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DRIFTING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH KOREA: DE-GLOBALIZATION, POPULISM, AND DIGITAL REVOLUTION

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I . INTRODUCTION

- WE HIGHLIGHT THAT THE RISE OF POPULISM AND DIGITAL REVOLUTION HAVE THREATENED AND EVEN DRIFTED CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH KOREA.
- THE DEMOCRATIC REVERSALS HAVE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ROBUSTNESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE RULE OF LAW DUE TO STATE SURVEILLANCE, MANIPULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CURBS ON PERSONAL AUTONOMY (PUDDINGTON, 2015).
- THIS IS CLOSE TO WHAT SCHOLARS HAVE LABELED 'DEMOCRATIC RECESSION', 'DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING', OR 'DEMOCRATIC DECONSOLIDATION'.
- POPULISM HAS BECOME A SIGNIFICANT FEATURE OF MODERN POLITICS BOTH IN FAR-LEFT AND FAR-RIGHT DIRECTIONS. THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN 2020 HAS INTENSIFIED SUCH POPULIST TRENDS IN THE PRETENSE OF NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC.
- THIS PAPER TRIES TO EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG DE-GLOBALIZATION, POPULISM, AND DIGITAL REVOLUTION THROUGH A CASE STUDY OF KOREA.
- WE CONTEND THAT CIVIC EMPOWERMENT AMONG KOREAN CITIZENS WOULD BE THE BEST SOLUTION TO GET OUT OF THE TRAP OF POPULISM AND REVITALIZE ITS ROBUSTNESS FROM A DRIFTING CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER THE THREAT OF DIGITAL REVOLUTION.

II. THE GLOBAL RISE OF POPULISM

- POPULIST PARTIES HAVE RISEN IN MANY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN THE FORM OF FAR-RIGHT OR FAR-LEFT EXTREMISM MOSTLY AROUND THE ISSUE DEALING WITH IMMIGRANTS AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES.
- POPULIST APPEARANCE IS STRONGEST IN LATIN AMERICA, FOLLOWED BY ASIA AND EUROPE.
- THE RISE OF POPULISM IS DUE TO A COUPLE OF MIXED FACTORS. IN DEVELOPING DEMOCRACIES, INCREASING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL DISPARITY ARE MOSTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR POPULIST RISING: HOWEVER, IN ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES, IT IS THE CULTURAL UNEASE AGAINST ONGOING SOCIAL CHANGE TOWARDS MORE EGALITARIANISM REGARDING GENDER, RACIAL AND GENERATIONAL EQUALITY, AND MORE OPENNESS TO DIVERSITY AND LGBTQ RIGHTS.
- IN THE PROCESS OF GLOBALIZATION, CAPITAL, LABOR, GOODS, KNOWLEDGE, AND INFORMATION ARE EXCHANGED BEYOND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES. OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF DECADES, THREATS COMING FROM DEEPENING INEQUALITY AND DISPARITY ON A WORLD SCALE HAVE GRADUALLY OUTWEIGHED OPPORTUNITIES OF THE COMPRESSION OF WORLD WITH GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

III. WEAKENED DEMOCRACY AND STRENGTHENED POPULISM IN KOREA

- IN KOREA, THE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE LEADER-ORIENTED RATHER THAN PROGRAM-ORIENTED (KIM, 1998: 138). IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO DISBAND OR CREATE PARTIES AT A LEADER'S DISPOSAL. THE AVERAGE LIFE SPAN OF PARTIES IS ABOUT FIVE YEARS. PARTY POLITICS ARE DOOMED TO BE VOLATILE, FLUID AND UNSTABLE. POLITICAL PARTIES DO NOT FUNCTION TO MEDIATE CONFLICTING INTERESTS AMONG SOCIAL CLASSES AND GROUPS, MUCH LESS TO DIRECT NATIONAL POLICIES.
- "IMPERIAL PRESIDENT" (SCHLESINGER JR., 1973) ARE CIVILIAN PRESIDENTS WHO USED TO BE UNDEMOCRATIC DURING THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISM.
- A STRONG PRESIDENCY IS AN OUTCOME OF THE PERSONALIZATION OF POWER EMBEDDED IN THE CONFUCIAN HIERARCHICAL POLITICAL CULTURE.
- DEMOCRACY HAS LOST CONFIDENCE: CITIZENS DO NOT WANT TO GO TO THE BALLOT BOX, BECAUSE OF RISING ECONOMIC ANXIETY, POLITICAL FRUSTRATION, AND CULTURAL UNEASE. THEY GO ON THE INTERNET AND RELY ON STREET ACTIVISM. PRESIDENTS DO NOT HESITATE TO DISCARD DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND INSTITUTIONS, INITIATING DIRECT CONTACT WITH CITIZENS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA.

