



Beyond Continuity: *The Defiance of Ordinary Citizens and the 2016 Candlelight Protests in South Korea*

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Abstract

In explaining the 2016 candlelight protests that removed Park Geun-hye from the presidency, many commentators in South Korea have emphasized the historical continuity of this event with previous candlelight protests that had different goals and contexts. Commentators have highlighted the uninterrupted commitment of active citizens to democratic progress and claimed that these citizens played the determining role throughout all of the candlelight protests. In addition to this view, this paper argues that there is an important discontinuity in the 2016 protests: ordinary citizens defied the Park government when the government undermined their livelihoods, and this defiance constituted the uniqueness of the 2016 candlelight protests. Specifically, by comparing the life cycle of the 2016 protests with that of the 2008 protests, this paper reveals that ordinary citizens influenced the process of the 2016 event by (1) initiating the preceding small protests, (2) continuously mobilizing livelihood issues and thus delaying the professionalization of the protests, and (3) de-radicalizing the movement. Therefore, the 2016 candlelight protests must be interpreted not only as the culmination of Korea's decades-long democratic movement but also as a successful struggle of precarious people against the growing neoliberal threats to their livelihoods.

Keywords: 2016 candlelight protests, ordinary citizens, defiance, Korean democracy, neoliberalism, discontinuity

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Introduction

Before the 2016 candlelight protests that removed the corrupt President Park Geun-hye from the presidency, South Korea (hereafter, Korea) underwent two other large-scale candlelight protests with different goals and contexts (Jiyeon Kang 2016). The first case erupted in 2002 when people gathered at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul to protest the accidental killing of two Korean girls by a US military vehicle. The protesters reproduced the feelings of injustice over US hegemony and the lingering Cold War legacies on the Korean Peninsula (Jiyeon Kang 2009). The candlelight vigils became a more powerful weapon in 2008 when the government decided to resume importing US beef. Citizens expressed concerns about mad cow disease, but went further and blamed the government for its lack of democratic accountability (Jiyeon Kang 2017).

Despite the different goals and contexts, scholars have emphasized that active citizens have long been committed to the progress of Korean democracy and that these citizens have shaped the historical continuity of these candlelight protests. Cheon (2017) highlighted candlelight vigils *per se* as a peaceful but powerful repertoire that active citizens have gradually developed. Analyzing the first two candlelight protests, more convincingly, Jiyeon Kang (2016) explained that the “post-authoritarian youth,” those who do not share the Cold War sentiment or authoritarian experiences with the former generation but have developed their democratic sensibilities in online spaces, have been key players in all the protests. Meanwhile, Sohn (2017) paid attention to the growing organizational and strategic capacities of active citizens. Progressive social activists, union activists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) politicized socioeconomic issues, including job insecurity, youth unemployment, and inequality, and mobilized these issues to challenge the legitimacy of the government.

In the same line of reasoning, the 2016 candlelight protests were portrayed as the culmination of active citizens’ struggle for democracy. Participation and protests of active citizens “did not slow down with South Korea’s transition to democracy” but “became the new normal as democratic

space expanded.”¹ Likewise, at the 30th anniversary event of the 1987 June Uprising on June 10, 2017, President Moon Jae-in declared that the 2016 candlelight protests were not a single event but a completion of the goals that the 1987 June Uprising had left unrealized. Moon stated, “Our heroic citizens did not stop at achieving direct presidential elections in 1987 but have continuously struggled for freedom of speech, the creation of voluntary civil associations, and the expansion of democratic space within our society.”²

This paper aims to critically examine whether continuity is a single proper framework for understanding the nature of the 2016 candlelight protests. For this purpose, it compares the 2008 and 2016 protests, both of which occurred under the conservative rule of President Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) and President Park, respectively. First, based on the data and literature, this paper defines the quality of Korean democracy as state domination over society, and deduces three possible types of citizens who are dissatisfied with Korea’s democratic regime. The first is proactive citizens who criticize the state’s domination with a partisan purpose. The second is critical citizens who accept this domination but express their anger when the government performs very poorly. These two types of citizens belong to the category of active citizens, and their prominent role both in the 2008 and 2016 events proves the continuity between the two events. Lastly, some ordinary citizens usually remain politically silent due to the urgency of daily livelihoods and sustenance but occasionally defy power-holders under certain conditions. If ordinary citizens played a more prominent role in 2016 than in 2008, one needs to investigate seriously not only the continuity that active citizens shaped but the discontinuity emerging among ordinary citizens.

This paper uncovers that while the prominence of the role of active citizens, including proactive and critical citizens, has been constant or decreased between the two years, the role of ordinary citizens became much

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1. Kim Sun-chul, “South Korea’s Candlelight Protests a Peaceful Force,” *Asia Times*, February 12, 2017.
 2. “President Moon Vows not to Let Democracy Falter Again,” *Yonhap News*, June 10, 2017, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170610001400315>.

more critical in 2016. It argues that such ordinary citizens as students, non-regular workers, and small shopkeepers defied Park's conservative rule when she undermined their livelihoods. These ordinary citizens influenced the process of the 2016 candlelight protests in three distinct ways: (1) by initiating small protests prior to the main candlelight protests, (2) by continuously mobilizing livelihood issues and thus delaying the professionalization of protests, and (3) by de-radicalizing the movement. Drawing upon this discussion, this paper offers a new interpretation of the distinct position the 2016 candlelight protests occupy in Korea's modern history of democracy: is the protests are not only the culmination of Korea's decades-long democratic movements but a successful struggle of precarious citizens against the growing neoliberal threats to their livelihoods.

