

Hell Joseon: Polarization and Social Contention in a Neo-liberal Age

Youngmi Kim

Innovations in information technology and the greater availability of social media and applications such as Kakaotalk (the Korean instant-messaging application used by tens of millions in the country and globally), Twitter, Snapchat and Line have transformed not only how Koreans communicate, but also the way in which grievances are aired and discontent is channelled from virtual discussions to demonstrations in public spaces, ultimately blurring the divide between online and offline politics (Kim 2009). Metaphors have been drawn between the contemporary ailing and the conditions of many Koreans under the late Joseon dynasty, which ruled the Korean peninsula from 1392 to 1910. *Hell Joseon* is the widely-used pejorative term used to compare current societal structure to class-based Joseon (also spelled as Chosun) Korea in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The gap between haves (*kap*, indicating those with power in society) and have-nots (*eul*), or those ‘born’ into eating with golden or silver spoons and the increasingly larger segment of society eating with ‘clay spoons’ (*heuksujeo*), is becoming wider. These terms are used to express the popular anger at the divisions within, the polarization of

Y. Kim (✉)
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
e-mail: youngmi.kim@ed.ac.uk

and the deepening inequality in society. The scandal of the ‘nuts rage’¹ and the ‘ramen incident’² well illustrate both the sense of entitlement and privilege of the ‘very few at the top of society’ and the widespread outrage such conduct sparks among ordinary citizens. Though much larger in magnitude and in its political significance and implications, the ‘Choi Soon-sil gate’ of 2016–2017, where the embezzlement of former Park Geun-hye’s confidant of several decades and the briberies companies had to pay for access and favour, is ‘merely’ the latest episode in a series. The impeachment of the former president, which was prompted by the scandal and demanded by millions of citizens that took the streets of Seoul every Saturday over several cold weeks in the fall and winter of 2016, is of high symbolic significance. Privilege, entitlement and abuse are widespread and lie at the very top of the Korean political and economic system; however, justice and change can be brought about from below.

Korean society is changing rapidly. It is also becoming more unequal and polarized. Debates over democratization and democratic consolidation have given way to others questioning the quality of democracy in the country. Starting from 2012 the term *economic democratization*, *Gyeongje Minjubwa* (to complement the political transition which took place in 1987) has become a common expression in Korean politics and society. Former President Park Geun-hye made achieving economic democracy a central feature of her electoral manifesto back in 2012 (Kim 2014).

The demand for economic democracy and more shared welfare is now the *Zeitgeist* in Korea (Yu 2013: 83). And yet, questions remain about how much Korea’s governments are actively engaged in addressing this issue and what the implications of growing societal divisions are for the social fabric. Can Korean society stick together or is it already made up of different segments that are increasingly disconnected from each other?

This book is concerned with understanding the sources of polarization in Korean society and the broader political and social dynamics this engenders in order to interrogate the state of Korea’s transition to democracy. This is especially timely in light of the scandals that engulfed the higher echelon of Korea’s political establishment and the large industrial conglomerates between late 2016 and early 2017. The conivance of politics and business, shady interference from non-elected and non-accountable individuals in policy decisions by the head of the country’s executive and the evolution of ties between politics, business

and the media have all been exposed. Through vast demonstrations in Gwanghwamun square, not far from the Blue House (the president's official home), sustained over several weeks and growing in numbers each time, the public, in turn, reminded outside observers of the contentious nature of Korean society and the potential for change that mass popular protests can generate. Eventually Korea's political system was plunged into a deep crisis. South Korea experienced the first removal of a sitting president through an impeachment, and the country went through a void of political leadership at a time of growing tensions with the North and uncertain relations under the new Trump administration. The individual contributions reflect how it has changed especially since political democratization and how the deepening inequality is affecting Korean democracy in such crucial times.

