

The Second Candle-Light Revolution in Korea: The People's Fight for the Survival of Clean Democracy

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The world still remembers the 2017 Candle-Light Revolution in which 17,000,000 Korean people fought peacefully and culturally on the streets, for several months, against the deep-rooted corruption culture developed and enforced under the 60- year conservative government's rule.

In the evening of September 28 of 2019, 2,000,000 people of all walks of life, all ages and all segments of the society came down to the street and shouted

"We are Moon Jae-in!" The people were crying out that they were with President Moon Jaen-in in the fight for the survival of democracy

"We are Cho Kuk!" "Let us fight for the reform of the corrupted Prosecutor Office!"

The people were shouting that they were with Cho Kuk, the newly appointed Minister of Justice, for the Reform of the Supreme Prosecutors Office (Prosecution)

They have cried out: "Let us reform the rotten media!" The Korean media have shown bluntly how they have been a part of the corruption culture; the people could no longer tolerate it.

The present candle-light demonstration started only a few weeks ago with 2,000, then 100,000 and now as many as 2,000,000.

They were angry; they were very angry; they will do it again next Saturday (October 5) with perhaps 3,000,000 people.

What is going on in the country of morning calm?

It is no longer a country of calm; it may have to go through a long period of fight for the survival of democracy and a cleaner society.

This second candle-light demonstration is, perhaps, a beginning of the final stage of cutting off the deep roots of corruption affecting every corner of the Korean society for last 60 years under the conservative government.

This paper deals with the following.

First, I will trace back the origin and the dreadful evolution of the corruption culture in Korea.

Second, I will discuss how the liberal government of Moon Jae-in has been trying, for last two

years, to clean up the corruption culture.

Finally, I will say a few words about the future course of actions Korea should take to be free from the corruption culture.

1. Origin and Evolution of the Corruption Culture in South Korea

The origin and the evolution of the corruption culture may be explained by the lack of legitimacy of the conservative government on the one hand, and on the other hand, the dictatorial violation of human rights and abuse of power committed in order to perpetuate the illegitimate government.

Korea was “liberated” from Japanese harsh colonial abuse of power which lasted for 35 years. But, was it really liberation? In 1945, the US army came with no knowledge about Korea and ruled the country for three years with the collaboration of former Japanese officials and, especially former Korean officials who had collaborated with Japan for the brutal oppression of the Korean people and, in particular, for capturing and killing Korean patriots who fought against Japan.

In fact, Korea was not liberated in 1945 from Japan; Japan continued to rule Korea along with U.S. and pro-Japan Koreans.

Syngman Rhee established in 1948 the first Korean government after three years of US military government. Most of the ministers and high ranking officials of Rhee’s conservative government were former Korean officials served under the Japanese colonial rules.

Moreover, about 70% of police force was former Korean police men worked for the Japanese government. These officials and police personnel feared greatly the Korean patriots, because they did the dirty work of capturing, torturing and killing them.

These pro-Japan Koreans (tchin-il-pa) murdered Kim Koo, the president of the Korea provisional government which fought against Japan.

In 1948, a committee investigating the traitors was established in order to investigate and punish those who collaborated with Japan. Unfortunately, the pro-Japan police attacked the office of the committee and destroyed all the documents on pro-Japan and anti-Korea activities of the traitors.

As a result, no “traitor” was caught and punished. It is possible that Korea is the only country in the world which could not punish the traitors who collaborated with the enemy in war time.

Koreans were impressed with the way France, the Netherland and other countries caught the traitors and punished them.

So, the government of Rhee had little legitimacy because it was run by former officials of the Japanese colonial government. The lack of legitimacy has made Rhee’s government to regard the people as “enemy” and protect itself from the ordinary Korean people; it chose a series of dictatorial measures.

First, it amended the constitution to assure long-period presidency.

Second, it used the brutal police force and the army to massacre a few hundred thousand innocent people in Jeju Island and elsewhere under the pretext of their being “red”.

The expression “red” meant a dirty word and it meant “communist” or “sympathizer of communism”. These poor people were farmers, factory workers, old people, young people, women, children who had nothing to do with ideology; their only concern was to find breads to eat twice a day, if lucky.

Third, Rhee’s government took away freedom of press, the right to form labour union and committed major violation of human rights.

Fourth, it stole and shared tax payers’ money among the closely knit pro-Japan groups in order to strengthen their internal cohesion, solidarity and monopolize their power for good.

This pattern of oppressing the people in order to monopolize power and wealth was repeated by Park Chung-hee who snatched power by military Coup d’État (1962), Chun Doo-hwan who appointed himself as president through an illegal “electoral council” (1981), Lee Myong-bak (2008) and Park Geun-hye (2012) who stole power by illegal rigged presidential elections.

The lack of legitimacy of the conservative government has led to dictatorship of various forms and the spread of corruption into the very fabrics of the Korean society.

Dictatorship means the monopoly of power; the monopoly of power leads inevitably to the abuse of power; the abuse of power invites necessarily corruption. This has been the sad history of post-war Korea under the conservatives.

