Leaderless Political Opposition: The 2008 Candlelight Protests and Changing Face of Korean Democracy

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Introduction

Manuel Castells, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, concluded that the network has become the dominant organizing paradigm (1996, 469-78). This has been facilitated by technological advances in mobile communication and the deep penetration of the internet into our lives. Recently, the examples of the protests of the so-called "Arab Spring" and the Occupy Wall Street Movement have proved that these very same networks made over the internet or on mobile devices can be turned into potent tools for political mobilization and activism.

However, preceding both of these were the massive candlelight protests[1] in South Korea from May to August of 2008. These were held to protest against the government's plan to reopen the South Korean market to the import of U.S. beef. Like the Arab Spring uprising and the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the 2008 candlelight protests demonstrated the ability of citizens to organize politically by using communication networks on the internet.

On April 18, 2008, the U.S. and South Korea announced the agreement to fully reopen the South Korean market to the import of U.S. beef, which had been banned in South Korea following the discovery of a cow infected with the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or "mad cow disease" in December 2003.[2] This announcement was quickly met with criticism, both on- and offline, such as the press conference organized by fifteen citizens' social organizations on April 21, which demanded that the government immediately halt the import of U.S. beef that "invites the catastrophe of mad cow disease."[3]

But for the next eleven days the mainstream newspapers tended to ignore the issue (Park 2012, 47). The internet, however, was increasingly becoming a center of lively debate as netizens discussed the issue on a myriad of internet 'cafes'

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1. The events to be discussed below have variously been referred to as 'candlelight vigils,' 'candlelight rallies,' and 'candlelight protests.' I have chosen to refer to them as candlelight protests in recognition of their explicit political goals.
2. For a review of the debate over BSE and U.S. beef in the years before 2008, see Sung-gi Hong (2010, 104-14).
3. Ihyeon Gang, "Lee Myung-bak jeongbu-neun 'gwangubyeong peurendeulli' jeongbu" [The Lee Myung-bak government is 'a mad-cow-disease-friendly' government], *Pressian*, April 21, 2008.

and blogs. Furthermore, netizens soon turned to internet activism, circulating numerous petitions demanding, among other things, the impeachment of the newly elected president Lee Myung-bak. By May 2, this internet activism would build into the candlelight protests, which were conceived of and organized almost entirely on the internet, and in the absence of a formal organization directing efforts.

The first candlelight protest on May 2, 2008 brought roughly 10,000 participants to Cheonggyecheon Plaza in downtown Seoul and was a clear example of the internet's ability to facilitate the "organizing" of collective action in the absence of traditional formal "organizations" (Bimber et al. 2009, 79).

That such a movement would arise in South Korea, of all countries, is not surprising; South Korea is by many accounts one of the "most wired" countries on earth (Shirky 2010, 34; Kwak 2012, 125). The South Korean government, from 1998 to 2002, invested heavily in the expansion of mobile services and broadband internet connections across the country, often investing in technology that, at the time, seemed too cutting-edge and too much of a risk—such as Wi-Fi, DMB, and WiBro (Lim and Lee 2010, 247-48). It is, then, somewhat ironic that the communication tools created through intense government investment would later be used as tools of resistance to the government.

The candlelight protests of 2008, however, were not the first instance of cyber political activism to take place in hyper-connected South Korea. Over the past decade, South Korea has had a history of successful political mobilization over the internet (Lim and Lee 2010, 248). The first example was during the 2002 presidential election, when the young, internet-savvy supporters of Roh Moo-hyun used the internet to organize campaign events, both on- and offline, and to raise awareness of candidate Roh among the public. Much of this internet activism was centered on the 'Nosamo,'[4] the mostly internet-based fan club of candidate Roh that was first formed in 2000. The Nosamo was successful in not only securing for Roh Moo-hyun the overwhelming support of voters in their 20s and 30s that was crucial to his electoral victory (S. Yun 2003, 224), it also played a role as a source of information to counter the perceived

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4. 'Nosamo' is an abbreviation of 'Noh Mu Hyeon-eul Saranghaneun saramdeul-ui moim' (A gathering of people who love Roh Moo-hyun).

bias against Roh Moo-hyun displayed by the major conservative newspapers[5] (Y. Yun 2003, 148). While the Nosamo pursued innovative internet-based activism, it was, however, still tied to a traditional political organization—in this case, the New Millennium Democratic Party; it was a case of an "old organization" doing "new things in new ways" (Bimber et al. 2009, 74).

Another example of internet-based activism came in November of the same year, when netizens organized massive candlelight vigils in Seoul in memory of Sin Hyosun and Sim Miseon, two middle-school girls who were killed when accidentally struck by a U.S. military armored vehicle. At its height, the protests drew as many as 30,000 demonstrators and employed many of the same technologies and tactics as the candlelight protests of 2008, such as the sharing of information on internet forums and the spontaneous organizing of protests (W. Kim 2005, 133; Kwak 2012, 67). However, a distinction is to be made between the 2002 candlelight vigils and the 2008 candlelight protests against U.S. beef imports in the presence of nationalism; whereas the vigils of 2002 were often punctuated with often vitriolic displays of anti-Americanism (W. Kim 2005, 144-52), participants in the 2008 candlelight protests for the most part displayed no such anti-American sentiment (Cho 2009, 137-39).

A final point of distinction to be made between these two previous instances of political mobilization on the internet and the 2008 candlelight protests is the use of "Web 2.0" technologies that previously had not been available (Kwak 2012, 128; Min 2008, 99-101). Web 2.0 technology, based on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, allows for greater user interaction across networks and is much more focused on participation (O'Reilly 2005). As discussed below, the media-sharing website Afreeca and the internet fora on Daum's Agora are two examples of the extensive use of Web 2.0 technology during the 2008 candlelight protests.

