

# Comparing Korean Liberalism with British Liberalism in Their Respective Roles in the Evolution of Democracy

Lee Hwa Yong and Moon Ji Young

## Abstract

*Our paper aims to compare the historical characteristics of democratization in Korea and Britain, and its result and significance in these two countries. In carrying out this project, we put special focus on the roles and the characteristics of liberalism in Korea and Britain. In Korean and British democratization, liberalism played a leading role in the historical contexts and sociopolitical conditions of each. British democratization relied on the spread of liberal values and principles, while Korea made it its objective to normalize or actualize the framework of liberal democracy given from above. The differences in the process of democratization were accompanied by divergences in both the composition of the supporters of liberalism and in its role. The two cases also reveal clear differences in the relationship between the evolution of democracy and liberalism and the development of liberalism after democratization. From our examination of the Korean and British experiences, we argue that the fact that Korea trod a different route should not lead to the underestimation or devaluing of Korean democratization.*

**Keywords:** liberalism, democracy, democratization, liberal democracy, universal suffrage, franchise reform, political right

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## Introduction

As is often the case with most studies of democratization in the Third World, the term “democratization” has, in the study of democratization in Korea, generally been defined as “a transitional process from authoritarian dictatorship to democracy.” Thus the focus has often been placed on the period from the early days of Chun Doo-hwans regime (or the late days of Park Chung-hee regime) until June 1987.<sup>1</sup> But, broadening our outlook onto the level of world history, we can observe that the starting points of democratization depend on the historical context in which a country is placed<sup>2</sup> and hence different contexts have created various paths to democracy. With these differences in mind, we can define democratization more comprehensively as the process by which democracy is formed,<sup>3</sup> and this holds good in Korea’s case too. The content and scope of the democratization of Korea, then, need to be understood in this same broad framework.

Understanding the definition of democratization as the process by which democracy is formed, this paper aims to compare the historical characteristics of democratization in Korea and Britain, and its result and significance in the two countries. In doing so, we intend to clarify and evaluate the Korean experience of democratization. The process of British democratization, which is regarded as a representative example of the formation of modern democracy, stands in clear

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1. See Im (1994); Cho (1995). In Korea, “June 1987” generally implies a point of time when the transition from authoritarian dictatorship to democracy was completed.
  2. To take an example, as we see below, whereas democratization in Britain was done to oppose the monarchy or absolutism, Korean democratization was done to oppose dictatorship or authoritarianism.
  3. Etymologically, democracy means “rule by the people.” However, historically speaking, no democratic state has accomplished this in a perfect sense. In this paper, we take Dahl’s definition of democracy, which offers a more comprehensive description. According to Dahl, democracy is defined as “a form of government in which the citizens have the classic civil rights, including the freedom of political opposition, and are endowed with universal suffrage and the right to run for election, and the fairly elected representatives of the citizens make most political decisions.” See Dahl (1989, 221).

contrast to that in Korea insofar as it comprised a long-term, internally-generated developmental process. Democratization in Korea, which started with “the impact of the West” in the nineteenth century, had a teleological character in which the development of democracy was not motivated and impelled by an internal dynamic, but rather was subject to a purpose fixed and imposed externally.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, democratization in Britain from its initial stage did not have a goal or an intended aim. Rather, it was a process in which demands for change were articulated in response to concrete issues, and mutual agreement was reached through conflict and compromises. It was this long process itself which comprized the path to democracy.<sup>5</sup> This difference between the two countries provides a key to understanding the characteristics of Korean democratization in the context of world history, and also elucidates various ways by which a democracy is created. Such is our justification for comparing the Korean and the British experience.

In carrying out this project, this paper puts special focus on the roles and characteristics of liberalism in Korea and Britain.<sup>6</sup> Playing a leading role in the democratization of both Korea and Britain, liberalism had a profound effect on the features and direction of democratization in both countries. Democratization in Korea has, since the late nineteenth century, when enlightened intellectuals first attempted to introduce Western liberalism for the modernization of Joseon, meant the institutionalization and regular working of liberal democracy. As a result of historical circumstances, democracy in Korea has implied liberal democracy, and hence liberalism has had a powerful influence in Korean democratization. On the other hand, in Britain, where liberal thought flourished earlier than anywhere else, and where several

4. See Kang (2002).

5. See Lee (2004, 212-236).

6. In this paper, we follow the minimum, mandatory definition of liberalism, which is often the case with that of democracy. Here liberalism means “a belief system which gives individual liberty the highest political value and believes that the political practice of a system or an institution is evaluated on how successful it is in promoting and fostering individual liberty.” See Ryan (1999, 292).

liberal revolutions took place, liberalism was engaged in the development of democracy in a spontaneous and autochthonal way. Liberalism in Britain, then, made an important contribution to its democratization; but the way in which liberalism worked is different from that in Korea.

