The Transformation of Cyberactivism and Democratic Governance in Korea: The Role of Technology, Civil Society, and Institutions

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This paper analyzes the transformation of cyberactivism in Korea by comparing two cases of cyberactivism — one in reaction to the killing of Hyosoon and Misun by U.S. soldiers in 2002 and the other responding to the U.S. Beef Import negotiations in 2008 in Korea. While the impact of the Internet on many political and social changes in Korea has already been shown, there are differences between the levels of impact that the Internet has over time. What is noteworthy of the two most representative case of citizen cyberactivism using the Internet in Korea is that,

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while the 2002 candlelight demonstrations were led by organized civil groups, the anti-U.S. beef candlelight demonstration of 2008 was prompted by the voluntary participation of citizens, in the absence of organized leadership. This paper identifies the nature of this transformation of cyberactivism, from within the changing sociopolitical context, that is, the changing characteristics of Korea's civil society, the advances in technological development, and the transformation of the relationship between the government and civil society.

I. Introduction

On the back of advances in information technology, the Internet has become an important factor in the unpredictable and dynamic sociopolitical changes that are taking place in many countries including South Korea. The Internet has already proved itself to be excellent in enabling citizens to participate in political and social issues, in particular social and political activism. The significance of the Internet in affecting political and social change in Korea has been demonstrated. The information exposure and discussions that were played out on the Internet regarding the death of two middle school girls that were killed by a U.S. military tank in 2002, and the import of U.S. beef in 2008 sparked explosive offline civil protests about government policies and caused several "candlelight demonstrations." The Internet has played a critical role in the explosive growth of civil participation since the 1990s. Information sharing and discussions between citizens on a variety of issues were carried out on the Internet, and often led to activities conducted offline. The decentralized and open nature of the

communication structure of the Internet allows users to overcome traditional limits of time and space enabling diverse cyberactivism by citizens.

However, it is noteworthy that two most famous cases of Korean civil cyberactivism that used the Internet — the demonstrations against the killing of Hyosoon and Misun by U.S. soldiers in 2002 and the anti-U.S. beef demonstration in 2008 were organized in different ways; the anti-U.S. Army demonstrations were led by organized civil groups, while the anti-U.S. beef candlelight demonstration of 2008 was organized, voluntarily, by everyday citizens, in the absence of organized leadership. Second, while the online civil movement in the period following democratization was concerned with issues of elections and government reforms, today, the political interests of citizens focus on everyday life issues. That is, Korea's civil movements in the 1990s were defined by their allegiance to either the pro- or anti-democratic camps. But recent protests in Korea have been more focused on the issues that concern people in their everyday lives. The 2008 candlelight demonstrations were similar in nature to the reaction to Korea's Nakdong River Pollution Incident and the movement opposing anti-waste disposal facility in Buahn, in the way that citizens used information technology to bring practical issues to the public and to highlight a political agenda.

This paper compares two cases of cyberactivism — the case of the deaths of Hyosoon and Misun caused by U.S. soldiers and the anti-U.S. Beef Import protests — and analyzes the changing trend of cyberactivism in Korean society. This study asserts that an analysis of cyberactivism in civil society must be conducted on the interactions between the offline and online context. This assertion is based on criticisms of existing Internet political literature. Most studies on the power of the Internet have only dealt with the Internet usage of civil society and have focused on the patterns and manner of usage (Arterton, 1987; Rheingold, 1993; OECD, 2003;

Clift, 2004). Although cyberspace may provide a venue for citizens to exchange ideas and to form public opinions, it cannot be construed as existing outside the political and social structure of the real world. While it cannot be denied that information technology plays a significant role in decentralizing the political ecosystem and establishing an environment for liberalization, the potential of electronic democracy is determined by the actions of participants in the real world, not by the inherent nature of the technology itself, which is divorced from reality.

This paper argues that the transformation of cyberactivism must be discussed within a sociopolitical context and with an understanding of online and offline interactions. Cyberactivism reflects the transformation of civil society and the relationship between the state and civil society, as well as online technological development. This paper analyzes the transformation of cyberactivism in Korea from the viewpoints of the changing characteristics of Korea's civil society, the advances in technological development, and the relationship between the government and the civil society.

II. Cyberactivism and Governance

The Internet provides a useful medium for groups with shared views to conduct movements of social activism in cyberspace (Vegh, 2003: 72-84; Mccaughey and Ayers, 2003). The significant reduction of transaction and participation costs that has resulted from this new model of the creation, distribution, and consumption of information has enabled individuals or groups that had previously been unable to create offline associations to overcome physical limitations (OECD, 2003). There are specific strengths and weaknesses in both offline and online civil movements. Offline civil movements often maintain a consistent and orderly activity sys-

tem effectively, through a hierarchical structure and central leadership. However, since these types of movements are often grounded in physical acts, the financial costs can be high and these movements can often be held back by the presence of people who do not contribute to the organization, but only reap the benefits. On the other hand, online civil movements are implemented around a horizontal network of scattered individuals, which makes it hard to maintain consistency and safety levels. However, electronic activities are cheap and the extent of the network means that many more potential supporters can be enlisted.

