From Unity to Multiplicities
Social Movement Transformation and Democratization in Asia

Edited by
Hee-Yeon Cho
Andrew Aeria
Song-Woo Hur
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Wizar,
To friendship and scholarship

Andrew

23/5/12
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STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE,
PETALING JAYA
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Preface

Understanding the changing landscape of social movements in democratization

Cho Hee-Yeon, Andrew Aeris and Song-Woo Hur

Social movements have played a very important role of driving and enabling transition from dictatorship to democracy, a process oft-known as democratization. These social movements are diversely referred to as ‘the opposition, civil society, movements, NGOs, popular uprising, non-party politics’, and etc., in different studies. We can say that, in all cases of democratization, democratization would not have been possible without bottom-up pressure and effective people mobilization in opposing authoritarian polities and dictatorships.

In that sense, all cases of democratization can be defined as ‘democratization by social movements’, despite contextual differences in the latter's influence and impact upon the former. However, social movements have also experienced changes after the onset of democratization because the process of democratization itself influences and changes the context in which social movements are located. Social movements, which have successfully fought against authoritarian polities and dictatorships, have since been confronted with a new context and tasks in the post-authoritarian or post-dictatorship period. This book aims to analyze how social movements have changed in the process of democratization in different national contexts.

Of course, this process of change is not a passive one, in which social movements are influenced one-sidedly by the contextual change. On the contrary, democratization itself is a kind of interactive process, in which social movements play a very important role in influencing or even composing diverse patterns of democratization.
General studies of democratization often divide the democratization process into periods of democratic transition and democratic consolidation. However, seen from the viewpoint of social movement change, generally social movements pass through three phases of change after the beginning of any democratic transition. These phases are characterized as the anti-dictatorship movement phase, the post-dictatorship democratic reform movement phase and the post-democratic reform movement phase, with each phase and movement characterization strongly influenced by its predecessor movement. Thus, movements within the post-dictatorship phase are influenced by movements within the anti-dictatorship phase. The strength, initiative and popular base of anti-dictatorship movements exert influence and effect change amongst social movements in the post-dictatorship context. Influenced by factors, forces and movements within its predecessor phase, social movements within the post-dictatorship phase consequently organize their democratic reform activities.

Throughout this process, changes in social movements happen differently albeit dynamically in terms of their popular support, internal composition, relations with institutionalized party politics, etc. And all in turn influence the larger social movement situation in its new context and phase of post-democratic reform.

Diverse forms of changes in social movements

Changes in social movements in democratization are expressed in diverse forms. First, we find an emergence of new forms of movements with different goals and strategies. Basically, authoritarian polities and dictatorships often repress diverse kinds of voluntary and civil society activities of people that do not align themselves with the interests and demands of such authoritarian and dictatorial governments. However, as dictatorial repression weakens, diverse and new kinds of people’s activities emerge. Some of these are expressed in more organized forms such as social movements in the narrow sense, while others are expressed in non-organized upheavals and demonstrations, etc.

Because of the change in the context in which people express their voices, the start of democratization brings with it some new forms of movements, different from the ‘old’ forms which initiated the anti-dictatorship struggle. These ‘new’ movements during democratization are not identified with those, which emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s in Western societies. In some cases, concepts such as non-governmental organizations or civil society movements were popularly used to designate these kinds of ‘new’ movements.

These ‘new’ movements also took on different forms and composition, depending on different national situations. The ‘newness’ of a movement
also varied given different national contexts. In some societies, a citizen’s movement or an environment movement symbolized a ‘new’ issue movement. In other societies, in which the anti-dictatorship movement was driven by popular movements like the labour or peasant movement and coalitions of diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs), diversification of former movements was what characterized post-dictatorship movements.

With democratization, formerly repressed minority movements were re-activated with their own identities such as the disabled movement or diverse aboriginal peoples’ movements. With this re-emergence of ‘new’ movements during democratization, the movement community has also been characterized by ‘diversification’.

