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An Analysis of Civic Advocacy Groups in Korea

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Abstract

This paper examines the developmental trajectory of the civic advocacy groups and the nature of them. It argues that under the strong influence of the state the civic advocacy groups in Korea became national- political-issue-centred and elite- or professional-centred organisations.

Introduction

Civil society has been one of the central concepts in political science from the ancient Greek society to the modern world. In ancient Greek society it was considered the same as the state itself and Hegel conceptualised it as opposed to the state.

One of the most intriguing questions to social scientist regarding the civil society is that whether the civil society is contributing to the democratisation and the consolidation of the democracy and, if it is, to what extent. There are contradictory explanations on the role of the civil society regarding the democratisation and the consolidation of the democracy. While some scholars have emphasized the importance of a strong and active civil society to the democratisation and the consolidation of the democracy (Putnam et al., 1993; Putnam, 2000), others suggest the negative role played by the civil society as in the case of Nazi Germany (Lewi, 1985; Carothers, 1999).

These rather contradictory views came from the lack of the analysis of the nature of the civil society which demanding the analysis of the developmental process of the civil society as well as the detailed examination of its effect on democracy.

To enrich the understanding of the role of civil society in deepening democracy, this

paper examines the developmental process of the civil society by focusing on the Korean case where the civic sector rapidly grew since the democratisation began in 1987.

In the first and second section we will review the developmental process of the civil society in Korea from the historical point of view and explain how political and social context shaped the nature of the civic advocacy groups. Then we will explain about the important factors forming the nature of civic advocacy groups at the organisation level in section 3.

In the conclusion we will argue that it was the state that stimulated the growth of the civic advocacy groups and determine the organisational natures in Korea. We will also point out some potentially negative aspects of the organisational features of the civic advocacy groups in Korea.

1. The Origin of the Civic Advocacy Groups and Their Nature

The active civil society is not a completely new phenomenon to Koreans. Just after the liberation from the Japanese Imperialism, there were about 23,800 voluntary associations (Jin, 1992). The dark age of the civil society followed this turbulent period when the Presidents Rhee (1948-1960), Park (1961) and Chun (1981-1988) consolidated

ated their authoritarian regimes by suppressing the anti-governmental civic groups. President Park established the Law on the Registration of the Social Associations to prevent the establishment of the civic groups and co-opt the pro-governmental organisations just after the coup in 1961. This suppression continued throughout the periods of Presidents Park and Chun. It was not, however, the age of complete darkness. There were formally and informally organised associations ranging from the syndicates of professionals such as professors and lawyers, labour movement activist associations and anti-governmental associations of student activists fighting against the authoritarian governments and the governments also co-opted and promoted pro-governmental associations such as employers' associations and trade unions to manipulate the public opinions.

Zald explained that in the cycle of the social movement there is a period where the frame is established. Frames draw attention to the role of ideas and understandings in social movements mobilisations, and are the "specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behaviour and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action" (Zald, 1996 262). Master frames are generally at a higher level of abstraction, and allow related movements to see themselves as part of a common struggle (Hochstetler, 1997 3). Using the Zald's term "frame", it was the democratization and anti-military government that played a role of master frame within which all the different anti-governmental civic organisations fight against the government. The master frame of the pro-governmental civic groups was the anti-communist and they considered the anti-governmental civic groups the "pinkos". Fights between the "contentious civil society" composed of anti-governmental associations

and the "conforming civil society" composed of pro-governmental associations were as fierce as that against the authoritarian regimes (Koo, 1993).

One of the most visible sign of this fight among the civic organisations can be seen in 1987 when the massive democratisation movement swept across the country. Sparked by the then President Chun's announcement to maintain the indirect Presidential election system, a lot of anti-governmental organisations organised nation wide demonstration. The pro-governmental organisations, however, showed quite contradictory stance against the anti-governmental organisations by publicly announcing the support for the decision of the President to preserve the indirect election system (Son, 1995).

Since the democratisation began in 1987 when the direct Presidential Election was introduced the speed of consolidation of democracy in Korea was very fast and irreversible. Although going through turbulent process due to the serious industrial strife in 1987 and financial crisis in 1997, there was no single incidence seriously damaging the process of democratic consolidation and now Korea can be said to be a full fledged democratic country with the 2005 Freedom House ranking of 1 in political rights and 2 in civil rights.