This paper is organized as follows. Section II analyzes the quality of Korean democracy from a comparative perspective and proposes three types of contentious citizens. Section III demonstrates that, in comparison with the 2008 protests, the defiance of ordinary citizens was the most prominent feature of the 2016 protests. Through a comparison of the life cycles of the two candlelight protests, Section IV investigates the manner in which ordinary citizens influenced the 2016 protests. The final section proposes a new interpretation of the historical significance of the 2016 candlelight protests and offers theoretical implications for a range of scholarship.

Korean Democracy and its Discontents

An analysis of diverse forms of discontent expressed through the candlelight protests must begin with contextualizing them within the distinctive quality of Korean democracy. The democracy-in-decline school might be helpful. This school has found that Korean democracy has not followed the global trend of a democratic recession but in recent years, maintained the quality of being "free" (Diamond and Plattner 2016). The Freedom House shares the same assessment. On its seven-point scale of political rights (1 being the best score), measuring electoral processes, political pluralism, participation, and the functioning of government, from 2010 to 2013, Korea received a score of 1,

and, subsequently, from 2014 to 2017 a score of 2.³ However, there is a critical problem in this approach: it has collapsed multiple scores into single scores and therefore failed to see how different aspects of democracy have evolved independently and how the structure of national democracy has changed.

The Quality of Korean Democracy

Alternatively, this paper depends on Robert Dahl's (1973) concept of polyarchy to grasp the quality of democracy in multiple dimensions. One dimension of polyarchy is *political responsiveness*, referring to the extent to which government policies correspond to citizen's preferences. This quality is determined not only by institutional arrangements for political representation but also by party competition to make use of citizens' preferences for electoral success. The other dimension is *political equity*, defined as the capacity of civil society to mobilize political resources through collective action and to influence public policies.

This paper makes use of the scores of the relevant categories from the Democracy Barometer Database to calculate how the two dimensions of polyarchy and democracy have changed from 1995–2004 to 2005–2014. The categories “competition” (competitiveness and openness of elections) and “representation” (inclusion of societal preferences, inclusion of minorities, and direct democracy), in the Database, are combined into the dimension of responsiveness, while the categories “association” (membership in labor unions and membership in professional/humanitarian/environmental organizations) and “participation” (petitions and demonstrations) are combined into the equity dimension. Figure 1 illustrates how the ten-year average scores of these two dimensions have evolved from 1995–2004 to 2005–2014 in 48 countries, which were all surveyed by the Database. For example, over the past two decades, Canada's performance in responsiveness and equity has improved by 3.74 points and 5.03 points, respectively. This figure helps to grasp the evolving quality of Korean democracy in comparison with 47 other countries.

3. Freedom House, accessed at <https://freedomhouse.org/>.



Figure 1. The changing quality of democracy in 48 countries between 1995–2004 and 2005–2014

Source: Drawn from the Democracy Barometer Database, <http://www.democracybarometer.org/>.

Given the average scores of all 48 countries in this figure (1.80; -2.86), there has been a worsening in the quality of equity and improving quality of responsiveness in the majority of the surveyed countries. On the one hand, governments have been able to improve their responsiveness performance because democratic competition or policy contestation among political parties has made the governments respond to citizens' concerns more promptly (e.g., Pontusson and Rueda 2008). On the other, the collective capacity of civil society has weakened because state-driven neoliberal policies (e.g., labor market flexibility) have pushed people away from collective actions for common benefits and forced them to compete for jobs and resources (Gago and Mason-Deese 2017; Wacquant 2009). The

comprehensive result of these contrasting patterns must be defined as state domination over society: while citizens have gradually lost their collective capacity to fight common problems, the state has acted as if it were a single guardian for the suffering society.

Korea is a typical case of state domination over society. During the last two decades, Korea gained approximately three points in terms of responsiveness performance but lost 12 points in equity performance. Except for two post-socialist countries, Lithuania and Latvia, Korea's loss in equity performance is greater than any of the other surveyed countries. Another survey confirmed the domination of the state over society in Korea. According to the East Asia Institute (2013, 10), public authorities in Korea have enjoyed much more influence and credibility than social organizations among surveyed citizens since the mid-2000s. Furthermore, the gap between public and social organizations has consistently widened.

This finding from aggregate data is in line with the existing literature on Korean democracy, which highlights the imbalance between the state and civil society in public spheres due to the weakening and exclusion of the latter (e.g., Moberand 2018; Shin 2012). Citizens' NGO activities increased remarkably between 1995 and 2000 along with democratization, yet these activities have rapidly weakened since then. Korea is now facing the dilemma of "civil movements without citizens" (Hee-song Kim 2006). Despite the gradual increase in the number of NGOs, NGOs have had difficulty recruiting members. Many NGOs have served to consolidate the government's power because the government has co-opted individual experts from pro-government NGOs. Meanwhile, although labor movements engaged enormously in the country's democratic transition in the 1980s, the new democracy has not incorporated labor organizations as policy-making partners. The government, opposition parties, and many NGOs have distanced themselves from radical labor movements and attempted to contain laborer's activities within the workplace (H. Song 2013).

