public, let alone in the world spotlight, Kim projected an image of an agreeable ruler who was interested in improving relations between the two Koreas. It was impossible to gauge what the spectacle of the two presidents side by side in their limousine meant to the thousands of ordinary North Koreans who had been mobilized to line P'yongyang's normally empty boulevards for the presidential motorcades. Did they feel pride at the sight of the southern president coming north into the center of their workers' paradise? Did they harbor secret dreams that the prospect of reunification might finally end their long era of deprivation and hardship? Whatever their thoughts, they had to return to their work, food rationing, dark homes, and uncertainty following this public display of Korean unity. And within another two years, their leader was once again committing them to a facedown with the entire world in a new round of nuclear politics (see Epilogue).

Chapter Eight

DEMOCRATIZATION IN SOUTH KOREA 1987–2000

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THE SUDDEN CAPITULATION of the Chun government in the face of the massive demonstrations of June 1987 marked a major turning point in the evolution of South Korean democracy. Many viewed it as the beginning of true democracy in the South. Less optimistically, it might be more apt to consider it only the beginning of a process of democratization. In 1987 Korean society had yet to work out how a truly open, pluralist democracy might function. After all it is difficult to find any period in the history of South Korea when the democratic procedures and rights embedded in the often-amended constitution had not been overridden by authoritarian abuses perpetrated by both civilian and military dictators. But the exhortations of authoritarian governments for the population to exercise discipline and accept limits on their democratic freedoms in the name of economic development and national security had ceased to resonate long before 1987. With the death of Park Chung Hee in 1979, there emerged a broad-based conviction that the time had come to create an open democracy and to curb the excessive powers of the executive. This hope had been shattered by the military coup in late 1979 and the rise of Chun Doo Hwan to power in 1980. It was a testament to the power of authoritarianism that it took another seven years for the popular will, so evident in 1980, to manifest itself again.

It is significant that democratization began at the behest of the government itself. Rho Tae Woo made enormous concessions in his Eight Point Declaration because he had to, but in doing so, he made sure that those in power would have a role in shaping how democratization would evolve. The nationwide crisis subsided rather quickly after his June 29 declaration. The concessions to introduce direct elections, a new press law, local autonomy, etc. satisfied the basic demands of the relatively conservative urban middle class that had tipped the balance in favor of popular reform. The more radical demands of students and labor leaders were relegated to the background. Negotiation between elites, of both the government and opposition parties, ensued over procedural issues for instituting direct elections and the restructuring of the Yushin constitution. Quickly the spotlight was directed toward a constitutional referendum and the promise of an open, direct election of a new president in the fall of 1987.

But what of the demands for the freedom to organize labor, the institution of distributive justice, the elimination of the National Security Law, and the creation

of a social welfare system that had also been a part of the protest agenda since the 1960s? How the new constitution and electoral procedures would serve the process of broader reform was still a question as the election of 1987 drew near. Procedural democracy does not necessarily mean that the goals of social justice will always be served. If the legal transfer of power through free and fair elections is democracy, then South Korea had democratized. But if democracy means a true sharing of power between all major constituencies in society, then South Korea was still in the process of democratizing. In the years remaining before the new century, the political process in South Korea matured. Society became much freer and political debate more open, but the drive to create a truly inclusive politics remained a work in progress. Over the next three administrations, those of Rho Tae Woo (1988–1993), Kim Young Sam (1993–1998), and Kim Dae Jung (1998–2003), the struggle to create a truly representative democracy continued to evolve.

The struggle played out in a Korean society vastly transformed by thirty years of economic growth, massive urbanization, and new global influences. While conservative anti-Communist sentiment continued to resonate, new ideas—and new cultural influences in particular—also moved to center stage. In addition, a new debate emerged in the 1990s as a consequence of the rapid creation of wealth in South Korean society. How had successful economic development altered the lifestyles, but more importantly, the values of the average Korean? This question was compounded by the effects of South Korea's complete insertion into global economic and cultural flows over the last thirty years. Indeed, globalization, the "World to Korea, Korea to the World," as one government slogan expressed it, stimulated more questions about South Koreans' social and cultural identity.[1]

The Elections of 1987 and the Formation of the Sixth Republic

Following his now-famous Eight Point Declaration, Rho Tae Woo seized the initiative in the negotiations over a new constitution. Since he had given in to the main demands of the opposition, Rho instantly gained some legitimacy as a candidate. He also restored Kim Dae Jung's civil rights, thus liberating Kim for a run at the presidency.[2] These moves began the process of isolating the students and more radical elements of the opposition from mainstream politics. Rho then entered into negotiations with representatives from the main opposition parties over the shape of the new constitution. One issue was the length of the presidential term: the government proposed a six-year single term and the opposition favored a four-year single term. Compromise produced a five-year single term. The government made another major concession by agreeing to drop the power of the president to dissolve the National Assembly. More wrangling fixed the voting age at twenty, not the eighteen years of age favored by the opposition in order to create more student voters. The new constitution was ratified by the National Assembly and then approved by 93 percent of the electorate in a national referendum in October 1987.