While the institutions of democracy is consolidated, the civil society also become very much active. According to the statistics of Encyclopedia of Korean Associations, there were at least about 25,000 civic organisations and out of them 3,937 self-claimed advocacy civic groups and 4,243 civic groups working on societal matters (Siminui Sinmun, 2003). Although the total number of civic organisations in that statistics a bit decreased to 23,000 the number of advocacy civic groups increased to about 5000 in 2006. This figures vividly show the rapid growth of the civil organisations, in particular, civic

advocacy groups since the democratisation. It also shows a unique characteristic of Korean civil society, the growth of the number and the influence of the civic advocacy groups.

One of the reasons behind this scene can be found in the origin of the civic groups in Korea. While civic groups in Western society has been growing by doing complementary role to that of the government in the fields of social services, Korean civic groups began by criticising the authoritarian government. Under the suppression by the authoritarian government the only resource of those civic groups was the support from the citizen being fed up with the authoritarian government and looking for a legitimate political forces (Kim, 2003). The civic groups were considered either political ally of the opposition party or the only genuine democratic force and could get the wide support from the citizens against the authoritarian regime. In the course of the anti-governmental activities, the issues those civic groups were fighting for became appreciated as justice and this image continued even after the democratisation.

The legitimacy of these anti-governmental civic groups became more strengthened as the authoritarianism designated them as illegal activities and suppressed them. The fiercer the government's suppression was, the more expanded the space for the power struggle became. The civic advocacy groups succeeded in accumulating the 'intellectual and moral leadership' and subjugating other social groups (Sasson, 1987).

We can find two national characteristics of the Korean politics concerning its relationship with the civil society. Firstly, in Korean politics the long existence of the authoritarian governments which lacked the political legitimacy expanded the space of the political power struggle beyond institutional process such as election. The anti-government

movement within the civil society consistently aimed at toppling down the authoritarian regime while the government crowded them out from the legitimate political activities by making them illegal activities with National Security Law. It has resulted in the expansion of the political space to the civil society whose majority did not acknowledge the government's legitimacy and produced groups called "Jaeya" (meaning being out there in Chinese characters) who were doing a variety of political activities ranging from political demonstrations to the participation of the election (Ryu, 1994; Lee, 1997; Cho, 2006 149 150).

Secondly, the wide support from the civil society and the resilient civic advocacy groups, however, were not materialised in terms of membership under the authoritarian regimes. Being afraid of naked and brutal suppression, the citizens kept a distance from those civic advocacy groups in terms of organisational connections. The civic advocacy groups were normally composed of key figures called Jaeya, university professors, and professionals such as lawyers and did not have many grass-root rank and file members.

2 . The Democratisation and its Influence on the Civic Advocacy Groups

The role of the government and governmental strategy in shaping the civic capacity or the nature of the civil society has been emphasized by many scholars (Tarrow, 1996). The government can encourage or damage the growth of the civil society and its various policies shape the nature of the civil society. In Korean society the lack of legitimacy and the brutal suppression against the anti-governmental activities of the authoritarian governments paradoxically helped those groups build up their influence in civil society until 1987. The influence of these civic advocacy groups reached its peak in 1987

when the nation-wide demonstration against the then President Chun who was trying prevent the power change by maintaining the indirect presidential election.

The growth of public advocacy group was not followed right after the democratisation which began in 1987. Although the then President Roh Tae Woo was considered the same figure as the President Chun by some civic advocacy groups, he was elected by the legitimate election process and adopted the language of democracy. Issues of democratisation and the anti-military government which had been the master “frame” of the social movements and civic advocacy groups began to lose its relevancy. The civic advocacy groups began to change their emphasis on democracy and explicit anti-governmental activities to the more concrete goals such as economic democracy such as redistribution and participation of the citizens in the policy making. The civic advocacy groups, however, did not attract much attention from the citizens as the social movements against the authoritarian government in the previous period.

This atmosphere changed when one of the opposition parties led by Kim Young Sam who was followed by a substantial number of the activists of the anti-authoritarian movement decided to merge with the ruling party. When he became the party leader of the ruling party and then the President, his followers were absorbed into the formal political organisations such as the government and the ruling party. He also established 0.67 billion won-fund for the encouragement of the NGOs in 1994. In 1996 Seoul City Government established the project to encourage the participation of the civic groups into the decision-making process of the Seoul city policies. This incorporation policy of the central and Seoul city governments resulted in the increase of the number of the civic groups and improved the financial situation

of them and the civic advocacy groups shifted their emphasis from the struggle against the government to the policy suggestions.