Against this background, the role of liberalism in the respective democratizations of Korea and Britain deserves careful attention. A comparison of the processes by which democracy was formed in these two countries will help us to understand the difference between the British experience and the Korean experience. To this end, this paper is concerned with the process of democratization in 1832-1928 in Britain and 1945-1987 in Korea, in both of which liberalism played a crucial part.

In the following chapters, we intend to compare the democratization of Korea with that of Britain, across a number of different areas. First, what are the issues on which liberals in Korean democratization focused, how do they differ from the issues on which British liberals focused, and what are the causes and results of these difference? Second, what differences can be discerned in the role which liberalism has played in democratization in the two countries? Third, after democratization, how has liberalism survived in Korea and Britain respectively? And finally, we shall make some concluding remarks about democratization in the two countries.

### **The British Experience: Politics, the Church, and Democratization (1832-1928)**

Even though democratic ideas and practices can be traced back to Ancient Greece, it was only in the late twentieth century that democracy achieved its present dominance. As mentioned in the introduction, there are a number of routes to democracy, which vary according to the historical context of any country. To the extent that democracy in Britain developed earlier than any other country, it can function as a historical and ideological reference to which comparisons

can be made. As a preliminary to a comparison of the democratization of Korea with that of Britain with special reference to liberalism, this chapter provides a brief analysis of the British case.

To this end, we shall investigate the issues that were suggested for the democratization of Britain, the main groups that led democratization, and the contribution liberalism made and the limits it imposed on the rise of democracy. By exploring the role of liberalism, we intend to argue that it constitutes the ideological basis and driving force of democratization in Britain.

Democratization in Britain, the transition from aristocracy to democracy, took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some people say that democracy in Britain started with the Glorious Revolution in the seventeenth century. However, after the Revolution there still existed deep-rooted discrimination in political rights caused by religious and economic factors. It was in the nineteenth century (in particular from 1830 to 1880) that a series of unprecedented reforms, that is, liberal reforms, were instituted in order to do away with these discriminations.<sup>7</sup>

Jonathan Clark notes that from 1688 until the early eighteenth century, Britain had three essential characteristics: it was Anglican, aristocratic and monarchical.<sup>8</sup> Challenges to the authority of the church, the gentlemen, and the Crown emerged explicitly from the mid-eighteenth century. This was largely due to the idea of radicalism advocated by Wilks and Paine, which was of great influence in the 1760s. In consequence, the 1820-1830s marked the turning point in a series of long lasting religious and political conflicts; from this turning point, democratization, along with sociopolitical change, took its initial shape.<sup>9</sup>

The removal of Nonconformist and Catholic civil disabilities in 1828-1829,<sup>10</sup> the first reform toward the path to democracy, signaled the end of the exclusive rights of the Anglican Church and the cancel-

lation of the collaboration of the church with the government. As the Church of England, from its inception, had been very much intertwined with politics, the reform of the religious establishment was followed by political reform. These reforms marked a prelude to a fundamental change of religious establishment and politics. In fact, the abolition of the exclusive privileges of the Anglicans led to the issue of the establishment of the electoral franchise, which was placed at the centre of the reforms. Until 1832, the electoral franchise was not a political right that belonged to everybody without discrimination, but a privilege which only people with property could enjoy. In the 1832 Franchise Reform Act, the long efforts to make Britain a politically equal society bore their first fruit. The franchise reforms in 1832-1884 gradually extended the scope of enfranchisement and brought about the abrogation of the property requirement for voting, which constituted a key issue for democratization in the nineteenth century.

The liberal features in British democratization deserve to be mentioned in our quest to understand the British path to democracy. First, the characteristics of the religious and political reforms are liberal in the respect that their aim was to attain civil and political rights for individuals, which are the main components of liberalism. Unlike most polities which democratized since 1918, Britain's democratization happened in particularly benign circumstances: Britain was substantially liberal, or at least liberalized before democratization began. Since the late seventeenth century Britain was familiar with liberalism in terms of its history of thought; and in practice, constitutionalism, parliamentarism, and the election of rulers were to some extent established.

