. In other words, violent protests are meaningful because they indicate the transformation of a collectivity from a state of "impurity" (authoritarianism) to a state of "purity" (democracy) (Smith 2000). Therefore, violence is not just an element in the strategic action repertoire of social movements (as the political process model suggests) (Smith 1991). It rather integrates the community of the protestors by symbolically anticipating the regime change.

A final condition for the success of a performance is the audience resonance (Snow and Benford 2000:619–22). The ultimate goal of every performance is identification of the spectators with the actors. However, despite strong efforts to successfully fuse text, identity code, narratives, and rituals, performances can fail. In complex societies, identification is not easy to achieve because actors and audiences are increasingly differentiated. Alexander (2004:564) notes that "the main structural barrier to re-fusing social drama and audience is the fragmentation of citizenry. Social segmentation creates not only different interests but also orthogonal subcultures, multiple public spheres that produce distinctive pathways for cultural extension and distinctive objects of psychological identification." Accordingly, the success of political challengers and movements largely depends on the social and cultural homogeneity of the groups that they attempt to mobilize.

This section showed that to seriously challenge a political regime, the advocates of democracy require cultural legitimacy. Political challengers and movements have to make their political alternative visible by means of successful performance, which is considered to be a key to acquiring the necessary cultural legitimacy for a democratic regime change. The greater their cultural resonance, the greater is their potential to topple the current (authoritarian) regime. Consequently, a symbolic conflict, where both camps make an attempt to win the support of the population and to delegitimize the opposing side at the same time, is unavoidable.

COMPETING CONCEPTS OF LEGITIMACY IN KOREA

The following analysis is an attempt to reconstruct the dynamic of this symbolic conflict in the case of South Korea. Although the country had experienced a strong economic growth since the early 1960s, the cultural conditions for democratization were not favorable: the political system was highly repressive, and the culture was strongly shaped by the hierarchical worldview of Confucianism. While, for instance, the British rule-of-law tradition favored the democratization of former colonies (Diamond 2003:1; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992), Korea had suffered for more than 30 years under the highly exploitive and authoritarian colonial rule of Japan. After World War II, the U.S. military administration established a formal democratic regime in the southern occupation zone, but the system suffered under authoritarian practices, corruption, and electoral fraud. In 1960, a student revolution made a political change possible, but the new democratic beginnings were abruptly ended in 1961 by a military coup. After that, the country was ruled by a military regime until June 1987, when the democracy movement finally succeeded with its demand for a regime change after weeks of sustained mass protests. The analysis begins with an overview of different concepts of legitimization in the modern political history of Korea. In

the next section, is a description of how the activists of the South Korean democracy movement increased the cultural resonance of their ideas and values.

The Idea of Popular Sovereignty Until 1945

The traditional Korean policy of seclusion ended in the 1870s and 1880s when the country established (unequal) trade relations with Japan and the leading Western colonial powers. In the following years, the Korean monarchy faced a deep crisis of legitimacy. While China, Russia, and Japan tried to achieve economic and military supremacy over the Korean peninsula, the country was shaken by social unrest, revolts, and wars. The Korean elite was paralyzed by power struggles; and Neo-Confucianism, which had been the ideological basis of the Joseon Dynasty for about 500 years, seemed not to be able to deal with the new situation. In Neo-Confucian thought, the king represented the nation. The people were regarded as an object of feudal paternalism rather than as the backbone of the nation. Accordingly, in times of social crisis, the chances to defeat the enemy were regarded as best if the people stay loyal to the king and his dynasty (Chung 1995:72). But under the specific historical circumstances, this idea offered no sufficient basis to mobilize and strengthen the national identity.

In 1910, Korea was annexed by Japan. The colonial government legitimized its rule by declaring the superiority of the Japanese race and its culture. In order to assimilate the Koreans, the national Buddhist tradition was revived and subordinated to the Japanese Zen tradition. Religions other than Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity were labeled as "pseudo-religions." The Korean language was suppressed and Korean history was excluded from school curricula. In 1915, the Japanese governor ordered the establishment of Shinto shrines all over the country. Afterward, the Japanese state religion became an increasingly important element of public life. In 1925, a central Shinto shrine was established on the Nam Mountain in Seoul. In 1935, the participation in Shinto rituals was made obligatory for students and teachers. After 1938, even the Christian churches were forced to practice Shinto rituals in their services (Nahm 2002:290).

Yet despite all ideological efforts, most Koreans never accepted the Japanese colonial rule. While the Japanese stressed the unity of both groups of people, the Koreans remained second-class citizens, suppressed and exploited under the regime of the colonial administration. In this context, the discourse about the Korean identity was dominated by two intellectual streams within the Korean independence movement: the culturalists and the populists. Although the so-called culturalists (Wells 1995:20–23) regarded the Korean people as the basis of a new and strong nation, they sympathized with the Neo-Confucian belief in the strength of ideas and the moral superiority of the ruling elite. The Korean people—called *Minjok*[3]—were considered immature and in need of leadership and education. The cultural weakness of the Koreans appeared to be the reason for the superiority of the Japanese. Against this background, the culturalists regarded the patriotic Korean elite as the social force that liberates the people from immaturity by means of progress and enlightenment and helps the nation adjust to the requirements of a modern world: "The people, called the *Minjok*, were to be *made* into a nation" (Wells 1995:17, original italics). This idea exerted an enormous influence on the early Korean independence movement.

[3]The Korean term "Minjok" means "race," "nation," or "people."

However, many intellectuals interpreted the defeat of the Korean independence movement in 1919—the climax of the anti-Japanese resistance in Korea—as a failure of the culturalist school of thought. As a consequence, partly on the basis of Marxist theory, the discourse of the independence movement shifted to "populism" (Wells 1995:23), which included the idea of full popular sovereignty. Accordingly, the people—called *Minjung*[4]—do not have to be made into a nation because it already is. The term "Minjung" was first used in the revolutionary *Donghak* farmer movement in 1894–1895 (Chang 2007:29). Now, progressive intellectuals considered it to be a new dynamic concept of sovereignty. The Minjung was viewed as the source of all authority, all "values of Koreanness and the dynamic of Korean history" (Wells 1995:16). Yet in comparison to Marxism, the Minjung was not regarded as a synonym for the working class. It referred instead to a broad coalition of those farmers, workers, intellectuals, and members of the upper class who suffered under the Japanese colonial rule and who participated in the struggle for national liberation (Kang 1995:34). Pro-Japanese collaborators were explicitly excluded. In this way, the Minjung concept represented the ideological basis for a broad alliance between different groups of the national independence movement.