WEALTH CONCENTRATION, POLARIZATION AND CONTENTION

In South Korea the largest 10 corporations contribute more than 76% of the country's total GDP while more than 80% of the country's GDP is contributed by small- and medium-sized businesses in Japan. Again, in Japan, conglomerates like Sony, Toyota and Panasonic contribute less than 20% of the total GDP (Kwon 2013: 19). On the surface level, the GDP seems to closely follow the trajectory of the Chaebols' performance, which may give the impression that all is well in the Korean economy. Below the surface, however, a growing number of citizens seem to be struggling to cope with serious economic hardship, as wealth is concentrated in very few hands. According to Nam, 68.5% of the population belonged to the middle class in 1996; figures dropped to 58.5% in 2006 (Nam 2009: 6). Before the financial crisis, 70–80% of Koreans believed they belonged to the middle class; after the financial crisis this dropped to 28% (Nam 2009: 9).

Much of the scholarly and policy discussion about the decline of the middle class (and the related aspect of the rise of new classes) revolves around the role and impact of the large industrial conglomerates, the Chaebols. The origins of the 'Chaebol economy' go back to the policies of the Park Chung-hee administration in the 1960s. During this time Chaebols collaborated with the state and the Chaebols could lead the way in the making of Korea's 'economic miracle' thanks to state aid and special benefits and loans allowed by the state, as well as to the sacrifice of labour in 1970s and 1980s. Chaebol business moved from heavy

chemical industry to services and IT industries. As the Chaebols' grip on the market becomes pervasive and manifests itself in every area of daily life from cars and electronics to coffee and bakeries, many now hold the belief that the power of the Chaebols is beyond the state's control. As former president Roh Moo-hyun mentioned at his annual speech in 2005, 'power is handed over to market [...] and the Chaebols hold a monopolistic position in the market' (Yu 2013: 79).

This is not to say that wealth is not generated outside of the Chaebol economy, but those who do accumulate wealth tend to do so riding the property market boom. Research on income polarization confirms that the polarization is led by non-labour income (Shin and Shin 2007 cited in Nam 2009). According to the 2007 income inequality index, non-labour income inequality was 0.7069, twice higher than that of income inequality (Kang 2012: 156). Those who belong to the top 20% of asset owners have a staggering 474 times more assets than those who belong to the lowest 20% (Ibid, 156). In his research Nak-Nyeon Kim measured wealth by the inheritance tax and estate multiplier method, which also shows the top 10% Koreans owning 66.4% of the wealth, while those below 50% owning only 2% of the total (*Business Post* October 29, 2015; Kim 2015: 1).

To be clear, the current predicament has not emerged overnight. Polarization in Korean society dates back at least as far as the restructuring project adopted under the guidance of the IMF following the Asian financial crisis that engulfed the Korean economy in 1997. Neither are inequalities and segmentation unique to Korean society. That said, the gap between the poor and the rich has widened considerably as a result of specific government policies.

During the Asian financial crisis the bankruptcies of many large industrial conglomerates such as Daewoo, Kia and Hanbo led not only to layoffs and vast unemployment at the time, but also to the shrinking of a middle class where those who lost jobs, security and their position in society could not 'bounce back' and lay in a socio-economic limbo in the following decades. Some sought to cope by opening small businesses, which engendered a race to the bottom on profit margins and fierce competition in the small business sector, which led to additional losses. Lack of start-up capital meant many borrowed large sums of money, incurring significant debt. Subsequent business failure translated into even bigger losses and pain. This was a predicament that each administration inherited from its predecessor and one which all failed to tackle.

From rags to riches: Government-labour relations in Korean post-war history and the advent of neo-liberal policies