For the first time in decades the way was clear for the opposition to gain the presidency in the fall elections. While Rho had salvaged some legitimacy for the ruling Democratic Justice Party, his party faced an uphill battled against an invigorated opposition. But the two major opposition leaders, Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, were unable to agree on one single candidate whom both could support, and each entered the election as head of a separate party, so the election boiled down to a three-way race between Rho's Democratic Justice Party, Kim Dae Jung's Party for Peace and Democracy, and Kim Young Sam's Reunification Democratic Party. The public was sorely disappointed that the opposition had failed to settle on a single candidate, and indeed, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung split 55 percent of the total vote, which allowed Rho to win the presidency with a bare plurality of 37 percent.

The election highlighted the joining of regional loyalties to the national electoral process. Regionalism in Korea had simmered in the postwar era. Over the decades of authoritarian rule, beginning with Park Chung Hee, the lion's share of government investment in development had fallen along the Seoul-Pusan corridor. The government had favored its leaders' home districts in the southeast Kyŏngsang provinces, with major development projects such as the Pohang Steel Complex, oil refineries, and the largest free export zone in Masan. The communications infrastructure (double tracking the railroads, the first superhighway, port development, and so forth) was first upgraded along the Seoul, Taegu, Pusan corridor. Of equal importance was the fact that people from the Cholla provinces in the southwest, also known as Honam, were systematically excluded from government leadership positions. Over time, people in the poorer, predominately agricultural Honam region felt progressively discriminated against. In addition, they had long felt a strong personal bond with Kim Dae Jung, a native of the South Cholla port city of Mokp'o, and his political prominence in the opposition provided them a spokesperson. Attacks on Kim were perceived as attacks on them. Then, after the Kwangju massacre, general discrimination transformed into active repression. The government blamed the Kwangju uprising on Communist instigation, thus by implication smearing Honam people as "sympathizers."

Regionalism emerged as an important factor in the open electoral politics of the Sixth Republic after 1987. Voting patterns in the three-way race for the presidency neatly coincided with each candidate's home district. Kim Dae Jung swept the vote in Honam, Kim Young Sam carried his home area around Pusan, and Rho Tae Woo's voters came from the Kyŏngsang region. Another factor crucial to the emergence of such strong regional identifications was that postwar South Korea lacked a history of issue-based politics. The range of acceptable ideological difference tolerated in its political culture had been extremely narrow, a product of the national division, the Korean War, and the emergence of anti-Communism

as the one preoccupying concern. Moreover, the pattern of controls concentrated in the presidency personalized authority around the president and his handpicked leadership. The opposition parties represented simply opposition, not an array of different ideologies, policies, or ideas for reform; they were not linked to a social base or any interest group such as labor. Machinations within the elite leadership in the parties determined who would lead. And the opposition's only stance was a desire to gain power, while the party in power was motivated only to maintain their hold on power. There was little or no accountability to public opinion (Choi, *Democracy,* 2005). Thus it was not surprising that at the start of the new era of open electoral politics, the process continued to be highly personalized and regional affiliation played a major role.

As Rho Tae Woo's administration moved into its second year, however, it was clear that politics in South Korea had changed. The opposition parties did considerably better in the 1988 National Assembly elections. In a stunning turnaround, the DJP won only 87 of the 224 constituencies, the rest being divided up among three opposition parties and a few independents. Since the National Assembly had gained power in the new constitution, the government party had tremendous difficulties with only 87 seats. Any policy initiatives required coalition-building with the opposition parties, who were not particularly willing to cooperate, because each was waiting for the next presidential campaign. The political process stalemated for the next several years, but within the government there were important developments.

The Rho administration did not have a strong mandate for reform, but it was able to initiate change through executive fiat. In spite of being closely associated with the military clique of the Fifth Republic, Rho began the process of returning the Korean military to the barracks, although a full purge of the military clique of the Fifth Republic would come later. During the summer of 1987 controls over labor organization were removed, and this led to a burgeoning of labor unionization and labor actions. Between June 1987 and June 1988 some 3,400 labor disputes, strikes, or lockouts occurred, the vast majority of which were over wage disputes (Ogle, 1990). In the next years most such disputes led to long-delayed increases in wages, often averaging 25 percent or more. While working conditions continued to be problematic, and Korean laborers still worked perhaps the longest average hours per week in the industrialized world, the rapid increase in wages, so long delayed, was welcome. That the government stepped back and let this occur was very significant, and did much to mollify labor's discontent. It also decoupled labor from the more radical opposition forces.