Second, the roles of the political elites were important in shaping and successfully managing Britain's democratization. In the initial phase of democratization, Liberals or Whigs were very supportive of the popular demand for religious and political reforms. But liberalism was not the sole preserve of the liberals; conservatives and common

7. About the reforms, see Bentley (1998); Machin (1977).

8. Clark (1985, 7).

9. See Garrard (2002).

10. Repeal of Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and in the following year Catholic

Emancipation Act removed legal obstacles to Dissenters holding civil office.

people too shared liberal ideas for managing society.

Third, though religious and political reforms in the initial phases of democratization arose from the awakening of individual rights, British liberalism had a more or less collective character, as J. S. Mill, one of the foremost nineteenth-century thinkers on liberalism emphasized.<sup>11</sup> It is true of Gladstonian ideology too, which included the identification of liberty with self-government, a high esteem for a life of public service and the idealization of “independence.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed to the “New Liberalism” around the turn of the century, community remained even more a crucial concept in the political system. Furthermore, “New Liberalism,” unlike classical liberalism, reinterpreted the liberty of an individual and justified state intervention for the welfare of the political community. This has important implications for identifying the nature of late nineteenth-century liberalism and its relationship to other democratic traditions, including Labor. In particular, the relationship of Liberals with Labor, even after 1900, gave liberalism a long life in British democratization.<sup>13</sup>

In these ways, though liberalism comprised one of the main forces driving England towards a democratic society, as was pointed out in the introduction, democracy was not what they intended to attain as a goal. To take one example, most Whigs thought that the 1832 Reform Act was a “final” settlement rather than a step on the way to something more popular.<sup>14</sup> What the Whigs intended to do was improving institutions, not fundamentally changing the form of the government. That is, they were not conscious of democracy as their final destination. As we see in the British case, such a passive understanding of democracy did not necessarily result in its failure.

11. Like classical liberal theorists, Mill argued for individual liberty. Unlike them, however, Mill paid attention to the social nature and the communal life of individuals, and considered what was the best way in which to secure individual liberty. It is said that since Mill, British liberalism has had a collective character based on individualism.

12. Liberalism which Gladstone had was not that far from Mill's liberalism in the respect that he too sought for individual liberty in a community.

13. For this argument, see Simhony and Weinstein (2001).

14. Peters (1971, 706-727).

Rather, even without an obsession with democracy, Britain managed to retain political flexibility and tolerance. However, despite the contribution of liberalism in removing obstacles to individual liberty and rights, it had certain limitations owing to its lack of concern with democracy as an aim. These limits include the retarded establishment of universal suffrage, the completion of which needed more than one hundred years after the first Franchise Act in 1832. But nobody claims that Britain was less democratized than France and Germany, where universal suffrage was granted from above without internal conflict in 1848 and 1871, respectively. And nobody claims that the contribution of liberalism was harmful to the institutionalization of democracy in Britain. This is simply one of the ways in which British democratization developed.

### **The Historical Characteristics of “Liberal” Democracy in Korea (1945-1987)**

Though imperfect, the establishment of the Republic of Korea (hereafter ROK) in 1948 followed the long, hard journey of modern liberal democratic state-building, which had been held back for a period by the imposition of Japanese imperialist rule after a series of spontaneous efforts to modernize Joseon.<sup>15</sup> The institutionalization of liberal democracy in Korea was given from above under the influence of the U.S. military government in 1948. But we need to trace the origin of liberal democracy in Korea, going further backwards in time. In a nutshell, the democratization of Korea can be explained as a dynamic process over a long period ranging from as early as the Western impulse for modernization, through Japan's colonial dominion, liberation, the division of the peninsula, state-building, and dictatorship, to the establishment of democracy.<sup>16</sup> With these historical contexts in mind, we will examine in this chapter the development and role of

15. On this point, see Moon (2005).

16. When defining democratization as the process by which democracy is formed, we

liberalism in the democratization process leading up to June 1987. By this analysis we aim to clarify the ideological and practical features of liberal democracy in Korea, and to pave the way for comparison with the historical experiences of liberal democracy in Britain.

First, liberalism in Korean democratization was mainly understood in its political or institutional dimension, i.e. as democratic polity or constitutionalism, rather than its philosophical or ideal dimension. Accordingly, the prospect for liberal democratization was liable to be connected with the task of institutionalization. The reason that liberalism was understood in such a way is related to historical conditions in Korea in which the formation and development of liberalism was secondary and derivative. As a matter of fact, Korean interest in Western liberalism originated from the desire to learn and import new political institutions in order to overcome the political crises faced in the late Joseon.<sup>17</sup> In those days, enlightened Joseon intellectuals groped for ways to introduce and adopt Western liberal institutions, as they judged that was where the wealth and power of Western countries were rooted. This approach to liberalism focusing on its institutional aspect was reinforced through the process of institutionalizing liberal democracy after liberation and came to determine the way liberalism was understood in Korea. The institutionalization took place once and for all from above in 1948 without a corresponding process in which the population internalized its ideas or was at least persuaded of them.<sup>18</sup> As a result, liberalism in Korea was mainly understood in terms of institutional forms, such as parliamentarism, the separation of powers, or universal suffrage. Its ideal values, such as liberty, equality, human rights, tolerance, or diversity, were paid attention to relatively late.