Official State Ideology and Minjung Ideology After 1945

The rise of populist ideas did not mean the end of culturalism. On the contrary, after the end of the colonial rule, the rightist nationalist forces were strongly influenced by the culturalist school of thought. The rightist camp was made up of conservative forces of the Korean independence movement who had been joined by former pro-Japanese collaborators. The alliance had been supported by the U.S. military administration (1945–1948) in order to strengthen the anti-Communist forces in Korea. The new state ideology of President Rhee Syngman (1948–1960), who propagated the so-called One-People Principle (*Ilminju-eui*), is an illustrative example (Cumings 1990:208–18). Although the One-People Principle was only a very simple adaptation of the sophisticated culturalist philosophy, it shared two central ideas: first, every political change has to be preceded by cultural progress and, second, the Korean people will not be able to exert its sovereignty before reaching full "maturity."[5] As the One-People Principle lost its importance after the end of Rhee's presidency, its effect should not be overestimated. However, it contained already all important components for the legitimization of the postwar dictatorships: the reference to the ethnic homogeneity of the Korean people, rigid anti-Communism, and a familialism, which was deeply rooted in the Neo-Confucian tradition.

The official state ideology regarded the ethnic identity of the Koreans as the basis of societal unity. Against this background, the North Korean government was considered a hostile anti-state organization[6] that "illegally occupies the northern part of the Korean peninsula" (Cho 1997:158). The North Korean people had to be freed, by military force if necessary. Time and again, the leaders stressed the idea of

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[4]The Korean term "Minjung" means "mass" or "people."

[5]Cumings quotes the inaugural speech of President Rhee Syngman (1948): "A new constitution, a new government, he said, were less important than a new people.... We cannot make a holy state out of corrupt people" (Cumings 1990:209).

[6]The National Security Law (NSL) defines an anti-state organization as an "association or group within the territory of the Republic of Korea or outside of it, organized for the purpose of assuming a title of the government or disturbing the State" (Cho 1997:138). According to Cho, the NSL was not only a primary instrument to fight the North Korean regime, but also a major tool to suppress the pro-democratic opposition.

an old, pure, and culturally unique Korean race, which was threatened by impure communist *ideas*[7] that intruded from the outside in order to destroy harmony and to bring chaos. By referring to an external enemy, the regime not only strengthened the cohesion of the fragile state, it also intimidated internal dissidents (Cho 1997). For decades, the political propaganda against the North Korean enemy was an essential part of everyday life (Cumings 1990:215–16). Following Neo-Confucian thought, the order of the Korean society was regarded as an enlarged family: while the military and economic elites were in command, the people were obliged to be obedient and loyal. Meanwhile, the promise of people's sovereignty was postponed for an indefinite period of time. In this sense, for instance, President Chun Doo-wan said, just a few months after he had seized power by military force (1980), in an interview:

> The free democracy which flourishes in the West cannot survive, if it is implanted in different soil of culture and tradition. It will only bring about social chaos. Accordingly we should create new democratic politics that can take root in our political climate and develop it. (*Korea Times*, August 12, 1980)

However, the populist philosophy responded to the challenge of the new political situation as well. While the independence struggle had been regarded as a fight of "the Korean race against the Japanese race" (Wells 1995:24), the structural contradictions of postcolonial South Korean society were much more complicated. Consequently, leftist intellectuals considerably broadened the concept. They described the Korean past as a history of suffering and a poor population struggling against its suppressors and exploiters. The exploitation of the Korean people by the Japanese colonial government appeared now only as an episode in the long historical contradiction between the Minjung and the ruling elite.

From this point of view, the South Korean regime lacked legitimacy considering, for example, the leading role of former pro-Japanese collaborators in the postwar political establishment. The intellectuals accused the new ruling elite of politicians, civil servants, military officers, land owners, and industrialists of following the model of the Japanese colonial rulers by exploiting the Korean people and preventing it from taking the legitimate leadership of the society. By comparison, the North Korean regime was considered to be more legitimate because it consisted of former anti-Japanese independence fighters. Furthermore, influenced by postcolonial theories and liberation theology, many intellectuals of the Minjung movement showed to some degree sympathy for Marxist ideas.

Consequently, in contrast to the official state ideology, the dissidents perceived the Korean society as being deeply divided. While the economic development helped to increase the power and the well-being of the ruling elite, the large majority of the South Korean people was politically suppressed and excluded from economic prosperity. Against this background, the famous South Korean poet and leading dissident Kim Ji-ha described the identity of the Minjung as follows:

> The Minjung are those who have increased and occupied the ends of the earth, revolutionized the world, built societies, and advanced the course of human history. They physically make up the substance of what we call humanity. In other words, the Minjung are those who eat food produced by their own labor,

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[7]In Neo-Confucianism, ideas are traditionally considered more important than practice: "To act is easy, to think is difficult" (Cumings 1990:208).

who till and cultivate the soil, and protect their country and its culture not just with words but with their lives. I think of the Minjung in these concrete terms . . . .

Authority or power originally comes from the Minjung. But when it is institutionalized, it becomes a tool to suppress the Minjung in whom its roots lie. Therefore, in the course of history, the Minjung have risen up in revolts to reappropriate the power which they lost and in so doing restore social justice. In my opinion, when the ruling power or authority perverts justice and takes an anti-Minjung stand, then justice is on the side of Minjung and injustice on the side of the ruling authority. Throughout the course of human history, we witness the constant change from the rule of power to the rule of the Minjung, from the history of dictatorship and oppression to that of liberation and democracy. (Kim Ji-ha, quoted in Suh 1981a:155)

As the guarantor of social reproduction and source of all political authority, the Minjung was regarded as the "subject of history" (Chang 2007; Chi 2000: 54–56). In contrast, the ruling elite represented the *anti-Minjung*, which was perceived as responsible for the suffering of the Korean people.

ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

The plausibility of the populist conception was not self-evident. After the end of the Japanese colonial rule, authoritarian concepts of legitimacy still dominated the political culture. Therefore, pro-democratic dissidents had to increase the resonance of their ideas by connecting them with the broader cultural environment. This process included four elements. First, the dissidents articulated a *claim for representation*. On the basis of the Minjung framework they presented an alternative concept of collective identity. Second, the dissidents increased the *plausibility* of their concept by connecting it to collective myths and narratives. Third, they made the legitimacy of their concept visible by means of *dramaturgical action*. In this context, games, rituals, and narratives played an important role as well as disruptive protest actions.