Three Types of Citizens and their Discontents

The above analysis helps to consider the three types of citizens who are dissatisfied with the prevailing imbalance between the state and civil society in Korean democracy. The first type is *proactive citizens*, who have strong partisan identification and are mobilized by political parties or associations into campaign activities (Pettersson 1978, 115; King 1969, 123–128). In Korea, proactive citizens have been directly affiliated with or influenced by progressive groups who equate the predominant power of the state with an authoritarian legacy. Particularly, they believe that the Lee and Park governments perpetuated a “statist,” “anti-democratic,” and “authoritarian” political paradigm (D. Kim 2014). Throughout the rule of these two conservative governments, proactive citizens organized political campaigns against the coercive actions of the government, such as the deaths of five protesters during forcible demolitions in the Yongsan area of Seoul, the dissolution of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP; Tonghap jinbodang), and the nationalization of history textbooks. During the 2016 candlelight protests, they supported the Headquarter for People’s Uprisings, which orchestrated the day-to-day operations of the candlelight rallies. The People’s Uprisings were composed of the Korea Teachers’ Union (KTU), Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), National Farmers’ Association (NFA), and progressive NGOs such as Lawyers for a Democratic Society (Minbyun) and People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD).

The second type is *critical citizens*, who do not have a strong partisan identification but are well informed politically and willing to act to improve the functioning of the political system through political participation (Norris 2004). Critical citizens have been found in the middle classes predominantly across industrial democracies (Von Beyme 2018, 102–103). In a pluralist form of state-society relations, middle-class citizens are likely to form interest groups, which constantly lobby the government to create favorable policies (Moe 1981). However, the middle classes are relatively weakly organized in Korea, where a reliable channel of interest intermediation remains underdeveloped. These citizens do not question the democratic legitimacy of this structure but regard it as a possible form

of liberal democracy. However, they are very sensitive to negative policy outcomes. They express their grievance through votes or petitions when the government performs very poorly. They become cynical of the government's misconduct because they are confident of their potential to realize social and economic success (Koo 2016). Particularly, the middle classes voice harsh criticism when the government fails to implement election pledges in the field of growth, public deficit, distribution, and employment (Kwon 2010).

The last type of citizens who can express discontent is *ordinary or standby* citizens, who keep themselves informed about politics but normally do not participate in manifested activities (Amnå and Ekman 2014). In Korea, the recent growth of this type of citizens is associated with the neoliberal restructuring of the economy for the following reasons. First, constant neoliberal reforms have weakened the collective capacity of civil society. Many citizens, including workers, have been forced to become politically inactive because market-oriented mechanisms have individualized people's life and deprived them of the capacity to act collectively (e.g., Burgi 2014). Second, in the face of increasing labor flexibility, poverty, and inequality (Lim and Jang 2006), ordinary citizens are under pressure to focus on livelihood and sustenance and pay little attention to the power structure of Korean democracy. Finally, the government has also consolidated the passive attitude of ordinary citizens by equating social welfare with job opportunities and pushing the responsibility for unemployment and poverty back onto individual workers (J. Song 2009).

Students were the most active political participants during the authoritarian era. However, the absolute majority of current students are now ordinary citizens.⁴ This never negates the fact that beneath this passivity, some students have developed democratic sensibilities and express anger against the government in online spaces (Jiyeon Kang 2016). However, students rarely voice complaints in offline spaces. The majority of students have focused on the development of individual careers necessary to survive

4. Jung Yong-in, "Haksaeng-undong 'ireobeorin 10 nyeon' doechajeuilkka" (Can Student Movements Recover from the Lost Decade), *Jugan Gyeonghyang* (Weekly Kyunghyang), October 27, 2009.

in an unstable economic environment and avoided political participation (B. Jung 2018; D. Lee 2008). In response to the shrinking employment demand, they have done their best to utilize universities as institutions where they can prepare themselves for the task of searching for a job. As a token for qualifying as professional candidates, students have accumulated “spec(s),” a Korean–English word that abbreviates “specification,” during their school years. Specs include not only good grades but also a high TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores, internships, and experience in foreign countries as exchange students. Some students have even delayed graduation to accumulate as many specs as possible before they leave school.⁵

Meanwhile, relatively old and less-educated people have accepted non-regular positions to resolve the urgent problem of livelihood and sustenance. According to the 2011 *OECD Economic Surveys* (OECD 2012, 123), approximately 48 percent of non-regular workers in Korea accepted their status voluntarily. More than 75 percent of involuntary non-regular workers signed contracts because they required immediate incomes. They could have been politically active because they were major victims of industrial restructuring. However, persisting market uncertainty after the 2008 financial crisis has weakened their capacity to unite themselves and made them seek pragmatic solutions to the livelihood problem. Consequently, both the unionization rate of these workers and their willingness to obtain union membership have been very low and they have been decreasing (Moon 2013). Lastly, most small shopkeepers are former wage workers who were laid off or retired early. As they have to keep working to maintain subsistence, they open small shops by making use of financial resources from their households and their unpaid family workforce (Yun 2011).