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can differentiate the democratization of Korea in two stages: democratization as modern democratic state-building and democratization as opposition to dictatorship and authoritarianism. This is an important feature of democratization of Korea where democracy was imposed externally and pursued as a fixed goal.

17. For the studies on the adoption of liberalism in the late eighteenth century, see Ahn (2003); Chung (2000).

18. For the more detailed discussions on the institutionalization of liberal democracy in Korea, see Moon (2005); Park C. (1997).

On the other hand, this feature of Korean liberalism exerted a more positive function, too: it helped Korean people realize the importance of the constitutionalist principle. Actually it was after long and intense conflicts over the political model of the modern state that liberal democracy was finally institutionalized in 1948. That is why, for Korean people, damage to the institution meant damage to liberal democracy itself. Accordingly, the infringement of constitutionalism became a main factor that triggered the democratic movement against dictatorship. In this context we do not agree with those who have evaluated as a limitation of Korean liberalism the fact that the core agendas of democratization up to June 1987 were elections or the protection/revision of the constitution. That should be taken rather as a contribution to the establishment of constitutionalism.

Second, liberalism in Korean democratization had strong affinities with welfare, cooperation, distributive justice, balanced development, equal shares; it was less interested in effective markets, competition, or private ownership. We argue that this feature of Korean liberalism reflects the historical contexts of Korean democratization: i) the basic progressiveness implied in "liberation," ii) the existence of a communist government in North Korea, and iii) the worldwide experiences of the deficiencies of capitalist development. Owing to such historical contexts, Korean liberalism did not have to repeat the developmental process, i.e., the transition from classical liberalism (which emphasizes individual freedom, property rights and market autonomy) to welfare liberalism,<sup>19</sup> which British liberalism had to undergo. Rather it came to assert people' welfare from the beginning. Due to particular situations in Korea, including national division and dictatorial governments, the liberation of individuals could not be accomplished solely through the claim of individual freedom and rights, but through the liberation of the nation or the *minjung*. The awareness of that point caused the Korean liberalist camp to lay great

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19. For the concise discussions on welfare liberalism, see Ball and Dagger (2004), especially ch. 3; Merquior (1991).

emphasis on welfare, distributional justice, or balanced development. So this can be indicated as a feature of Korean liberalism, rather than as one of communitarianism or social democracy.

One remarkable fact is that although the development of the Korean economy was distorted by capitalist modernization led by dictatorial regimes, those who were involved in the antidictatorship democratization movement since the 1960s also favored welfare liberalism, which prefers strong state intervention in the market over laissez-faire economics and competition. In the eyes of the democratization movement camp, the problem was not in the welfare-oriented state itself but in the nature of the state power; welfare statism was problematic for them only to the extent that it provided the developmental dictatorship with a justification for domination. Accordingly, they pursued as their goal the change in the nature of state power, which employed welfare statism, not in welfare statism itself, and they made efforts through the antidictatorship movement to establish a democratic government which would substantially actualize the welfare state. This set of goals, of course, has often been criticized because it did not recognize the inherent contradictions in capitalism in Third World countries, like Korea, and so one-sidedly depended on a political solution. But we argue that the emphasis on the welfare state was a distinct feature of Korean liberalism.

Third, in the process of Korean democratization, liberalism has been developed and supported by forces that share certain ideals and values rather than interests based on classes, and has functioned as an ideology for the liberation of the nation or people rather than of individuals or classes. So we can say that it is the most important feature of Korean liberalism that its characteristic of class ideology is weak and its individualistic aspect is underdeveloped. The state-building process in Korea was not based on civil struggles against absolute monarchies, as was the case in Britain, but on national struggles against imperialism and/or on struggles within the nationalist camp between the left and the right. Indeed, the democratization movement after the establishment of government was explicitly a *minjung* (or people)'s struggle against authoritarian dictatorship. In

this situation, it was difficult for Korean liberalism, which had developed as an ideology first for the independence movement, then for modern state-building, and then for antidictatorship democratization, to emphasize individual liberty and personality as its own essence. Moreover, after liberation, liberal democracy was institutionalized from above under American influence, and it was under the influence of the state in which the bourgeoisie was formed and in which modernization made progress. Thus in Korea the spontaneous development of an indigenous and autonomous bourgeoisie was almost impossible. That is why we suggest that it was not the bourgeois class but a group that cut across class lines and shared some specific models for the state that supported liberalism in Korea. It is our assertion also that it was due to such non-class or trans-class features of Korean liberalism that the nation or the *minjung* could be presented as the subject of democratization in liberalist programs.