Since 1998 the newly elected President Kim Dae Jung who had been involved in a variety of outright political civic organisations as a head figure actively promoted the civic groups. During the period when the President Kim Dae Jung was in office the ruling party and the government established the Act on the Support for NGOs (2000) and the special governmental agency in the Ministry of Administration and Self-Governance to support the NGOs. The law includes the clauses on the rental of the central government- and local government-owned buildings either by free or under the market price, discounted utility costs, free postal service and the tax exemptions on the contribution. One of the key figures in the NGO activities was also appointed as the Presidential Advisor on Civil and Social Affairs.

Another catalyst for the re-growth of the civic advocacy groups came from the economic dimension. It was the Asian Financial Crisis which gave the momentum for the advocacy civic groups to rise as a main player in Korean civil society. When the Asian Financial Crisis hit the Korean economy, the Chaebols were the biggest loser and at the same time the one people pointed fingers at for the disastrous social consequence. The civic groups such as the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) and Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) demanding the reform of the Chaebols actively campaigned for the reform of Chaebol during the Crisis and the aftermath, of which activities the media fully covered. The analogy of the story of David and Goliath was commonly used as the title of the news clip of the media and civic advocacy groups attracted the unprecedented attention by the media. It was not only the civic advocacy groups which demanded the reform of

the Chaebols. The President Kim Dae Joong who took the office in February 1998 in the midst of the Financial Crisis also claimed that he would be the first President in Korean history to successfully undertake corporate reform. Many Chaebols' foreign creditors, foreign fund managers, Korean and foreign minority shareholders, institutional investors, and Korea's IT start-up companies also were in line with this direction of the civic advocacy groups. (Beck, 2000). The civic groups advocating Chaebol reform supported by the government policy paradigm on Chaebol reform successfully disseminated their images of the representation of the public interest during this period.

The active promotion policy by the President Kim Dae Jung allowed the improvement of financial situation of the civic advocacy groups and helped a sizable number of former student activists get together in the advocacy groups. It was coincided with the emergence of the labour activist-turn politicians in the President Kim's government. The president Kim's active promotion of civic advocacy groups resulted in a political group composed of former democratic movement activists. Straddling both the government and the civil society.

One characteristic of the leaders of the civic advocacy groups was their morality and professional expertise which the leaders or representatives of those civil organisations were expected to have. Professors, lawyers, and democratic activists who were still revered by the public for their morality and expertise accounted for the majority of the civil organisation leader groups. For instance in CCEJ, one of the biggest and successful civic advocacy groups, 25% of the members were the professionals such as the professors, lawyers and accountants followed by the 24.2 % of salaried persons, 13 % of the self-employed and 2.8% of the manual workers in 1994. The noticeable one is only 2% of the members

belonged to political parties, which shows the separation of the civil groups from the politics in terms of composition of members. The increase of the salaried persons and the self-employed from 11.3% in 1989 to 24.2% in 1994 was in line with the developmental direction of the CCEJ to the independent civic groups keeping distance from the formal political institutions.

This feature of the composition of the membership is also found in the case of "People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy" which is almost equal to CCEJ in terms of its influence and size in the early 1990s. The PSPD was organised by key members of the Korean Social Science Institute, one of the key think tanks for the democratic movement in the 1980s, Lawyers for a Democratic Society, the syndicate of the lawyers working for the democracy and human rights, student activist group, and the Sarangbang Group for Human Rights, the activist group working for the human rights of the prostitutes in the U.S military stationed areas.

Another feature found in the composition of the civic advocacy groups is the emergence of the age group of the 30s and the 40s as the majority membership of them. For instance in the case of CCEJ, the statistics on the age group of its memberships shows that while the groups of the 30s and the 40s gradually increase the age group of the 20s continuously decreased from 40.7% to 15.4% between 1991 and 1994 (Chung, 1995 11).

The election of the President Roh Mu Hyeon was the clearest sign of the growth of the power of the civil society in Korean politics. Roh Mu Hyeon, an ex-human-rights lawyer and active member of the civic group, "Lawyers for a Democratic Society" did not have much resource such as connections and money compared to other candidates within his party. Although the newly introduced citizens' votes in the Presidential candidate

Table 1. Composition of the members of the CCEJ by the occupation (%)