Apart from diversification, social movement change also involves a process of ‘differentiation’. If the anti-dictatorship movement is generally oft-described as a ‘big movement’, the more accurate reality is that it comprises ‘many different movements’ but united for a common purpose. Under authoritarian polities and dictatorships, most progressive movements converged and pooled their efforts in pursuit of a common goal, namely that of toppling the authoritarian polity/dictatorship. Therefore, we can say that there has been a kind of anti-authoritarian/dictatorship ‘movement community’. However, with democratization, these movements have differentiated into many dissimilar movements without a common goal, having their own unique identities and championing their own issues.

This differentiation has not only taken different forms. Ideological shades of thought have also accompanied this process of differentiation. Thus, individual movements have also differentiated into a spectrum of diverse ideologies. For example, the environment movement has differentiated into conservation movements, radical ecology movements, way of life reform-oriented movements, or environmental policy movements, and ecological community living movements, etc. These organizations, despite being largely similar in their aims, often end up competing with each other.

The human rights movement under the dictatorship existed just as a partial activity of the anti-dictatorship movement as a whole, problematizing such issues as torture, illegal kidnapping, imprisonment of democracy activists, etc. However, it soon ceased to be a partial activity, and transformed into a very important independent movement. With democratization, the emergence of many new human rights movement organizations was not uncommon.

This differentiation is both expressed and observed in the widening spectrum of political ideologies among movement activists and/or organizations. Under authoritarian polities and dictatorships, a radicalizing tendency existed among activists, especially in the last stage of dictatorship.
However, this tendency towards ideological radicalization is converted during democratization into a liberal democracy-orientation. Within the ranks of pro-democracy radicals having a national democratic or people’s democratic revolution orientation, a new ‘moderate’ ideology pursuing Western or American type of liberal democracy emerged during democratization. This ideological differentiation might also take on different features. For example, in some Southeast Asian countries, religious fundamentalism has proved attractive to ordinary people and activists, especially those resisting secular ideology-oriented authoritarian polities and dictatorships. In this sense, democratization sees a more complex landscape of political ideology.

The third form of change observed in social movements is that of ‘transformation’, whereby a movement organization switches its main core issue focus into something completely new. For example, there have always been active religious movements under authoritarian polities and dictatorships. Their main task has always been to support repressed movements because with their religious and social credibility, they have often been free from any kind of taint or ideological attack from authoritarian polities or dictatorships in the name of ‘pro-communist activities’ or ‘anti-state ones’.

However, as democratization proceeds, such religious movements have stumbled upon new issues and goals, confronting human rights violations and protesting labor abuse of migrant workers. Such transformation has also seen the disappearance of certain anti-authoritarian/dictatorship movements. For example, in some countries, the grassroots people’s church movement nearly disappeared, because it could not maintain its popular base during the democratization period.

In addition, transformation includes the weakening of certain movements, which was previously very strong with a large popular base in some areas. The student movement is a leading example of a vibrant movement. During the early stages of democratization, student movements had great vitality as they worked to overcome dictatorial legacies. However, as democratization progressed and core issues championed by student movements got resolved, the dynamism of student movements declined as it lost its former wide popular base.

Changes in social movements can also be seen in their changing hegemonic role within the movement community. For example, under authoritarian polities and dictatorships, the intellectual movement has played an important role in popularizing resistance and in protecting the cause of social movements from ideological attack by dictatorships. Some intellectuals achieved ‘notoriety’ and even ‘fame’ in this process. However, as democratization proceeded, the hegemonic status of intellectuals weakened.
because popular movements like the labor movement have moved to the fore. In the Korean case, the intellectual movement's contributions were held in high esteem by the people. However, people's movement organizations such as the trade union movement emerged and played a more central role within the progressive movement community, especially in popular mobilization. Thus, in these processes of differentiation, diversification or transformation, solidarity relations within the movement community has changed, reflecting national differences.