As the 1990 National Assembly elections approached, Rho Tae Woo was searching for a way to break the deadlock between the executive and the highly fractious legislature. For his part, Kim Young Sam was attempting to consolidate support for the next presidential election in 1992. Their meeting of minds produced the stunning creation of a grand coalition party in which Rho's DJP merged with Kim Young Sam's RDP and the smaller National Democratic Republican Party of Kim Jong Pil to form a new majority party called the Democratic Liberal Party.[3] This was a hugely cynical move on the part of Kim Young Sam, who had long been associated with opposition politics. In effect Rho, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Jong Pil had created a party very similar to the long-ruling government party in Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).[4] This marriage of convenience had been made behind closed doors and represented the personal ambitions of major political figures, not important reform issues. The bargain created a viable government party and at the same time provided for a controlled transfer of power in the next election. Kim Young Sam took his chance, seeing that there was no other sufficiently powerful politician in line for the government party presidential nomination. Regaining control of the legislature after the 1990 elections emboldened Rho to be less tolerant toward the opposition, and political arrests increased during 1989 and 1990. Rho also responded to the business lobby by cracking down on labor union activity, asserting that further rises in labor costs would end Korea's comparative advantage in global trade.

Settling Accounts: The Kim Young Sam Presidency

Kim Young Sam's gamble paid off. He won the 1992 presidential election, defeating his old rival Kim Dae Jung with 41.4 percent of the national vote and becoming the first civilian president to occupy the post since 1963.[5] Significant as well was the fact that although he had been in opposition for his entire career, he was now head of the government party. And in spite of his calculated opportunism, the public was optimistic at the beginning of his term; he enjoyed a 92 percent approval rating in polls taken in early 1993. Given this strong mandate, expectations ran high that significant reforms would be possible and a new era of politics had begun in South Korea.

Kim's presidency began with several major and very popular decisions. He removed the last of the so-called TK faction (Taegu-Kyŏngsang group) from the sensitive positions they had dominated during the Chun and Rho years.[6] He also made a number of popular appointments of intellectuals and prominent dissidents in his administration, some of whom were important figures from the Honam region. He restructured the dreaded KCIA in order to reduce domestic surveillance and make it accountable to the public. Expanding on Rho Tae Woo's limited amnesty, Kim restored the civil rights of thousands of dissidents. And in a surprise move, he pushed through a Real Name Law that made it illegal to hold bank accounts and property in fictitious names. The use of fabricated names for such purposes was customary and widespread, and it made hiding income to avoid taxes or any government scrutiny very easy. The law declared that after a short grace period, all accounts had to be declared under a legal name. Many accounts were abandoned; politicians and government bureaucrats were particu-

larly threatened, for it became more difficult to hide bribes and slush funds. This law was part of a general anticorruption and clean-government campaign undertaken by the Kim Young Sam administration. In the first year of his administration dozens of high-ranking bureaucrats, including military officers, were indicted and punished for unethical and illegal activities.

Kim came to power as the Korean economy was in the throes of readjustment. The heady years of 8 to 10 percent increases in GDP were long gone, and the government came under pressure from competing economic interests. Big business lobbied for more labor controls because they were worried that foreign investors would leave Korea for cheaper labor markets in Southeast Asia or Indonesia. The public wanted the administration to create a social welfare safety net and address the long-term effects of the last twenty-five years of economic expansion, particularly the dismal state of environmental quality in South Korea. The pension system begun in 1988 was scheduled for full implementation by the end of 1996, and Kim's administration added a new program of unemployment insurance in 1995. Nevertheless, environmental improvement and social welfare remained seriously underfunded.

Before he was halfway through his term, Kim Young Sam's administration was bedeviled by a number of problems. Many of his early reforms and announced intentions failed to be translated into concrete form either in new institutions or programs. Critics charged the administration with excessive favoritism in appointments and an "imperial" style of unilateral action and lack of consultation. By 1995 the anticorruption campaign had unearthed a number of irregularities within campaign finances, notably the existence of huge slush funds amassed by Rho Tae Woo during his administration.[7] The campaign implicated other politicians as well, notably Kim Dae Jung, who admitted to accepting, ironically, some two billion won ($2.5 million) from Rho Tae Woo in the 1992 elections. During Rho's trial for corruption, the president was dogged by rumors that he himself would ultimately be implicated in the widening scandal. And in 1996, Chang Hak Ro, one of Kim Young Sam's top aides, was indeed arrested and charged with collecting millions of dollars in bribes from Korean businessmen.