Occupation	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Academics	7.2	13.2	10.5	11.2	11.5
Religious Leaders	3.2	4.8	7.5	7.4	6.4
Mass Media	2.2	3.0	3.5	3.6	3.7
Professionals	3.4	6.0	7.1	7.4	9.5
Students	18.3	15.5	15.9	12.1	10.6
Civil Servants	0.5	0.6	1.1	1.2	1.4
Salaried Workers	11.3	27.9	25.9	23.4	24.2
Manual Workers		1.7	2.3	2.5	2.8
The Self-employed	5.0	9.2	9.2	11.2	13.0
The Urban Informal Sector	4.6	0.9	0.7	5.8	0.5
The Urban Poor		3.1	2.9		1.4
Social Movement Related Associations		5.1	4.9	5.2	5.1
Labour Movement Related Associations		0.7	1.2	1.4	1.3
Agriculture		0.4	0.7	0.7	0.8
Political Party				1.7	2.0
Other	39.2	6.2	2.4	3.8	5.8
Total					

Source: Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, Report Commemorating the Establishment of the CCEJ, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 Quoted from (Kang, 1995)

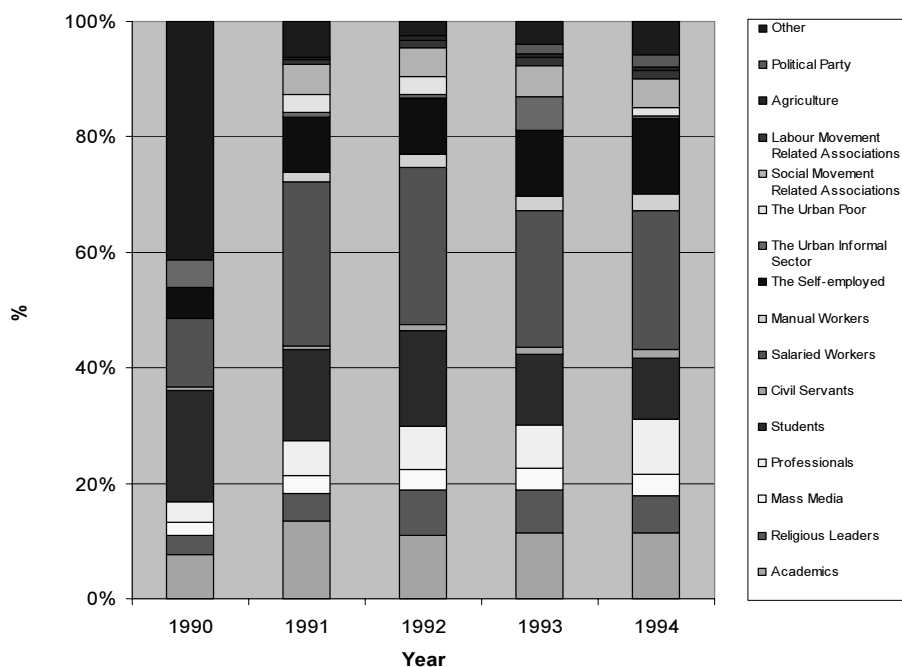


Figure 1. Composition of Members of CCEJ by Occupation

election within the party could bring about a surprise, in the early stage of the Presidential Candidate campaign he was still considered as one of dark horses at best and the media did not pay much attention to him. His lack of connections with the main figures of the Seoul's politics and the lack of financial resources, however, was turned into his strength during the course of the party competition. Citizens, in particular, young voters in their 20s, 30s and 40s who viewed Seoul's payola-driven politics with distrust and disdain strongly supported Roh Mu Hyeon and at the end of the campaign it was him who became the ruling party's candidate, which was a surprise to everybody including him (Eberstadt, 2004; Kang, 2005).

With the election of the President Roh, the civic advocacy groups had its heyday. The citizen groups supporting the candidate Roh formed influential opinion leader groups and other civic advocacy groups could make a bigger voice as the President Roh paid strong attention to civic groups' opinions.

First of all, President Roh recruited a number of key members of the civic advocacy groups to his government and they maintained strong relationship with the remained members of the civic groups. Since the key members of the civil advocacy groups were former democratic movement activists or professors who were involved in a wide range of social activities, they were in a relatively easy position to enter the government (Kim, 2003 19 20). Secondly, President Roh's leadership style has increased the importance of the civic advocacy groups. Having the strong contempt against the established political system and cynical views on the major opinions leader groups such as major newspaper companies and the employers' associations he did not look for the support from the established dominant actors who accumulated power and influence until his election. When he was impeached for the "minor inter-

ference" in the April 15th Local Election in 2003 civic groups who had supported Candidate Roh during the Presidential election once again actively organised the campaign criticising the opposition parties' impeachment. His governing style was also very much unconventional from the view point of those established dominant actors in Korean politics and often ridiculed and criticised by those groups of major newspaper companies. The civic advocacy groups in line with the established dominant opinion leaders such as major newspaper companies began to be organised and supported impeachment. Korean civil society was divided over the issue of the impeachment of the President and the space of the political struggle in the civil society once again began to be expanded. It is notable that President Roh who had been very much active in supporting the labour movement as a lawyer and Assemblymen did not have a good relationship with the trade unions and the labour related civic groups did not actively supported him during the process of the impeachment.