**Diverse factors defining the landscape and constellation of social movements in democratization**

There are many factors influencing change in the landscape and constellation of social movements in the wake of democratization, especially in the post-dictatorship context.

Firstly, there is the struggle of overcoming former authoritarian/dictatorial legacies in which the landscape and constellation of social movements change. This is one of the main tasks of social movements once democratization begins. In most cases of non-revolutionary democratization, political change proceeds with a Gramscian “passive revolution” character, which means that former dictatorial forces retain some institutional and non-institutional powers, and attempt as much as possible to keep their monopolistic privileges. Against such ‘retroactive’ powers, social movements have to drive the democratic reform forwards and coerce it onto the post-authoritarian/dictatorship government. How this struggle develops and how strategically social movements intervene in this process define not only changes in the post-authoritarian/dictatorship government but also in social movements.

The democratization process is one in which interaction between top-down reforms by political elites and bottom-up pressures for change from social movements maximize democratic reform. Social movement change is itself influenced by the progress of such reforms of the former authoritarian/dictatorial regime. If such reforms are limited and incomplete and the emergent democracy does not include nor represent formerly repressed demands and interests, the movement has wider possibilities for mobilizing popular activism for further change. However, in such cases, social movements cannot help but become embroiled in fighting past legacies, rather than building upon new emerging issues. Paradoxically, although this lagging of democratic reform gives more space for the popularization of social movements, it however stymies the movement's push for broader social change.

The extreme example of such a case is that of the so-called 'reverse wave' of democratization in Thailand in September 2006. The military coup de d'état
which occurred then not only deepened the battle-lines between democracy and dictatorship but also heightened other social differences and class cleavages. In the process, civil society and the larger movement community became marginalized and had to regroup and re-examine their strategies for renewed democratic change even though they were the key forces pushing the initial democratization process forward.

At the other extreme are advanced cases in which former authoritarian/dictatorial legacies and remnants are removed quickly and widely. Consequently, new democratic institutions work well. In such cases, social movements are pushed forward to confront new issues, failing which they will likely lose their dynamism and vitality given the absence of any urgency in overcoming already resolved authoritarian/dictatorial legacies. It is likely that most cases of democratization are positioned in the middle, which means that democratization proceeds forward, albeit with some incompleteness. This is because former authoritarian/dictatorial regimes are forced to transform themselves so as to re-legitimize and reproduce their regimes. This also occurs in cases when former authoritarian/dictatorial forces maintain the political initiative.

For example, Indonesia's current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, came out of the military. However, he presents a new and clean image, one that is distinctly different from that of the former military dictator, Suharto. This kind of top-down change influences the popular base of movements, especially the anti-corruption movement. In this way, progress in democratic reform of former authoritarian/dictatorial legacies can and does influence change among social movements.

Secondly, the inclusiveness of institutional politics and its interaction with social movements influences the landscape and constellation of movements. In the democratization process, institutional politics and social movements influence and interact with each other. In a sense, institutional politics and movement politics compete with each other in order to ‘represent’ the people’s hitherto repressed demands and interests. As the democratization process is basically one of recovering democratic institutional politics comprising party and parliamentary politics, it means that the newly recovered institutional politics is supposed to represent diverse kinds of repressed and formerly unrepresented opinions, demands, and interests. In this structure, social movements are supposed to play a role in delivering social demands and interests into institutional politics.

And yet, politics in a democracy cannot be reduced merely to institutional politics. The feminist slogan that ‘the personal is the political’ teaches us that politics is more than that of just institutions. Thus, in a sense, institutional
politics and social movements compete with each other in a process that enhances the performance of democratic politics. Only then are people's demands and interests well represented.