Three Important Questions

Much attention has been given to answering three very important questions

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5. These conservative newspapers are *Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Daily*, and *Dong-A Ilbo*. Together, as of 2009, they hold 67.7 percent of the market share of all daily newspapers (Kwak 2012, 71).

regarding the 2008 candlelight protests, namely, who participated in the protests; how did they participate; and why did they participate? The answers to these questions have varied widely, often based on the ideological perspective of the observer. However, it seems that most studies have concluded that the protests were made up of (a) "networked individuals" (Chang 2009, 48-49; Kim and Park 2011, 167) many of whom belonged to age and social groups that had been presumed to be politically inactive, such as housewives and teenagers (D. Han 2010, 6); (b) participants initially organized across existing social networks on the internet (Yun and Chang 2010, 145-46; Chae and Kim 2010, 77) but soon began organizing offline activism in the form of the candlelight protests (Kim and Park 2011, 166-67), and these protests were not directed by a single organization or centralized authority (Cho 2009, 125; Yun and Chang 2010, 137); and (c) finally, there were various reasons why people chose to participate in the candlelight protests, but chief among these seem to be either dissatisfaction with, and very often anger at, the Lee Myung-bak government for either failing to guarantee the public's safety and the nation's sovereignty (Kim and Lee 2010, 24; Yun and Chang 2010, 143), or to express criticism of the Lee Myung-bak government's "anti-democratic" policies (Cho 2009, 140).

Taken individually, each of these elements of the 2008 candlelight protests represents an important development in social movements and collective action in South Korea; taken together, these elements suggest a new direction in political resistance and political participation. The candlelight protests of 2008 eventually built into a powerful political movement that forced the government to alter its policy. After steadily gaining participants and attracting attention, the protests reached a peak on June 10, 2008, when, by some accounts[6] almost one million people joined candlelight protests throughout the country. The relentless protests led President Lee Myung-bak to publicly apologize twice, caused the president's cabinet to resign en masse, and ultimately forced the government to change its stance by limiting the import of U.S. beef to cattle less than 30 months old.[7] It is therefore important to understand the political nature of the

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6. Sangpyo Park, "'Jigeum-eun gollanhada, gidaryeo dalla'" ['It's not possible now, get them to wait'], *Pressian*, July 22, 2008, http://www.pressian.com/article/article.asp?article_num=60080722104240&Section=.
7. Stella Kim and Blaine Harden, "S. Korea's Lee offers new beef apology," *The Washington Post*, June 20, 2008.

candlelight protest.

This article seeks to describe the political nature of the 2008 candlelight protests and its implications for future democratic participation in South Korea. It asks the following questions: How could a mass of seemingly unrelated individuals come together to form a coherent voice of opposition to the government? What was the role of the internet in this process? And what does the use of the internet in the 2008 protests suggest for the future of political organizing online in South Korea? To answer these questions, the concept of the "multitude," as described by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, is used to explain how seemingly isolated, unrelated individuals could come together to form a potent form of political resistance. The protesters who participated in the 2008 candlelight protests could collectively be considered a "multitude" because they were a group of individuals with irreducible differences that, nevertheless, were capable of collective political action. In addition, Multitude Theory is useful in exploring the use of the internet in the organizing of the 2008 candlelight protests in two important aspects. First, Multitude Theory is used in order to highlight the potential of the internet to be a space of opposition. Second, in its discussion of "immaterial labor," it connects the politics of opposition to the everyday life, an important facet of the 2008 candlelight protests.

Compared to many protests in Western Europe, for example, the commonality between the majority of the protesters in the initial stages was not based on any shared organizational identity (such as membership in a union), ethnic, or class identity (Cho 2009, 134). Besides a general tendency towards youth and an ill-defined subscription to a "progressive" (*jinbo*) political outlook (134), there was little in terms of a clear boundary of membership. Lacking such a ready-made identity, it was necessary to create one through communication across networks—a process Hardt and Negri refer to as "biopolitical production" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 93-95). In the case of the 2008 candlelight protests, much of the biopolitical production took place in disparate networks of netizens, spread across several different chat websites, also called "cafes."

In terms of collective action, this is similar to the process of constructing a "collective identity" (Taylor and Whittier 1992, 109-10); however, the term "biopolitical production" not only emphasizes the "political" nature of the construction and negotiation of a collective identity, but the "production" aspect draws a connection to other forms of immaterial labor in order to

highlight the fact that the processes are essentially the same. Most importantly, however, in biopolitical production, the individual identities are retained and a single, overarching collective identity is neither achieved, nor even desired. The individual participants are free to express their own separate identities, while the multitude as a whole still maintains the cohesiveness needed for collective action. This represents a new development in political resistance movements in South Korea, in which the various identities have tended to be subsumed to collective identities, such as the '*minjok*,' the '*minjung*,' or the '*undonggwon*.' This greater freedom to express individual identities gave a stronger voice to those who had previously been largely ignored, such as women[8] and teenagers (Y. Kim 2010, 47). It has also changed the overall tone of the protests; the protesters employed various novel "action technologies" (Oliver and Marwell 1992, 255), such as the use of candles and the incorporation of musical performances, that ensured that the 2008 candlelight protests varied from the well-established pattern of protest in South Korea, with "workers or other citizens clashing with riot police" (Aleman 2005, 71).

Networks on the internet allow individuals "to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations" (Shirky 2008, 21). In order to explain how the multitude can conduct coordinated opposition while lacking a central authority, Hardt and Negri adapted the concept of "swarm intelligence," which suggests that individuals acting independently can, in aggregate, form a creative and effective collective movement. The "swarm," as defined by Hardt and Negri,[9] is constructed of a multitude of "different creative agents," and from the communication and cooperation between the agents can emerge "collective intelligence," which directs the collective action of the multitude in the absence

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8. Women accounted for roughly 70 percent of the participants of the candlelight protests (Y. Kim 2010, 42).

9. It is important to note that the definition used by Hardt and Negri is not the only, nor even the most agreed upon, definition of "swarm intelligence." For example, Kennedy, Eberhart, and Shi take issue with the definition of the swarm's members as independent "agents" (2001, xix). Kelly (1998, 13), on the other hand, disputes the "creative" ability of the swarm's members, instead suggesting that the swarm is a system of "dumb" parts. In addition, Bonabeau, Dorigo, and Theraulaz (1999, 25) note that, far from communicating and coordinating, the members of the swarm pursue their own agenda; the resulting "intelligence" is "emergent" from the swarm, rather than something constructed.

of a centralized, hierarchical authority (Hardt and Negri 2004, 92). This concept can help to understand how the various groups of netizens were able to coordinate their actions and to employ unique protest tactics, which is discussed below.