Cyberactivism is the overview of the activities that achieve sociopolitical goals using online space — not only those where the Internet is the medium but also those where the Internet allows for more than just information sharing (Jho and Song, 2004). Instances of sociopolitical activism that use cyberspace as a new platform for participation have already demonstrated the potential of the Internet as an effective starting point for overcoming the traditional obstacles that stand in the way of political participation for citizens. Participatory democracy seeks to complement existing models of representation by creating opportunities for citizens to participate in the working arena and for widening the space for debates and deliberations to be conducted between enlightened citizens in the public field, enabled by voluntary associations and intermediary groups.

However, researchers have claimed recently that while political processes are transformed during early phases of Internet introduction, after some time the processes begin to take on the same social power structure that exists in the offline society (Hill and Hughes, 1998). These assertions are based on the assumption that communities cannot exist without material space and political and social institutions (Davis, 1999; Jho, 2005). The influence of the Internet on democratic governance varies from country to country, and its level of power also depends on the characteristics of the political power

and the civil society (Rodan, 2003). The Internet may be used by leaders to attack the elitist and oligopolistic nature of the existing social order and circumvent representative institutions, or to form a non-mediated relationship with the masses (Canovan, 1999: 2-3).

The Internet is a construction that reflects the social and political features of the "real-world," around which it exists. Therefore, to analyze the influence of Internet on the political process, both the democratic potential of Internet technology and the sociopolitical structure of the offline world need to be analyzed simultaneously. In many cases, the Internet functions within boundaries that have been prescribed by the traditional institutions. In addition, it also influences those forces that are organized within these institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The Internet may impact the distribution of power between organizational groups such as politicians, bureaucrats, and civil society. Organizational groups form coalitions by adopting new technologies that promise to enhance their power (Agre, 2002: 318).

The transformation of cyberactivism in different countries and at different times depends on technological development, the features of each specific civil society, and the interactions between the government and the civil society in both the online and offline world. According to the nature of the relationship between the government and society, for instance whether it is cooperative or adversarial, or whether it is subordinate or equal, the level of activation of cyberactivism and its influential power will vary. The goal of the government and the interest of the ruling class are to exert influence over the attitude and direction that the state takes toward cyberactivism, and to ensure that the state's policies have been made with the organized support of major social groups.

III. Transformation of Cyberactivism in Korea

The 2008 candlelight demonstrations were different from the 2002 protests in two ways — the participants of the movement and the behavior patterns. First, in terms of the participants of the movements, the candlelight demonstration of 2008 was led by individual networks that were scattered and not bound by a fixed structure. This contrasts to the events of 2002, which were led by a small group of movement leaders. In addition, in terms of the behavior patterns of the movement, where the 2002 movements emphasized a union of offline and online civil movements, the 2008 candlelight demonstration was primarily an online civil movement that centered on electronic activities. The 2008 candle-light demonstration was based on "decentralized networks" which was structured horizontally and had multiple centers (Y. Kim and J. Kim, 2009). This network was insured by simultaneously creating and expanding its supporter base through an organic union of online and physical activities, as well as strengthening the solidarity and identity of participants in the demonstrations. In this aspect, the 2008 candlelight demonstration showed the rise of 'multitude' and possibility for a collective intelligence, as has been defined by Hardt and Negri (2004).

Table 1. Comparison of the Two Candlelight Demonstrations

Category	2002 Candlelight Demonstration	2008 Candlelight Demonstration
Issues	Punishment of U.S. Soldiers, New SOFA Anti-Americanism	Issues concerning Livelihood, New negotiations with U.S. Anti-Americanism
Leadership	Existence of Leadership	Absent or Loose Leadership
Citizen Participation	Organized by Civil Organization	Voluntary / Scattered
Pattern of Movement	Structuralized	No Fixed Structure

A. Candlelight Demonstrations for Hyosoon and Misun in 2002

The 2002 candlelight demonstration was a protest rally that was initiated and driven by a particular organization, and it was sparked by the death of two middle school girls who were hit and killed by a tank of the U.S. Army, stationed in Korea.[1] However, the fatal accident of the two girls did not receive instant attention because, at that time, Korea was in the midst of the World Cup. Even in November of the same year when the two U.S. soldiers believed to be responsible for the accident were found not guilty, only small scaled protests were carried out in front of U.S. military bases and the U.S. embassy. The critical impetus for the 2002 large-scale candlelight demonstrations came from a "netizen" with the ID "Angma." He posted a moving piece on the death of the two girls and proposed a "candlelight demonstration" to be held on the November 30, 2002, in the center of Seoul. After the first gathering on November 30, the "Cyber All People's Council (CAPS)" was formed by a selection of netizens and around 70 Internet communities. It was through this council that the December 2 demonstration was announced. Information and opinions on the fatal incident were exchanged through the website of the "CAPS" as well as other portal community cafes.[2] These online cafes and websites posted witness reports depicting the tragic scene with the U.S. military AVLB (armored vehicle-launched bridge). Various movements campaigned to bring the incident into the public dominion and continued through relay links between netizens and

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1. On June 13, 2002, on a narrow road in the Kyunggi province, South Korea, two middle school girls named Hyosoon Shin and Misun Shim were hit and killed by a tank driven by soldiers from the Engineer Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army.
2. At the time, in Daum ([http://cafe.daum.net/antiusacrime]) — a Korean portal site — over 200 cafes were identified as discussing the U.S. military stationed in Korea (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, December 10, 2002).