Some context as to why and how the Korean government and society has come to this point is needed to understand the discussion that follows. Under authoritarian rule workers are not allowed to form organized unions. The Chun Doo-hwan government (1980–1988) was determined to deter unions from political participation, cracking down on their collaboration with political actors such as student activists, opposition intellectuals or political parties. However, this did not prevent unions from resorting to strikes, demonstrations and a whole variety of repertoires of contention to voice its demands (Im, this volume, Chap. 2). In fact, the contentiousness of Korea's labour and its contribution to the country's democratization is well noted in the literature (Lee 2011). The civilian (but former military) government of Roh Tae-woo (1988–1993) made some concessions to the workers, while maintaining the pluralist company unionism introduced by Chun Doo-hwan. Because of the internal fragmentation of the unions each of them had to negotiate with its own firm to improve the workers' conditions and work environment. Under the highly pluralized unions the Chaebols become responsive to the militant unions within their own companies and provided an occupational welfare system in the form of housing or subsidizing children's education or offering extra training and leisure. This fragmented unionism and the Chaebols' response resulted in large gaps in the welfare system between what was happening in large firms and situation with the small and medium-sized companies that could not afford such schemes (Kim and Lim 2000 cited in Im, this volume, Chap. 5). As Im notes, Korea's labour unions came to be characterized as 'a mixture of pluralist company unionism and paternalistic company welfarism' (ibid.). During the Kim Young-sam administration (1993–1998) wages continued to rise through the unions' negotiation with the Chaebol companies; the wage rate in heavy and chemical industries reached such a level that it started to hamper the sector's competitiveness in the export market. As the Korean economy became more integrated into the global economy, labour reform became necessary to meet the standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. With the reform initiatives, the KCTU (the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions) led by Chaeya (or known as Jaeya, extra-institutional) labour

movement activists were also invited alongside the main union (FKTU—Federation of Korean Trade Unions), which is recognized by the government and business, to meet in the Presidential Commission on the Labour-Management Relations Reforms, though this failed to bring about effective labour governance to manage challenges from democratization and globalization (Im, this volume, Chap. 5). The Kim Young-sam administration's rigorous implementation of such policies ended with the Asian financial crisis and a number of large companies such as Hanbo Steel, Kia Motors and Halla Heavy Industry went bankrupt.

The crisis changed the politics of Korea (Kim 2011). The pro-labour presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) adopted an ideology built on a neo-liberal social and economic model as a way proposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) to handle the financial crisis in South Korea. Although Kim Dae-jung promised market liberalization and democratization, the match between the two was far from unproblematic. Market liberalization needs a flexible labour market, while an insecure labour environment undermines democracy. The Kim administration launched a tripartite commission as a forum where labour, business and government were supposed to deal with the demands of a globalized economy, labour rights and democratized work relations; however, the restructuring program was mostly focused on business efficiency, sacrificing labour rights. The administration ran out of alternatives. Despite the electoral promises, Kim Dae-jung was unable to side with the labour union and followed the IMF-guided restructuring program. The IMF had its way and the Chaebols also benefited as flexibility was introduced into the labour market. At this point the unions faced a dilemma, especially the more 'outsider' union, the KCTU, as on the one hand they could have joined the commission, while on the other, they would have become a partner in an effort that saved the Chaebol-centred economy. The commission reached an agreement in early 1998 on major issues such as flexible layoffs, legal union activities, recognizing the teachers union and providing social safety nets. Foreign investment started to flow into the Korean economy again, and the country was seemingly over the financial crisis within 6 months of its outbreak (Im, Chap. 5). Although the state successfully dragged the economy out of the crisis, it came at a cost. The neo-liberal policies that were seen as the recipe for doing so actually precipitated fissures within society. Regular workers who had secured permanent job contracts with big firms were safe in their positions and had high incomes and a welfare system,

whereas irregular workers with short-term contracts had low wages and a less-certain welfare provision. This polarization existed not only within large firms, but also between large firms and small and medium-sized companies.

To tackle this issue the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2008) launched a ‘Social Pact for Job Creation’ in early 2004; however the social dialogue between the government, management and the union came quickly to a stalemate. The unions suffered from a weak and fragmented leadership and were unable to represent all the workers since the regular workers were unwilling to negotiate benefits for irregular workers. Neo-liberal economic policies, already de facto embraced by the Kim and Roh administrations gained even further traction during the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008–2013), himself a former CEO of Hyundai. The Lee administration became infamous for its pro-Chaebol business-friendly policies. In order to boost a shrinking economy, it implemented neo-liberal business-friendly policies, which resulted in stronger Chaebols. The alleged benefits were not felt by ordinary people who believed their lives had not improved. In actuality, it was quite the contrary; the size of the middle class shrunk and Korea’s social structure now looks like an ‘hourglass’ instead of being diamond-shaped (Im, Chap. 5). Hyung-a Kim (2004), in Chap. 6, calls this condition ‘super-capitalism’. Some labour unions became accomplices in the perpetuation of the system. Park Geun-hye (2013–2017) was elected on a platform of tackling the social impact of such policies. During the presidential campaign on economic democratization, the camp of the ruling party candidate, Park Geun-hye, promised banning unfair contracts and regulating work relations in order to reduce differences between large and small companies, while Moon Jae-In, the opposition candidate, advocated further Chaebol reforms in order to give some breathing space to small and medium-sized companies. While the two competitive parties both used the buzzword ‘economic democratization’ in their campaign, the way the term was understood, let alone the way this might have been achieved, was clearly very different and contested. The conservative Saenuri Party saw the Chaebols as playing a major role in boosting the nation’s economy by expanding business and thus creating jobs. In contrast, the progressive parties such as the Democratic United Party (DUP) and the Unified Progressive Party (UPP) considered the Chaebols to be a major source of problems in a hugely polarized society. They believed that this situation could only be addressed if the Chaebols and their influence