Despite the dictatorial policy of the conservative government, Korea has produced the Han River economic miracle and saved democracy.

This was possible owing to the courage and wisdom of the Korean people. Koreans are patient and they endure the abuse of power by the vested interest groups for long time, but when time comes, they fight back and win.

In fact, Korean people led by young students took the street and fought bravely against the evil of dictatorship. We remember the huge protest against Rhee’s government on 16th of April 1960, the bold street demonstration against Park Chung-hee’s government on the 16th of October 1979, the bloody street fight against the dictator Chun Doo-hwan on the 18th of May, 1980 and the effective demonstration to amend the constitution in June 1987.

In each of these protests, several hundred thousand people joined and some times, more than million people joined; many of them were murdered.

But, they have succeeded in making all of the six presidents of pro-Japan conservative governments to pay for their crimes; they all ended their presidential terms in tragic manners.

Syngman Rhee was chased by students; he escaped on board of US CIA plane, Park Chung-hee was assassinated by his own CIA director, Chun Doo-hwan and his successor Roh Tae-uk were put in prison, Lee Myong-bak is waiting for the Supreme Court ruling for possible 15-year free room-and-board in prison; Park Geun-hye got 25 year prison life.

Thus, none of the presidents of the conservative governments has finished in normal way the presidential terms. Each one of them was accused for violation of human rights, abuse of power and corruption.

The courage and determination of the Korean people has succeeded in punishing the conservative presidents, but the roots of corruption they have planted is so deep and so widely spread that the fight against the resulting injustice, unfairness and abuse of power and privileges must go on.

The corruption of Park Geun-hye was perhaps the most devastating case in the annals of the Blue House corruption. She made major decisions in the areas of politics, economics and foreign relations on the basis of the opinion of a woman, her long-time friend, Choi Soon-Sil, who had nothing to do with government affairs. This was a grave crime.

Park had illegal dealing with the business world, especially with the Samsung Group. She received tens of millions of dollars as bribe in exchange of facilitating the succession of Samsung Group control by Lee Jae-yong.

Choi Soon-sil (in prison for 20 years) is suspected for having intervened, on the regular basis, in the nominations of ministers, deputy ministers, members of the National Assembly, judges and other persons of power for possible huge rewards.

The corruption culture has three characteristics.

First, the people have lost confidence in the Blue House (the government); the government has lost its authority.

Second, since the upstream (the government) is rotten, inevitably the downstream (the people) cannot avoid from being rotten also.

Third, the society has lost public ethics in such way that illegal behaviour can be transformed into “legal” behaviour by paying a fee (bribes)

Fourth, the corruption culture kills the economy and the survival of the country as a viable country becomes uncertain.

Well, the people had enough; 17,000,000 people came down to the Kwang-hwa-moon square for eight months in the period, 2016-2017, spent countless evenings sitting on icy square’s cement floor, getting soaked wet on rainy days and asked Park Geun-hye to leave the Blue House. They won; they sent her to prison for 25 years.

And they put Moon Jae-in in the Blue house in 2017.

2. Anti-Corruption policy of the government of Moon Jae-in

As soon as he took over the government, Moon declared a war against the corruption culture. The target of this war may be grouped as follows: the Blue House, military establishment, the police, the public corporations, previous crimes neglected by the police, the business sector and the Prosecution.

The corruption of the Blue House was dealt with success by putting in jail two responsible presidents, Lee Myong-bak and Park Geun-hye and punishing the individuals involved in the

Blue House corruption and crimes.

However, the embezzlement of tax payers' money amounting billions of dollars connected with the infamous 4-River projects and the Natural Resources Diplomacy remain to be investigated.

The corruption of the military is deep rooted, but the most alarming was the case where the Defence Security Command (ki-moo-sa) originally designed to supervise anti-patriotic behaviour of the military personnel has committed the crime of harassing civilians who may say or act against the conservative government.

What is really alarming is that it prepared even a military coup d'Etat to eliminate those citizens who would be against the government of Park Guen-hye in case where her impeachment would fail.

Moon has dissolved the organization. The commander who was responsible is hiding somewhere in the U.S.

The corruption of the police is being investigated by a newly appointed police chief and a committee designed to look into the matter.

One of the troubling cases of corruption of the public corporations is the illegal hiring of children of members of the National Assembly, high ranking government officials and other people of power. The practice of such hiring is so widely spread that the government has decided to make major investigation..

There are numerous crimes committed in the past which were not properly investigated properly by the previous conservative government and the Prosecution.

There was the case where a beautiful movie star killed herself after being raped times after times by numerous individuals including the owner of a large news paper, lawyers, bankers and other "society leaders".

The Prosecution did not investigate properly possibly because of possible bribes.

There are other cases of violent crimes and violation of human rights which were not fully investigated. Some of the large Christian church leaders suspected to have committed such crimes have not been properly investigated.

Moon's government has established a special committee to re-examine these cases, but it has not been able to get full cooperation of the Prosecution.