Internet news stations (G. Kim, 2003). This online information sharing by netizens meant that online activities begun to spill out into the offline world. A study conducted by a Korean researcher showed that, during the 2002 candlelight demonstrations, the numbers exposure to online information was proportional to the numbers that participated in the candlelight demonstrations (K. Kim, 2006: 183-211). During the 2002 candlelight demonstration, the information disseminated on the Internet and its subsequent exposure into the wider context, sparked and propagated interest in the incident. The distribution of photographs and videos depicting the two girls at the site of the accident was enough to instill anti-American feelings in the hearts of many Koreans.

Although the 2002 candlelight demonstration was the result of the voluntary participation by citizens, the overall management and organization was implemented by a particular organization, the CAPS. This council, which included existing networks of civil organizations, was responsible for the day-to-day operations, and conducted discussions on matters such as schedule, fund raising, demonstration evaluation, methods of civil mobilization, and so forth. The council tried to use the traditional methods of protest and rally of existing civil organizations, including forming organized ranks under a banner, creating a centralized arrangement for the speaker stage, controlling the demonstrators through large podium and command vehicles, and scheduling speeches of well-known figures. The CAPS was started from around 150 civil organizations in June, 2002, two weeks after the death of the two middle school girls, and it organized the "Candlelight Congregation in Memory of the Two Middle School Girls." By the end of 2003, 401 candlelight demonstrations had been organized by the CAPS (*Yonhap News*, May 13, 2004). Exposure to information mediated through the Internet resulted in a citizen mobilization effect that increased both online activities and offline participation in candlelight demonstrations. In addition, the Internet simultane-

ously maximized the reaction of citizens to the issue, strengthened the supporter network, and increased participation in the candle-light demonstrations (K. Kim, 2006: 183-185).

B. Candlelight Demonstrations against U.S.-beef Import in 2008

In 2008, thousands of protestors holding candles assembled in the center of Seoul, Korea, protesting against plans of the government to renew imports of U.S. beef (*The New York Times*, June 7, 2008). This mass demonstration of discontent powerfully showed the Internet's significant ability to enable public gatherings. When the newly launched Lee Myung-bak government announced their plans to resume imports of U.S. beef in April 18, 2008, "Agora," an Internet discussion channel at the portal site Daum, as well as other Internet communities, was the primary medium through which people could exchange opinions on the government's import decision.

While several civil organizations tried to create guidance councils and influence the direction of the movement, the majority of citizens did not come out on the streets through these organized groups. At the beginning, a relatively small group criticizing the beef imports negotiations, led by teenagers, demonstrated in central Seoul throughout April. Much of the older generation, including those in their 20s and 30s, were astonished to see teenagers taking to the streets and waving candles in protest against U.S. beef imports. However, as the candlelight demonstrations continued, more and more citizens including teenagers, university students, mothers with their babies in perambulators, military reserves, and blue-collar workers began participating in the candlelight demonstrations. The majority of these participants were not activists with affiliations to offline civil organizations but instead were self-motivated participants. The fervor of the people who were criticizing the incompetence of the government in the U.S. beef import

reopening negotiations, and the Lee Government's perceived reckless disregard for the safety of the people, resulted in additional negotiations between Korea and the U.S.

The people who gathered for the candlelight demonstrations in 2008 actively interacted with each other. This was true not only around the plaza in front of City Hall — the protest site — but also in "Agora," which had often been used for the online debates. Instead of participating via a single center, as would have been the case in the traditional civil movements, the protesters were focused around diverse communities and networked with each other. Even the protesters themselves could not predict what kind of behavior would be exhibited in the middle of the protest rallies. This is because the protesters were individuals who themselves had multiple centers and their self-evolving organism was open and in constant flux (Baek, 2008).

IV. Analysis of Changing Cyberactivism

The difference of cyberactivism reflects the variety of existing social systems and regulations and exerts influences on actors which are organized under this system. The power of the Internet is harnessed by the distribution and coalitions of power that are already present in groups such as individuals and government, groups that will adopt new technologies to enhance their power. This section discusses the question of how the Internet usage of civil society has been influenced by offline socio-political factors such as the growth of Korean civil society and the changing relationship between the state and civil society, as well as the development in technology.