were reined in. In the end, however, the labour policies adopted by the Park administration still treated a flexible labour market as an unquestionable dogma. The regular workers employed in large heavy and chemical industries found themselves at the top social strata having secured income and benefits, while the majority of workers are irregular, including young part-timers who are exploited by the so-called ‘labour aristocrats’ in the same company. Part-timers receive less than half of regular workers’ salary with fixed term contracts. This is not just about job security and income gaps, of course. Inequality and polarization, as this volume demonstrates, influence the workers’ social-cultural aspects, as irregular workers cannot afford private education for their children (a ‘must’ in Korean society) after regular public school tuition. This in turn undermines any prospect of upward social mobility.

Inequality and social polarization are issues that Koreans care about deeply. As Suh notes in his chapter in this volume (Chap. 3), a recent survey showed that 35.7% of Koreans consider economic equality to be most essential for democracy. Suh contends that Koreans see communitarian and egalitarian welfare as more important than political freedom or individual liberty. According to the World Values Survey in 2005–2008, Koreans see egalitarianism as more important than individualism (51%), a higher value than in other neighbouring countries in Asia. Koreans also consider income differences as too wide (75%). Inequality feeds polarization which produces a segmentation of society. Might Korea be moving to a class-based system? Evidence to that end, based on the available survey data, is inconclusive, as Youngmi Kim and Sunhee Park show in Chap. 4. Anecdotal evidence suggests that class is re-emerging as an important social category, and a category of analysis in understanding Korea’s socio-political dynamics, but more work is needed in that regard. At the same time, many Koreans see that ‘exiting’ the (political) system is no longer an option for getting their interests represented or for addressing their grievances. What are the consequences for Korean democracy then? The civil revolution that was sparked by the outrage over the Choi Soon-sil scandal in the fall of 2016—examined in greater detail in Chap. 7 and the concluding chapter of this volume—gives some hope. Outrage-fuelled demonstrations of over a million citizens in the streets of Seoul and other cities and eventually, in the face of popular pressure the legislature, including many MPs of Park Geun-hye’s own party, passed a motion to impeach the (former) president (technically suspending her), herself reluctant to either explain her own view or to resign. In March

2017 the Constitutional Court upheld the motion with a ruling that formalized the impeachment, removing her from office and paving the way for the presidential elections. In the face of privilege, entitlement and abuse of power, ordinary Korean citizens rebelled, bringing about political change.

AIMS AND CONTRIBUTION

This edited collection, which grows out of two conferences on this topic held at Central European University, Budapest (Hungary) in 2013 and 2014, aims to investigate the sources of polarization in contemporary Korea, the political contention this fuels and the way this is reshaping society. To do so, it adopts a dual focus. The first is on the agency and the specific policies of successive administrations. While structural constraints, including international ones, certainly do account for Korea's embrace of neo-liberal economic and social policies, the story the volume's contributors tell is one that emphasizes agency over structure. Policies do not just happen. They are made. The contributors focus on various administrations, some (Im and Suh) through a more historical overview, others zooming in on specific presidencies (Kim). The second focus is on different social groups, their experiences, voices and impact on government and society at large. Again, these are not conceived of as passive recipients of government policies. Rather they are a complex and internally fragmented ensemble, with internal agendas, preferences and divisions. Moreover, the contributors show that while some groups, from immigrants to militant unions, have sought to counter government policies and in some cases even change them, others (regular workers and the unions protecting their interests) have joined efforts with the government in the preservation of privilege and a 'labour aristocracy', as Hyung-a Kim notes in Chap. 6. Government and society (labour, immigrants) are not worlds apart though, and the book examines a contentious government-society relationship through a series of in-depth case studies (tripartite commissions; legislative changes allowing voting rights to immigrants in local elections). What emerges is a picture of a complex, increasingly segmented society, but one that is still contentious, where the groups on the losing side do not give up and have scored some victories against all odds.