Finally, due to its strong affinity with anticommunism, Korean liberalism has given some limitations to the content and direction of democratization. The establishment of the ROK itself was a product of the Cold War system, and the international trend of Cold War liberalism was strong for a long period.<sup>20</sup> In this respect, the impact of anticommunism on Korean liberalism was unavoidable. Actually, during the period of modern state-building, the liberalist camp acknowledged as its urgent task the establishment of democracy, not national reunification. That is why the liberals made a coalition with extreme anticommunists for the establishment of the ROK, and this coalition became their original sin ever since.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, even in the process of antidictatorial democratization, liberal forces maintained their intolerant position against communism. Their anticommunism made it difficult for them to deal appropriately with the suppression of dictatorial regimes, which exploited anticommunism. As a result, Korean liberalism in the process of democratization could not overcome anti-liberal orders imposed by the Cold War system and

20. For the articulate discussion on Cold War Liberalism, see Arblaster (1984).

21. For the detailed examination of this problem, see Moon (2005).

was trapped in the frame of anticommunism. Because of this limitation, liberalism in Korea, in its quest for democratization, could not solve the national problem, and in the 1980s became gradually conservative, yielding the agenda of reunification to those in favor of radical change.

### **Achievements and Limitations: Liberalism and Democratization in Korea and Britain**

The above discussion has demonstrated the links between liberalism and democratization, and the specific characteristics of these links in the history of Korean and British democratization. In this chapter we attempt to draw a comparison between the Korean and the British cases.

British democratization began with a challenge to the political privileges enjoyed by Anglicans, i.e., an attempt to sever the chain linking politics and religion, which was a prominent characteristic of British society from 1688 till the early nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> From this point onwards there were active efforts to justify personal conscience, the freedom of thought and the value of tolerance, and to abolish religious and political discrimination. Challenge to the existing social structure resulted in a series of parliamentary reforms; the subsequent revision of the election law to eliminate qualifications for the right to vote paved the road to democracy. If we define democracy according to Dahl's definition, Britain's democratization may be compared to the ideal type of democracy in formation. The whole process of challenging religious oppression and privilege and justifying civil rights and then taking a further step to extend political rights (including universal suffrage) through political struggle and compromise, represents a long internal causal development process to reach

22. The attempts to break the privileges could be made thanks to radicalism, which successfully made religious oppression and privilege a public issue in the mid-eighteenth century.

the phase of the establishment of democracy. In this respect, it can be said that British liberalism spawned democratization and later determined its direction.

Korea's democratization on the other hand had from the outset the goals of the institutionalization of liberal democracy and its normal operation. After liberation, liberal forces, who considered building a liberal democracy more urgent than building a reunified nation-state, separated themselves from the right-wing nationalist camp and participated in setting up a government in the South alone over conflicts and compromises with the far rightists' anticommunism. Their main interest was in the institutionalization of a liberal democracy. One can get a glimpse of the debates on the institutionalization of liberal democracy and its specific contents during this era by looking at the formation process of the Constitution of 1948 and its consequences.<sup>23</sup> Two main issues over which various political factions collided in making the Constitution were whether to adopt a presidential or a parliamentary cabinet system for the government and whether to provide workers with equal profit-sharing rights in individual companies. The institution of universal suffrage was undisputedly out of question.<sup>24</sup> This demonstrates very well the teleological nature of democratization and the characteristics of liberalism as a derivative ideology in Korea,<sup>25</sup> in contrast to the British experience in which the

23. The Constitution of 1948 was a result of compromises among the U.S. military government, Syngman Rhee and the Hanmindang (Korea Democratic Party), and the liberal-nationalism forces, faced with threats from North Korea, each weighing their own political interests and ideological preferences. Therefore, it is difficult to say that it means institutionalization of "liberal democracy." However, considering that the establishment of the government in South Korea alone had to be justified through a clear contrast with the North Korean communist regime with the so-called "U.S. marginal line" in operation, there is no question that the participants tried to pursue liberal democracy at least on the appearance and lay a framework of nation-state suitable for it.