Finally, the concept of "biopolitical grievances" is used to discuss the protesters' motivations for participating in the candlelight protests. At the center of the definition of "biopolitical grievances" is the understanding that, in the current globalized world, grievances cannot be divided into categories of politics, rights, justice, or economics; rather, many grievances contain elements of all of these categories (Hardt and Negri 2004, 282). This was also the case with the 2008 candlelight protests. The most obvious and immediate issue that drove mobilization was concern over the safety of the beef South Koreans consumed; however, the number of grievances expressed in the protests steadily increased throughout the cycle of the protests, encompassing various issues, such as the Lee Myung-bak administration's newly proposed English immersion education plan, the proposed privatization of the public utilities, and the president's plan to construct a Grand Canal, among other issues. A common thread linking all of these grievances seems to be anger at the perceived "anti-democratic" policies of the Lee Myung-bak government (Cho 2009, 140). This is very important because it suggests that, in the current political situation in South Korea in which the formal institutions of democracy—political parties, in particular—remain weak and garner little trust from the general public (Kwak 2012, 115-16), the internet can enable people to "express their political interests through non-institutionalized and unconventional political activities" (J. Kim 2007, 305). Therefore, the 2008 candlelight protests are a significant indication of the future directions of democratic participation in South Korea.

Theoretical Framework: The Multitude

Multitude Theory discusses the ways in which the masses launch collective political opposition. The multitude, however, is in fact a very old concept. The idea originated in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, in which he noted that, far from being irrational, the "multitude" is often "wiser and more constant" than its rulers ([1531] 1997, 80-81), and that it contains the potential to overthrow its "Prince" (7). The idea was later developed by both Hobbes and Spinoza, respectively

fearing and lauding it (Virno 2004, 21). It has been most recently employed by Hardt and Negri and Paulo Virno to describe new patterns of mass resistance in the post-modern era.

At the center of the "multitude" is what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call a "crisis of democracy" (2004, 237). According to them, globalization has presented serious questions over the effectiveness of modern democratic institutions and stretched representative government to the limits. In this context, the multitude is an attempt to redress a dearth of democracy while discussing new forms of political opposition. Hardt and Negri conceived of "the multitude" as a political movement in which individual participants retain their separate identities, yet are capable of collective action (xiv). The collective action of the multitude is not structured like a normal hierarchical movement, which requires the leadership of some elite. In these two aspects, the retention of the constituents' individual identities and a lack of a hierarchical command, we can see that the multitude lends itself to the political analysis of the 2008 candlelight protests because it helps to explain how a movement like the candlelight protests could have been so successful despite the lack of a clear, strong central authority.

The Multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2004) was written as a follow up to their explication of "empire," which represents "network power" of the dominant nation-states, supranational institutions, and major capitalist corporations (2000, 3-21). "Empire" is the system that ensures the stability in which the globalized capitalist political economic structure can thrive. The multitude, as the counter to "empire," is also composed of networks of collaboration across nations and continents, but it is framed in the vocabulary of resistance and is the alternative to empire. The multitude can be likened to other conceptions of resistance, such as 'the people' and 'the masses'; however, the multitude is different in that, while it contains the potential for powerful collective action, its component members retain their individual identities—unlike 'the people' who are subordinated to a nation-state, or 'the masses' who are formed into a unitary structure in order to act (2004, xiv). This is a departure from new social movement theories, which regard the construction of a collective identity as the "most central task" for new social movements (Gamson 1992, 56).

A major departure of the opposition of the multitude from that of previous models of political opposition is that it is "spontaneous," "self-organized," and "leaderless" (Nickels 2012, 14). As Nickels notes, this concern for "spontaneity" and "leaderless-ness" is not new (17). In fact, the issue has

been addressed by many others in different disciplines. Elias Canetti (1962, 16) described a similar situation when he discussed the "spontaneous" formation of "open crowds." In addition, Barbara Kellerman (2012, xx) notes the decline in the importance of "leadership."

The desire for true democracy is central to the multitude. It is a 'bottom up' response to the 'top down' order imposed by 'empire,' and therefore, the structure of the multitude tends to be more democratic and based on collaboration. Lacking what would traditionally be considered a head or a command, centralized decision making is replaced by more diffuse leadership (Hardt and Negri 2004, 100). Far from being a riotous, violent mob, however, the multitude produces order through the communications process of biopolitical production. The lack of a central command has been quite perplexing for many states and entities who have found themselves under the coordinated assault of the multitude, and the South Korean government in 2008 was no exception.

Because the multitude is composed of different individuals with disparate identities, the "common" must be constructed in order to maintain cohesion. This process is termed "biopolitical production," and it is the act of individuals coming together to share knowledge, making it "common" (Hardt and Negri 2004, xv-xvii). This in turn produces new knowledge, which is then communicated again. Biopolitical production thus is the spiraling network of communications producing and reproducing the "common" which binds the multitude. Furthermore, this spiral of communication also produces the subjectivity of the multitude. The prefix "bio" is significant because it indicates that such production is not merely an economic process of constructing material goods, but also includes the construction of the so-called "immaterial"— information, knowledge, ideas, images, relationships, and affects—and touches social, economic, political and cultural facets of life (65).

Biopolitical production is done through the process of "immaterial labor," which is labor that produces knowledge and relationships. As Hardt and Negri note, "immaterial labor" has become the predominant labor practice in post-modern societies (2004, 113). The production and maintenance of relationships and networks is increasingly important not only economically, but also socially, culturally, and politically as well. Thus, the previous lines between work, politics, and the personal life have blurred (Virno 2004, 51).