However, ordinary citizens can turn to political action in certain conditions (Amnå and Ekman 2014). During the Park government, specifically, ordinary citizens defied the government when it undermined the above livelihood (e.g., Rudrappa 2015). Students departed from their

5. Baek Cheol, “Yojeum hagsaengdeul, daehak myeonnyeonssik danilkka” (How Long It Takes for College Students to Graduate), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, February 23, 2013.

political passivity when the Park government implemented a university restructuring program. The government persuaded universities to specialize in areas that were in demand by industries. It implemented the PRIME (Program for Industrial Needs-Matched Education) project to increase the number of graduates majoring in engineering while reducing the number of graduates in liberal arts, social sciences, and the arts. Universities responded to this policy by reducing the number of students in non-engineering departments and undertaking department mergers and shutdowns. A rampant restructuring of universities resulted in the discounting of specs that students had hitherto accumulated. Students worried that if the universities shut down or downsized their departments, labor markets would stigmatize them as having unnecessary knowledge and skills. The student protests at Ewha Womans University in the summer of 2016 were the most well known response. As the university decided to establish the LIFE college bachelor's degree for those who had completed only two years of the program, students felt the relative depreciation of their specs through the university's decision to "sell" degrees at lower prices.

Non-regular workers defied the government because its labor market reforms undermined the way these workers had strenuously maintained subsistence. The government lifted the ban on labor dispatching for all manufacturing jobs. The inflow of additional labor made it difficult for current regular workers to rely on their existing income. This intensified competition among non-regular workers while giving more discretion for employers to hire them selectively. The other reform measure was to allow employers to dismiss poorly performing workers and revise workplace rules with greater ease. Unorganized, non-regular workers could be further discriminated against in terms of contract termination, and they were subject to the arbitrary power of employers.

Lastly, the majority of small shopkeepers voted for President Park in 2012. However, they withdrew support when the government worsened their business environment. An example is the long-term effect of the policy of super-low interest rates that the Park government implemented to keep the real estate market afloat (Ji-yeon Kim and J. James Kim 2014). In the short term, the low-interest rate policy helped small shopkeepers to borrow

more money to open new businesses or make up for insufficient business resources. However, growing liabilities, together with stagnant incomes, resulted in a serious financial burden on the household economy and small businesses (Hyundai Research Institute 2015). To make matters worse, when the Park government collected more taxes from small shopkeepers, it punished many small shopkeepers for tax-saving practices (Yun 2013).

Revisiting the 2016 Candlelight Protests from a Comparative Perspective

If the role of two or more of the types mentioned above of citizens proves to be prominent in both the 2008 and 2016 candlelight protests, this will support the continuity hypothesis. For example, the constant contribution of proactive and critical citizens in both protests would suggest that, as conventionally discussed now in Korea, active citizens have created a continuum between the two events. Otherwise, if the prominence of two or more types of citizens changed remarkably between the two years, this finding would undermine the continuity hypothesis. Particularly, the increasing prominence of the role of ordinary citizens, together with decreasing prominence of one or two other types of citizens, would suggest that the 2016 protests have a distinct character, which cannot be reduced to being a continuation of the 2008 protests.

The Prominence of Ordinary Citizens

An extensive survey by Lee, Lee, and Seo (2017) on protest participants in 2008 and 2016 is very useful for grasping the changing prominence of the contribution of the three types of citizens. According to this survey, first, the role of proactive citizens was less critical in 2016 than in 2008. Progressive groups in 2016 rarely mobilized demonstrators. Only three percent of demonstrators joined the rallies after being urged by political parties, NGOs, and labor groups to do so. The absolute majority of participants visited the rallying places together with families, friends, and colleagues or by themselves (Lee, Lee, and Seo 2017, 107). Furthermore, the share of

conservative citizens among protesters dramatically increased from 4.9 percent in 2008 to 17.3 percent in 2016 (Lee, Lee, and Seo 2017, 118).

Second, in terms of size, critical citizens played the most prominent role in both years. During the 2008 protests, according to another survey, middle-class citizens represented the largest share of demonstrators. They also showed a higher level of grievance than other citizens regarding the poor performances of the Lee government in food security, economic recovery, democratic accountability, and foreign relations (K. Lee 2010). The middle classes also played the largest part in the 2016 protest (Lee, Lee, and Seo 2017, 159). Although the silent majority not involved in the demonstrations shared anger about Park's incompetence (*muneung*) and ignorance (*muji*), it was middle-class citizens that demonstrated the highest level of criticism toward the poor performance of her government during the 2016 protests (Lee, Lee, and Seo 2017, 161).

Table 1. Occupational Compositions of Candlelight Protest Participants: 2008 and 2016

Occupational area	2008	2016
Agriculture / forestry / fishing	0.7	0.9
Self-employment	7.3	8.6
Sales / services	1.9	4.5
Manufacturing	3.3	2.9
Management / professional	42.7	35.1
Housewives	6.9	7.1
Students	30.4	33.0
No job / retired	6.5	6.8
No response	2.3	1.0

Source: Lee, Lee, and Seo (2017, 226).

Finally, the most remarkable change between 2008 and 2016 was the growing prominence of ordinary citizens. The occupational compositions

of demonstrators in 2008 and 2016 (Table 1) reveal this point. The share of the self-employed or small shopkeepers increased from 7.3 percent in 2008 to 8.6 percent in 2016. This increase may look small but must not be underestimated. Small shopkeepers usually work on Saturdays when the rallies were held, and they needed to abandon their daily incomes to attend demonstrations. The same is the case with workers in sales and service sectors in Table 1, whose share increased from 1.9 percent to 4.5 percent. Most were non-regular workers who cannot leave their workplaces without their supervisors' permission. According to the table, students were the second-largest group in the 2008 protests (30.4 percent). The share of students increased remarkably in 2016 (33 percent) and became almost similar to that of the group on the top, i.e., those who are in management and professional jobs (35.1 percent).