Late in 1995 the Kim administration reopened the lingering wound of Kwangju by passing special legislation to punish members of the military coup responsible for the carnage. Within a month of this move, Kim had former presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Rho Tae Woo arrested to stand trial for their roles in the military coup as well as their responsibility for Kwangju. In March 1996 the nation watched with mouths agape as the joint trial of the two former presidents opened. Their bribery and malfeasance had been handled in separate trials, but both men were now in the dock to be tried for mutiny and sedition. On August 26 the court sentenced Chun to death (later commuted to life imprisonment) and Rho to twenty-two-and-a-half years in prison for mutiny, treason, and corruption in office.[8] The spectacular trials in some sense resolved public outrage at the worst excesses of the authoritarian state. In no small way they also signaled a strengthening of the judiciary and the concept of the rule of law in South Korea.

The trials of the former presidents did not, however, deflect public dissatisfaction with Kim Young Sam's administration. By 1997 his approval rating had sunk to a dismal 4 percent, which in large part reflected unhappiness with the legislative deadlock, the scandals continuing to swirl around the Blue House, and persistent signs of an economic slowdown. The public and Kim's political opposition had been outraged by the tactics he used to ram through a controversial labor law in late 1996. In addition, several of Kim's closest aides were implicated by revelations of corruption and bribery that surfaced in the wake of the sudden collapse of the Hanbo Steel Company, a subsidiary of one of the largest *chaebŏl.* Making matters worse, it was revealed that Kim's son, Kim Hyun Chul, had solicited illegal political funds from Hanbo. Kim's personal reputation was now destroyed, and he progressively lost control over his own party, renamed in 1995 the Korea National Party, as its leaders struggled to secure the nomination as candidate in the 1997 elections. With Kim's administration in such widespread disrepute, the stage was set for a wide-open election in 1997, and interest was especially high because Kim Dae Jung had returned to politics after a brief retirement between 1992 and 1995.

The Asian Financial Crisis and the Election of 1997

A far more serious crisis than partisan politics loomed in the economic arena, as South Korea fell into a severe recession following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. This crisis erupted in mid-1997 with a speculative attack on the Thai baht that led to sharp declines in currencies, stock markets, and other asset prices in a number of Asian countries. When the crisis spread to South Korea, the world's eleventh largest economy, the possibility of Korea defaulting on its huge international debt obligations raised a potential threat to the international monetary system. For South Korea, the economic downturn and the massive layoffs that followed was a trauma of the first order.[9] It came at a high point of Korean confidence and financial expansiveness and was a sober reminder of the fragility of economic and social well-being in South Korea. Throughout the summer and fall, cascading loan defaults exposed the financial weakness of many overleveraged Korean companies. The government was slow to respond to the crisis, and labor remained inflexible, unwilling to lose any of its hard-won gains. Interest rates rose precipitously as everyone scrambled for hard currency. At their highest point, 30 percent, interest rates caused massive bankruptcies as they exacerbated companies' debt-service burdens. In 1998 some 20,000 firms went bankrupt. The Korean won *(wŏn)* devalued, reaching an all-time low of 1,640 won to the dollar in January 1998. Unemployment soared to almost 9 percent in December of that year. And Korea's growth rate, a public obsession for decades, slid to a negative 5.8 percent in 1998 (Doowon Lee, "South Korea's Financial Crisis," 2000).

The Korean government was forced to go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout. One editorial termed the day these negotiations became public a "day of national humiliation" and a "loss of economic sovereignty," and the press lamented that Korea had come into a new era of "IMF trusteeship" (Byung-Kook Kim, 2000). This sense of national humiliation was particularly understandable given South Korea's passionate nationalism and colonial history. Moreover, the $57 billion rescue package came at the price of mandatory reforms. It dictated changes in government economic policy, reform of banking and accounting practices, and the restructuring of industry—a clear intrusion by international economic interests in Korea's affairs. Hurt nationalist sensibilities notwithstanding, the real pain was felt by the tens of thousands of middle-class managers and office workers who would lose their jobs in the subsequent bankruptcies and downsizing of many of Korea's largest corporations. An even greater disaster lay in store for as many as a million laid-off or fired workers in the dark years of 1998 and 1999.