The volume's contributions, coming from scholars with various disciplinary backgrounds (from history and sociology to international

relations, from political science to economics) fundamentally deal with and seek to bring two strands of scholarship into a conversation. The first one is the work on the political economy of development, and specifically of Korea's economic and democratic development, which has devoted more attention to macro-economic processes (Sun 2002; H. Kim 2004; Lew 2013; Kim and Shin 2004; Yap 2013; Gray 2014; Mathews 1998; Lim and Chang 2007). The second is scholarship on social contention and its impact on (the quality of) Korea's democracy (S. Kim 2000, 2002, 2003; Choi 2002; Koo 2001; H. Kim 2013; Shin 2006; Moon 2002; Koo 1993; Cho 1998, 2006; Lee 2014, 2015; Yap 2013). In their chapters, the contributors draw on the growing scholarship on the active social and political role of labour and the contentious nature of the relationship between government and unions (Lee 2011; Gray 2007a, 2014; H. Kim 2004; Kim and Sorensen 2015), including that on issue-based activities of grassroots digitally-enable movements (Kim 2008; Shin 2005; Min 2003, Hauben 2005; Chang and Lee 2006). Thus, the volume seeks to intervene to the debate on the effects of growing inequalities on Korean society and the rise of a poorer, alienated and aggrieved 'under-class' (Chang 2007, 2012; Shin and Shin 2007; Nam 2009; Kwon 2013; Keum 2011; Kang 2012; Gray 2007a, b, 2008).

ARGUMENT

The story the books tells is one of a society acutely divided by the neo-liberal policies that accompanied the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the intervening years. Rescuing the Chaebols at all costs was seen as the only feasible way to salvage first and boost the economy later. A set of neo-liberal social and economic policies reshaped the labour market around the dogma of flexibility and had wide-ranging social, economic and political consequences. As part of this bigger picture, the various contributions develop three distinct arguments. The first one is about the long-term continuities of successive governments which, even before the 1997 crisis, had embraced the ideology of labour market flexibility along with the social and economic costs that came with it, excluding possible alternatives built around cooperation and concertation (Im in Chaps. 2 and 5) or looking back into the communitarian roots of Korean agricultural society (Park in Chap. 8). The second is about the contentious nature of Korean society, which emerges strongly in all contributions. In their appraisal of civil society, Fiori and S. Kim (Chap. 7) argue that this has

changed considerably since democratization, and not for the better, as civil society organizations replicate the problems plaguing political parties. They are torn by ideological strife, are increasingly decoupled by ordinary citizens and their relationship with the government has also deteriorated. Their role and impact is being questioned. H. Kim's analysis in Chap. 6 unpacks organized labour, showing intra-labour divisions and the formation of a faction-prone elitist union in Korea, keen on cooperating with large firms and the government. The role of government and intelligence services in manipulating the official union was crucial to ensuring a split among the likely sources of opposition to authoritarian rule. This split led to the creation of a labour aristocracy, as Kim calls it, whereby a small circle of union-affiliated regular workers employed by big firms came to enjoy the security and the benefits reserved for few. Youngmi Kim and Sunhee Park's chapter use data from Korea's elections to reflect on the emergence of new social and political cleavages and the possible—and widely expected—emergence of class as a key concept to understand contemporary Korean society. The third is that of a changing face of Korean society brought about by growing immigration (Pedroza and Mosler, Chap. 9) and international marriages (Kim, Chap. 10). Though still small in scale, collective action has brought about some unexpected changes in voting rights for immigrants, as Pedroza and Mosler nicely show in their contribution. Taken together, this volume's contributions suggest that dealing with inequalities and polarization are challenges that Korean policy-makers can no longer postpone. The solution, however, cannot be, once again, one that is imposed from the top down, but instead needs to arise from a broad conversation that includes all segments of Korean society, not just the privileged ones. Korea is indeed at a crossroads.