In short, the prominence of the role of the three types of citizens evolved in different ways between 2008 and 2016: that of proactive citizens decreased, critical citizens remained constant, and ordinary citizens increased. This finding implies that there is not only continuity but also a discontinuity between the two candlelight protests. Although the influence of ideological or partisan motivation has remarkably weakened, middle-class citizens have shaped the historical continuity, and they have continued to criticize the poorly performing conservative governments. In particular, the participation of middle-class citizens made the two candlelight protests unusually large. In addition, a distinctive character or discontinuity of the 2016 protests must be equally emphasized. Different to the 2008 event, an unusual number of contentious students, non-regular workers, and small shopkeepers were recruited into the 2016 movement. To understand the character of the 2016 protests properly, therefore, this paper turns its attention away from the much-discussed contribution of active citizens to the role played by ordinary citizens.

The Role of Ordinary Citizens in Protests

For this purpose, Table 2 compares the life cycle of the 2016 candlelight protests with that of the 2008 protests. It makes use of a word cloud test

to single out several keywords and phrases that are semantically related to the word “Candlelight” from articles of two progressive newspapers (i.e., *Kyunghyang Shinmun* and *Hankyoreh Shinmun*) and two conservative newspapers (i.e., *Chosun Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo*). These keywords and phrases were used to observe the changing levels of organizational engagement (i.e., the involvement of professional protest organizations and government authorities) and diversity throughout the protests. On the basis of these levels, Table 2 recomposes the respective protests by dividing them into different life-cycle stages, including emergence, coalescence, professionalization, and decline.

At first, Table 2 identifies three remarkable features of the life cycle of the 2016 candlelight protests in comparison with the 2008 protests: (1) The relatively long period of preceding protests prior to the main candlelight protests, (2) a long coalescence phase and the resulting delaying of the professionalization of the protests, and (3) the decreasing diversity of contentious issues without any confrontation with power-holders. Then, the paper investigates keywords or key phrases in light of preliminary research about the 2016 protests and explains how ordinary citizens contributed to the shaping of these features: (1) They waged small preceding protests at the emergence stage; (2) they continuously mobilized disarrayed livelihood issues and, thereby, delayed the professionalization of the protests; and (3) they avoided radical issues and helped the movement to moderate issues spontaneously.

In detail, the first remarkable distinction of the 2016 candlelight protests is that small and large preceding protests continued to occur for approximately a year before the candlelight protests. In the case of the 2008 protests, online activities by the youth against mad cow disease (08-A in Table 2), such as those by high school students through Agora, an Internet community operated by the portal site Daum (08-A), constituted an important precondition of the 2008 protests (Kim and Kim 2009). However, this preceding or emergence period was short-lived (i.e., from April to May 2008) along with the immediate engagement of many professional organizations, including KTU, PSPD, KCTU, and the national liberation faction in the Democracy Labor Party (08-B).

Table 2. The Selections of Semantically Related Words with “Candlelight” in Newspaper Articles: The 2008 and 2016 Candlelight Protests

Event	Stage (period)	Organizational engagement	Issue diversity	Remarks
2008	Emergence (April 2008– May 2008)	Low • High school students (2.67); The youth (5.33) • Daum Agora (3.00) • The behind force (2.18)	Low • Wider autonomy to schools (3.00) • Mad cow disease (4.00); Impeachment (3.08) • Anti-Americanism (7.92)	08-A
	Coalescence / Professionalization I (May 2008– June 2008)	High • KTU (3); PSPD (3.53); KCTU (8.92); Democratic Labor Party (3.23); National liberation faction (3.60); Alliance against Mad Cow Disease (4.24) • Forced dissolution; Violence (19.42)	High • Beef imports (4.80); Mad cow disease (9.74); Inspection sovereignty (4.20); Renegotiation (20.87) • The Four Major River project (4.76) • Democracy (10.43); Impeachment (6.40); Anti-Americanism (7.92) • A threat to economic development (18.53)	08-B
	Professionalization II (June 2008– July 2008)	High • PSPD (2.31); KCTU (13.43); Democratic Labor Party (4.00); Minbyun (7.83); National Metal Union (7.22); Sajedan (15.1) • Crackdown (14.05); Forced arrest (4.00); Internet censorship (3.81); penalties on protesters (3.73)	Low • Beef imports (4.01); Mad cow disease (8.84); renegotiation (10.50) • Mature protest culture (2.47)	08-C
	Decline (July 2008– August 2008)	Intermediate • Alliance against Mad Cow Disease (7.55) • Guerrilla protesters (3.60); Forced dissolution (8.47); Suing for compensation for damages (5.33)	Low • Democracy (7.88) • “Political” candlelight (4.00); Violent protests (7.54) • A threat to economic development (2.67)	08-D
2016	Emergence (November 2015– November 2016)	Intermediate • The People’s Uprisings (2.00); KCTU (2.40); Professors for Democracy (PfD) (1.67) • Students (2.41); Universities (1.33); Sky protest; Non-regular workers (2.78); Dismissed workers (3.01) • Baek Nam-ki (1.71)	High • Democratization (6.16); Revolution (2.4); Impeachment (3.00) • The PRIME project (1.41); University restructuring (1.33); Choi Soon-sil (1.33) • THAAD (0.80) • Labor reform (2.01)	16-A