Although, institutional politics is an official form of politics accredited by the people under a democracy framework, it is nonetheless in reality continuously constrained and colonized by the powerful, including capital, which results in narrowed and distorted representation of interests. In this sense, democracy is paradoxically inherently insufficient as a system of representation. Thus, social movements play an important supplementary and surrogate role in filling the vacuum of institutional politics, when it is left to its own devices. Indeed, the space for social movements to play this role is quite large, often representing popular demands and interests. Social movements thus stand proxy for the people, undertaking an essential form representation that stands apart from institutional forms.

In cases of ethnic conflict, the inclusiveness of institutional politics is also very limited. For example, most authoritarian polities/dictatorships have worked in ways that have either incited or officially taken advantage of a sense of 'ethnic supremacy'. In such cases, the authoritarian polity/dictatorship's legacy is a distorted ethnic awareness that promotes discriminative consciousness and practices by the majority towards minority ethnic groups. Positive democratic development is easily stymied in such an environment. Things are made worse when ethnically-based political parties also take advantage of such existing ethnic prejudices and boost it in some conjuncture for their own political mileage. Consequently, the newly emergent democracy will continue to have an exclusive character, which constitutes a different popular situation for social movements. In this way, change in the inclusive nature of the new democracy, especially institutional politics, can and does influence the dynamism of social movements.

Thirdly, the factor that defines the landscape of social movements during democratization would be the dynamic relationship between the people and social movements or the capacity of social movements to appropriate popular demands and voices and thus expand their base. There might be different roads to this end.

On the one hand, a positive situation is when democratization becomes a kind of blessing which enhances the popularity of social movements. On the other hand, democratization may well bring disastrous results in terms of fragmentation or marginalization. There are thus diverse possibilities for social movements depending upon how well organized social movements are and how well they manage to sustain their collective popular activities.

Expansion of the popular base of social movements during democratization
is related to the level of political consciousness of ordinary people. Under authoritarian polities/dictatorships, ordinary people have long been mobilized in a way that promotes obedience and commitment to the ruling regime. However, once influenced by the growth of anti-authoritarian/dictatorship movements, they change and critically confront the authoritarian/dictatorial reality of their lives. People in the democratization context are not what they used to be. They turn into new self-empowered 'modern citizens' with strengthened consciousness of rights beyond their former 'pre-modern' slave or serf mentality.

Hence, democratization brings with it a changed people and wider freedoms for political and social activities. This enlarged space also gives wider room for social movements to deepen their popular base and to connect with ordinary people. Therefore, it would not be incorrect to suggest that democratization has different growth consequences for different movement organizations. Some movements will enjoy increased popular support while others will be confronted with stagnation or decline.

This changing popular base of social movements during democratization is crucial since it has the potential to play a decisive role in consolidating democracy. As is well-known, democratization is not uni-linear process but rather one that zigzags, intervened by diverse domestic and international factors and with progress being made only at critical conjunctures. Such political bases are thus a prop for further democratic development and can even prevent it from being de-railed especially in a conjuncture of an economic and political crisis, when weak growth and strong resistance of former status-quo forces tend to come together to put pressure on any further democratization. In addition, when a nascent democracy is too weak to accommodate serious social contradictions during crisis situations, people tend to give up hope in democracy in favour of quick solutions. It is here when the strength of the relationship between social movements and ordinary people can be an important defining factor in sustaining a society on the road to democratization. Progressive movements having a wide popular base and strong commitment to democratic causes have sufficient influence to successfully prohibit any derailment of the democratic process.