The Asian Economic Crisis came in an election year. By the fall of 1997 the full extent of the crisis was manifest, and with the government party in disarray, the election seemed wide open. Once again it was a three-way race. Lee Hoi-Chang ran as candidate of what was left of the ruling party. Under the banner of the New Party for the People, a newcomer to national politics and former governor of Kyŏnggi province, Rhee In Je, promised to sweep away the old generation of leaders. A reinvigorated Kim Dae Jung ran by forming a new party, the National Congress for New Politics, in coalition with his old arch nemesis, Kim Jong Pil.[10] The expectation that Lee Hoi-Chang would carry the election with Kim and Rhee splitting an opposition vote was dashed by revelations that Lee's two sons had evaded military service by falsifying their health records. This devastating smear on Lee's integrity caused his ratings to nosedive. Similar attempts to besmirch Kim Dae Jung's by pointing to his record of creating political slush funds surprisingly had no effect on his public standing. Kim Dae Jung eked out a narrow victory in the December 18 elections, garnering 39.7 percent of the national vote to Lee Hoi-Chang's 38.2 percent and Rhee In Je's 18.9 percent, respectively.

Kim Dae Jung's victory and the establishment of his administration in 1998 marked the first peaceful transfer of power between government and opposition parties in the postwar history of South Korea. This momentous event, however, was overshadowed by the economic crisis and concern about Kim's abilities to manage the government, particularly the task of implementing the major reforms contained in the IMF bailout agreement. This would be no mean task because the reform package demanded the restructuring (downsizing) of the major economic engine of the Korean economy, the politically powerful *chaebŏl.* It also required major concessions on the part of labor because layoffs were necessary for the *chaebŏl* to reduce excess capacity and shed losing business ventures. Layoffs were also a precondition of the financial reform, namely, the acquisition and recapitalization of insolvent banks by foreign interests who would only do so if they

could shed excess employees. Kim established a Tripartite Committee, a presidential advisory group that was charged with creating a plan to mediate the crisis. Ultimately a package deal emerged. It required "concessions on job security from labor federations in return for reform of the corporate-governance structure by the *chaebŏl,* strengthening of labor unions' political rights, and welfare programs for discharged workers" (Byung-Kook Kim, 2000, p. 40). This entire drama emanated an aura of unreality. The plan called for Kim Dae Jung, long known for his populist politics, to oversee what was in essence a neoliberal downsizing that would ask much from the long-suffering Korean laboring masses. Yet the grand compromise settled most of the outstanding policy issues. Employers would be able to lay off workers, labor unions could engage in political activities, the *chaebŏl* would have to reform reckless financial practices, and banks would hold businesses to higher standards of performance and financial probity. While not all of the new policies were implemented, the package outlined a route out of the crisis and started a process that would place the Korean economy on a sounder footing by the first years of the new millennium.

The IMF crisis was more than a financial threat to the stability of international financial markets or the bottom line of Korean corporate or state balance sheets. The massive layoffs, income reduction, and asset depreciation that attended the economic disruption created a profound "social crisis" in South Korea. The financial crisis disrupted the lives of millions of Koreans. While an unemployment rate of 8 percent may not be considered unusual in the United States during a recession, this rate meant two million Koreans were out of work in a society accustomed to full employment and decades of economic expansion. The crisis not only meant privation, even disaster, for hundreds of thousands of working-class families, it also actually shrank what had been a burgeoning middle class.[11] One survey taken during the crisis estimated the overall income reduction in Korea at 20 percent, with about 90 percent of the population experiencing some level of reduction. The Korean Development Corporation estimated that the number of households under the poverty line ($500 per month) rose to 12 percent of total households.[12] Of course the economic shocks were not felt evenly throughout the population; the poorest households suffered the worst (Gi-Wook Shin and Chang, 2000).

The social crisis shocked the South Korean population psychologically. Few were prepared for the crisis, and many had never experienced such dislocation. Unemployed men were cut from their social networks at work, and the social and economic hardships strained the basic social institution in Korea, the family. The divorce rate increased 34 percent at the height of the crisis in 1998. The family, however, remained the core resource for coping. The crisis necessarily stimulated an expansion of government programs to improve the nascent social safety net put in place but not fully implemented in the early 1990s. But in the end, the extended family provided the major source of aid for relatives affected by the layoffs. Families provided the "sharing of housing, guarantees for loans, cash lending,

day care, role switching" that sustained members in distress (Gi-Wook Shin and Chang, 2000, p. 85). Looking back over the turbulent postwar period, it had always been this way. Perhaps the key to the resilience of Korean society itself has always been the strength, cohesiveness, and adaptability of the family unit no matter how assaulted by the enormous forces of change that have swept through South Korea over the last half century.