Codes of Collective Identity

Every notion of collective identity necessarily includes the idea of a boundary (Eder 2005; Giesen 1999). Members have to be made distinguishable from nonmembers, inside from outside. The South Korean military regime used a quasi-primordial code by drawing a distinct boundary line between South Korea (anti-communism) and North Korea (communism). The rejection of communism and the struggle against the North Korean regime represented the sacrosanct principles of political correctness in public life. Outwardly, the border between both states is still one of the most guarded boundaries in the world. Inwardly, according to the logic of primordial codes, every contact with the enemy was regarded as a source of "pollution" (Alexander 1992). In countless campaigns, the population was educated to be everywhere and at all times on guard against the communist enemy. Those who had been "polluted" by contacts with North Koreans or communism never got rid of their ideological stigma. Furthermore, every political opposition—not only "communists" in a narrow sense— was labeled as "leftist" and often brutally suppressed. The U.S. historian Bruce

Cumings (1990) reported from his own experiences in South Korea in the 1960s as follows:

> When I taught at a middle school in 1968, for months the gates were draped with banners proclaiming a campaign to smash communism and catch spies; President Park's calligraphic phrase 'obliterate communism' (*Myol-gong*) was stamped in many books. English lessons incorporated phrases like 'smash the red cloven hoof that annihilates the people'; essays from students evinced dark, inchoate fears of communists as the devil incarnate. Children would wake up from nightmares, screaming about the '*Kong-san-dang*' communist party). (Cumings 1990:216)

How did the Minjung movement describe the identity of the Korean nation? Progressive intellectuals drew the boundary line between Minjung and anti-Minjung based on a universalistic concept. The Minjung was considered to be "a broad societal alliance" (Koo 1999:61) between different groups on the basis of common values and goals. For example, the sociologist Han Wan-san (1978; Chang 2007) equated the Minjung with those who are alienated. He identified the Minjung in political terms as "politically ruled people, who are excluded from the means of rule consisting of the power to command, mobilize, and also to suppress," in economic terms as "economically ruled people, who are excluded from the means of production, consumption, and distribution," and in cultural terms as "culturally ruled people, who are excluded from access to public recognition in the form of honor and prestige" (Kim 1995:47–48). In contrast, the term anti-Minjung referred to those who are responsible for the alienation of the Minjung.

The causes for alienation and suppression were attributed to grievances in the internal and external political relations. With respect to internal political relations, the activists criticized the elitism and authoritarianism of the regime, the violation of human rights by police and other state agencies, and the economic exploitation of the workers. Correspondingly, they demanded a democratic constitution that recognizes the principle of popular sovereignty, maintains the rule of law (including associational and human rights), and protects the three basic labor rights (free labor unions, free collective bargaining, and freedom to strike). Concerning external political relations, Minjung intellectuals regarded the division of Korea as a legacy of Japanese colonialism and U.S. imperialism (Yun 1999:492). The reunification of Korea was therefore considered to be a necessary condition for the achievement of full national independence. From Japan, they demanded a serious apology and compensation for the colonization of Korea. From the United States, they requested to immediately stop its support for the authoritarian regime in Seoul.

The expression of anti-Japanese sentiments—the burning of Japanese flags and chanting of anti-Japanese slogans—had been an integral part of protest activities for many years. By doing so, the protestors claimed to be legitimate successors of the national independence movement against the Japanese colonial regime. In contrast, the anger against the United States was closely connected to the brutal suppression of the so-called Gwangju Uprising by South Korean troops in 1980. Many dissidents believed that the massacre could have been prevented by the United States (CISJD 1988:37–39). In the following years, their frustration erupted in sometimes violent protests against U.S. institutions. Table 1 gives an overview of the binary code characterizing the collective identity of the Minjung democracy movement along the distinction of valued and devalued traits (Baiocchi 2007:293–94). In the public

Table 1. Binary Code of the Minjung Identity

Valued Traits (Minjung)		Devalued Traits (Anti-Minjung)
Social equality		Social inequality
Popular sovereignty	*Internal relations*	Authoritarianism
Rule of law		Despotism
Resistance		Collaboration
Independence	*External relations*	Dependence
Unification		Division

Source: Author's elaboration.

discourse, the identity concepts of the movement and the regime represented mutually exclusive "master frames"[8] competing for hegemony in the public sphere.

The Minjung identity formed a broad umbrella for groups with different ideologies and goals. With respect to their ideological orientation, the movement was divided in two wings: the first group mainly constituted of moderate opposition politicians (the so-called Chaeya) and Christian dissidents struggling for democratization (focus: internal relations) and the second group was constituted of more radical students and labor activists with social-revolutionary ideas (focus: external relations). During the 1980s, both camps closely worked together. However, after the regime change in 1987, they separated. While the moderate wing followed a pragmatic approach and negotiated with the authoritarian regime in exchange for democratic concessions, the radical wing refused to recognize the government and denied any cooperation. In the 1990s, the moderate activists formed the core of the so-called citizen movement (*Shimin undong*), making a great contribution to the democratic consolidation of South Korea. The radical activists initiated a large wave of unification protests in the first half of the 1990s and played a leading role in the development of the democratic labor movement (Koo 2001). Although the Minjung ideology has slowly disappeared, the South Korean civil society is still shaped by both wings of the former democracy movement (Kern 2005a).

Narrative Plausibility

The identity codes of the two opposing political camps were rooted in different myths and narrative traditions. The authoritarian regime often referred to the so-called Dangun myth that gives an illustrative example of a legitimating myth. It confirms the idea of an ethnic identity (Minjok) by tracing a direct line of descent between Dangun and the Korean people in the South as well as in the North. According to

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[8]Snow and Benford (2000:614) define collective action frames as "schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large. Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action." They describe the relation between collective action frames and master frames as following: "Master Frames are to movement-specific collective action frames as paradigms are to finely tuned theories. Master frames are generic; specific collective action frames are derivative. So conceived, master frames can be construed as functioning in a manner analogous to linguistic codes in that they provide the grammar that punctuates and systematically connects patterns of happenings in the world" (Snow and Benford 1992:138).

the legend, Dangun is the founder of the Korean nation (Cumings 1997:24).[9] Until the 20th century, the monarchy was regarded as a vessel of his presence. Every year, the Koreans celebrated the "Festival of the Opening of Heaven" (Gaecheonjeol) as the foundation of their nation. After the annexation of Korea by Japan, the Dangun myth became a symbol of resistance and national identity. Against Japanese attempts to enforce cultural assimilation, the Korean government in exile in Shanghai declared the "Festival of the Opening of Heaven" to be a national public holiday. After the establishment of the postcolonial regime in the South, the public holiday was officially introduced in 1948. By claiming the legitimate succession of the Joseon dynasty, the postcolonial government revived the memory of Dangun and connected its rule to the historical unity and cultural uniqueness of the Korean people.[10]

In contrast, the Minjung ideology was based on a *myth* that *challenged* the current political order by confronting it with an alternative "possible world." The narrative core was based on the widely spread Buddhist belief in *Maitreya* that is characterized by the expectation of an inner-worldly savior. According to the myth, the coming Maitreya Buddha will replace the present "*Sapa*-World" by a future "*Yonghwa*-World" (Chi 2000). The believers, mostly members of the lower classes, expected the coming of a savior who brings an end to poverty, suppression, and alienation. In Korean history, Maitreya Buddhism repeatedly inspired rebellions against the ruling elite. Against this background, dissident intellectuals regarded the belief in Maitreya as a sign for growing self-consciousness of the Minjung.