3. The Analysis of the Civic Advocacy Groups

We have examined the development trajectory of the civic advocacy groups in Korea focusing on its relationship with the external political and economic environment and found several characteristics such as the state-reactive or state-driven development and the professional-centred organisations. In this section we will focus on internal characteristics and capacities of the civic advocacy groups in order to find out the reasons for the growth of the civic advocacy groups at the organisational level.

3 - 1. The Organisational Structure of the Civic Advocacy Groups

The organisational structure of the civic advocacy groups is also a major factor

making those characteristics of the civic advocacy groups in Korea. Most civic advocacy groups in Korea have similar organisational structure composed of Congress, Decision-making Board, Executive Committee, and Secretariat. Congress is the highest decision-making body which is normally held once a year and elect the Board members and heads of various departments of the organisation. Although it is the highest decision-making body, it does not have a great influence on the operation of the organisation due to the infrequency of the meeting and the low attendance rate. The Decision-Making Board is held once every one or two-month and composed of Board members and the heads of the Executive Committee, the heads of the department of Secretariat and the self-organised groups by the members. The Decision-Making Board is in charge of the establishing or changing organisational structure, operation of the organisation, and the appointment of the heads of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat. The members of the Decision-Making Board are composed of people from a wide range of background. According to the research, 36.7 % of the heads of the Decision-making Board of the 773 civic advocacy groups had had experiences of representatives of the non-governmental organisations and 17.2% were university professors (Simino Sinmun, 2000).

The Executive Committee is held more

than once per month and composed of the Head of the Executive Committee and the heads of the department, and the head of secretariat. Since usually the Decision-making Board members are also members of the Executive Committee this is the real engine of the civic advocacy groups and in many cases this is the decision-making point of the civic advocacy groups. (Yang, 2000; Kim, 2003 18 19). The Secretariat is composed of those people who you can see most of time in the office of the civic advocacy groups. They are in most cases very low paid and doing a variety of works. One of the most serious problems the Secretariat is facing is the shortage of human resources. Due to the low payment the members of the Secretariat regard the post not as permanent or relatively long term post but as a temporary one. The turn-over rate is very high and the organisation is currently facing the serious problem of recruitment too. Although there are still those who are willing to participate in the civic advocacy groups, mostly university graduates in their late 20s and early 30s who had been active in the student movements, as the student movement is gradually declining and shifting the focus from the political issues to the quality of campus life, finding the workers for the Secretariat is getting difficult (Choi, 2003; Kim, 2003 21).

This picture of the organisational structure shows several notable features of the

Table 2. Career of the Heads of the Civic Advocacy Groups in Korea (2000)

Career(or Current Positions)	Religious Leaders	Quasi-governmental Organisations	National Non-governmental Organisations	Politicians	Governmental Organisations	International Organisations	Civil Servants	Journalists
%	8.9	4.9	36.7	3.7	0.6	1.7	2.0	4.6
Career(or Current Positions)	University Professors	Head of Private Enterprises	Local Non-governmental Organisations	Free Lancers	Former members of Provisional Government before 1945	Winner of Various Competition	Salaried Persons	Total
%	17.2	9.7	4.2	0.9	0.2	0.4	4.4	100

Source: Compendium of Korean Civic Organisations, 2000 (Simino Sinmu NGOTIMES, 2000)

civil advocacy groups in Korea. Firstly, most organisations are dominated by the heads of NGOs or professors who are better at agenda setting. The special resources they had such as expertise on a wide range of issues, social credibility, more opportunities to be exposed by the media and the nation-wide or sometimes international networks greatly helped the growth of the civic advocacy groups. These special resources, however, have also a negative effect on the participation of the citizens to the advocacy groups. The rank and file members are more often swayed by the dominant ideas and policies by these key figures and they began to dependent upon them. Secondly, the lack of financial resources. Although there are a lot of government subsidies for the NGOs it is not enough for the organisations and the donation from the citizens and membership fees are not enough either. This lack of financial resources led the civic advocacy groups to rely on public stunts which can advertise their activities and there are certain cases where the activities of the civic advocacy groups are exaggerated by media (Kim, 2003 22).