A Transformed Society: Korea in the 1990s

By 1990 fully 75 percent of the South Korean population lived in cities of more than 50,000, completely reversing the demographic profile of 1960, when the country was still 75 percent rural. And the megalopolis of Seoul, South Korea's capital, dominated this urban culture, for more than a quarter of the entire population lived within its environs.[13] Urbanization had developed hand in hand with the expansion of the middle class, which, in terms of income, measured over 50 percent of the population by the late 1990s; in terms of perception, surveys reported that over 80 percent of the population thought of themselves as belonging to the middle class.

By the 1990s education through the equivalent of high school was universal, and higher education had expanded to satisfy an enormous demand for college degrees, even postgraduate training. South Korea's education system created a virtually universally literate population, and many point to this fact when considering the productivity, adaptability, and drive of the Korean workforce. Society is awash in publications. South Korea's publication rates per capita rival Japan's and greatly exceed those of the United States, an older and more affluent democracy. Moreover, South Korea's rise as a middle-class, urban society coincided with the communication revolution of the late twentieth century. Around the time of the IMF crisis, South Korea was well on its way to becoming one of the most "wired" societies in the modern world (see Epilogue).

Urbanization, rising wealth, changing consumption patterns, increased literacy—all hallmarks of modernization—have altered behavior and values in Korea. Throughout the postwar period there have been periodic public debates over how traditional values and culture have been stressed, altered, or obliterated by the aggregate changes brought about by this great transformation. The more conservative elements in society have decried the breakdown of traditional familial roles and the movement of women into the workplace. Indeed, women have gained rights long denied them within patriarchal family law. Throughout the postwar period the fight over the legal constitution of the family acted as a metaphor for the larger debate over traditional values and identity in Korea. In the 1950s family law was codified to reassert the ideal of the Confucian traditional family that colonial policies were believed to have altered. But by the 1970s there was increasing pressure to make family law conform to more modern ideas about the position of

women in society. Spurred by the rise of an organized women's movement as well as the political opening in 1987, a breakthrough occurred with the third revision in the family law in 1989. This revision abolished articles that discriminated against women in the areas of inheritance and custody rights but upheld the patriarchal idea of the man (husband or sons) as legal head of the family. In the 1990s women challenged the provision in the law that banned marriage between individuals with the same surname, but the courts ruled against them. More rights within the family and marriage have coincided with a rise in the number of divorces, a statistic often lamented and blamed on women's liberation by conservative forces within Korea. But the fact remains that while it has taken a long time, women were moving aggressively to gain gender equality in society and to remove patriarchal constraints from their lives (Ki-Young Shin, 2006).[14]

In the 1980s Korea had evolved from a developing to developed economy. Along the way the country had been physically transformed by decades of construction projects, both public and private: new superhighways, gleaming skyscrapers, endless rows of apartment blocks, a massive underground for the capital of Seoul, and new stadiums and parks for the 1988 Olympics and later the 2002 World Cup. A cornucopia of consumer products unimaginable to the prior generation were available. Perhaps no better index measures how economic change spurred changes in behavior than the rise of the automobile as an integral part of Korean life. By the 1990s the automobile had gone from being a luxury scarcely obtainable by the upper middle class to household necessity for the entire middle class. The availability of automobiles and their affordability was made possible by the general shift in the economy in the 1980s from a reliance on exports as the engine of growth to a greater emphasis on the power of the domestic market. Indeed, the combination of overcapacity and falling sales of automobiles abroad caused the automobile manufacturers—Hyundai, Kia, and Daewoo—to market their cars at home. There a tremendous latent demand coupled with enough disposable income created an explosion of automobile ownership that accelerated through the 1980s and continued into the 1990s.[15] The numbers of cars on the streets of Seoul and other major cities soon overwhelmed the roadways, and as a consequence enormous amounts of public funds have been spent on new roads, highways, bridges, and tunnels. When planners laid out the vast new area of Seoul south of the Han River called Kangnam, much of which developed only after 1970, planners clearly had automobiles in mind when they built broad avenues and laid the endless rows of apartment blocks on a coherent grid.[16] Building codes required one parking space per apartment, yet by the 1990s cars were spilling onto the streets. having long since overwhelmed available parking capacity.

It became socially significant whether one drove a Hyundai Grandeur at the top end or a Kia Pride at the bottom end of the brand hierarchy; and as time went on many gradations developed in between. Car ownership mirrored social status and respect for age—a younger middle-class individual did not want to buy above

a socioeconomic equal of more advanced age, for instance (Nelson, 2000, p. 100). Korea had become a consumer society, and their new habits contradicted traditional values of restraint as well as thirty years of government exhortations to save, be frugal, and work hard for the national cause of development.