Event	Stage (period)	Organizational engagement	Issue diversity	Remarks
2016	Coalescence (November 2016– February 2017)	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' Emergency Action for Impeaching Park (2.86) • Students (2.40), Residents (2.31); Local city residents (4.67); The bereaved (Sewol ferry accident) (1.50); The disadvantaged (2.23) • Closing the shops temporarily (1.72) • Kim Jin-tae (2.40); Taegukgi (10.08); The pro-Park faction (2.67) • Ten million demonstrators (1.60) 	High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impeachment (1.71); Regime change (1.71); Imperial Presidentialism (1.33) • Economic democracy (1.50); Arresting Chaebol owners (2.40); Inequality (1.60); Citizens Assembly (2.00) • Self-disparaging (3.00) 	16-B
	Professionalization (February 2017– March 2017)	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens (14.94); The youth (1.67) • Taegukgi (15.95) • The Democratic Party (2.67) 	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy (3.43); Endorsing impeachment (10.96) • Corruption mopping-out (2.73) • The special prosecutor (2.40) • The rule of law (2.18); Constitutional Court (2.67) • National integration (4.04) 	16-C
	Decline (March. 2017)	None	Low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy (8.57); National pride (3.22); National integration(2.49) • Presidential elections (1.61) • New government (2.00); Moon Jae-in (2.00); Corruption mopping-out (1.60) 	16-D

Source: BigKinds (<https://www.bigkinds.or.kr/>) for *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, *Hankyoreh Shinmun*; Naver News (<https://news.naver.com/>) for *Chosun Ilbo*, and *Dong-A Ilbo*.

Note: Words are selected on the basis of the Word Cloud Test; number in parenthesis is TF-IDF (term frequency, inverse document frequency), i.e., a score of the importance of words in a document based on how frequently they appear across multiple documents.

In contrast, large and small protests already had already taken place long before the 2016 candlelight protests (Hye-jin Kim 2018). These protests were waged against Park's economic policies and misconduct. As early as

late 2015, progressive groups, including the KCTU and the PfD (16-A), organized large political rallies against Park's economic policies. NGOs supported the victims of the Sewol Ferry accidents and the families of the victims also held independent rallies (D. Kim 2017). The People's Uprisings was the largest rally hosted by the KCTU (16-A), and this rally later merged with the first candlelight rally on October 29, 2016. The People's Uprisings raised diverse issues, including Park's impeachment or resignation, and the cancellation of such policies as labor reform, the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), privatization, and the nationalization of history textbooks (16-A). After Baek Nam-ki (16-A) was hit by a water cannon during the People's Uprisings and died a year later, protesters blamed the Park government not only for impairing democracy but also for this cruelty (16-A).

The first contribution of ordinary citizens involved the preceding protests at the emergence stage where they had already been important protesters against Park's policies (D. Kim 2017). In March 2016, eight months before the breakout of the candlelight protests, universities (16-A) were full of contentious voices against Park's project of restructuring the university. At Kookmin University, Chung-Ang University, Soongsil University, Ewha Womans University, and Sungshin Women's University, students (16-A) asked the universities to cancel plans for department mergers, the change of department titles, and the shutdown. Some students occupied university buildings, staged press conferences, and marched on campus. Later, students' anger became uncontrollable when the illegal admission of a daughter of President Park's friend, Choi Soon-sil, to Ewha Womans University was reported (16-A).

Additionally, Gwanghwamun Square, the main location for the 2016 candlelight protests, had been a symbol of protests by non-regular workers and dismissed workers (16-A) against neoliberal restructuring (Choi 2018). In accordance with Park's labor reforms, employers continuously implemented employment adjustment programs in workplaces. They even sued striking workers for damages to business property, and the amount of compensation requested by employers increased dramatically. Without any institutional support to overcome these difficulties, an increasing number

of workers opted to disclose their plight to the public in painful ways. They exposed themselves to physical risk in the form of *sky protests* (16-A), long-term tent sit-ins, and the three-step-one-bow march. Particularly, sky protesters alarmed many people as they survived in high-altitude places with minimal food and water for several months to a year (Y. Lee 2015).

The coalescence phase of a social movement begins with a “moment of madness” (when people feel that “all is possible”) and ends with the establishment of organizational leadership and its coordination strategy, i.e., the “professionalization” of the movement (Staggenborg 1988; Zolberg 1972, 183). If so, the second characteristic of the 2016 candlelight protests is the long duration of the coalescence phase and the consequent delaying of professionalization. Young people opened the coalescence phase of the 2008 protests by transforming their vernacular discourse and culture in online communities into offline spaces (Jiyeon Kang 2016). However, as mentioned earlier, these protests were soon professionalized due to the engagement of social organizations. Moreover, the established political discourses of these organizations overshadowed the voices of the youth. The issues that these organizations brought to the forefront were related to President Lee’s performance, such as opposition to beef imports, the cancelation of the the Four Major River project, the impeachment of President Lee, and anti-Americanism (08-B) (Sang-joon Kim 2008).