Thus far, the multitude has been established as a non-hierarchical form

of political resistance that is composed of members who maintain distinct and separate identities and is capable of effective collective action. How, then, is the multitude capable of executing collective action while lacking a central command authority? To explain how the multitude resists, Hardt and Negri borrowed, and adapted, from the realm of biology by using the term "swarm intelligence." They described it thus:

> When a distributed network attacks, it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then disappear back into the environment. From an external perspective, the network attack is described as a swarm because it appears formless. Since the network has no center that dictates order, those who can only think in terms of traditional models may assume it has no organization whatsoever—they see mere spontaneity and anarchy. …If one looks inside a network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational, and creative. It has swarm intelligence (2004, 91).

'Intelligence,' in this sense, is social rather than individual, and it is dependent on communication across networks. The individual components communicate and coordinate with each other and from this network arises collective behavior, despite the lack of a central command. This "multitude of different creative agents" is able to not only to achieve collective action, but is capable of unique and flexible tactics of resistance that a single hierarchically structured organization is not (92).

The final question to be addressed is why the multitude forms. Hardt and Negri identify several different "grievances" that motivate mass protests in the globalized era, roughly dividing them into: grievances of representation, grievances of rights and justice, and economic grievances (2004, 270-82). However, as stated above, most issues cannot be neatly categorized thusly; rather, often, one issue contains elements of all grievances. An example of a biopolitical grievance would be an ecological grievance, which often simultaneously has negative economic, social, cultural, and political effects. Hardt and Negri contend that at the heart of biopolitical grievances is a "democratic project," and this struggle for democracy is built into the fabric of the multitude (285).

The Multitude and the 2008 Candlelight Protests Online Connections: Biopolitical Production and Communication Networks

In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells (1996, 1-25) described a struggle between the Self and the Net. However, as Kazys Varnelis (2008, 152-53) notes, in the "networked culture" of today, the network has become an integral part of one's identity. With the rapid expansion of social-networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, individuals increasingly construct their own identities within various overlapping online networks. South Korean society has been in the forefront of this trend of developing "networked" identities through the rapid increase in the number of SNSs and cafes (Lim and Lee 2010, 248).[10] It is true that most of the information shared in these networks is related to entertainment news or everyday living, but, as is discussed below, such networks retain a political potential that can be quickly harnessed with powerful results.

Contrary to what Evgeny Morozov feared, that the preponderance of entertainment content on the internet contains the "seeds of depoliticization and thus dedemocratization" (2011, 59), the presence of entertainment content does not seem to displace political content. In fact, as is discussed below, active sharing and communicating across internet networks, even ones only related to entertainment news, can lead to politicization. Thus, it can be concluded that the development of these online social networks is important not so much in the content of what is shared, but rather in the actual act of sharing. Youths sharing content on the internet are "building the capacity to connect, to communicate, and ultimately, to mobilize" (Shirky 2010, 38). These online networks enabled South Korean netizens to communicate and mobilize for action during the 2008 candlelight protests and, by doing so, engage in the biopolitical production that would form the basis of the multitude that was mobilized for protest.

Long before the first candle appeared in Cheonggyecheon Plaza in Seoul, political debate had already begun in chat rooms, blogs, and cafes in cyberspace.

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10. South Korean social-networking sites such as Cyworld and iloveschool were both founded in 1999, predating such well-known SNS as Friendster (2002), Myspace (2003), and Facebook (2004).

Following the South Korean government's announcement of the resumption of beef imports from the U.S. on April 18, netizens went on internet chat rooms to voice their opinions, debate, and criticize the government's policy. Of course, the act of individuals posting comments or opinions on an online message board does not alone create a political movement; this is what is referred to as "slacktivism," and some suggest it is detrimental to the process of organizing traditional forms of political resistance (Morozov 2011, 201).

However, the processes of 'consensus formation' and, eventually, 'consensus mobilization' are important steps in the organizing of collective action. The former refers to the "generation of a set of individuals predisposed to participate in a social movement," whereas the latter refers to the "activation of participants in collective action" (Klandermans 1992, 80). In this way, the posting and sharing of opinions and content on various websites was important to the process of 'consensus formation' because it not only let people discontent with the government's policies know that like-minded people also existed, but it also significantly contributed to the formation of a collective action frame that stood in opposition to the government. Shirky describes the progression followed by successful online movements as starting with sharing, leading to cooperation and collaborative production, and finally to collective action (2008, 49-54). Kim Kyung-mi and Park Youn-min, in regards to the 2008 candlelight protests, referred to this process as "convergence participation," and divided it into three "convergences": the convergence of the mass media and online media, the convergence of rational and emotional communication on the internet, and the convergence of online and offline activism (2011, 156). All of this forms the basis of the biopolitical production that would mobilize the multitude.

The first convergence, at the level of media, involved the coming together of the traditional mass media and new "individualized interactive media" on the internet (Kim and Park 2011, 160). Individuals repackaged and reproduced content viewed in the mass media by posting the content on blogs, joining a discussion forum, or commenting on a message board. Individuals, in their roles as "prosumers" (Toffler 1980, 284), not only performed the task of distributing mass media material, but even augmented it by commenting on, editing, and remixing it (Lim and Kann 2008, 95). This pattern is clearly visible following the airing of MBC's highly controversial episode of *PD Notebook* (*PD Sucheop*) entitled "American Beef: Is it Really Free of Mad Cow Disease?" (Miguksan soegogi, gwangubyeong-eseo anjeonhanga?) on April 29. In the hours

immediately after the airing of *PD Notebook*, the number of messages posted on the anti-government website 'Anti MB' doubled to over 1,200 (Kim and Park 2011, 163).

One of the main sites where this online debate took place was Daum's[11] public debate portal called "Agora"; a website which Chang Woo Young, drawing on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, described as an "online public sphere" (Chang 2012, 3-7). Agora attracted a massive number of unique visitors leading up to and throughout the protests[12] and had the majority of messages posted online regarding the import of U.S. beef.[13] Furthermore, of the netizens who posted messages in the political debate chat room of Agora, a vast majority (69.6 percent in May, 76 percent in June, and 80.9 percent in July) only contributed once (Chang 2012, 15), displaying a "Long Tail" pattern that suggests a diversity of views and opinions (Chang 2012, 15; Anderson n.d.). This contradicts the belief that such movements are often led by the efforts of a few key individuals (Gladwell 2000, 33). Clearly, websites like Agora had become a place for online deliberation for a large number of netizens and were important in the setting of public opinion regarding the issue of U.S. beef imports.