This elite centred civic advocacy groups shows much more significant problem at the regional level which we will see in the next section.

3 - 2 . Regional Distribution of the Civic Advocacy Groups

Although there was a trend of growth of the civic advocacy organisations since the democratisation of 1987, most of them are concentrated in the capital city, Seoul (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that about 54.6% of total civic advocacy groups are in Seoul and the density index of civic advocacy groups of Seoul is almost four times bigger than the average density index of the country. Given the centrality of the capital city, Seoul in most of dimensions it can be said that this regional distribution reinforces the professionals and elite centred organisational nature of the civic advocacy groups. The lack of human resources for both policy making and implementation makes local civic advocacy groups more dependent upon the established professionals and elite groups in Seoul. It

Table 3. Distribution of the Civic Advocacy Groups by Region

Region	Seoul	Busan	Incheon	Daegu	Daejeon	Kwangju	Ulsan	Kyeonggi	Kangwon
Number of Groups(A)	2,196 (54.6%)	169 (4.2%)	119 (3.0%)	98 (2.4%)	96 (2.4%)	135 (3.4%)	38 (0.9%)	336 (8.4%)	74 (1.8%)
Population (B)	9853972	3655437	2466338	2473990	1365961	1350948	1012110	8937752	1484536
Density Index (A/Bx10000)	2.23	0.46	0.48	0.40	0.70	1.0	0.38	0.38	0.50
Region	Chungnam	Chungbuk	Kyeongnam	Kyeongbuk	Cheonnam	Cheonbuk	Cheju	Total	
Number of Groups(A)	82 (2.0%)	85 (2.1%)	124 (3.1%)	101 (2.5%)	120 (3.0%)	197 (4.9%)	53 (1.3%)	4,023 (100%)	
Population (B)	1840410	1462621	2970927	2716218	1994287	1887239	512541	45985289	
Density Index (A/Bx10000)	0.45	0.58	0.42	0.37	0.60	1.04	1.03	0.69	

Source: (Simino Sinmu NGOTIMES, 2000), National Statistical Office

makes local advocacy groups more alienated from the grass roots citizens and consequently not paying much attention to local issues. In fact Kim (2003, 23) pointed out that local civic advocacy groups' agenda were much more about the national political issues rather than the specifically local issues.

Conclusion

Salamon (1994) argued that the growth of the civic organisations were the result of the crises which revealed the lack of capacity or the limitation of the state to address the various problems. In Korea the growth of the civic organisations, in particular advocacy groups, is not the result of the diminishing capacity of the state or the limitation of the state but the political suppression of the government in the emerging stage and political utilisation of the government in the growth stage. In both senses their development and growth were determined by the state strategy toward the civil society.

We found that those factors such as repression, legal environment, and state mobilisation efforts affected civil society and thus condition its potential to contribute to democracy (Tarrow, 1996; Lynch, 1997; Olvera, 1997), and the nature of the civic advocacy groups in Korea.

In Korea civic advocacy groups emerged as the legal and illegal anti-governmental social forces and their master frame was the democratisation and the anti-military government. The blatant repression and active cooptation of civic advocacy groups by the authoritarian government play a certain role in activating civil society. The master frame of the democratisation and anti-military government was changed into more detailed goals of democracy such as economic redistribution, political participation, environment and gender equality since the democratisation of 1987, and the nature of the civic advocacy groups which is national

political issue centred and elite or professional centred organisation was not changed. This nature of civic advocacy groups in Korea was reinforced by the lack of financial resources and human resources.

In the introduction we introduced two contradictory views on the role of civic organisations in strengthening democracy or making democracy work. Although different on the role of civic groups they shared the point that in understanding the role of the civic organisations, you should know the nature of the civic organisations. Carothers (1999) emphasised the importance of the contents of the agenda which civic organisations pursue for and Putnam (2000) argued that the structure of the civic organisations, that is, the horizontal ties rather than vertical ties are the keys to make democracy work.

It is certain that civic advocacy groups has significantly increased since the democratisation of 1987, questions of how and the extent to which Korean civic advocacy groups can contribute to the strengthening democracy or making it work are still left to be answered since, drawing on analogy with Putnam's "bowling alone", it seems that the bowling is played only by the professionals or elites in Korea.

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