Contrastingly, the coalescence phase of the 2016 protests began on October 24, 2017, when the JTBC News Room disclosed the memory of Choi Soon-sil’s tablet computer on October 24, 2017, and President Park’s involvement in corruption, and lasted until February 2017. The continuing inflow of numerous issues into the square prolonged the coalescence phase and, thus, delayed professionalization (Joon Mann Kang 2017). No doubt, impeachment and the recovery of democracy (16-B) were priorities, but the protests gained increasing vitality by absorbing other issues, which were not directly connected with Park’s misconduct. For example, many demonstrators cried for economic democratization and the alleviation of social inequality (16-B). Others called for the creation of a Citizens Assembly (*simin uihoe*) (16-B). Together with thousands of citizens, famous figures such as the comedian Kim Jae-dong and novelist Kim Hoon proposed a new

institution that could replace the National Assembly and promote the direct participation of citizens in the policy-making process. Finally, many local city residents (16-B) raised peculiar local issues, including nuclear plants in Busan and regional discrimination in Gwangju. That is, so many claims were continuously raised that the central movement organization, the Citizens' Emergency Action for Impeaching Park (16-B), could not professionally coordinate all of these issues.

Ordinary citizens did not necessarily support all of the above claims. Instead, they delayed professionalization in their own way: they translated their concerns about livelihoods into political issues and continued to bring these issues to the square (Joon Mann Kang 2017). According to the press releases of the Citizens' Emergency Action for Impeaching Park (website), many issues raised from November 2016 to February 2017 are associated with the interests of the middle classes, including demands for improvement in the treatment of avian influenza patients and protection from earthquakes and pollution due to radioactive materials from Japan. However, the issues also included a series of disarrayed livelihood issues of ordinary citizens, such as the improvement of working conditions, the elimination of the disability grade system for disabled people, protection for delivery workers, the re-employment of dismissed workers, and support for small shopkeepers.

Furthermore, ordinary citizens delayed professionalization by turning protests into joyful events. One example is individual protesters who brought their own comic banners or flags, for example, banners supporting the "Single Men's Marriage Promotion Committee" or "Daddy Party." These individuals did not follow the organizational leaders who spoke with megaphones on big trucks in front of marching demonstrators but moved quickly through the masses in a playful way. Their slogans and activities were so humorous and sarcastic that the established discourses of politics are not helpful for understanding these protestors. According to an extensive survey by Sung-Il Kim (2017, 164), these comic protesters came from the so-called young Sampo generation, referring to the young people who have given up on courtship, marriage, and having children due to economic difficulties and employment distress.

Small shopkeepers were the other major participants that turned the square into a joyful place (D. Kim 2017), and the *Maeil Business News* reported their activities vividly.⁶ Some of these protestors set up street vendor stalls and sidewalk cafés around the square, selling candles, cushions, snacks, coffee, and alcohol, and they provided humor and wit. In response to the conservative lawmaker Kim Jin-tae (16-B), who disparaged the candlelight vigils by saying, “Candles are blown out when it is windy,” the shopkeepers sold LED candles that never go out. They named their items in a way that satirized the Park government. These items included impeachment cushions, impeachment coffee, geun-hye squid fries, and resignation beer. Together with students, the small shopkeepers reacted fiercely to Park’s televised statement on November 5, where she stated, “I cannot help disparaging ‘myself’ (*jagoegam*) because I, as President, allowed the scandals to occur” (16-B). The small shopkeepers felt that it was ironic that Park, being an offender, pretended to be a victim. They parodied Park’s statement to criticize her. Members of the National Federation of Retailers marched with placards saying, “I cannot help disparaging myself because I opened a shop foolishly,” and, “I cannot help disparaging myself for paying taxes naively.”

The last feature of the 2016 candlelight protests involves the way the diversity of the contentious issues decreased. In the case of the 2008 protests, the decrease in the diversity of the issues resulted from the counteraction of the government authorities and the conservative newspapers (Chae 2009). After the June 10 rally, the Lee government swiftly changed from a cautious approach to a crackdown on the march, featuring forced arrests, punishment by law, and internet censorship (08-C). The conservative newspapers claimed that the protestors were a threat to economic development and were not a mature protest culture (08-C). Minbyun, the National Metal Union, and progressive Catholic priests (Sajedan) attempted to defend the movement from the counteraction by claiming its legitimacy publicly (08-C). The protesters also focused on the original goals of the demonstrations, such

6. Yu Jun Ho, “Gongjja hatdogeu nanwojun jayeong eopja” (The Self-Employed Who Handed Out a Free Hot Dog), *Maeil Business News*, November 13, 2016.

as beef imports, mad cow disease, and renegotiation with the United States (08-C), and struggled to sustain the momentum of the struggle. In the end, however, the protests lost their resistance momentum after a relatively large-scale rally in mid-August 2008.

According to Table 2, the issues of the 2016 protests decreased in diversity after February 2017. The demonstrators shifted their attention to the original goals, such as endorsing impeachment, democracy, and national integration (16-C), no longer claiming that the issues were unrelated to Park's performance. This change can be explained by protesters' concerns about reactionary movements (J. Kim 2017). For example, Park's supporters, or the so-called "Taegukgi (Korea's national flag) troop" (16-C), suddenly appeared and pressured the Constitutional Court to reject impeachment. In the face of this counteraction, the 2016 protesters needed to prioritize the goal of impeachment.