IV. DRIFTING KOREAN CIVIL SOCIETY

- THE MOON REGIME HAS PROPOSED THE “PEOPLE-CENTRIC ECONOMY,” INSTEAD OF THE PREVIOUS CHAEBOL-CENTERED, EXPORT-ORIENTED ECONOMY THAT FAILED TO MAKE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECTS AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH, AND TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE PEOPLE.
- BUT THE RECENT POOR PERFORMANCE SHOWN BY KOREA’S NATIONAL ECONOMY HAS OFTEN STIRRED UP BLAME FOR THESE POLICIES. CRITICISMS CLAIMING THAT THE MOON REGIME HAS SO FAR FAILED IN MANAGING MACRO-ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, IN REVITALIZING THE ECONOMY THROUGH SOCIAL POLICIES, AND IN STRENGTHENING FAIR ECONOMY ARE MOUNTING (CHO, 2018).
- RECENTLY, THE YOON, SUK-YEOL REGIME HAS BEEN RETURNING THE MOON JAE-IN GOVERNMENT’S POLICY BACK TO THE STARTING POINT. BY MOBILIZING THE MASTER FRAME OF FREEDOM TO SUPPORT LARGE CORPORATIONS, SUPPORT NUCLEAR POWER INDUSTRY, AND DECREASE WELFARE SUPPORT POLICIES, ETC., KOREAN SOCIETY SEEMS TO BE LOST IN ABSENCE OF TALKING AND CONSENSUS POLITICS, BUT RATHER RETREATING TO A STRONG GOVERNMENT-DOMINATED POLITICS CENTERED ON PROSECUTORS BASED ON IDEOLOGY AND FACTION LOGIC.
- IN ADDITION TO THE CITIZENS GROUPS AND PEOPLE’S ONES, THERE HAVE EMERGED TWO EXTREMELY OPPOSING POLITICAL CAMPS THAT ARE DIVIDED BEING FOR AND AGAINST MOON’S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICIES. ONE OF THESE GROUPS IS THE PRO-MOON GROUP WHO UNCONDITIONALLY SUPPORTS THE MOON REGIME, AND THE OTHER IS THE ANTI-MOON GROUP WHO ABSOLUTELY OPPOSES THE REGIME

V. KOREAN CITIZENS' STRUGGLING FOR EMPOWERMENT SINCE EARLY 2000S

- WHILE POLITICAL PARTY POLITICS STILL CANNOT ESCAPE FROM THE INFANT STAGE, THE KOREAN CIVIL OR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS HAVE PRODUCED A SO-CALLED "OVER-SOCIALIZATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS", WHICH PROMOTES NATIONAL POLICY REFORM.
- EVEN WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY, RATHER THAN PURSUING THE PUBLIC GOOD, IT OFTEN PURSUES ITS OWN INTERESTS BY RELYING ON A KIND OF 'SWARMING STRATEGY' IN WHICH THEY PRETEND TO ARGUE FOR PUBLIC INTERESTS.
- YET CIVIL ASSOCIATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL CHANNELS FOR MEDIATING DIFFERENCES AMONG THEM. INTEREST POLITICS ARE STILL UNARTICULATED, HYPERBOLIC AND UNRULY (IM, 2000: 23). FOR DEMOCRACY TO DEEPEN, A ROBUST CIVIL SOCIETY IS REQUIRED. CAPITALISM IS POSSIBLE IN THE ABSENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY, BUT DEMOCRACY IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT CIVIL SOCIETY (FISH, 1994: 41). THE EXISTENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IS A PREREQUISITE NOT FOR THE TRANSITION TO BUT THE DEEPENING OF DEMOCRACY (SCHMITTER, 1995).
- THE CANDLELIGHT PROTESTS HAVE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THIS ERA IN WHERE CIVIL SOCIETY IS ATROPHYING GLOBALLY, REGARDLESS OF A COUNTRY'S STATUS AS DEVELOPED OR UNDERDEVELOPED. BY CARRYING NOT ROCKS AND MOLOTOV COCKTAILS BUT 'PAPER STONES' AND OPENING A STREET PARLIAMENT, CITIZENS DECRIED THE PRESIDENT'S INFRINGEMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION AND STATE MONOPOLY AND CALLED OUT FOR THE EXPOSURE AND CESSATION OF THE EPIDEMIC EVILS AND ABUSES HOLDING UP THE PRIVILEGED CLASSES
- THIS PAPER SUGGESTS A TRIPARTITE RELATIONSHIP MODEL FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN THE PANDEMIC ERA. JAN SCHOLTE ARGUED THAT A TRILATERAL MODEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION, AND DEBATE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO PROMOTING CITIZENS' CONSENSUS AND ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS (SCHOLTE 2003). THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC HARDSHIP, CITIZENS HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED OR MARGINALIZED IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FROM ACTIVELY RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC.