BOOK OVERVIEW

In Chap. 2 Hyug-Baeg Im contextualizes his discussion of the effects of neo-liberalism in the debate over the three-corner relationship with globalization and democracy. While proponents of neo-liberal policies believed that globalization would promote democracy and democracy, in turn, would enhance globalization, critics countered that globalization can also undermine democracy, while others suggested that democracy could also obstruct the globalization of national economies. The question Im engages with in his contribution is the following: under what

circumstances does globalization deepen social polarization, ultimately weakening democracy? The contribution focuses on the case study of the Lee Myung-bak administration as this, more than its predecessors, has been when neo-liberal policies favoured the large industrial conglomerates and rendered social polarization more acute. The net result was the emergence of new polarized classes, different income groups and a polarized education environment, and a stark divide between regular and irregular workers. In his pursuit for a way out of the status quo, Im calls for policy innovation ‘for a fair society’ aimed at expanding the size of the middle class, extending and bettering the welfare system to include irregular workers while also supporting development and growth. Im draws on Hirschman’s work on ‘possibilism’ (Hirschman 1971; Adelman 2013) and reform mongering (Hirschman 1963) as he proposes any alternative solutions for growth and welfare society. In his chapter Im argues that it is not necessarily globalization that induces social polarization, but rather that agency lies with those political actors adopting specific policies. The Lee Myung-bak administration, whose starting point was that pro-business policies would generate growth and create jobs, is thus a case in point of a government that would not provide policies for fair society but relied on neo-liberal policies focusing on the supply side only. However, an expanded Chaebols-centred economy did not guarantee more jobs for ordinary people nor did it set in place a fair business environment. As neo-liberal policies pushed for state downsize and withdrawal, the reduction of social services, deregularization and privatization, Im argues this led to a more technocratic government which lacks deliberations with the National Assembly. The consequences extend way beyond the Korean case, with the legitimacy of representative institutions being eroded and called into question (Wuger 1998).

Chapter 3 provides a historical tour d’horizon of economic and democratic development in Korea, starting from the economic miracle under the Park Chung-hee administration, to democratization and democratic consolidation, the financial crisis and its aftermath. Doowon Suh argues that electoral democracy did not lead to economic and cultural democracy. Because of the severe income inequality and disappointment with the government’s failure to tackle this issue, Korea is further divided by region, ideology, generation and now by an emerging class division. Suh warns that democracy is backsliding as the 2012 presidential election shows nostalgia for the authoritarian government and its efficacy. The export-oriented industrialization in general can, of course, result in high

inequality; however, the Park administration's careful mixed effective governance encouraged a vocational welfare system that narrowed social and income inequality. Unlike in the well-known U-shaped theory, the relationship between economic growth and inequality in Korea showed the reverse outcome: higher economic growth and less inequality. Suh concludes that the neo-liberal reform during the financial crisis created a more harmful environment for democracy. Furthermore, Suh argues that a capitalist market needs institutionalized market regulation to correct inequalities and the increased poverty resulting from free competition and the monopolization of the market. Drawing on the Korea Barometer Survey (KBS) data in Chap. 4, Youngmi Kim and Sunhee Park examine the determinants of party support over a period of two decades (until 2010, when the latest data were available). Analysis confirms the persistence of old cleavages (region, ideology, age), whereas evidence concerning the possible rise of new ones (class, most notably) is at present inconclusive.

The next two chapters shift the attention from government policies to labour, labour unions, and the deepening gulf between government and labour on the one hand and between regular and irregular workers on the other. In Chap. 5 Im provides a historical trajectory of labour union movements from the authoritarian period through democratization up to the present day. What emerges is a bleak picture of polarized labour unions against labour aristocrats, who enjoy welfare protection and a regular and high income but are outnumbered by irregular workers who are on short-term contracts and have no social welfare support. Im argues that the labour unions such as Korea Trade Commission (KTC) should engage in a social dialogue on the issue of the insecure work environment of irregular workers, though this is not happening due to the monolithic, centralized and internally non-democratic structure of the unions.