A. The Growth of Korean Civil Society

Korean civil society emerged as an importnat political entity in the 1980s when it became active in several anti-government movements. The establishment of democracy in 1987 firmly established procedural democracy in Korean Society, and provided the momentum for the development of a civil society, especially in terms of quantity. In 1997 an analysis was conducted into 3,200 private organizations, and it showed that 55.8% of those organizations were created after the political democratization of 1987. On another note, the fall of socialism in the early 1990s provided the opportunity for civil society to use their protest voice for issues aside from anti-government and popular movements and to widen their interests. Diverse civil organizations sprang up, and the so-called "new social movement" organizations such as the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice and the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy were created (Yeom, 2002; Lee, 2002). In particular, Korean NGOs have been engaged in anti-government movements to promote civil rights and political freedom since the 1960s, and have often worked in coalition with blue-collar workers and the middle class, who had been alienated during the industrialization process. Korean civil society had been characterized by anti-government resistance against the suppressive authoritarian regime for a long time (Choi, 2002). Since 1987, Korean civil movements have developed into protests that demand further reforms of the government.

Since the establishment of the institutional mechanisms of a representative democracy in Korea, political parties and the National Assembly have developed a lack of trust in the people. Korean NGOs have become an important route through which civil society can express its political opinions. During the post-democracy period, NGOs have become a tentative alternative to formal institutions and organized political power, and they have

played an important role in monitoring legislative activities and elections since then. In other words, NGOs in Korea have become quasi-parties, which have replaced political parties in terms of mediating between the state and people. Korean civil movements are clearly different from western countries Whereas Korean NGOs have evolved into new social movements that deal with the practical issues of society, Western NGOs mainly focus on exercising influence on the central government (Shin, 2001). And yet, as voluntary political participation increased after democratization, NGOs in Korea raised criticism on the political system's tendency to allow nomination of candidates in elections based on the interests of political leaders and clique heads. The NGOs' involvement in the policy-making process became increasingly diverse and their influence was strengthened as demands for political reform increased.

The advent of the Internet provided NGOs with an opportunity to expand their scope and depth of their activities. It became common for NGOs to rely on the Internet when they mobilized support from the general public, and built coalitions with other organizations. In particular, throughout the sixteenth general election in 2000, the potential of the Internet as a tool for promoting NGO activities became clear. The enthusiasm and interest of the general public toward the anti-nomination and anti-election civil movements in 2000 made NGOs realize the potential power of the Internet when used in political and social movements. In fact, various data have proved that the influence of the Internet has increased in Korean politics and elections since 2000. A poll by *Hankyoreh Shinmun* revealed that 52% of voters relied on various Internet sites to locate information of the candidates; this included Internet newspapers, dedicated politics sites, and portals (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, May 8, 2004). As Bimber claims, the Internet was an effective tool that enabled Korean NGOs in the field of civil movements to grow their organizations, strengthen their membership enhance

coalition and coordination between themselves and other NGOs, and increase the role of intermediary groups in Politics (Bimber, 1998).

Table 2. Source for Candidates Information

	Candidate Info	Election Info
Internet News	26%	40%
Politics Sites	7%	4%
Portals	9%	10%
News-papers	5%	10%
TV	14%	35%
Official Mailings	28%	

* Source: *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, February 4, 2003.

By the end of the year 2000, however, Korean civil society has continued to become increasingly diverse and moved away from the influence of NGOs. Advances in ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) have meant plenty of opportunities for creating diverse networks between individuals, and individuals and groups in Korean society. The most significant characteristic of these civil activities is that citizens who are in non-political communities can join together when an appropriate issue arises. Network formation through the Internet provides a method of social participation that is based on virtual communities made up of individuals and groups connecting with other individuals or groups. New communities that were established online create a solidarity based not on traditional educational or geographical backgrounds but on shared interests. In Korea, many netizens form Internet communities with others who have similar interests, hobbies, and age ranges. At least 40% of Internet users in Korea use Internet portal cafes or communities; there are 7.3 million Daum cafes as of April 2008 (NIDA, 2008: 473). These cafes pro-

vide diverse communities for members to interact and share common interests; they function as places for forming public opinions within a society. Information and messages can be delivered to millions of people instantly on the Internet and many citizens use the Internet to broadcast their opinions and improve internal communications.

The sparks of gathering the people who demonstrated in the central Seoul city Plaza in early May 2008 was, in fact, these Internet portals and communities. The bulletin boards of portals and Internet communities are not just simply a place where information coalesces, but also where media allows citizens to exchange opinions freely, form public opinions, and deliver news from on the ground. The development of the Internet allows distinctive individuals to interact with each other. The masses within cyberspace can link with each other, like hypertext, to form a mosaic-like union and creates a decentralized organization that functions as a foundation for collective intelligence and behavior. Even in communities dedicated to various hobbies rather than social or political issues, when a social issue is raised, community members share information and conduct various discussions on the issue. For example, in the case of Myclub ([http://www.myclub.com]), a site for sharing gossip of celebrities, when the U.S. beef import issue flared up, the writings posted on the site began to focus on current issues. The bulletin board of Myclub was primarily used to exchange celebrity related information, but as of August 7, 2008, a search for the word "mad cow disease" displayed around 6,900 results. Korea's Internet communities provided opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to interact without being constrained by time or space.