COVID-19 AND K-MODEL REFLECTED

- IT IS HIGH TIME THAT DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP SHOULD BE REVITALIZED. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO EVALUATE THE K-QUARANTINE MODEL WITH REFERENCE TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT—THAT IS, DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP—BY FOCUSING ON THREE KEY MECHANISMS: PUBLIC EDUCATION, DEBATE, AND PARTICIPATION. THESE KEY FACTORS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN WHICH CITIZENS ARE INCLUDED IN THE PROCESS OF TACKLING THE PANDEMIC, AT THE SAME TIME AS IMPROVING THE COGNITIVE PROCESS (LEARNING), DELIBERATION PROCESS (DEBATING), AND PARTICIPATION PROCESS (COLLABORATING) DURING THE PANDEMIC ERA.
- . IN THE PANDEMIC ERA, THE GOVERNMENT EMPHASIZED THE K-QUARANTINE MODEL AS A MASTER FRAME, PUSHING ASIDE OTHER CRUCIAL ISSUES SUCH AS SAFETY, LIFE, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, PRIVACY, AND THE WELFARE OF SOCIAL MINORITIES. LIKEWISE, SOME LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HEAVILY BIASED TOWARDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT HAVE ALSO FAVORED LOCAL INTEREST GROUPS, AND AMBITIOUSLY TRIED TO CONTROL INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS BY MOBILIZING DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS. MINORITIES HAVE BECOME MORE VULNERABLE TO SUCH PANOPTICON-LIKE DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE INITIATIVES WHILE AT THE SAME TIME EXCLUDED FROM FULL ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM.
- WE ARGUE THAT WITHOUT DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP, THE K-QUARANTINE MODEL IS NOT SUSTAINABLE AND WILL DRIVE SUCH COMPLIANCE OF CITIZENS INTO THEIR INCREASING RESISTANCE. GIVEN THESE PROBLEMS, WE MUST REVISIT AND REFLECT ON THE K-QUARANTINE MODEL IN A CRITICAL WAY WITH REFERENCE TO DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP.

VI. CONCLUSION

- IN KOREA, THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT DIVISION OF CIVIL SOCIETY BETWEEN PROGRESSIVE AND CONSERVATIVE GROUPS ALONG GENERATION, GENDER, AND IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION. THE YOUNGER GENERATION TENDS TO SUPPORT THE MOON REGIME'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES WHILE THE OLDER GENERATION STANDS OPPOSED. HOWEVER, IN THE 2021 APRIL MAJORS' BY-ELECTION IN SEOUL AND PUSAN, YOUNG WOMEN CONTINUED TO SUPPORT THE RULING PARTY CANDIDATES, WHILE YOUNG MEN STOPPED BACKING THEM.
- A SEVERE RIFT AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION HAS APPEARED REGARDING MOON REGIME'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES. RECENTLY, THE YOON REGIME SEEMS TO GO BACK TO THE OLD AUTHORITARIAN ERA. WE ARE NOW LIVING IN THE NEW ERA OF THE 4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION COUPLED WITH POST-MODERNISM.
- AS THE CANDLELIGHT REVOLUTION HAS PROVEN, PEOPLE'S POWER HAS BECOME DECISIVE IN THAT MORE PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION ARE URGED. KOREA IS NOW AT THE CRITICAL TURNING POINT, PROBABLY FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT TIME IN ITS MODERN HISTORY. THE CHOICE IS UP TO ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS THEMSELVES WHERE CIVIC EMPOWERMENT WOULD MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.
- PEOPLE MUST ALSO URGENTLY LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT WHO THEIR NEIGHBORS AND COMMUNITIES ARE. MANY ARE TEMPORARY CONTRACT WORKERS, PLATFORM WORKERS, THE ELDERLY IN NEED OF CARE, CHILDREN, WOMEN, MIGRANT WORKERS, AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES—ALL OF WHOM MUST NOT BE MARGINALIZED.
- SO FAR, WE HAVE ONLY REFLECTED ON A SMALL PORTION OF THE UNEQUAL AND UNJUST SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC AND K-QUARANTINE MODEL. IT IS NEITHER JUSTIFIED NOR VALID TO MAKE INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE FOR RESTORING NORMAL LIFE. ULTIMATELY, WE MUST STRIVE TO RESTORE DEMOCRATIC LOCAL COMMUNITIES. MORE CHALLENGES ARE COMING FOR KOREAN CIVIL SOCIETY IN ENRICHING DEMOCRACY UNDER THE NEW THREATS OF DIGITALLY INVISIBLE SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL.

Q & A

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