> From our point of view, the focus of messianism is the resurrection of all the people (the Minjung) for historical judgment against Evil and its followers. The general resurrection of all the people is a concrete vision of history in which the people realize their corporate subjectivity in participating in the Messianic Kingdom. (Kim 1981:188)

The dissident intellectuals claimed that the ruling elites usually consider the existing world as the best of all possible worlds. The Minjung people, by contrast, transcend their misery by drawing an alternative reality. The source of the utopian and imaginative power of the Minjung was attributed to the physical experience of injustice and suppression. This experience leads to a feeling of powerlessness, which "is expressed in the form of passivity, dependency and silent reserve" and in "emotions of hate, rage, resentment and vindictiveness against the suppressors" (Chi 2000:52, translated by Thomas Kern). The Korean tradition describes this emotional state as "Han":

> Han is an underlying feeling of Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation and nothingness. On the other hand, it is a

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[9]The first written testimony of the Korean Dangun myth goes back to 147 AD, but it is presumably much older. According to a version of the legend from the late-Koryo dynasty, the myth starts with a tiger and a bear that lived together in a cave and asked the god Ung to turn them into human beings. Ung listened to their prayers and instructed them to stay in their cave for 100 days and to eat only garlic and herbs that they had received from him. The bear and the tiger took the food and went into their cave. While the bear was transformed into a woman, the tiger gave up after about 20 days and left the cave. As the bear-woman could not find a man to marry, she asked god Ung for a child. He turned into a human being, married her, and soon she gave birth to a son, who was named Dangun (O 1979:75).

[10]For example, An Ho-sung, a leading propagandist of the young South Korean republic established the first President Rhee Syngman in his speeches into a successor of Dangun (Cumings 1990:211–18). Later, the famous regime-loyal poet So Chong-ju compared the smile of President Chun Doo-hwan, the largely unpopular leader of the military regime from 1980 to 1988, in a poem with the smile of Dangun.

dominant feeling with a tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings. The first aspect can sometimes be sublimated to great artistic expressions and the second aspect could erupt as the energy for a revolution or rebellion. (Suh 1981b:54)

As Han emotions refer to physical experiences of hunger, cold, and pain, the movement intellectuals regarded them as the physical and subjective correlate of social injustice. On this basis, the Minjung movement demanded the full guarantee of human rights, associational rights (especially for the workers), and a share of the growing economic welfare for the members of the lower classes (Kern 2007). In the Korean tradition, the Han of a person demands (therapeutic) dissolution. This task is conducted by a Shaman (*Mudang*). She is qualified to drive out evil spirits by magical rituals (*Kut*) and to restore the lost balance between the visible and invisible world in order to liberate the individual from his or her Han (Lee 1998). Although magical rituals relieve the believer only for a limited period, dissident intellectuals interpreted it as a model and reference to a deeply rooted desire of the Minjung for societal liberation.

Dramaturgical Action Repertoire

In order to bring alive their concept of representation, the dissidents looked for symbols and rituals that make the boundary of their collective identity visible. In the 1960s and 1970s, intellectuals and artists began to examine the Korean cultural tradition, particularly the lifeworld of the poor farmers and slaves, and looked for evidence that could "prove" the existence of a genuine *Minjung culture*. In the course of this movement, the traditional entertainment and religious practices of the working poor people turned out to be rich sources for the development of a dramaturgical action repertoire (Cho 1987).

Among traditional entertainment practices, mask dance (*Talchum*), folk music (*Nongak*), and the art of recitation (*Pansori*) were often used to visualize the identity of the Minjung and to challenge the government. In the 1970s, many folk theatre and music groups were established, mainly at universities (Lee 2003). These groups often produced tragedies or satires that aimed at showing the suffering and the struggle of the Minjung. The groups narrated, sang, played, and danced their pieces. Famous dramas of this genre are *Chang Il-dam* and the *Five Thieves* by the poet Kim Ji-ha (2001) that were written in a traditional manner but dealt with political and economic problems of the current society.

In the field of religion, Shamanism experienced a powerful comeback. Many supporters of the Minjung movement regarded Shamanism as a symbol for the strength of the Korean identity because it had maintained its hold against "foreign" religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. In this context, the Shamanist Kut ritual played an important role. Intellectuals perceived it as a symbolic anticipation of a coming societal transformation (Choi 1995). They turned their attention in particular to the phenomenon of ecstasy. The poet Kim Ji-ha regarded collective ecstasy as a driving force of social transformations. He believed that by means of collective ecstasy, suppressed people are turned into a community, and this gives them the power to overthrow an unjust political and social order. The leading dissident Paek Ki-wan considered the Kut ritual to be an event that exerts a transformative power on the individual. "It becomes an aesthetic moment when individual experience merges with social praxis. Ecstasy in this sense should become the very

momentum from which history develops" (Paek Ki-wan, quoted in Choi 1995:116). Paek viewed the Kut ritual as the starting point of a deeper understanding for the revolutionary struggle of the Korean people in history. Accordingly, Shamanist rituals were an important component in the protest repertoire of the Minjung movement.

For the dissidents, the identity of the movement expressed the suffering of the Minjung. Against this background, songs, dances, games, and prayers as well as all kinds of protest actions and confrontations with the military regime were perceived as techniques to channel and dissolve "accumulated Han" (Suh 1981a, 1981b) by connecting present actors with the mythic origins of the Minjung: "To resolve the Han, the Minjung share their stories of Han with each other, and then, through sharing the stories, the Minjung form the huge community of Han" (Kim 1986:96). The boundary of this community was marked by three types of performative practices (Giesen 1999:88–95). In the first case, the communication aimed at strengthening the social cohesion of the participants. In the second case, the emphasis was put on the persuasion and mobilization of the public. In the third case, the activists directly challenged the ruling elite. Although the rituals and symbols of a movement often address all three functions at the same time, the following description gives an overview of typical situational arrangements.

(1) The first type of practice is performed in front of a sympathetic audience of adherents who largely support the goals of the protest movement. The priority of the ritual is to gain the affirmation and strengthening of the community. The collective identity of the group is reinforced by ritual practices like bowing, praying, displaying pictures, burning joss sticks, keeping silence, and giving speeches. The social access to the ritual event is usually limited to members and supporters. According to Giesen (1999:83), the social structure of the ritual depends on the performance of three social roles: the speaker, the addressee, and the broader audience that supports the ritual communication. Participants with a critical attitude are not allowed to show their dissent or to express their opinion publicly. An ideal typical pattern of such a ritual communication within the South Korean Minjung movement is described in the following story from the daily *Korea Times* (April 12, 1980):

On 11 April 1980, about 5,000 professors and students participated in a commemoration ceremony for a student of the Seoul National University who had committed suicide a year before. He killed himself after tape-recording a "declaration of conscience" in which he demanded the restoration of democracy. The participants of the service prayed for the deceased student. After an open letter to President Park Chung-hee (who had been killed in October 1979) was read, the audience listened to the student's declaration of conscience. Many participants burst into tears. Some representatives of the student corps pledged to continue courageously with the struggle and to keep up the spirit of the deceased student. At the end, the participants sang together a song, which included a line of the student's declaration of conscience: "I prefer dying on my feet than living on my knees". The title of the song was: "We Are Fighting For The Righteous Cause". The event had been organized by the newly elected student council of the university.