The second convergence occurred at the level of communication and involved the convergence of rational and emotional communications (Kim and Park 2011, 160). In addition to posting and reposting information, such as articles about the restrictions of U.S. beef imports in Japan and Taiwan or video clips of BSE-infected "mad cows," netizens posted highly emotional messages as well (Kim and Park 2011, 163-65). The number of emotional posts—posts expressing "anger," "anxiety," or "fear"—on Naver blogs about U.S. beef imports sharply rose in the days following the airing of *PD Notebook* on April 29, reaching a peak around the time of the first street protests. The use of emotion in the mobilization of support for the protests, particularly among middle and

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11. Daum is one of the major internet portal sites in South Korea.
12. Agora attracted 4,998,099 visitors in April, 6,534,129 in May, and 7,120,142 in June. In comparison, the "debate room" of Naver, South Korea's number one portal site, drew just 45,000, 38,000, and 42,000 for the respective months (Chang 2012, 13).
13. Of the 28,800 messages regarding the import of U.S. beef posted on debate boards, 67 percent were on Agora. DCinside received the next highest number of posts at 11 percent (Chang 2012, 11).

high school students, would prove very important. In a survey of participating middle and high school students, a majority listed emotional reasons for joining the protest; 56.1 percent cited anger at the Lee Myung-bak government and 14.6 percent cited fear of BSE (Kim and Lee 2010, 24).

This outpouring of emotions on cafes and message boards tapped into preexisting emotions of various groups on the internet. For example, anger expressed at the South Korean government echoed the anger that many middle and high school students felt toward the newly established Lee Myung-bak government's recently announced education policy.[14] Also, the anxiety expressed about the dangers of U.S. beef resonated with housewives who were concerned about food safety and the health of their families (Chae and Kim 2010, 83). The sharing of these emotional responses helped to cement a sense of community across online networks. Furthermore, the emotional responses shared on the internet would help to build the common between groups that would ordinarily have little in common, such as teenagers and housewives. These two aspects were highly important in the process of biopolitical production.

Many of the cafes and blogs on which these communications took place originally had little to do with politics. Among teenagers, two of the most popular websites for discussing U.S. beef imports, 'The Bizarre or The Truth' and 'JjukBbang,' were sites focused on entertainment news (Yun and Chang 2010, 155; Shirky 2010, 33). Among the housewives that participated in the protests, many got information from the website '82cook,' which is focused on housekeeping (Chae and Kim 2010, 77). Fashion and entertainment cafes such as Lemon Terrace and SoulDresser helped to bring women in their 20s and 30s out to the protests (Y. Kim 2010, 48). These internet networks would be crucial to the mobilization of participants in the street protests that began in May. According to a poll conducted of teenage participants of the candlelight protests, a majority learned of the protest on the internet (51 percent), rather than from friends (17 percent) or TV (17 percent). Furthermore, 71.3 percent responded that their decision to participate was an individual "voluntary" decision, rather than through the invitation of a friend (18 percent) or parents

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14. Haegyu Jeong, "Cheongsonyeon hakkyo jayulhwa bandae chotbul munhwaje gaechoehanda" [Youths against school liberalization hold Candlelight Cultural Festival], *Hankyoreh*, April 17, 2008.

(5.6 percent) (Yun and Chang 2010, 153-55). This shows that, in the case of the 2008 candlelight protests, seemingly non-political internet networks were effective in mobilizing support for political action; more effective, in fact, than strong social ties.

Gradually, each individual group decided to join the increasingly growing street protests that first started on May 2. This was the third convergence: that of online and offline activism (Kim and Park 2011, 166). However, it is important to note that, whereas the communication of the biopolitical production was able to create the commonness on which the multitude would be founded, it did not create an overarching collective identity. Individual groups retained their own separate identities, and many groups sought to distinguish their own identities among the multitude. Two separate-identity groups that featured prominently in the 2008 candlelight protests were the Candlelight Girls (*Chotbul sonyeo*) and the Baby Stroller Brigade (*Yumocha budae*). The Candlelight Girls consisted of middle and high school girls who often wore their school uniforms to the protests. First participating in the protests on May 17, the Candlelight Girls were often an important part of speeches and public statements during the protests (Yun and Chang 2010, 156). The Baby Stroller Brigade was originally suggested by a netizen on the website 'AntiMB' and first appeared in protests on May 29. It was a group of middle-aged housewives who marched in the protests with their young children in their strollers (Chae and Kim 2010, 72). For both groups, issues of identity—in particular, how they were perceived in the mass media and in society—were very important and often sparked debate, as in the debate within the Baby Stroller Brigade over whether the group should remain "nonpolitical" (86). In addition, each of these separate-identity groups came to the protests to voice their own grievances; the Candlelight Girls focused on the education policies of the Lee Myung-bak government and the Baby Stroller Brigade focused on the issue of food safety. Thus, each individual group defined its own identity and pursued its own grievance, yet the multitude as a whole was capable of effective collective action.

The process of biopolitical production, conducted through continuous and spiraling communication across networks on the internet, created a commonness that would form the basis of a growing community of potential online activists. This internet community, however, had been constructed of social ties that would be considered as "weak" to "absent" (Granovetter 1973, 1363). This is a multitude which most likely could not have even

been conceived of, let alone constructed, before the recent advances in communication tools and high-speed internet (Shirky 2008, 47). Having established who made up the multitude and how it formed, the task now is to address how it resisted.

Mobilization and Participation: 'Swarm Intelligence' and the Collective Action of Individuals

It had been previously understood that formal organizations were central to the mobilization of collective action. However, as Bruce Bimber, Cynthia Stohl, and Andrew Flanagin note, it is increasingly more important to make a distinction between 'organization' and 'organizing' (2009, 78). This is because new communication technology, the internet in particular, has dramatically reduced the costs of organizing collective action. Such "self-organizing" protests obviate the need for cumbersome hierarchical organizations (75).