In Chap. 6 Hyung-a Kim discusses detailed cases of labour polarization between what she terms the labour aristocracy and irregular workers in post-developmental Korea. Kim appraises the origins, evolution and splits within Korea's labour unions, and the problematically close relationship some of these have enjoyed with the authoritarian government and even the intelligence services. Borrowing the concept of Reich's 'supercapitalism', which states that 'democracy may not be essential to capitalism (Reich 2007: 9)', Kim argues that a focus on state-led development and an 'economy first' mentality continued in the post-Asian financial crisis period, with a flexible labour market rendering workers, most notably the irregular ones, especially vulnerable. Kim concludes

three main features on the polarization of the labour aristocrats and the non-regular workers. First the labour flexibility that accompanied neo-liberal globalization and the financial crisis led Korea into the Chaebol-centred economy with supercapitalism. As a result, the Chaebol economy is competitive in the global market but this is only due to the sacrifice of the majority of irregular workers. The cooperation between management and the past militant labour union is achieved on the basis of exploitation of irregular workers within each company-based union. Second, supercapitalism allowed the Chaebol companies to be highly influential in politics, policies, and society, and now they are beyond the control of the state. Chaebol firms have relatively good relations with the militant union within their own company, but they do allow the system where regular workers exploit irregular workers at the same firm for their own interest, and thus the irregular workers' conditions become the buffer between the management and the militant union. Finally, Kim argues that while the labour aristocracy seems to enjoy their secure job, high income and benefits of social welfare, they comprise only 10% of the total labour force; the militant labour union is also ageing.

In Chap. 7 Antonio Fiori and Sunhyuk Kim assess the relationship between the state and civil society since democratization. Looking at six governments after democratization the authors examine how the role of civil society has changed and how it has interacted with different governments. Social movements during the authoritarian regimes primarily sought to achieve democratization. After democratization, civil movements have moved away from being 'people's movements' (*Minjung undong*) and towards 'citizens' movements' (*Simin undong*), which are more moderate and diversified movements. Citizens' movements played their role as 'policy entrepreneurs' (Fiori and Kim 2011; Kim 2013) raising issues on environment and gender equality, among others. Fiori and Kim argue that the previous two progressive governments had maintained close relations with civil society; however, since the conservative Lee Myung-bak administration, the relationship has deteriorated sharply. Furthermore, civil society has become ideologically polarized since the Roh Moo-hyun administration took over North Korea, especially in relation to their policies towards the Chaebols. This chapter illustrates some of the recent failures in the evolution of Korean civil society, its being mired in ideological battles, its gradual detachment from ordinary citizens and its reliance on financial support from the state. In Chap. 8 Albert Park argues that even an economic democracy-centred critique

of the current development path does not actually propose any alternative to the status quo. Rather, he maintains, a possible option requires looking at Korea's experience with agricultural cooperatives. This has the advantage of shifting the focus away from the attainment of individual benefits to the pursuit of the common good and the idea of community. Park uses the case of modern Korea's experience of grassroots-level cooperation within an agricultural society to advance an idea of a community-centred society (as opposed to individuals and consumers). Looking at the cooperative movements of the YMCA, Presbyterian and Cheondogyo (indigenous religion) in 1920s and 1930s, Park examines how agricultural societies were built around notions of community ethics and cooperation. Next, he turns to the contemporary cooperative movement in which the Korean Peasants League (KPL) and Korean Woman's Peasant Association (KWPA) organized agricultural cooperatives such as iCOOP Korea, Hansalim and Dure as concrete ways of actualizing the idea of economic democracy.