(2) In the second type of practice, the activists leave the relatively protected space of the closed community and move their issues to the public. The purpose is,

on the one hand, to affirm the movement identity and, on the other hand, to convince and persuade neutral bystanders of the goals of the movement. The action repertoire basically constituted of public statements and signature campaigns. These operations were difficult and dangerous because the authoritarian regime carefully controlled the access to the public space. In general, only representatives of the Christian churches and (moderate) opposition politicians were allowed to raise their voices in the public. A typical example for the application of public statements was the so-called Y.H. Incident. In August 1979, the police stormed a building that had been occupied by 180 female workers who demanded compensation after the company had gone bankrupt. During the police action, a leader of the strike movement was killed.

In the following weeks, the government identified the ecumenical Christian Urban Industrial Mission (UIM) as the "wirepuller" behind the incident because the workers had been supported by the organization. It blamed the UIM for the death of the strike leader; some politicians even speculated about a connection to "impure outside forces" (*Korea Times*, August 14, 1979) in North Korea. Eight Christian labor activists were arrested and accused of having violated the National Security Law and "of having roused the workers to attempt the extreme method of group suicide by suggesting that they make a suicide solution, form a suicide group and make suicide practice" (*Korea Times*, August 18, 1979). High representatives of Protestant and Catholic organizations responded in sermons and press conferences to the government campaign with public statements denying the accusations of the government and defending the goals of the UIM.

> On the occasion of a prayer meeting with more that 2,000 participants, the Catholic Bishop Chi Hak-seon demanded the reinstallment of the three basic labor rights and requested the government to immediately stop the campaign against UIM. "In his preach he said, that the Christian churches, which had sided with the entrepreneurs in the wake of the industrial revolution in the past, are now exerting efforts to restore the rights and interest of the laborers and farmers, regretting its errors in the past. This action, he said, cannot be regarded as an act of impure elements and it was improper and wrong for such efforts to be regarded as impure. He said the UIM would continue to carry on its evangelical mission, sharing pains and difficulties with the laborers and farmers" (*Korea Times*, August 28, 1979).

(3) The third type of practice aims at disrupting everyday life and challenging opponents by means of demonstrations, boycotts, or strikes. In the South Korean case, this strategy often resulted in violent confrontations with the police. In some cases, the protestors intentionally used violent techniques such as arson attacks, occupation of public facilities, suicides, and the burning of American or Japanese flags in order to expose the weak legitimacy of the military regime. U.S. facilities were a particularly popular object of protest actions.

> From 1980 to 1983, U.S. cultural facilities in Gwangju, Busan, and Daegu were at least three times objects of arson attacks by protestors (*Korea Times*, May 24, 1985). In the case of Busan (1982), a Korean visitor of the

institution was killed. The young offenders claimed that the attack aimed at revealing an alleged U.S. involvement in the Gwangju incident.

In May 1985, 96 students occupied the U.S. Information Service Building (USIS) in Seoul and demanded that the U.S. government apologize and reveal its alleged involvement in the Gwangju incident. After keeping up the occupation for 72 hours, they gave up peacefully. Between 1985 and 1986, the *Korea Times* reported at least 12 further more or less successful attempts of student demonstrators to intrude into U.S. facilities.

PRAGMATICS OF PROTEST

This section deals with the "fusion" (Alexander 2004:527) of the elements of cultural performance. Since rituals produce meaning by connecting present events with past (mythic) events, the first step of this section gives an overview of the most important components in the collective memory of the Minjung democracy movement. In the second step, the relationship between collective memory and protest activities in the period between 1981 and 1986 will be discussed. An analysis of newspaper reports shows that the collective memory produced rhythmic patterns of protest. To the extent that most protests were performed by students, the great resonance of the Minjung ideology strongly depended on their social homogeneity. In the third step, the development of the June Uprising—which began with the torture death of a student named Park Chong-chol in January 1987—will be taken as an example in order to show how the mythic framework of the Minjung movement resonated with single events.

Collective Memory

The activists of the Minjung movement claimed a close relationship between social order and emotional experience and used a broad repertoire of cultural techniques to visualize the suffering of the Minjung in the public. Against this background, the dissidents' awareness of human suffering and their sensitivity for external stimulations were extremely high. Accordingly, the movement groups continually "scanned" their social environment for potential empirical events that corresponded to their cultural script (Schwartz 1996:921–22). Every time the violent behavior of the military regime matched with the expectations of the movement's master frame, moral indignation was aroused. The higher the correspondence between their cultural script and the empirical event, the stronger was the mobilizing potential for collective protest actions.

In this way, the myth of the Minjung was turned into a cognitive tool that allows distinguishing meaningful historical "events" from mere "happenings" (Sewell 1999). Events are meaningful because they make collective myths and narratives come alive. From the actor's point of view, "destiny" or "higher powers" intervene into history and "divide the stream of occurrences into the trivial non-semiotic background of regularities and the semiotic foreground of exceptions and events without making a distinction between historical and natural events" (Assmann 2002:249–50, translated by Thomas Kern). In other words, the distinction between "sacred" events and "profane" happenings depends on the correspondence with collective myths and narratives. Accordingly, the unique feature of events is not their singularity, but the generalizability of their meaning in regard to history. Halbwachs (1967:68) defines the

chain of historical events of which a community is conscious as collective memory. It offers a meaningful background for the self-reflection of a collectivity by drawing a historical line from the "times of origin" (Eliade) to the present.[11] Accordingly, activities, events, and biographies that are meaningful within one meaning frame are reinterpreted in terms of another and "seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman 1974:43–44). Goffman describes this transformation process as "keying." Drawing on the "sacred" events of the Minjung movement, this section gives an overview of how Korean history was represented in the collective memory of the activists.

(1) *Donghak Revolution (1894–1895)*: Barrington Moore (1969:520) remarked that the modernization process begins with farmer revolutions that fail. This statement also appears to be true for Korea. On the breeding ground of political, economic, and social crisis after the opening of the country, the dissent with the growing influence of foreign colonial powers strongly increased and stimulated occasional local unrests and rebellions. In the southwestern region of Jeolla, particularly the *Donghak* movement—a new religious formation that had been established in the 1850s—enjoyed a growing popularity. The supporters of the movement proclaimed the equality of all human beings and demanded far-reaching social and political reforms such as the reduction of foreign influences. In 1894, more than 100,000 people—mostly farmers—participated in a popular uprising of the movement (Cumings 1997:119). While the rebels gained control over a growing number of towns, the weak central government showed no considerable resistance. However, Japan used this incident to send troops to Korea in order to make a bid for the leadership in the East Asian region. It took only one week until the rebels were defeated. Thousands were killed. The Japanese military hunted the rebels until 1895. Although the rebellion had failed, many Koreans consider it to be a milestone of modern Korean history. The rebellion became a national epic, inspiring many poems, songs, and artist works reflecting the political experiences in postcolonial South Korea (Suh 1981a; McCann 1988; Yea 2000).