24. Some scholars call it a "premature democracy" noting those characteristics found in the institutionalization of liberal democracy in Korea. For example, see Choi (2002).

25. Kang (2000, 203).

electoral franchise was an important issue in the development of liberal democracy. In Korea, institutionalization of liberal democracy was not an outcome of the support and advocacy of liberal principles and values from below, but was given from above under the influence of external forces. Thus, the legitimacy of liberal democracy was borrowed from the Western experience rather than attained from within.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, as in Britain, universal suffrage was not earned as a core component constituting a liberal democracy based on the awareness of political rights from fierce demand from below, but was understood as being already a part of liberal democracy. Therefore, in the institutionalization of liberal democracy, the role of the liberal forces was not focused on voicing and promoting consensus on the importance of human liberty and of basic rights and thereby securing the legitimacy of a liberal democracy from within, but on adopting liberal democracy which was already accepted as legitimate and trying to resolve the tasks of establishing a modern state and achieving national reunification.

The issues raised by liberal forces and the role they assumed in the antidictatorial democratization of Korea can be understood in this context. The liberal forces put forward as key issues fair election and the revision of antidemocratic laws, that is, the normal operation of a liberal democratic system, and they were committed to this goal. It was on the question of “how” to oust the dictatorial regime, build a democratic government, and establish constitutional governance that they exerted themselves; “why” it had to be a liberal democracy was not yet an issue they pondered. From the modernization period in the late nineteenth century, liberal democracy was set as a model for Korea to follow, now that it was the system employed in wealthy developed countries in the West. In particular, after Korea was incorporated into the Cold War regime, it came to mean the system of the United States.

The most striking issue in comparing the role of liberalism in

26. For an attempt to explain the adoption and settlement of liberal democracy in Korea with the concept of “borrowed legitimacy,” see Kang (2002).

Korean democratization with the British case is concerned with election. In Korean democratization for antidictatorship, liberal forces put great emphasis on free and fair elections. This issue has been interpreted narrowly as concern with procedural, formal democracy, giving grounds for an evaluation that the struggle for democratization in Korea led by the liberal forces sought the minimum criteria of democracy and, therefore, failed to go beyond a satisfactory level. However, considering the teleological characteristic of democratization in Korea, this issue should be viewed in a broader perspective. We think that the issue of free and fair election in Korea had the same historical significance as the issue of “universal suffrage” in Britain. Today universal suffrage is regarded as the minimum criteria of democracy, but when it was demanded for the first time in Korean history, it meant the realization of the ideology of “popular sovereignty.” The issue of the electoral franchise worked as a core factor leading the struggle for democratization in Britain, because it signified the expansion of liberalist values and rights to the entire society. In Korea, where democratization was pursued as a goal under foreign influences from the outset, universal suffrage was given along with the institutionalization of liberal democracy as noted above, and it was never taken away or suspended even under dictatorship. Unable to reject the framework of liberal democracy laid with the establishment of the first modern government, the dictatorial regimes maintained power by attempting unfair, illegal elections. Universal suffrage existed, but members of the society did not actually enjoy liberal values and rights, which, in turn, prompted democratic movements in Korea. In the political condition of extreme oppression and irregularities committed by autocratic regimes in Korea, demanding and fighting for “regular, fair and free elections” was a reflection of an “ardent” belief that the legitimacy of the state and exercise of power could be secured only through such elections. In this respect, we can understand that the issue of free and fair elections in the antidictatorial democratization in Korea had an appeal for realizing the ideology of popular sovereignty, just like the issue of “universal suffrage” in British democratization.

It has been demonstrated from the above discussion that i) the main issues raised by the liberal forces in the democratization of the two countries differed, that is religious tolerance, civil liberty, and increased political rights in Britain, free and fair election and constitutional governance in Korea, and ii) the difference reflected the disparities in the historical contexts in which democracy was formed. Furthermore, Britain's democratization began with rebellion against the Anglicans' religious and political privilege and was accelerated by earning the sympathy of many liberals. It was the liberals in the establishment called parliament who lent political support to the voice of the powerless non-Anglicans. Britain experienced a series of liberal revolutions even before democratization began in full force. In this situation, responding to the demand of the middle class, non-Anglicans, and radicals, including the working class, the Whigs did away with the political discrimination of Nonconformists and Catholics, which heralded the early phase of democratization.<sup>27</sup> Now, as demand for democracy became the prevailing spirit of the era in the mid-nineteenth century, the Conservatives as well as the Liberals could not help adopting democratization as an agenda in order to expand and strengthen their political support base. From the mid-nineteenth century, British democratization was carried out relatively smoothly in the institutionalized space with political parties conflicting, clashing and compromising over ideologies and policies, rather than via intense struggle from below.