Changes in popular support for social movements are related to that of hegemony within civil society. Generally, in early stages of democratization, progressive and reform movements enjoy a 'leading status' within civil society because conservative pro-authoritarian/dictatorship groups and organizations continue to remain committed to supporting the undemocratic regimes governing their countries. At this stage, they contribute nothing towards democratization. Pro-democracy movements thus enjoy some moral
superiority at this stage among ordinary people who thirst for democratic reforms and change. However, as time passes, continued democratization soon leads whole societies into serious democratic conflicts and crunch moments as new problems and contradictions emerge demanding resolution. It is at this stage when hitherto silent conservative movements attempt to impede the unfolding democratic process via resort to popular support. For example in South Korea, when some pro-democracy figures and forces were involved in corruption cases, conservative forces actively mobilized to block any further democratic reforms by way of criticizing the pro-democratic forces embroiled by the corruption allegations. This kind of ‘conservative activism’ challenged and weakened the hitherto dominant hegemony of progressive movements within civil society. In this sense, the democratization process reflects a ‘progressive hegemony’ within civil society even as this hegemony remains dynamic and in continuous flux subject to internal and external forces impinging upon it. National differences will be composed and reflected in the social movement arena depending on the quality and strength of the relationship between ordinary people and social movements.

Fourthly, the direction, ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of the so-called ‘democratic government’ influences the landscape of social movements. The so-called ‘democratic government’ means one, in which the former anti-dictatorship forces keep state power as a dominant group. The emergence of the anti-dictatorship government is a positive development of democratization and realization of issues of social movements on government policies.

In the democratization process, the dividing line between the dictatorial bloc and anti-dictatorial bloc gets blurred. This is because many activists and politicians with anti-dictatorship movement identity move to the former dictatorship bloc, including the former dictatorial ruling parties or their transformed ones, and diverse kinds of mergers occur between the former ruling parties and former opposition parties, or their factions. However, in terms of the dominant group, in the democratization process, there emerges a kind of anti-dictatorship government in which a certain political party or bloc coming from the former anti-dictatorship camp has a dominant position.

The thing is that the dominant group has been in the same bloc with oppositional social movements. This brings with it wider inclusion of social movements issues into the government policies. They include such issues as repeal of former notorious anti-democratic laws; redressing past state crimes committed by former dictatorial state officials and forces; bringing higher levels of anti-corruption measures into institutions; reforming diverse kinds of institutional measures which have given monopolistic privileges to former dictatorial bloc members; institutionalizing some affirmative action to formerly
under-privileged minority groups; providing a wider legal space to formerly repressed political and social oppositional activities; and etc.

In addition, some movement activities like providing nursery services to urban poor families and supporting urban poor youth expands into becoming part of governmental welfare services. As well, many issues raised by the women’s movement are legislated into laws like the prohibition of gender discrimination, and the penalization of family and sexual violence. Some feminist leaders turn themselves to politicians. Many activists move their positions from the movement arena to the institutional one.

This is the so-called 'institutionalization' process. Here, 'institutionalization' means that former movement issues are accepted as part of government policies while former figures and groups outside of the institutionalized arena now move into the institutionalized one. Consequently, the emergence of democratic government achieves a level of institutionalization that is much higher than before.

In this sense, the emergence of democratic government means great progress in democratic reform. However, this process comprises a great challenge to social movements too. Therefore, how social movements go through this period of democratic government changes the social movement landscape.

The challenge of institutionalization brings about a change in the relationship between the state and civil society; between institutional politics and movements, between ruling party and opposition, and between the so-called 'public' and 'private' realms.

There might also be many negative impacts of institutionalization. The popular image that progressive or reform movements are on the same page as democratic government movements has often been overshadowed by the negative image of democratic government, e.g. when democratic government leaders are found to be corrupt. These situations result in the aforementioned 'reactivation of the conservatives' and a negative change in hegemony within civil society. These situations bring about a form of democratization stalemate in which pro-democracy forces lose their momentum and conservative ones are reactivated; sufficiently energized to block further progress of democratic reforms.

The real challenge of democratic government for social movements is thus whether they can continuously make and re-make bottom-up popular power to break through such stalemates. For this, 'the radical bloc of the pro-democracy movement', which I term as the 'democratic left', should be strengthened.