The protest rallies of 2008 demonstrated that a growing number of citizens define their social agenda by identifying issues that were more specific and practical than had traditionally been the case for protest movements. Cyberspace promotes civil move-

ments where people gather around a specific topic of interest or stake (Jho and Song, 2004: 205-206). It is within this context that Guattari uses the "molecular movement" concept to explain the emergence of a new movement where molecularized individuals with everyday problems attempt to deal with authority that is becoming more secretive (Guattari, 1997). The open and horizontal nature of cyberspace increases the possibility of connecting multiple centers through various networks, and promotes the sharing of specific values. This multiple center model of civil action is self motivated and unorganized, in stark contrast to the public model, which is more goal-oriented and organized.

B. The Advances of Web 2.0 Technology

The technological development that prompted Internet use in political movements in 2002 and 2008 can be identified as the successful completion of the broadband penetration project, which the Korean Government pursued aggressively. Since the Kim Dae-jung Administration, all ministries and government agencies have constructed websites and utilized them in their policy public relations. As a result, citizen access to government improved significantly by means of cyber bulletins and other media. According to the ITU (International Telecommunications Union) survey (ITU, *World Telecommunications Indicators Database*, 2003), Korea ranked top in 2001 and second in 2002 in terms of number of Internet users per 1000 of the population. The total Internet-using population in Korea reached 29 million in December 2003, and 64.5% of the total population above the age of six connects to Internet at least once a month. Average Internet usage time is 12.5 hours a week; heavy users who spend over 10 hour per week on Internet account for 46.9% of the total population, and 10% of the economically active population regularly use information technology (NCA, 2004: 72-74). As diverse on-line activities, such as electronic docu-

mentation, on-line shopping, on-line chatting, and e-commerce became common in the life of the Korean people, the Internet emerged as a new medium to directly connect citizens and policy-makers or candidates in elections and political processes.

The improvement in accessibility to the Internet and increasing Internet speed ensured that the Korean people found it far easier to participate in the political arena. In particular, advances in technology led to an increase in the amount of large capacity multimedia data that was being shared. In the 2008 candlelight demonstrations, UCC (User-Created Contents) that had been created and video edited directly by netizens were used widely. As of May 22, 2009, a search for the keyword "mad cow disease" on Naver ([http://www.naver.com]) resulted in 9,013 hits for video files. When Koreans began to fear that beef suspected of "mad cow disease" could be imported into Korea due to the Korea-U.S. beef negotiations, edited videos began to circulate quickly through personal blogs; these videos included one depicting a "downer cow" suspected of having mad cow disease, and one showing butchering scenes in the U.S. These videos prompted people to engage individually in the protest movement.

Different from the past masses who participated in protest rallies, digital cameras were channels that connect the mass to the physical actions. Images created with digital cameras were transmitted and communicated in real-time via the Internet or mobile phones; it became clear that the masses had in their hands a new vehicle of communication. The development of Web 2.0 made everyday engagement in politics possible; the emergence of personal media successfully brought people who were interested in social issues into the public sphere. In addition, as online exchanges gradually moved from text-based content to multimedia content (including video), the forms of communication and information exchange also changed. This was due, in part, to the digital devices that allowed UCC videos to be created and transmitted on the

Internet. The free expression of opinions and the exchange of a variety of information via Internet bulletin boards, without the requirement of any special formats or conventions, has become a universal form of communication in Korean society.

The 2002 candlelight demonstrations received media coverage from reporters and cameras, but the 2008 candlelight demonstrations were covered not only by the existing media, but also by people of varying ages who were not media professionals, who carried out live online broadcasts using their laptop and web cameras throughout the demonstration site. This new generation used personal access to media to express themselves and relay news, using diverse multimedia devices. The Internet TV station, Afreeca ([http://www.afreeca.com]), which enabled real-time delivery of on-site information and bi-directional communication through Internet chatting, was successful in rallying sympathy from many people. This site, in particular, contributed to the initiative to get citizen participation in the street protests. There were over 400 so-called Internet BJs (Broadcast Jockey) that broadcasted live feeds on Afreeca under the subject tag "candle using video,"[3] and replies to these broadcasts shaped Internet users' opinions. As the number of broadcasts increased, so did the number of visitors to Afreeca. According to "Internet Matrix," in the period between May 25 and June 2 — when the candlelight demonstrations were gaining momentum — the cumulative number of broadcasts that were fed live to Afreeca was 9,571, and the cumulative number of viewers was 4.68 million (*Sisajournal*, June 17, 2008: 31).[4]

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3. Video has become a universal medium of information delivery. Presidential and general election candidates have proactively implemented video as part of their campaign to deliver messages in a way that is unfiltered by traditional media. This is true of both Korea and the U.S. (*The Washington Post*, January 22, 2007).