The 2008 candlelight protests followed this pattern of the "self-organizing" protests. No single, centralized organization directed the protests; in fact, many of the most visible protest organizations of the candlelight protests, such as the Baby Stroller Brigade and the Candlelight Girls, were not founded until well after the street protests had begun (Chae and Kim 2010, 81; Yun and Chang 2010, 147). The fact that the protests lacked a single, centralized directing authority perplexed the Lee Myung-bak government that sought, in vain, to target the "masterminds" and the "powerful backers" of organizations such as the Baby Stroller Brigade.[15]

Lacking a central command, the multitude involved in the 2008 candlelight protests coordinated its various constituent organizations through communication networks. Each of the members of the multitude voluntarily contributed its "informational goods" (Bimber et al. 2009, 75) while at the

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15. Songmu Chae, "'Yumocha budae' geomchal josa nokko yeoya nollan" [Ruling and opposition parties debate prosecution office's 'Baby Stroller Brigade' report], *Inews24*, October 6, 2008, http://news.*inews*24.com/php/news_view.php?g_serial=362638&g_menu=050300; Sangmin Kim, Gukhui Bak, and Suyeon Sin, "Gwangubyeong chotbul 2 nyeon… geuttae geusaramdeul-eun jigeum" [Two years after the mad cow candlelight… that time, those people now], *Chosun Ilbo*, May 10, 2010.

same time pursuing its own tactics in concert with the other members of the multitude. From this sharing of information and communication arises a sort of swarm intelligence that allows the member groups to coordinate action with each other and granting the multitude, as a whole, access to creative forms of resistance. This swarm intelligence, an extension of the biopolitical production, made use of mobile communication devices, nearly ubiquitous high-speed internet access, and online networks for collaborative, and later collective, action. Initially, this collective action took the form of online protest, but later coalesced into the massive offline street protests.

In discussing online political activism, Lim and Kann concluded that the practices of online movements tend to mirror traditional offline activism; paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan, they referred to this practice as "backing into the future" (2008, 92). Following this pattern, online political action in the case of the 2008 candlelight protests began with a petition posted on Agora calling for the impeachment of President Lee Myung-bak (Chang 2012, 14). Two days after the announcement of the resumption of U.S. beef imports, the petition had received 20,000 signatures. This number reached 200,000 following the airing of *PD Notebook*, and later reached over 1 million signatures about a week after the first street protests. Cyber-activism also took less conventional forms at this point, including an attack launched by angry netizens on the same night the *PD Notebook* program aired against the Blue House's[16] homepage, flooding the server and crashing it (Kim and Park 2011, 166). Other similar attacks were later directed at police authority websites (Yun and Chang 2010, 145).

Another more traditional protest action collaboratively organized over the internet was a media campaign mainly directed against the three major conservative newspapers—*Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*, and *JoongAng Daily* (Chang 2010, 44). The participants of the candlelight protests widely criticized these three newspapers because of their perceived bias against the protests. The campaign consisted of both "positive" and "negative" campaigns (44). The positive campaign consisted of drives to increase the subscriptions of progressive newspapers such as the *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, campaigns to increase advertisement revenues for the same progressive newspapers, and

16. The Blue House (*Cheongwadae*) is the residence of the South Korean president. The word is often used as short-hand for the presidency itself.

a massive fundraising campaign for the online amateur-journalism website *OhmyNews*—one of the major sources of information for participants in the candlelight protests—which raised 145 million won (44).

The negative campaign, centered on the Daum cafe titled the Citizens' Campaign for Media Consumer Sovereignty (*Eollon sobija jugwon gungmin kaempein*), included an advertisement boycott launched against the three conservative newspapers (Chang 2010, 45). It can be said that the advertisement boycott was successful since advertisements in all three conservative newspapers during the height of the 2008 protests fell by over half compared to the year before (46).

These two forms of activism—a petition campaign and a boycott campaign—were not new forms of activism; they have been used by activist organizations in South Korea for decades. The difference in the case of the 2008 protests is that advancements in communication technology and the development of online networks reduced the costs of organizing such campaigns to "near zero" (Shirky 2008, 47-48). Furthermore, this type of cyber-activism allows for "part-time activism"—activism without the need to commit substantial time or effort (Lim and Kann 2008, 101). Individuals, visiting a cafe on Daum could participate in the protest movement by merely adding their names to a list. On its own, this action is insignificant; taken in coordination with the rest of the multitude, the individual becomes part of the "swarm." This was a type of activism where people "who cared a little could participate a little, while being effective in aggregate" (Shirky 2008, 181). Effectiveness in aggregate is the essence of swarm intelligence.

Online activism has its distinct advantages, but "face-to-face gatherings" has proved "necessary to sustain, organize, and focus" political efforts (Lim and Kann 2008, 101). The multitude organized in response to the opening of U.S. beef imports displayed an impressive ability to act collectively on the internet; however, had the movement remained only on the internet, it is unlikely it would have had the political impact that it did. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the attraction of media coverage that was gained by each successful protest contributed to the rapid increase in the number of participants in the protests in early May (Park 2012, 47).

Thus, in early May the movement became a "hybrid" of online and offline elements (Chadwick 2007, 284). In other words, after having begun as an unconventional, internet-based movement, the protest groups of the 2008

candlelight protests began to develop and act like more traditional activist organizations. However, like all other actions of the 2008 protests against U.S. beef, the decision to move from online to the streets was not undertaken by a centralized authority or single activist organization, but rather was the product of communications across networks. The number of messages suggesting a candlelight protest posted on Naver and Daum blogs and community websites increased sharply in the days between April 27 and May 2, the dates of the first street protests (Kim and Park 2011, 167).