The democratic government period also brings with it a new differentiation, namely that of the 'democratic right' and the 'democratic left'.
If we reflect on the composition of previous anti-dictatorship movements, we note that many newcomers emerged with the disintegration of the dictatorship's popular base. Even conservative groups and individuals defected from the dictatorship and joined the anti-dictatorship camp. Consequently, there emerged a 'moderate' bloc on one hand and a 'radical' bloc on the other hand within the anti-dictatorship camp.

If the former can be called the 'democratic right', then the latter is the 'democratic left'. This complexity composition of the anti-dictatorship camp has not only meant popular expansion of it but also further differentiation. For example, depending on national factors the radical bloc has been composed of Marxist or socialists, Maoist, anti-statist anarchic groups, national or peoples' democratic revolution groups, diverse kinds of leftists in the broader sense or so.

Still, whether the impact of the 'democratic left' is strengthened in the democratic government comprises a very important factor in enabling democratization to a higher level.

If the democratic left bloc grows fast and gains more popularity during democratization, and especially retains its impact within the democratic government, then it gathers a new momentum for higher level of democratization. However, in most cases, because the social movements are not in such a good situation, the democratization process reverses and is 'hijacked' by a 'neo-conservative government' or transformed pseudo-authoritarian government.

In some cases, under the democratic government, a larger part of the progressive and reformative social movement community is 'co-opted' into the democratic government bloc, and, as a result, the 'independent' social movement community becomes too weakened to be able to drive further democratization.

Thus, how strong the democratic left is, and how popular the independent social movement remains through the period of democratic government, are very important factors for democratization and the social movement landscape. In addition, a wide range of national differences emerge depending on the popularity and ability of progressive parties and social movements in confronting former dictatorial or reformative liberal and moderate parties and movements.

Sixth, whether social movements enrich themselves in response to new economic contradictions thrown up by neoliberal globalization influences will influence changes in the landscape and constellation of social movements in the process of democratization.

Most dictatorships were deeply involved in promoting rapid capitalist
development. Whether successful or not, such development under the dictatorship brought about fundamental economic change which affected society. Therefore, democratization, emerging after such development, has not only brought about a qualitatively positive political change but has also highlighted new economic contradictions brought about by the same capitalist development.

Social movements in the context of democratization are exposed to and not exempt from these forces and contradictions. Here neoliberal globalization, which comprises the international economic context of democratization, turns former state-led developmental regimes into more market-centered open economies, in which the market and capital play central roles. Market forces and capital, nurtured by developmental dictatorships attempt to reorganize the new democracy in their favor, with the help of the new pro-business environment of neoliberal globalization. For example, new phenomena such as more labor flexibility and the ir-regularization of the labor force, more bipolarization, decline of social welfare measures, reduction of the public sector, etc. all can have an impact upon social movements which are forced to deal with these new situations.

In this sense, social movements are confronted with a ‘declining’ task of overcoming dictatorial legacies but with the ‘rising’ task of confronting the new contradictions of a market-centered open economy and neoliberal globalization. The landscape of social movements thus changes during democratization depending on how well social movements respond by appropriating new issues and remaking them into popular ones.

Finally, if top-down reform marginalizes the anti-dictatorship movement, social movements are unable to appropriate new popular issues and renew their causes. In such circumstances, market forces and capital end up constraining the new democracy in their favor and according to their constructs. Consequently, democratization degrades into a so-called ‘low-intensity democracy’. This means the new democracy ‘works’ insofar as new measures pass but only to lower the level of social conflicts. It does not ‘work’ because it stops short of transforming the whole system to allow ordinary people to channel their demands and interests into political agendas.

In this regard, there are always different possibilities for change in social movements during democratization. But a higher level of radical democracy requires issue renewal and popularization by social movements so as to give birth to a new popular dynamics that will allow democracy to move forward - against new political, economic, and social powers.

This volume hence attempts to explore these various issues further with reference to the diverse experiences social movements in Asia. The book