However, a more correct interpretation is that the protesters reduced or moderated issues spontaneously because of their political orientation. Middle classes citizens did not agree with the radical ideology of some issues and ordinary citizens are so subsistence-oriented that they worried about abrupt changes to existing institutions (Joon Mann Kang 2017). These protesters showed no sympathy for radical claims such as the construction of a Citizens Assembly (16-B) and the release of former KCTU chairman Han Sang-kyun and former lawmaker Lee Seok-ki of the now-defunct UPP. The agenda of the Citizens Assembly (16-B) disappeared as many people considered the *red guards* would cause political chaos, as in Mao's China,⁷ but economic democracy (16-B) did not completely disappear from the square. However, most citizens, including ordinary citizens, were not organized enough to take consistent collective action to obtain results. These citizens feared that radical issues would undermine national integration (16-C; 16-D) and the rule of law (16-C). Together with the middle-class citizens, the ordinary citizens avoided the radical issues and helped the movement to

7. Hong Sung-il, "Wanjangjillo chotbul waegok: Kim Je-dong chamyehan siminuihoe geupjedong" (Distorting Candlelights with Armbands: Kim Je-dong's Citizens Assembly Movement Stops), *No Cut News*, December 12, 2016.

moderate its issues without invoking effective counteraction.

The Constitutional Court's approval of Park's impeachment, on March 10, 2017, saw the return of institutional politics and ended protest politics (Roh 2017). Virtually no new issues were raised after the Court's decision. The KCTU and the Pfd proposed new policies that the newly constituted government must implement. However, these groups did not gain public attention. Instead, society returned to a calm state. As the Court's decision automatically began a presidential election race, people paid more attention to the election pledges of potential candidates, including Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party, the main opposition party. Subsequently, optimistic prospects for the new government and its efforts to mop out all corruption (*jeogpye cheongsam*) were prevalent (16-D).

Conclusions

Korea's 2016 candlelight protests have been largely understood as taking place as a continuum of the decades-long democratic struggles of active citizens. As Nan Kim (2017, 3) claimed, however, such analysis often leads to "a misrecognition of the contemporary social transformations that brought about the Candlelight Revolution." This paper enriched the understanding of this event by highlighting the discontinuity of the 2016 protests from the previous 2008 candlelight protests: an unusually large number of originally ordinary citizens, including students, non-regular workers, and small shopkeepers, participated in the protests to defy the government, and this defiance critically influenced the process of the 2016 protests. Keeping both continuity and discontinuity in mind, this paper proposes that the 2016 candlelight protests must be interpreted not only as the culmination of Korea's decades-long democratic movements but also as a successful struggle by precarious people against the growing threat to their livelihoods from neoliberalism.

The contribution of ordinary citizens can be more theoretically refined in the context of social movement studies. The sustainability of collective actions depends on whether they can address the dilemmas between

professionalization and issue diversity. An extent of professionalization or centralization is required, but rank-and-file protesters may challenge the ideas of centralized leadership and decide not to join parts of the collective action (Klandermans et al. 2014). On the other hand, diverse issues vitalize the movement, but a failure to coordinate unorganized protesters can impair the solidarity of the whole movement (Gamson 1990). A closer observation of the process of the 2016 candlelight protests led to the finding that ordinary citizens addressed this dilemma substantially, if not exclusively. The continuous participation of students, non-regular workers, and small shopkeepers, who were not controlled by centralized organizations but speaking of their concerns, helped to reduce the risk of professionalization. Additionally, ordinary citizens did not weaken the solidarity of the 2016 candlelight protests but instead, strengthened it. Together with the middle class, they prevented the movement from becoming radicalized and thus, avoided an internal divide over politically sensitive issues.

This paper also offers three broad implications for other fields than social movement studies. The first is for the field of regime change. This study warns against a romanticization of the 2016 candlelight protests as the purposive creature of what President Moon called “heroic citizens.” The 2016 protests were, in Skocpol’s (1979) terms, not necessarily “made” by ready-to-act citizens, but they “came” from the defiance of ordinary citizens who were forced to do so. Although students, non-regular workers, and small shopkeepers were less politically aggressive than progressive groups and much smaller than the middle class in size, they influenced the initiation, development, and conclusion of protests in their own way.

The second involves political economy. A group of scholars have presented that an increasing number of precarious people—for example, those who are deprived of job opportunities, those who are blocked from entering labor markets, and those who are marginalized in terms of employment security (Standing 2014)—have become increasingly contentious and even revolutionary in many countries (Lambert and Herod 2017; Atzeni and Ness 2016). However, these scholars have yet to see any remarkable success from precarious people’s struggles. In this regard, Korea’s experience can suggest one possible route to success. Students, non-regular

workers, and small shopkeepers were not the mainstream protesters, yet their unique motivation and actions vitalized the movement and, in the end, served to make it successful.

The last implication is for other social scientists and humanities scholars who have an interest in domination-resistance dynamics. Scholars have predominantly paid attention to labor unions and social movements as counter-hegemonic agents while expecting that they can block the sweeping victory of neoliberal domination (e.g., Smith 2014; Bieler 2007). However, the defiance of ordinary citizens in this study complicates any clear-cut distinction between domination and resistance. Ordinary citizens appear to be the most accustomed to the neoliberal market order and even politically voiceless within it, but they defied the regime effectively when their daily efforts for survival were critically undermined. That is, resistance is not necessarily about building a counter-hegemonic bloc, and contention often operates near the boundary between domination and resistance.

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