4. The video of "University girl being kicked by army boot" in June 1 on "Afreeca" has widely been viewed as trigger that renewed the fervor of the candlelight demonstrations. On that day, the number of viewers in

Advances in mobile communication technology also allowed certain aspects of the 2008 candlelight demonstrations to be brought into the public eye. In contrast to the situation in 2002, when text messages were more or less the only way to invite citizens to participate in the protests, camera functions that had since been added to mobile phones, allowed teenagers to share their photos and videos of candlelight demonstrations, a technology that prompted further participation. The advances in mobile phone technology as well as their widespread use, led directly to the large numbers of middle and high school students that were able to participate in the 2008 candlelight demonstrations. The photographs or videos recorded by these mobile phones, especially those that showed clashes between progressive groups and conservative groups, revealed the illegal activities of some demonstrators in 2008 around the Gwanghwamoon area.

In December, 2002, during the time of the protests for Hyosoon and Misun Incident, online communities such as cafes within portal sites were used significantly more than blogs. The number of online cafes that were registered on the leading Korean portal, Daum ([http://www.daum.net]), in 2002 was 1 million (NCA, 2002). In 2002, the number of Internet subscribers in Korea was 26 million, but it increased to 35 million in 2007, reaching 77% of the total population. This means that almost every household in Korea is now connected to the Internet (NIDA, 2008: 434). These Internet cafes provide a place for people to communicate and get together in order to share common ideas and hobbies.

In 2008, a phenomenon occurred wherein citizens voluntarily expressed — through blogs and large portal message boards — their desire to participate. In 2008, blog usage rate passed the 50% mark, and blogs became a communication tool recognized by the majority of netizens (NIA, 2008: 166). Due to the individualistic

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"Afreeca" was 1.27 million (*Seoul Shinmun*, July 31, 2008).

Table 3. Changes in Technological Environment between 2002 and 2008

		2002	2008
Internet	Internet Users	26,270,000	34,820,000
	Broadband Subscribers	10,405,486	15,050,961
	Wireless Internet Subscribers	25,981,443	42,140,132
Mobile Phones	Mobile Phone Subscribers	32,342,493	44,266,046
Others	Digital Camera Penetration	–	50.5%

* Source: NIA (2008).

nature of blogs, there is a limit to the extent to which a particular group can take leadership. In fact, this problem created confusion for the police as they could not identify the "instigator" or the "group" behind the demonstration. With the emergence of personal media — such as blogs — that go beyond existing cafes or unidirectional online media models, activities and information sharing conducted in a horizontal manner, increased more than ever. This new model allowed citizens to exchange information on Mad Cow Disease and the perceived dangers of U.S. beef, as well as allowing engagement of other diverse activities focusing on criticizing the renewal of plans to import U.S. beef. The online debates on Mad Cow Disease, online petitions, the creation of UCCs, the mobilization of voluntary workers, and the immediate delivery of related information through the Internet directly resulted in candles covering the heart of Seoul. In particular, the 2008 candlelight demonstration owed its rapid propagation to Web 2.0. In particular, online debate forums such as Daum's Agora, the establishment of a vast network for delivering specific agendas via blogs, the quick and wide organization of citizens through Internet cafes all contributed to mobilize citizens. The Internet with the growth of a civil society ensures that, whenever an issue piques considerable public interest, such as the import of U.S. beef, there is a possibility of sparking lively online activities that could eventually lead to offline political participation.

C. Changing Relationship between the Government and Society

The changing nature of the participation of civil society through cyberspace should be examined in the context of the historical development of Korean civil movements and the relationship between the government and NGOs. The democratization of Korea in 1987, and the fall of socialism in 1990 both had a huge impact on the relationship between the government and society. Before 1987, the relationship between the government and the people was antagonistic. Under a government-led economic development plan, the authoritarian government took advantage of growing anti-communist feeling and severely oppressed the demands of civil society. As a result, civil movements instigated the notion of overthrowing government, and a hostile relationship emerged between the government and the people (Park, 2001).

However, during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, civil organizations were supported by the government. When the Kim Dae-jung administration came into power, it was in a relatively weak political position, and in order to effectively manage the state agenda, a new strategy to secure political resources was needed. In this context, the administration actively supported civil society under the political slogan of "participatory democracy" or "governance." The success of cyber-activism in Korea could be due to this utilization strategy of the government and the ruling party. They mobilized the student, the citizens, and the labor unions, to strengthen coalitions between anti-establishment forces. The government and the ruling power adopted a strategy that attempted to harness the power of netizens, which had the tendency of anti-conservatism and comparatively shallow depth of supporting group.

Kim's administration sought a cooperative relationship with civil organizations and created supportive legal frameworks and institutions. In 2002, it announced the "Non-Profit Private Organi-

zation Support Act" and pledged financial subsidy for non-profit civil organization. The implementation of this law was undertaken by the "Public Organization Selection Committee," which was composed of private sector civilians and government officials. Under this arrangement, the Ministry of Public Affairs and Security spent US$ 7 million in 2000 on the activities of NGOs. Over US$ 10 million have been allocated every year to support over 1,300 civil organizations with subsidies. Organizations such as the "National Unity Cooperation People Council," the "National Commission for Rebuilding Korea," and the "Citizens Coalition for Medical Reforms" are civil organizations that supported the policies of the Kim Administration (Lee, 2002). As part of this process, the Kim Administration cut support funding for conservative organizations, such as the Society for a Better Tomorrow, and the Korea Freedom League (Park, 2001; Lee, 2007). The government sought to augment its political capacity and justify its reformist nature by bringing civil organizations into the political and administrative arena. Members of civil organizations were able to strengthen their influence within a framework that involved cooperation with the government, which enabled them to receive legal, institutional, and financial support from the government.