(2) *Independence Movement (1919)*: After the annexation of Korea by Japan (1910), activists organized an underground movement fighting for independence with assaults and illegal demonstrations. Inspired by U.S. President Wilson's idea of the self-determination of people, the leaders of the movement published a declaration of independence on March 1, 1999 and organized demonstrations with more than 2 million participants all over the country (Nahm 1997:82). However, the Japanese colonial government responded with repression. Thousands were arrested, tortured, or killed by the police. In postcolonial South Korea, March 1 was declared a national holiday. The authoritarian regime and the democratic opposition both attempted to instrumentalize this national holiday in order to underscore their claim for legitimate succession of the independence movement.[12]

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[11]Schwartz distinguishes two modes of self-reflection: "First, collective memory is a model of society— a reflection of its needs, problems, fears, mentality, and aspirations. Second, collective memory is a model for society—a program that defines its experience, articulates its values and goals, and provides cognitive, affective, and moral orientation for realizing them. Collective memory affects social reality by reflecting it and shaping it" (Schwartz 1996:910).

[12]On March 1, 1976, the leaders of the pro-democratic opposition published during a Catholic afternoon service in the Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul a statement with the title "Democracy and Salvation of the

(3) *Student Independence Movement of Gwangju (1929)*: On November 3, 1929, a scuffle between Korean and Japanese students in the provincial capital of Gwangju escalated into a national wave of protests against the Japanese colonial rule, mobilizing more than 54,000 students at 194 educational institutions. Again, the Japanese government responded with repression: 2,330 students were arrested and for an unlimited period excluded from school education and 580 students were sentenced to long prison terms. In 1953, November 3 was officially declared to be the "Memorial Day of the Student Independence Movement of Gwangju." Due to growing problems with the student opposition, President Park Chung-hee suspended the national holiday in 1973. Eleven years later, the student movement forced the government with massive protests to reintroduce the Memorial Day.

(4) *Revolution of April 19 (1960)*: In 1960, the student movement again initiated a national wave of mobilization. Due to suspected electoral fraud, the protestors demanded the resignation of the authoritarian regime of President Rhee Syngman. On April 19, when hundreds of thousands participated in the demonstrations, the president ordered the police to shoot the protesters. At least 115 were killed and about 1,000 were injured (Cumings 1997:344). A week later, the president resigned and went into exile. The following democratic springtime lasted only for about one year. In May 1961, General Park Chung-hee initiated a military coup and became the new head of state.

(5) *Self-Burning of Chun Tae-il (1970)*: The self-burning of the textile worker Chun Tae-il in November 1970 became the founding myth of the Korean democratic labor movement (Park 1996:181). The young man worked in a small sweatshop on the so-called Peace Market in Seoul. At that time, about 20,000 people, mostly women between the ages of 14 and 30 years, worked in small factories in this city quarter under miserable conditions for a monthly wage of less than 30 U.S. dollars. The female workers were regularly subject to sexual harassment, beatings, and maltreatment. One day, Chun Tae-il acquired an edition of the labor law where he read that the maximum working time per week was legally limited to 48 hours. In case of extension, the employer had to raise the wage by 50 percent. According to the labor law, children under 14 years were not allowed to work in fabrics and women were entitled to one holiday every month for reasons of health protection. However, most female workers had never heard about it. As their working conditions considerably deviated from legal regulations, he sought the support of the public labor office. Since the state officials ignored his reports, the female workers decided to start a protest campaign in order to draw public attention to their issue. The police responded with brutal violence. The U.S. Protestant missionary and labor activist George Ogle (1990) reported in his book about the Korean labor movement what happened after the police had turned down the protests. His story assumes a mythic form that expresses how the workers and activists perceived the following event:

Country." They demanded the abolition of the Yushin Constitution that had been introduced in order to stabilize the dictatorship of President Park Chung-hee. In the morning service of the same cathedral, Prime Minister Choi Kyu-hah had read out a message of greetings from the president in which he claimed that the Yushin Constitution is a manifestation of the spirit of the independence movement (Kim 2000:188). In response, the regime ordered to arrest all signers of the statement.

The next demonstration was ghastly. A second attempt to plead their case before the public was made. Again the police at the order of the owners attacked the young people. In the midst of the melee, Chun Tae-il poured gasoline over his body and set himself afire. A macabre specter of shooting flames. A young man's voice crying out from the flames: "Obey the Labor Standards Act! Don't mistreat young girls!" The flames were quenched. Too late. He died. And in a mysterious way this young man of twenty-two years ignited a spiritual fire that continued down through the subsequent years. His flaming body lit up the wretched Peace Market and evoked a groan of anguish and protest from workers everywhere in the country. His act has become a symbol of resistance and rebellion ever since. Chun Tae-il's mother was present at his death. His last words reminds one of Jesus last words on the cross. He said, "Mother! Now you are the mother of all workers!" (Ogle 1990:73)[13]
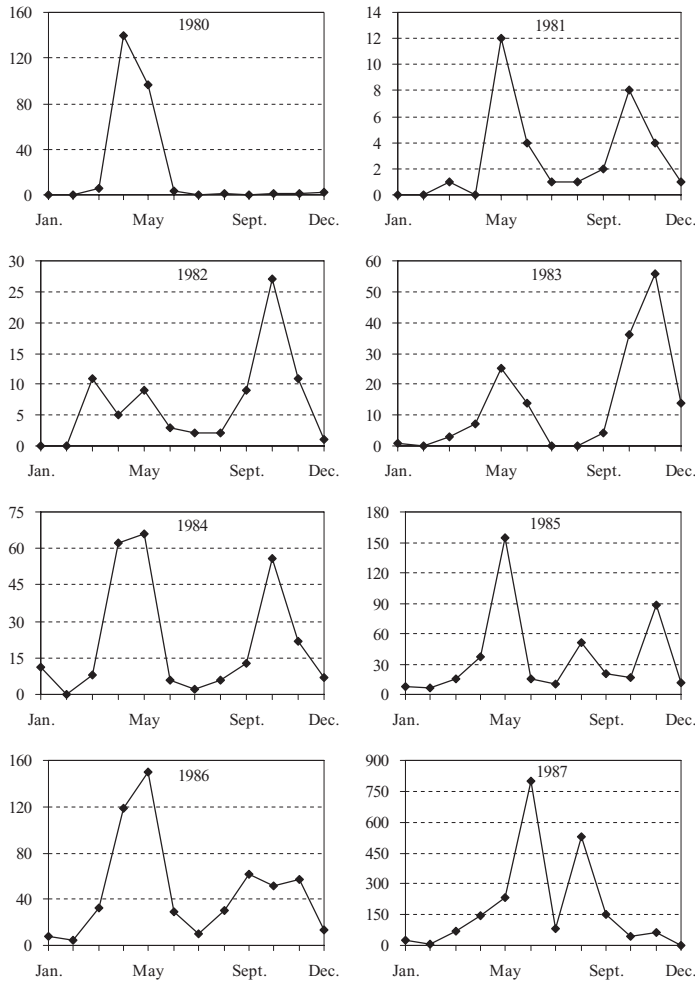
(6) *The Democratic Uprising of Gwangju (1980)*: After the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in October 1979, the political opposition hoped for a rapid transition to democracy. However, a second military coup d'etat turned down all hopes. In May 1980, the government declared martial law and interdicted all public meetings. On May 18, some 100 students and citizens of Gwangju ignored the interdiction and demonstrated against the military government (Clark 1988; Scott-Stokes and Lee 2000). The security forces responded with brutal violence. They killed, injured, and arrested dozens of people. Spontaneously, more and more ordinary citizens joined the demonstrations in order to protest against the violent behavior of the security forces. On May 21, they brought the city fully under control. Gwangju was surrounded by military troops and for several days besieged. On May 27, military forces attacked the city with tanks and helicopters. According to unofficial estimations, more than 2,000 civilians were killed during the incident (CISJD 1988:30).[14] In the 1980s, the Gwangju uprising became a synonym for the suffering of the Minjung indelibly imprinted in the collective memory of the pro-democratic movement. Until the late 1990s, activists frequently demanded—sometimes supported by large waves of protest—a thorough investigation of the incident, the punishment of the responsible persons, and compensation for the victims. After civilian rule was reinstated, a national cemetery was established in order to honor the victims of the incident.