Chapters 9 and 10 shift the attention to another area in which Korean society is changing: immigration, and its demographic impact on a society that has long been almost mono-ethnic and is now becoming increasingly plural. In Chap. 9 Luicy Pedroza and Hannes Mosler focus on one aspect of this diversity by bringing attention to the issue of migrants' voting rights in the local elections. Though a noteworthy achievement, the impact is still small as only a fraction of the population received the benefits from this legislative change. Among the migrants, only the F-5 visa holders were afforded voting rights, which is less than 10% of the total migrants. The enfranchisement of migrants is the result of a diplomatic strategy to influence Japan's reform of its own legislation to ensure voting rights to local Koreans. Specifically, the authors argue that *Mindan*, the ethnic Koreans' civil society organization in Japan, was most active and influential in bringing about the migrant enfranchisement reform in South Korea. *Mindan* was active in pushing for voting rights lobbying legislators in Japan as well as the Korean government. *Minbyon*, the 'lawyers for a democratic society', based in Korea also played crucial role in bridging Korean and Japanese activities over enfranchisement and migrants' human rights with voting rights for immigrants in Korea. An important point made by Pedroza and Mosler in their chapter is that while NGOs have been actively pushing for reforming the law to grant voting rights, this did not alter the ethnocentric view of South Korea's, nor did the new law engender a higher

participation rate among immigrants, though this is perhaps too early a stage to gauge long-term changes. The change in legislation also encouraged ethnic Chinese settled in Korea to acquire similar rights; a discussion aimed at extending voting rights for local elections to Koreans living abroad also followed.

In Chap. 10 Kyung-mi Kim examines the case of international marriages and the way in which Korea's immigration policies have changed to respond to this phenomenon, increasingly widespread in the country. Revisiting the issue historically, Kim notes the negative connotation that accompanied the situation where Korean women married foreigners after the Korean War; the reverse (Korean men marrying foreign women) was not the case. The chapter discusses the role of civil society organizations advocating for immigrant women's rights, and assessing government policies in the areas of integration and social inclusion. Kim argues however, that such policies focus on integration of the foreigners' side but do not require much effort of accepting divergent cultures from the locals. Also, Korean women who married foreigners are left with less attention in addition to foreign male workers who are married to foreign women. Thus, such integration and multicultural policies have been partial to the groups who benefit, while ignoring various minority groups. The chapter elaborates how the issue of otherness within the ethnic-centred, homogeneous Korean society, helped to realize the rapid changes with cross-border marriages and the policies that were enacted to solve such emerging issues. The author points out that while the discourse on multicultural society advanced various institutions to support cross-border, married, foreign women and their children, such institutions still ignore or exclude various marginalized minority groups who could also be accommodated by such institutions and welfare systems. Multicultural policies should look beyond cross-border marriage for Korean males.

In Chap. 11 Virginie Grzelczyk reminds us all that Korea's domestic actors and social groups do not operate in a vacuum. There are broader constraints that Korea and Koreans are subject to and need to take into consideration. The chapter is a stark reminder of the tough international environment in which Korea finds itself, and that it is a rapidly evolving one too. Grzelczyk's application of Ikenberry's work on world orders in transition to a discussion of Korea's aspiration to being a middle power brings together the discussions on the global politics of neo-liberalism and the domestic dynamics of government policies and social contention. Overall, she notes that Korea's own internal predicament and

troubles have not, so far, had negative externalities in terms of the country's foreign policy and its international image and perception. Lastly, in Chap. 12 Youngmi Kim takes stock of the preceding contributions to locate the South Korean experience comparatively in relation to those of other advanced industrial economies. In this regard, Korea's case is hardly unique and in line with a global trend in polarization. The negative effects of inequality and polarization on societal fabric are evident, with evident risks on the quality of Korea's democracy. There are nonetheless some distinctive traits in Korea's own trajectory, namely the contentious and yet fractured nature of labour, the evident limits of civil society and the intertwined relationship between politics and (large) business, which has defined Korea's rise in the past and now risks undermining the considerable progress this still relatively young democracy has made. The 'civil revolution' that brought down Park's presidency holds a tremendous promise for Korea democracy, but the road ahead remains tortuous.

NOTES

1. The daughter of the founder of Korean Air subjected a cabin staff to humiliation on an airplane bound for Incheon Airport over the way macadamia nuts were served in the first class cabin in 2013. (see also in Chap. 12.)
2. A board member of the 'POSCO Energy' company hit a flight attendant over the alleged poor quality of the ramen (noodle) served on board. He was arrested by FBI upon landing at Los Angeles Airport in April 2013 (*Korea Times* April 27, 2013).

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