The 2002 candlelight demonstration was the largest mass protest in Korea since 1987. Demonstrators used the Internet space to popularize the incident, which was not receiving significant coverage from traditional media outlets, and aggressively utilized other Internet media, such as *OhmyNews* during protest rallies. This was an example of the people's successful attempt to bypass or circumnavigate the existing media. During the demonstrations, conservative politicians and media were targets for criticism. With the presidential election on the horizon in 2002, each nominee from the political parties had to outline their position on the new SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) with the U.S.

The Internet was an effective weapon for presidential candi-

date Roh Moo-hyun and, later, his government. Roh Moo-hyun had previously lagged far behind his rival, Lee Hoi-chang in terms of lacking the required political funds and organizational power to mobilize numerous individuals in a very short time. The Internet site, for example *OhmyNews* ([http://www.ohmynews.com/]) had helped to influence the opinion of those involved in anti-establishment forces, by criticizing the existing offline media as only reflecting the interests of the ruling group. Internet political column sites, such as *Seoprise* ([http://www.seoprise.com]) and *Ddanziilbo* ([http://www.ddanzi.com]) focused on Roh Moo-hyun's supporters, covering the so-called "NOSAMO" in the early and mid 2000s. These sites argued that the existing offline press represented only the conservative, the right, and the *Chaebol*. They attacked the existing order in Korea by appealing to the youth to support the new wave of politics in the forthcoming election (King, 2003). When Roh Moo-hyun was voted into office, several mechanisms were invented to activate the online political participation of netizens. All of the main administrative institutions have established their own websites. And the Blue House opened an agency specifically focused on promoting peoples' political participation and instigated a cyber debate room, named "controversialist,"[5]

The Roh government established a kind of implicit anti-establishment coalition relationship with the civil groups. In many cases, the political participation of civil organizations via the Internet was favorable to the government. The Internet, which had been hugely influential during the presidential election in 2002, supported anti-conservatism in defiance of the existing established media and politicians. However, the alliance was not based on citizen participation or an equal relationship between the government

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5. The participation activating policy of Roh Moo-hyun Government had not aimed at general people of the nation, but it rather focused on the Netizens. Therefore, comparatively to other people the voices of youth have been more reflected in the political process.

and civil society. Rather, it involved a process of mobilizing civil organization and handpicking various support policies (Lee, 2007). Although civil organizations were able to strengthen their organizational capacity during the Roh Administrations, the mobilization of civil society by the government eroded the legitimacy of reform initiatives that functioned as the foundation of civil organizations. Furthermore, the weakening of direct communication between citizens and civil organizations brought about a separation of civil society and the masses (Cho, 2007).

However, the friendly relationships between government and progressive civil organizations during Kim and Roh's administrations were changed and weakened in 2008 when the new Lee Myung-bak administration came into power. The relationship between civil organizations and President Lee, whose political affiliation lay with the conservative Grand National Party, was not a friendly one. This was due mainly to the fact that Korea's civil movements were involved with criticism and reform of those conservatives who enjoyed vested rights. The Lee administration, in order to weaken the influence of civil organizations, downsized or restructured the committees which had been used as springboards for figures from civil organizations to enter into mainstream politics during Roh government (*Yonhap News*, Jan 18, 2008). In 2008, the Ministry of Public Administration and Security reduced government support for 56 organizations (47%) out of 117 non-profit civil organizations that had been subsidized by the previous Kim and Roh administrations (*Maeil Kyongjae*, May 19, 2008). Under the Lee government, civil organizations found themselves greatly weakened in mobilizing citizens and raising funds. This was partly because of civil organizations had failed to secure autonomy under the Kim and Roh administrations. Elite-centered civil movements weakened the representative nature of civil organizations and were characterized by low citizen participation.

This explains the different role of civil organizations in two

candlelight demonstrations, in 2002 and 2008. In 2002, civil organizations, that traditionally performed the task of gathering public opinion, were able to take the lead in raising issues and organizing protest rallies, in spite of minor conflicts with citizens. However, the conflict between civil organizations and citizens was apparent during the 2008 candlelight demonstration. As protests progressed in 2008, a split was formed between the movement camp and the general citizens over the issues and methods of demonstration. Both civil organizations and general citizens were raising issues concerned with government negotiations over U.S. beef and showed nationalistic sentiment.