On the evening of May 2, an estimated 10,000 people gathered for a peaceful candlelight protest in Cheonggyecheon Plaza in downtown Seoul.[17] Titled a "Candlelight Festival," it featured live music performances in addition to political speeches. The next day's protest brought out approximately 20,000 protesters, most of whom were teenagers. The protest on the evening of May 3 was organized on the website called "Mad Cow" (*michincow.net*), however the participants were not members of any civil society organization, but rather netizens who had taken the individual choice to come to the protest.[18] This is a pattern of participation that would be typical, particularly among teenagers, throughout the 2008 candlelight protests. The candlelight protests, throughout the following weeks and months, gradually increased in size, scope, and level of organization. The weekly—at times, almost daily—protests continued to gain more and more participants, reaching a peak at the protest on June 10.

Swarm intelligence also allowed the protesters to not only resist the attempts by the government to suppress the protests, but also to develop creative and unconventional methods of attack. Mobile phones were an essential tool, and many of the streets protests were organized and coordinated by text message (Lim and Lee 2010, 252). An innovative example of this use of technology was the use of Google Earth to mark the location of police barricades and water cannons in Gwanghwamun Square (Min 2008, 95). Protesters also used mobile technology to conduct street journalism by posting live streaming video of the

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17. Jaehyeon Heo, "(Hyeonjang) 1 manyeo myeong hapchang 'gwangubyeong so suip bandae!'" [(On scene) A chorus of roughly 10,000 'against the import of mad cow infected cows!'], *Hankyoreh*, May 2, 2008.
18. Miyeong Kim, "(3 il hyeonjang 3 si) 'gwangubyeong peurendeulli, buja jeongchaek neomu shilta'" [(On scene, day 3, 3:00) 'We really hate mad-cow-friendly policies for the rich'], *Hankyoreh*, May 3, 2008.

protests on websites such as Afreeca, thus avoiding a reliance on the mainstream media to get the protesters' message out to the public (Chang 2010, 41-43). This amateur journalism also served to expose instances of violence and brutality against the protesters on the part of the riot police, such as an incident that occurred on the night of June 1, when a 22 year-old female college student was repeatedly kicked in the head by booted riot police (Amnesty 2008, 13).

Such use of new communication technology expanded the effectiveness of the 'swarm' beyond the protests on the streets of Seoul. In fact, it can be said that the 2008 candlelight protests helped to blur the definition of the term 'participant.' Many netizens took part in online activism but did not participate in the street protests. In addition to the "part-time activists," there were also the "virtual activists": those who did not attend the street protests but viewed them live via streaming video posted on websites like Afreeca (Lim and Lee 2010, 253). The number of "virtual" participants was quite significant; videos of the candlelight protests posted on Afreeca between May 25 and June 10 reached 17,196, with a total of 7.71 million views. Between June 1 and June 5, as many as 256,000 viewers were watching videos of the candlelight protests at the same time (Chang 2010, 43). In addition to viewing the protests, these virtual participants would also blog about what they saw, further contributing to the effectiveness of the protests (Lim and Lee 2010, 253). Such activity helped to keep the news related to the protests relevant. The impact of these viewers can be seen in the fact that while mainstream media coverage of the protests (measured in the number of articles regarding the protests carried in six national daily newspapers) decreased to half the level of the days immediately following the first protests (Park 2012, 47-48), views of the protests on Afreeca steadily increased (Chang 2010, 43). In addition, the amount of views served as a measure of public interest in the candlelight protests, as the choice to view the videos of the protests was free from the intervention of the traditional "gatekeepers" of the mainstream media (Y. Yun 2003, 143; Chang 2012, 5).

Democratic Participation: 'Biopolitical Grievances' and the Future of Activism in South Korea

Probably one of the most contentious issues regarding the 2008 candlelight movement is the question of what motivated the protesters to join the

movement. Of course, the immediate concern, and the cause that sparked the movement, was the issue of the safety of U.S. beef imports and the potential risk of mad cow disease. However, many have sought to find a deeper meaning in, or a directing ideology behind, the protests. Some on the political right have argued that it was instigated by "anti-American"[19] leftists, or that it was even led by "pro-North Korean"[20] elements. On the other hand, some on the political left have claimed that the protests were "anti-neoliberalist" in character (Cho 2009, 130). From an academic perspective, some have argued that the protests represent a shift towards post-materialist values—values that are more concerned about the quality of life, rather than securing basic economic and physical safety—in Korean society (Cho 2009, 141; D. Han 2010, 7).

The first two hypotheses are fairly easy to refute. Surveys of candlelight protest participants showed no significant feeling of hatred toward the U.S. or Americans and American culture, and neither were pro-North Korean feelings significant (Cho 2009, 139). In addition, a cursory comparison of the candlelight protests of 2002 with the candlelight protests of 2008 reveals that the 2008 protests lacked much of the vitriolic anti-Americanism that was so prominent in 2002 (W. Kim 2005, 145). In regards to the hypothesis that the protests were motivated by resistance to neoliberalism, there is very little evidence to support this as well. According to surveys of the protesters, 55.9 percent favored a renegotiated deal with the U.S. to allow a strictly limited import of U.S. beef, whereas only 34.1 percent favored a complete ban on U.S. beef imports (Cho 2009, 140). Furthermore, many of the cafes that helped mobilize participants, like SoulDresser and Lemon Terrace, were typical "middle-class cafes" that espoused consumerism and cosmopolitanism views (Y. Kim 2010, 48; Cho 2009, 126). All three of these hypotheses do little to reveal the motivations of the protesters and, most often merely represent the presenter's political bias.

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19. Hyeonjin Yun, "Siwi kkabomyeon 'banmi kodeu' … 'da miguk-ttaemun' seondong [Peel back the surface of protests, 'Anti-American code' … 'all-because-of-the-U.S.' agitation], *Munhwa Ilbo*, December 5, 2011.
20. "Minjuhwa-undong, chotbulsiwi-do jongbuk?... gyoyungnyong DVD nollan [Democratization movement and candlelight protests pro-North Korea?... an educational DVD draws criticism], *MBC News Desk*, televised by MBC on October 22, 2012, http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/nwdesk/article/3164606_5780.html.