In contrast, Korean democratization proceeded mainly through intense struggle outside the formal sphere of government. This was largely because the dictatorial regimes, which emerged in a sequence of events against liberal democracy by revising the constitution and

27. Not all supporters, who made political reform possible, identified themselves as liberals from the beginning and hence they are distinguished from the official liberals such as Whigs. But they should be included in the liberal forces, that is the makers of the history of liberal democracy, because they agreed at least on some key issues of liberalism such as religious tolerance, civil liberty and expansion of political rights, in particular universal suffrage.

exploiting the anticommunist National Security Law, pushed the liberal forces out of the formal sphere of government.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, unlike in Britain, Korean liberal forces were not organized solidly into a party before democratization. Considering that Korea had little historical experience of liberal democracy before it was institutionalized, it is not surprising that liberalism did not work as an ideology to organize and articulate institutionally with support from below until the antidictatorial democratization was in progress.<sup>29</sup> In Korea, the organization and popularization of liberal forces occurred as democratization developed in full force. While democratization was developing in struggles against the regimes outside the formal sphere of government, belief in liberal democracy spread to a broad range of people. Support from below and mobilization of people were essential for the success of the antigovernment, anti-establishment struggle. The liberal forces seeking democratization fought against dictatorship on the one hand and exerted efforts to advocate and justify liberal democracy to the public on the other hand. The issues of free and fair election and revision of antidemocratic laws had an effective public appeal and so furthered the goal of democratization. Contrasting the true face of dictatorship with the ideals of democracy helped to make everyone want democratization. If the transition to democracy on June 1987 could be regarded as "democratization by compact,"<sup>30</sup> it was the result of expanding liberal forces and support from below that had accumulated since the struggle against the Syngman Rhee regime. The general election on February 12, 1985 marked a

28. In Korea the dictatorial regimes, unable to deny the framework of liberal democracy flatly in the U.S.-led Cold War order, represented liberal democracy at least formally, with the exception of the Yusin regime. By this reason, liberalism or liberal democracy, which appeared as the ideology of dictatorship, had a negative connotation in Korea. The dictatorial regimes are not to be included in the liberal forces which we use in this article.

29. This is not a problem of liberalism only and it is related to the fact that the institutionalization of the parties remains at a low level in Korea. As a matter of fact, the development of the party system in Korea was not a condition but a result of democratization, similar to the settlement of constitutional governance.

30. On this point, see Im (1994); Cho (1995).

turning point in that those forces that sought democratization converged into a party and finally entered the institutionalized space based on the support for democratization from below. The forces working for democratization emerged as a partner of state management that could not be ignored, and democratization is now carried on in a context of competition and compromise between parties in the institutionalized space.

The differences in the process of democratization in Korea and Britain influenced the different outcomes of democratization and development of liberalism after democratization in the two countries. In the case of Britain, democracy began to take shape gradually with a series of parliamentary reforms, including the franchise bill in 1832, and liberal democracy was firmly in place by the early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> In developing democratization, however, they could not succeed solely by relying on the liberals' initiative. In the early twentieth century, the Conservatives and Labor become mainstream parties and the Liberal Party lost power. Considering that after the mid-nineteenth century, democracy developed through competition and compromise over ideology and policy between parties in Britain, it might be argued that liberalism lost its appeal and had no role to play in the development of democracy from the twentieth century.

But in fact this does not mean a weakened liberalism but rather its strong survival in British soil. As mentioned previously, British democratization was fed on the establishment of the liberal system and the diffusion of liberal values that extolled individual freedom and rights and tolerance, which were the achievements of the liberalist revolution. The institutionalization of liberal democracy since the mid-nineteenth century marked a peak in the development of British liberalism. Although the Liberals experienced a collapse in British

31. In Britain, liberalism propelled democratization, but the liberals were not always cooperative in the path to democracy. They believed that individual rights of human beings were innate but political rights were not. So it was not easy for them to agree to the indiscriminate provision of political rights to everyone. In this aspect, liberalism functioned to limit the speed of democratization, which continued until 1948 when voting rights were given equally to men and women.

politics, swept up in the domestic and international whirl of events—rapid capitalist development and the swelling working class at home and imperialist expansion and the outbreak of World War I on the international scene—this does not mean liberalism was defeated as a political ideology. Absorbed into the Labor Party, which pursues a socialist policy, and the Conservatives, who stand for conservatism, liberalism persists as a basic principle in British politics. In other words, even though it has stopped working as the ideology of a specific party since the establishment of a liberal democratic system in Britain, it continues to exercise influence in developing British democracy.