The civil organizations rallied under a banner of anti-Americanism and even demanded that the Lee administration step down, whereas the general citizens adopted a more narrow nationalism, aimed at a mutually agreeable arrangement with the U.S. (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, May 9, 2008) In fact, even within those citizens who were participating in the protest there was a wide range of views on the issue. In the 2008 demonstrations, teenagers were unhappy over the Korean education system — although they were ostensibly expressing their fear of the perceived dangers of contracting Mad Cow Disease. Korea was also in a state of social unrest due to the failure of the newly formed Lee government to revitalize the economy (Y. Kim and J. Kim, 2009: 70-71). Some citizens were disappointed with Lee's policy of favoring conservatives when he was appointing high-level officials, a preference that resulted in political and economic bipolarization.

During the rally, civil organizations tried to mobilize under a huge flag and to gather the masses under it. The civil organizations wanted a more organized protest for the candlelight demonstrations. However, general citizens clearly expressed their disapproval of organized movements led by civil organizations (*Chosun Ilbo*, June 5, 2008). Most participating citizens wanted to continue protesting independently and peacefully with candles. Heated

debates between civil organizations and general citizens regarding the use of flags during the protest were carried out on the Internet ([http://www.dcinside.com, June 8, 2008]). Netizens clearly showed their disapproval of the organized movement method of the civil organizations and tried to find a more liberal approach for gathering and attending protesting rallies.

These differences between the citizens and the civil organizations led to a split in the 2008 candlelight demonstrations itself. When civil organizations tried to steer the movement toward "anti-government" and other issues such as MBC or labor, the general citizens regarded this as the final straw and resulted in the candlelight demonstrations dissipating around the middle of July in 2008.

V. Conclusion

This examination of two candlelight demonstrations has shown the possibility of new method of civil participation and a transformed relationship between the state and civil society. The 2002 candlelight demonstration, which is regarded as a successful protest rally, was organized by the leadership of civil organizations, who were able to mobilize the citizens. In contrast, the 2008 candlelight demonstration was organized by the citizens themselves, without the guidance of a civil organization, and was conducted in a manner that was untraditional for a protest rally. The Internet also has clearly functioned for citizens as an effective tool to engage in the political process. The demonstration of civil groups in 2002 resulted in a renegotiation between the U.S. and Korea over SOFA. The civil groups directly proposed the political agenda and exerted their influence on the political and diplomatic process. Citizens and members of civil organizations, who came out on the streets in 2008, also pressured the Korean government

to renegotiate with the U.S. government and prohibit the import of U.S. beef from cattle older than 30 months.

It is obvious that the Internet is making an important contribution to the formation of new models of governance in state and civil society. Before the development of the Internet, the citizens were often unable to find effective ways to deliver their agenda to the center of the political arena. With the advance of the Internet, however, most people are now equipped with the tools that enable them to demand responses from the government and political parties. The Internet helps to construct organizations of scattered individuals or groups by linking them through networks or communities. Besides, while the existing media could not provide a place for the people to discuss and debate public issues, the Internet now offers an alternative vehicle for expressing opinions. Through the Internet, citizens can rediscover themselves not just as passive consumers, but also as active partners in governmental policy making. Within democratic institutions, the notion of whether political agenda can be influenced by individuals or organized groups can make a significant difference in political process and policies.

It may be difficult to draw any assertive conclusions regarding the impact of explosive civil participation during the candlelight protests on the possibility of democratic governance in Korea. At this point, the candlelight demonstrations have demonstrated both the positive and negative aspects of using cyberspace as a venue for democracy. On one hand, the Internet is capable of leading social mobilization, and has been hailed as a herald for the birth of true democracy, since it can aid the mass public influence over public policy, by enabling the collective organization of diverse people. On the other hand, the candlelight demonstrations have been seen as the culminated expression of a digital populism and collective stupidity that makes assertions based on incorrect information about American beef. Indeed, there have been significant criticisms of the nature of the information on Mad Cow Dis-

ease that prompted the group demonstrations. Many incidents show that the information which was spread through the Internet was completely unsubstantiated. Hence, the influence that the advance of Internet has on the configuration of governance cannot be evaluated entirely optimistically.

An examination of the 2008 candlelight demonstrations in terms of outcomes also reveals its shortcoming. As the demonstration was characterized by the discontinuous, multi-centered, and horizontal network lacking clear leadership, it made difficult to achieve real results by bargaining and negotiating with the government (Y. Kim and J. Kim, 2009). In other words, although the candlelight demonstration can be seen as a successful movement in terms of mobilizing citizens, in reality, the movement itself was a failure in that did not produce any meaningful result for the Korean society.

This study shows that the transformation of cyberactivism as a way of social mobilization in the digital age and the possibility of democratic governance. Although many countries have Internet access, not all countries are experiencing cyberactivism in the same way as Korea. The levels of impact that the Internet has on the sociopolitical arena varies from country to country (Jho and Song, 2007). The issues, actors, participating classes, level of organization, methodologies of cyberactivism are changing in accordance with the times and countries.

It is clear that political participation through the Internet is a matter that relates to the sociopolitical structure of the existing society, and it evolves within a historical context; the Internet technology itself does not automatically guarantee democratic governance. In other words, there will be limits to expanding democracy of a country without favorable institutional environment and socioeconomic conditions. A good governance structure is necessary for political and social communication in cyberspace that can develop into responsible dialogue and participation of citizens.

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