The post-materialist hypothesis has the most potential; however, it too has limitations. South Korean politics seems to be going through a "transitional stage," and that has produced a generational divide in terms of political views (Lee 2005, 108). South Korean youths are increasingly more likely than the older generations to demand government reforms, and they are more concerned about national sovereignty, particularly vis-à-vis the U.S. (108-12). This sort of generational shift in values is at the base of the post-materialist theory (Inglehart 1971, 991), and post-materialist values seem to be on the rise in South Korea—a trend that may also be being driven by the rapid increase in internet access (J. Kim 2007, 307).

This, however, ignores the ways in which the protesters themselves framed their action, which was most often in terms of either the resistance to a threat to the people's safety (Chae and Kim 2010, 74) or resistance to the government's anti-democratic policies (Cho 2009, 140). These two grievances, however, are really two sides of the same grievance, which can be summarized as follows: The newly inaugurated Lee Myung-bak government, ignoring the voice of the people, was solely focused on its role of guaranteeing the rights of capital, rather than its duty to protect the welfare of its citizens.

Thus, the concept of biopolitical grievance is useful in that it recognizes the interconnectedness of the various grievances articulated throughout the candlelight protests. Furthermore, it helps to explain how the protests could continue to expand to include not only the issues of U.S. beef and education policy, but also the proposed privatization of the national health insurance plan, President Lee Myung-bak's proposed Grand Canal, and the independence of public broadcasting channels (Yun and Chang 2010, 150). Running through all of these grievances was a belief that the Lee Myung-bak government was pursuing controversial, anti-democratic policies. The multitude was thus mobilized in opposition to such encroachment.

The participants in the 2008 candlelight protests often defined their struggle as a crusade for democracy. One way in which this was done was in the appropriation of symbols from the democratization movement of the 1980s, such as the use of certain well-known protest songs like "A March for My Beloved" (*Im-eul wihan haengjin gok*), or the staging of a massive protest on the anniversary of the protests that successfully brought an end to the military dictatorship on June 10, 1987. A more unique form was a performance in which Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, stating that "the

Republic of Korea is a democratic republic in which all power is derived from the people," was sung with an accompanying dance routine.[21] The fact that one year after the protests, many of those students who participated in the protests expressed pride at having been a part of a movement they identified with "protect[ing] citizens' rights" and "defend[ing] democracy" (Kim and Lee 2010, 27-28) suggests that the emphasis on democracy was not mere sloganeering. From this, it seems the protesters were mostly animated by anger at the "anti-democratic" policies of the Lee Myung-bak government (Cho 2009, 140).

Conclusion

The candlelight protest movement that arose in resistance to the opening of the South Korean market to U.S. beef in 2008 can be described as a multitude because it brought together various different groups and individuals for collective action, while at the same time lacking a central control organization. Also, the participants of the protests were not limited by any boundaries in terms of identity. The protests brought a wide variety of groups that self-identified in different ways and were not subsumed into a large collective identity. The networks needed to hold the multitude together were constructed over the internet through the process of biopolitical production, which took place across existing social networks. The multitude was able to undertake creative forms of collective action because of the voluntary and rapid sharing of information between its members. This created the 'swarm intelligence' that allowed the multitude to effectively resist despite lacking a central authority. Finally, the multitude of the 2008 candlelight protests was driven by a desire for democracy that was at the base of its many biopolitical grievances.

　　The ability to form such a large, coordinated, agile, and successful

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21. Based on the author's observances of two protests on May 17 at Cheonggyecheon Plaza, and on June 8 at Gwanghwamun Square. For a description of the May 17 protest, see Seonghwan Kim, "Eoreundeul '10 daedeul-e bukkeureowo nawatta'" [Adults, 'I came because the teens made me feel ashamed'], *Hankyoreh*, May 18, 2008. For that of the June 8 protest see Jaemyeong Yi and Juhwan Im "(Hyeonjang) 'uriga moimyeon hal su itta' '10 il sicheong-euro'" [(On Scene) 'We can do it if we come together,' 'to city hall on the 10th'], *Hankyoreh*, June 8, 2008. Also, see Bohui Han (2009, 260).

multitude has been greatly enhanced in South Korea by the advances in communication technology and internet networks. It is important to note, however, that technology did not create the 2008 candlelight protests. There was already a trend toward greater citizen activism and involvement in civil society preceding the events of 2008 (S. Kim 2002). Furthermore, activism had already been trending toward post-materialist values (J. Kim 2007, 291). What the enhanced technology did was reduce the barriers to communication between groups and individuals.

The candlelight protests of 2008 suggest that the internet is a space for political resistance in South Korea. It also suggests that political resistance can arise in areas of the internet where it is least expected, such as blogs and cafes. Patterns of political participation have changed, and mobilization on the internet has become standard political strategy, for the mainstream political parties and protest movements alike. This suggests that the potential exists for future multitudes to form and shape politics in South Korea.

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Abstract

The recent examples of the protests of the so-called "Arab Spring" and the Occupy Wall Street Movement have shown the potential for mobile communication devices and networks over the internet to be turned into potent tools for political mobilization and activism. In light of these developments, this article seeks to reinterpret the 2008 candlelight protests against the import of U.S. beef in South Korea to demonstrate the potential of mobile communication technology and internet-based networks as tools of political resistance in South Korea. The 2008 candlelight protests suggest that this form of political opposition fostered by the internet is a "leaderless" opposition in that it lacks a central hierarchical leadership. The candlelight protests was a 'multitude' composed of various different participating groups that lacked a single, unifying collective identity enforced by a leadership. In the absence of such a unifying collective identity, the common was constructed through communication across pre-existing networks on the internet. Furthermore, it was a 'self-organizing' movement that lacked a central organization directing action. The protesters, however, were able to execute coordinated resistance through 'swarm intelligence' which, again, relied on mobile communication devices and the internet to facilitate rapid communication between the participants. Finally, the candlelight protests, though fueled by numerous and various grievances against the Lee Myung-bak government, presented a coherent opposition to the Lee Myung-bak government. This analysis concludes that, while traditional political institutions seem to have dominated cyber-electioneering, the internet remains a space for potential political resistance in South Korea.

Keywords: multitude, candlelight protest, online activism, collective action, democratic participation