In Korea's history of democratization, "June 1987" stands for the normal operation of a liberal democratic system and the presence of constitutional governance. Liberal democracy was institutionalized from above with the establishment of the ROK in 1948, but since its operation fell into the hands of dictatorial regimes, struggles for democratization arose to recover a liberal democratic system and its normal operation. While the democratization movement focused on the issue of "how" to realize democracy, questions like "why" it has to be a democracy or "what kind" of democracy it should be had to be reserved until democratization was finally achieved. In this context, some diagnoses that, in Korea, democracy has leaned towards conservatism or faces a crisis since the implementation of democracy in June 1987<sup>32</sup> seem to reflect theoretical and practical debates relating to these questions and trials and errors. Recent theoretical reflections<sup>33</sup> on the relationship between the rule of law and democracy and that between constitutionalism and democracy too originate from the harsh experiences of democracy after democratization.

Besides, Korean democratization did not proceed on the foundation of the achievements of liberalism, as it did in Britain. It was after democratization that liberal principles and values received theoretical and practical attention and gained consent and support from below.

32. For example, see Choi (2002).

33. See Choi (2004); Park M. (2005).

In Korea, liberalism is diffused on the basis of the actual institutionalization of liberal democracy, which was achieved as a consequence of democratization. Diffusion of liberalism takes some concrete forms, such as concern for personal freedom, heightened awareness of rights, awakening of such values as tolerance and diversity, the mature consciousness of citizens, and an active and growing civil movement. On the other hand, there is a concern that it produces excessive discourse on individual rights, intense conflicts over private interests, and challenges to traditional norms and customs. It is also true that as Korean society has been exposed without defense to the aggression of U.S.-led neoliberalism since democratization, negative views of liberalism are increasing. After democratization, Korean liberalism is being tested in terms of its value and significance as a political ideology. In this sense, the path to democracy is closely related to the development of liberalism since democratization.

### Conclusion

Korea's democratization stands in clear contrast to the British experience, where liberalism emerged as a resistant ideology to challenge the existing order and garnered the support and positive response of a majority of the society, finally gaining the status of an official dominant ideology. In Korea, the effort to build a modern democratic state was attempted by a group of enlightened intellectuals who tried to adopt Western liberalism in the late nineteenth century. However, it was aborted by the forced occupation of Korea by the Japanese. After liberation, the institutionalization of a liberal democracy was made from above under the U.S. military government. Yet the subsequent dictatorial regimes violated and compromised the rules of liberal democracy set at the time of the establishment of the Republic of Korea, and democratization took the form of a struggle against them.

Reflecting upon some differences and similarities in Korean and British democratization, we make the following concluding remarks. British democratization relied on the spread of liberal values and

principles, while Korea made it its objective to normalize or actualize the framework of liberal democracy given from above. The differences in the process of democratization were accompanied by divergences in both the composition of the supporters of liberalism and in its role. The two cases also reveal clear differences in the relationship between the evolution of democracy and liberalism and the development of liberalism after democratization.

There are some similarities in the experiences of the two countries in the respect that liberalism shares an affinity with democracy as a form of government and contributes to its institutionalization. But there are also considerable variations in the content, prospect, actual process, and leading forces of "liberal democracy." This is mainly because the historical tasks which liberalism was faced with differed in each country. Therefore, liberal democracy should be understood as a system that takes on diverse forms in specific historical contexts rather than as an ideal type.

Based on this understanding, generalizations about democratization should be attempted with caution. The British experience, which is regarded as a model of the development of Western democracy, is meaningful only as a case for exploring Korean democracy. The fact that Korea took a different route should not lead to an underestimation of Korean democratization. A more important fact in evaluating democratization is, regardless of what form it took, the serious concern with and practice for democracy, that is, rule by the people. From our examination of the Korean and British experiences of democratization, we intend to emphasize the following point: an explanation or evaluation of the development of democratization or democracy should be made with a rich understanding and careful consideration of the historical and sociopolitical conditions and contexts under which it occurred rather than by simply applying a grand theory to produce some clear answer. Therefore, a study on democratization in Korea (and Britain) should be based on thorough understanding and recognition of the characteristics of individual cases, not on a rough generalization.

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