Rhythms of Protest

The collective memory shaped the identity of the democracy movement and determined the pragmatics of protest. Figure 1 shows that, in the period between 1981 and 1986, the protest activities of the Minjung movement followed a striking rhythmic pattern. In January and February, the level of protest activities was generally low. In March, the number of demonstrations slowly increased; in April, it heightened and in May it finally reached the annual climax. Afterward, the number of

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[13]The mother of Chun Tae-il became a leading activist of the Korean democratic labor movement. In the following years, labor activists frequently initiated protest campaigns and strikes at the place were Chun Tae-il had burned himself. Since 2005, a sculpture of Chun Tae-il reminds passing pedestrians of his "sacrifice."
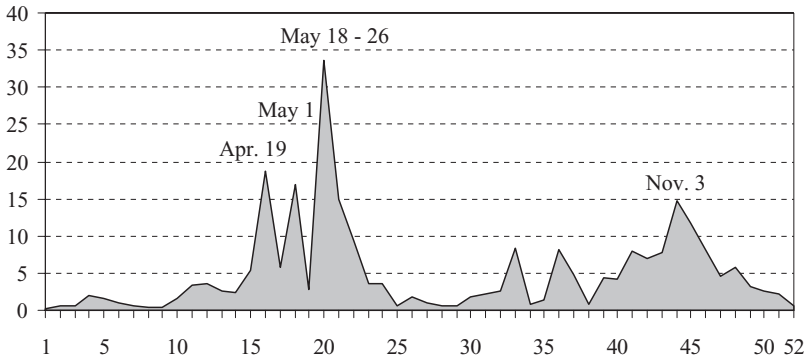[14]Official statements admit about 150 civilian casualties (Clark 1988).

Notes: Protests were defined as a "public action by a non-governmental actor who expresses criticism or dissent and articulates a societal or political demand" (Rucht and Neidhardt 1999:68). Protest actions of single individuals (i.e., suicides) were also included in the sample because the authoritarian government sensitively responded to every form of opposition. The collection of protest data focused on the daily *Korea Times*, which is published in the English language. The *Korea Times* is a medium with nationwide distribution. It was established in 1950 by a Korean newspaper company that also publishes the Korean-language *Hankook Ilbo*. Although the reports differed not much from the leading daily competitor *Korea Herald*, I decided for the *Korea Times* because this medium paid a little more attention to Korean domestic politics. The effects of political censorship were difficult to assess. A comparison of the collected protest data and official police statistics (on an annual basis—other police statistics are not available) shows that the *Korea Times* reported on average about 75 percent less protest events than the police between 1979 and 1987. In other words, a considerable number of protest events were not reported. Despite it, at least the relative distribution of protests is almost equal in both sources (Kern 2005c:103–04). Consequently, the data give no reliable information about the extent of protest activities in absolute numbers. However, they allow reliable statements about proportions, correlations, and tendencies. For the purpose of this study, this limitation is acceptable.

Source: Protest reports of the daily *Korea Times*, 1979–1987, six editions per week.

Figure 1. Monthly protests (1980–1987).

Figure 2. Average distribution of weekly protests (1981–1986).

protests dropped. In autumn, the same pattern appeared again on a lower level. In October, the protests increased and reached their climax in November. In December, the activities tended toward zero. This rhythmic pattern was stable even in periods of heightened repression until 1983 and did not change during the so-called liberalization phase—when the regime abandoned some repressive measures—until May 1987. From 1981 to 1986, 70.2 percent of all protests activities were concentrated in the four months of April (15.0), May (27.1), October (12.6), and November (15.5).

   How can we explain this relative rhythmic pattern of protest activities? A look at the weekly distribution of the average annual protest shows that a majority of protests between 1981 and 1986 were concentrated not only in particular months, but also in particular weeks (see Figure 2). On average, the protests reached their climax in the 16th, 18th, 20th, 21st, 44th, and 45th week of the year. Those weeks were by no means ordinary weeks as they enclose important events of the Minjung movement: (a) April 19 was the day of the student revolution (1960), (b) May 1 is the Labour Day, (c) the democratic uprising of Gwangju occurred from May 18 to May 26 (1980), and (d) November 3 marked the memorial day of the student independence movement (1929). These memorial days frequently gave rise to protests. On the one hand, the commemoration of the past strengthened the collective identity of the movement; on the other hand, it massively challenged the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime.

   The next question is why in particular these memorial days shaped the protest activities of the pro-democratic movement in such a remarkable way. Except May 1, the protests reminded of events that were above all meaningful for the student movement. Consequently, the mobilization of students was particularly high. The students were also the most important protest group because they participated in 74 percent of protest events that had been reported by the daily *Korea Times* between 1981 and 1986. Seventy-nine percent of their protests were concentrated in the four months of April, May, October, and November. The six memorial weeks accounted for 37 percent of these protests. As the current regime was responsible for the brutal suppression during the democratic uprising in Gwangju, this event drew most attention. May 1 deviates from this pattern in the sense that it commemorates Labour Day. Despite this, mainly students used this opportunity and joined the protests of labor activists in order to show their solidarity with the working class by supporting their demands. Furthermore, as May 1 is favorably located between April 19 and

May 18, the organizers of demonstrations benefited from the heated protest climate at the universities.