The business sector is as much corrupted as the public sector. Apart from the practice of bribery, the Chaebols often violate human rights of their employees.

The abuse of power and illegal imports of luxury goods for personal use of the family of Korea Air was a typical case of "kap-jil" or the verbal or physical violence against the employees. The founder of the Korea Air, his wife, his son and his two daughters were all found to be guilty of mistreating hired employees.

Through the sustained efforts to destroy the corruption culture since two years, the Moon government has been able to reveal that the real force behind the corruption and illegal

activities of the establishment was the Prosecution.

The Prosecution in Korea monopolizes not only the accusation procedure but also indictment process; it supervises the police work. It is said that the Korean Prosecution is the most powerful judicial institution in the world.

To fight the corruption, one had to penalize the offender. But, it is the Prosecution which can prosecute offender. The sad reality is that it is difficult to bring the Prosecution to the court, because the court makes its ruling on basis of the information presented by the Prosecution.

Thus, the prosecutors are almighty; they could prevent the corruption, but they don't do it, because they are themselves corrupted. It is now clear that without the reform of the Prosecution, the corruption will win over honesty, justice and decency.

President Moon Jae-in knows how and why it is so difficult to reform the Prosecution. Moon was one of the chief aids for President Rho Moon-hyun (2003-2008) who was machinated by the Prosecution into suicide. The Korean Prosecution can kill a president of the country.

Those prosecutors who participated in the machination of President Rho's suicide had all big promotion and are leading luxury life.

President Moon had to find a superman to undertake the reform of the Prosecution.

Moon picked Professor Cho Kuk who has been studying Prosecution all his life. President Moon appointed Cho first in 2017 as the chief aid responsible for civic affairs, a position handy for observing how the Prosecution operates.

The president appointed Cho Kuk a month ago as Minister of Justice who can play a key role in the reform of the Prosecution

The appointment of Cho stirred up violent protest by the opposition part, Hangeuk-Dang (LKP), the media, the conservative establishment. In fact, they were panicked by the thought that Cho might succeeds. But the most powerful protest came from the Prosecution itself.

Why? It is obvious to them that if Cho succeeds with his Prosecution reform, the whole network of corruption will be destroyed and they can no longer live above the law; they can no longer abuse power and privileges; they can no longer steal tax payers' money

The reform proposed by Cho has two parts. The first part is the priority right given to the police to accuse the suspect based on the autonomous investigation, although the Prosecution will be given the right to conduct supplementary investigation, if necessary.

Second - this is the most important- there will be an institution which can investigate high ranking officials and, especially the prosecutors.

As far as the conservatives - especially the conservative party LKP- are concerned, Cho's plan means a death sentence; they cannot rely any more on the Prosecution to cover up their crimes. As far as the Prosecution is concerned, Cho's plan means the end of the gold mines filled with bribery money and unlimited power.

The Prosecution has launched a total war against Cho. The Prosecutor's first tactic was to

find vulnerable spots in Cho's personal life such as real estate speculation, unlawful moving of house for his kids' school, doubtful investments and so on.

It failed; Cho has passed the investigation with flying colour.

Having found no faults in Cho, the Prosecution has decided to harass Cho's wife who is a university professor. Nothing came out. Then, Cho's son and his daughter were made the target of merciless accusation with no justifiable reasons

The Prosecution has made Cho's family life miserable and humiliating with no justifiable reasons hoping that Cho would give up his appointment under the pressure put on his innocent family.

Cho has no intention of doing so, because his job will determine the very survival for Korea as a decent clean country.

Koreans have found out to what extent the Korean media are under- developed, non professional and dishonest. They published what the Prosecution told them; they do not know and they are not interested to know how to verify the reliability of information given by the Prosecution.

The Korean media are also very corrupted. They write what the information sources tell them to write in exchange of articles favourable to the information sources or and bribe money This practice is found in the business world, the research institutes, government agencies and schools and everywhere in the society.

We need a reform of the media as much as we need the reform of the Prosecution.

3. Summary

To sum up, Korean people have found out that neither the political parties nor the media can really cope with the corruption crisis; they have concluded that only the people themselves can do something about it.

The fight against the Prosecution is by no means easy, because under the present law it has all the power. In the final analysis, only the ordinary people can do the job.

In fact, the street protest of 2,000,000 people which took place on the 28th of September seems to have made the Prosecution to wake up and re-examine its position.

The director of the Prosecution, Yoon Suk-yul said, after having watched the event, that he would undertake the reform as demanded by the people.

But, I doubt his sincerity. Even if he is, I am not sure if the prosecutors will follow him.

In the coming Saturday (October 3), 3,000,000 people are expected to show their force and their support to President Moon and Minister of Justice, Cho Kuk.

It is possible that Cho Kuk can keep his job and launch the reform of the prosecution.

But optimism is to be avoided, for the conservative establishment has money, a lot of money hidden around the world. Nobody knows how much, but it could amount to hundreds

of billions of dollars.

The conservatives can buy media and supporters for their greed, but they cannot bribe the mass of the ordinary people. The ordinary people are the true master of the society.

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