Government-directed economic development in the 1960s and 1970s had relied heavily on exhortations for public discipline and frugality. Such behavior had become an expression of national patriotism. The values of hard work, frugality, and deferred gratification also resonated with traditional Confucian values that were strongly imbedded in the public mind. Yet in the early 1980s, when import barriers to what had been classified as unnecessary luxuries were removed, the new middle class (per capita income reached $10,000 in 1995) went on a spending spree. Almost immediately, however, the new consumption was criticized as self-indulgent, unpatriotic, even threatening to Korea's fragile economic success.

In the early 1990s this challenge took the form of a debate over "excessive consumption" *(kwasobi)*. Editorials decried as an abomination the competition among the wealthy to put on the most extravagant weddings, complete with fabulous gift-giving (Kendall, 1996). Other critics focused on the obscene amounts of money spent in the salons and nightclubs of Kangnam or lamented the waste and self-indulgence exhibited within the youth culture. Did young people not understand that the present good times were built upon the hard work and sacrifice of a previous generation? Worse yet, were they completely ignorant of the horrible deprivations suffered by their parents and grandparents during the Korean War and its aftermath? *Kwasobi* critics expressed what was a widespread ambivalence about the meaning of wealth and just what might constitute "proper" or "appropriate" consumption. Just as college students of the 1980s had looked to the rural countryside and *minjung* culture for inspiration in developing a new national identity, intellectuals and critics of the new consumerism were reflecting on how the new materiality was affecting core traditional values. What was the relationship between wealth and social status? Did consumer greed signal a loss of communitarian values? And would Korea lose sight of its past values in favor of the untrammeled pursuit of personal pleasure(Nelson, 2000; Lett, 1998)?

Approaching the Twenty-first Century and the North-South Summit

Another issue that consumed public attention in the 1990s was a problem that had in many ways defined life in the South since 1948—North Korea. During his election campaign in 1997, Kim Dae Jung signaled his interest in pushing forward with reconciliation with the North, and his opposition attempted to play Kim's long-standing commitment to dialog with the North against him. But Kim's victory demonstrated that the playing the national-security or North-Korean-sympathizer card was no longer completely effective in Korean politics. Indeed, since

the end of the Cold War, overall South Korean policy toward the North had shifted decisively toward engagement.

The roots of the new policy can be traced to the Rho Tae Woo administration, when its policy of *nord politik* sought a general engagement with the nations of the former Soviet Bloc. Rho established diplomatic ties with both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in the early 1990s, and this had placed considerable pressure on North Korea. Rho also engaged North Korea in direct dialog, and, after a series of preliminary negotiations, the North and South announced a Basic Agreement in 1991.[17] It affirmed the principles of nonaggression and reconciliation and created exchanges, both cultural and economic, between the two Koreas. This was the most important state-to-state meeting between the two Koreas since the South-North Communiqué of 1972 that had established the first "hot line" between the countries. The Basic Agreement also contained the North's first formal recognition of the South Korean state. Implementation of the Basic Agreement stalled, however, after the outbreak of a crisis over the North Korean nuclear program in 1992, and the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 also created a major diversion.

The North Korean famine provided a new chance for inter-Korean cooperation with South Korean offers of food relief in 1995. While the Kim Young Sam administration was criticized for its poor handling of Kim Il Sung's death and a general inattention to the North Korean issue, it did negotiate the shipment of 150,000 tons of food aid to the North. The famine also changed the way that many in the South viewed the North. By the time of Kim Dae Jung's election, North Korea was no longer the automatic "Other" in South Korean political discourse. It now played alternately as the main enemy or the dialog partner, a military threat or a desperate, isolated failure (Snyder, 2002). North Korea was now an issue about which various political stances could be openly expressed. Politicians could speak of positive engagement with the North and not automatically be labeled an enemy of the state or a Communist sympathizer.[18] Conservatives still feared rapprochement and engagement as a danger to security, and they generally believed that any economic relief simply rewarded bad behavior on the part of the North. But moderates like Kim Dae Jung insisted that engagement with and even economic assistance to the North could be a "win-win" proposition, bringing the North out of its shell, providing humanitarian assistance, and generally reducing tensions and thereby strengthening national security.

Kim Dae Jung announced his intention to reinvigorate dialog with North Korea at his inauguration. The Sunshine Policy was based on a concept of open-ended engagement with the North. It set no formulas for reunification, declaring that issue to be one for future generations to decide. Nonaggression, exchange, and cooperation were the fundamental tenets of the policy, and Kim made the initiative a priority. In April 1998 he opened state-to-state talks with the North, the first since the 1991 General Agreement. Kim was limited in what he could offer the North officially, and the talks foundered, but a private overture by Chung Ju-Yung, chair-

man of the Hyundai Corporation, produced an agreement that allowed Hyundai to established tourist visits to the Kumgang mountains on the eastern coast of North Korea in return for yearly payments of foreign exchange to the North. While the tours were highly controlled and there was no people-to-people interaction, the program was an unprecedented joint venture. Hyundai paid the North $330 million between 1998 and 2001, but could not sustain what was a money-losing project. The program demonstrated that the North Koreans would respond to financial incentives, but it also stimulated considerable controversy in the South over what was "appeasement" and what was "true" cooperation in such dealings.