Every protest drama followed the script of a mythic confrontation. The activists framed Korean history as a series of confrontations between the Minjung and the ruling elite that usually ended in the defeat and humiliation of the Minjung. These narrations described a mythic conflict between the "good" and the "evil" (Smith 2000): on one side, the Minjung who rose up against suppression, and on the other side, the anti-Minjung, who made the common people suffer. Through protests, time and again, the profane temporal life of both camps was interrupted by "periods of a sacred time that is non-historical (in the sense that it does not belong to the historical present)" (Eliade 1961:72). In other words, the protests were not merely a "commemoration of a mythical event"; they "re-actualized" it (Eliade 1961:81). In this way, protest events removed the boundary between the present and the (mythic) past; every tear gas grenade that exploded and every arrest of activists strengthened the faith of the (mostly) students and stimulated further confrontations.

The interaction between protestors and police created a ritual circle of memory, protest, confrontation, and confirmation, shaping the rhythm of protest activities for years: *commemoration caused protest activities, protest activities lead to confrontation with police, within the confrontation the myth of the Minjung movement was confirmed and strengthened the motivation for further commemoration*. In this way, the memory frame of the Minjung became an independent driving force behind the mobilization against the authoritarian regime. The great resonance of the Minjung frame among students indicates a relatively high degree of social homogeneity. In the cultural context of Korea, the educational background of a person establishes strong bonds and feelings of solidarity with all graduates of the same university (Kern 2005a, 2005b).[15] While older students are responsible for their younger fellows, the younger fellows have to show respect to the older students. This kind of relation turned out to be favorable for the organization of collective action.

June Uprising 1987

The incident that finally led to the democratic regime change in South Korea equally corresponds with the dramaturgic pattern of the Minjung myth. On January 13, 1987, an anti-communist police squad arrested the university student Park Chong-chol without warrant and brought him for interrogations to the national headquarters of the police in Seoul. On the following day, he was dead. When some newspapers reported about the incident on January 15, the public resonance was overwhelming. According to the report of a doctor, the body of the student showed indisputable traces of torture. At first, the police denied all reports about the incident. However, several days later, newspapers published unanimous reports that the student had been drowned in a bathtub during police interrogation. Government officials denied the application of torture. They argued that the cause of death was a shock (CISJD 1988:46).

On January 16, a day after the death of Park had been made public, 20 activists occupied an office of the National Church Council of Korea (NCCK) in order to protest the alleged murder of the student. A few days later, the Catholic

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[15]The specific Korean network culture is called *Yeongojueui*. It refers to the strong internal cohesion of *Hyulyeon* (networks of family or kinship), *Hakyeon* (school or university networks), and *Jiyeon* (home town or regional networks).

Cardinal Stephen Kim Su-hwan called the government in his Sunday sermon to respect human rights. On January 20, students of the Seoul National University staged a funeral ceremony for Park. In the following days, a growing number of protest organizations publicly condemned the torture death of Park and demanded a thorough investigation of the incident. Among them were groups such as the oppositional National Korea Democratic Party, the Korean Bar Association, the International Human Rights League of Korea, the Literary Men's Association, and the Human Rights Council of the NCCK. A growing movement led by Christian and Buddhist groups organized ceremonies and protest events in commemoration of Park. On February 7, about 20 dissident groups attempted to hold a mass demonstration in Seoul. According to reports of the *Korea Times*, the police sent about 33,000 officers to obstruct the event. Thousands tried to get through to the central meeting point in front of the Catholic Myongdong Cathedral. Inside the church, about 50 priests, 800 nuns, and 200 lay believers held a funeral service for Park. In many places, people protested against the authoritarian regime.

On February 27, following Buddhist funeral rites, leading activists of the democracy movement announced to organize a mass demonstration 49 days after the death of Park Chong-chol on March 3. They called their supporters to march peacefully from different starting points to the central Pagoda Park in Seoul where the leaders of the independence movement had published the declaration of independence against the Japanese colonial regime in 1919. The police mobilized about 60,000 officers to block the demonstration. At the same time, about 6,000 students at 49 universities supported the march with nationwide demonstrations. In protest against the ban of the demonstration march, three Catholic priests started a hunger strike. From then on, two protest campaigns ran parallel: one against police violence and one for democratization. The protests further increased when a Catholic priest announced on May 18 that the investigation of Park's death had been obstructed by the police. The three main suspect policemen were still not under arrest.

By the end of May, about 80 percent of all students in the country participated in an education boycott following an appeal of their fellows from the Seoul National University. They demanded the full truth about the torture death of Park Chong-chol. On June 10, tens of thousands of citizens participated in mass demonstrations against the authoritarian regime, calling for an end of torture practices, police violence, and dictatorship. After weeks of sustained protests by hundreds of thousands of citizens, the authoritarian regime finally conceded and agreed to negotiations with the pro-democratic oppositional party about a democratic constitution on June 29. In December 1987, a new president was democratically elected and South Korea finally entered the difficult path of democratic consolidation.

CONCLUSION

This article focused on the enculturation of democratic values and ideas in South Korea. In contrast to the rationalist paradigm of democratic regime changes, the results show that the Minjung democracy movement challenged the government by connecting ideas of popular sovereignty and human rights with genuine cultural traditions. By mobilizing (emotional) commitments, the collective identity of the movement exerted a strong influence on the process of democratization. Furthermore, it provided an ideological basis for coalitions of different groups with sometimes contradicting ideologies and interests (Kern 2005c:173–80). In contrast to the normative paradigm, the study also showed that value systems are not unchangeable.

Although the Confucian heritage "with its emphasis on authority, order, hierarchy, and supremacy of the collectivity over the individual" created "obstacles for democratization" (Huntington 1996:238), the legitimization concept of the Minjung movement was based on a rich tradition of collective narratives and practices that were also part and parcel of the Korean cultural heritage.

Joas (2000, 2004:296) claims that "value commitments are not the result of rational-argumentative justifications, but of experiences of self-formation and self-transcendence, hence of experiences in which we transcend the boundaries of ourselves and in which something appears to us as good (or evil) in a subjectively evident and affectually intense way." From this point of view, the acculturation of democratic ideas substantially depended on the creative connection of individual and collective experiences with narrative traditions and a convincing analysis of the political and social situation. The self-transcendence and the formation of value commitments are based in particular on the experience of suffering and violence (Shin 2003:348), which was interpreted in terms of the concept of Han emotions. The dissidents substantiated democratic values and ideas by (1) developing an alternative collective identity challenging the legitimacy of the military regime, (2) increasing the cultural resonance of their concept by linking ideas of popular sovereignty and human rights to traditional narratives and practices, (3) developing a rich dramaturgical repertoire of collective action, and (4) mobilizing public outrage by fusing the three latter elements within historical situations.

Against this background, it is surprising that the literature on political regime changes pays only little attention to the role of cultural performances. This study showed that cultural performance is an essential element in the process of regime change (Edles 1995). However, as the generalizability of a single case study is limited, further studies are necessary in order to broaden our understanding of not only the different patterns and outcomes of cultural performance, but also of the role of human creativity in the process of social change.

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