The Sunshine Policy faced another test during the West Sea crisis in the summer of 1999. This crisis originated from North Korea incursions below the Northern Limit Line, a line never recognized by the North, that extends the DMZ into the West (Yellow) Sea off South Korea's northwestern coast. The North Korean navy began escorting their crab fishing fleet south of the line, and after several weeks of incursions and growing tension engaged in a significant firefight with the South Korean navy, in which the technologically superior South Korean ships defeated the aging Northern escorts. This was the most significant military confrontation between the two sides since the 1970s. Kim Dae Jung's willingness to respond to military provocation strengthened support for his Sunshine Policy, which had been vulnerable, as he had been, to charges of being weak on security issues (Olsen, 2002).

On April 10, 2000, three days prior to the National Assembly elections, Kim Dae Jung announced that he would visit P'yongyang for face-to-face meetings with Kim Jong Il. As the first-ever meeting between the heads of state of North and South Korea, the announcement created a sensation. Opposition politicians charged Kim with timing the announcement in order to affect the elections, and everyone wondered just how such an unprecedented summit meeting might unfold. In fact, Kim's announcement did not provide a positive bump for his party: the Millennium Democratic Party did poorly, and the main opposition party, the Grand National Party, fell only a few seats short of a majority in the Assembly. This augured poorly for Kim Dae Jung's legislative program in his final years as president, but for the next months all attention in the South focused on the meeting scheduled for that summer.

On June 13, 2000, when Kim Dae Jung arrived in P'yongyang, he was unexpectedly greeted at the airport by Kim Jong Il and immediately taken on a joint inspection of assembled troops from the Korean People's Army in parade dress. Before the summit South Koreans had speculated how the reclusive Kim Jong Il would behave; after all, South Koreans had been regaled with stories of his dissipation, depravity, and villainy for decades. But Kim Jong Il acted the gracious host. The live video coverage created a sensation in the South, as it showed Kim Jong Il's courteous and traditionally deferential treatment of the elder Kim Dae Jung. On the ride into the city from the airport, Kim Jong Il insisted that the southern

president take the "power seat," and his self-deprecating jokes bespoke of a gracious, accomplished statesman. Years of vilification of the North Korean leader as a dangerous and mercurial tyrant were erased in the first hours of the summit. And Kim Dae Jung reciprocated the warmth, creating a remarkable set of images of how reconciliation could sweep away decades of enmity and bitterness. Certainly, this unexpected display by both leaders raised an entirely new prospect in the minds of people in the South.

While the imagery and symbolism of the summit was perhaps its most important achievement, it also produced a Joint Declaration on areas of common agreement: it stated that the two Koreas would solve the issue of reunification independently, it recognized common elements in previously discussed reunification formulae, it resolved to settle humanitarian issues by establishing visits between separated relatives, and finally, it declared the principle of balanced development of the national economy through cooperation and exchange.[19] Of course how to implement these areas of common agreement was the real issue. But at least in the first year of the new millennium the two Koreas had met face-to-face and had seen a glimmer of what relations might become.

The summit was the high point for Kim Dae Jung's presidency, and for engineering this first North-South summit and his lifetime commitment to the cause of democracy he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000. He finished his term, however, amidst political controversy and personal embarrassment. His presidency disappointed many of his longtime supporters because he was unable to act substantially on many of his reform ideas. And during his last year in office he was hobbled by scandals that involved his sons' business dealings and influence-peddling. The habits of corruption within the top circle of power in South Korean politics remained seemingly intractable. And public disaffection with the political system remained high. But as with the Kim Young Sam regime, political gridlock and public anger with the process might also be seen as a symptom of the democratization process. Authoritarian regimes may have been more efficient, but they suppressed all voices of dissent. The more open politics after 1987 brought a certain amount of procedural democracy, but the process had yet to give expression to all voices in Korean society. Nevertheless, the army remained in the barracks, and the way was still open for a continuing evolution of Korean democracy. Already alternative voices are being heard from the thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) working in all arenas of public life. The political parties may lack a social base, but NGOs—both great and small—have appeared either to lobby the government on issues or to solve independently the myriad problems of social welfare, gender equality, environmental quality, corruption, transparency in government, distributive justice, labor reform, and all the other problems any complex, modern society faces.