

# Igniting the Internet



MODERN KOREAN SOCIETY

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# Jiyeon Kang, *Igniting the Internet* 2016



- Internet activism begins in ROK in 2002
  - Kang—new form of political organization based upon captivation
  - Kang looks back on the 1990s as the “prehistory of the present” whereas Kim looked at the 1990s as a culmination of the creation of a labor aristocracy
    - ✦ Even though they cover the same material, their “positioning” is different
- Captivation
  - What grabs internet users’ attention so that they further circulate the material
  - Modality through which social actors engage each other publicly, yet *often lacks a well-defined agenda and is ephemeral*
  - People connected through hypertext links in which recency and frequency of posts determines priority in search engines
  - Often collapse public/private boundaries when multiple audiences are flattened into one, yet an emergent vernacular discourse can be created

# Stakes for Democracy?



- Anecdote from Professor Donald Hellmann from a meeting on the internet set up by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012
- Reaction of Chinese to Thomas Friedmansesque (*The World is Flat*) remarks on the potential of the internet
  - The internet is an institution-destroying technology
  - China is capitalist and authoritarian, and unfettered internet will undermine Party authority—so China has internet firewalls
  - USA is in worse trouble, however
    - ✦ Fact and fiction are not distinguished on the internet with no firewalls
    - ✦ Yet the United States recruits leaders through transparent and open elections in which internet information influences peoples' votes
    - ✦ Will USA get bad leaders because of this reliance on a non-factual source of information?

# Fears about the Dangers of Capitivation



- Plato—people might be swayed by the unreasoning (emotion rousing) talk of the sophists
- Kant—charm and emotion connected to art objects might taint the judgment of beauty (in which true beauty has morally uplifting content)
- Weber—a charismatic leader might take over politics by arousing people's emotions
- Frankfurt School (Institute for Social Research eventually moved to New York in 1935)—Max Horkheimer's "critical theory"—self-conscious social critique aimed at emancipation through enlightenment and very aware of false consciousness promoted through propaganda and advertising

# Candlelight Vigils (in Kang's book)



- **Over deaths of Misŏni and Hyosuni**
  - Mass vigil held in Kwanghwamun (and other places) from November 30, 2002 through December 14th, and every weekend through January 2003
- **Against the impeachment of Roh Moo-Hyun**
  - March 2004 in Seoul and other cities and led to Uri Party victory In the April National Assembly Elections
- **2006 demonstrators in support of stem cell researcher Hwang Woo-suk**
  - Fabricated research claiming to have produced human embryonic stem cells through cloning
- **Against the importation of US Beef**
  - April 2008 President Myung-bak Lee, in an agreement with President George W. Bush, lifted the ban on the importation of US beef imposed in 2003 when a case of Mad Cow Disease was discovered in the US
  - Candlelight vigils from May through August 2008

# More Recent Candlelight Vigils



- **Against Park Geun-hye's corruption**
  - In Kwanghwamun October 2016 through March 2017, from the time it came out that Park's friend Choi Soon-il had improper access to presidential materials and had shaken down chaebŏl because of her closeness to Park
  - Ended when her impeachment was confirmed by the Constitutional Court

# Kwanghwamun



- Theatrical space for national sovereignty and sacredness since the Korean War
- Surrounded by Chosŏn Dynasty palaces
  - Kyŏngbokkung, Tŏksugung, Kyŏnghŭigung (now Seoul History Museum)
  - Today's Sejong-no used to be Yukcho-gŏri (Six Ministries Road)
  - National government buildings, Seoul Press Club, Tonga & Chosŏn Ilbo, US Embassy, Seoul City Hall
- Barred from ordinary use until the 1980s

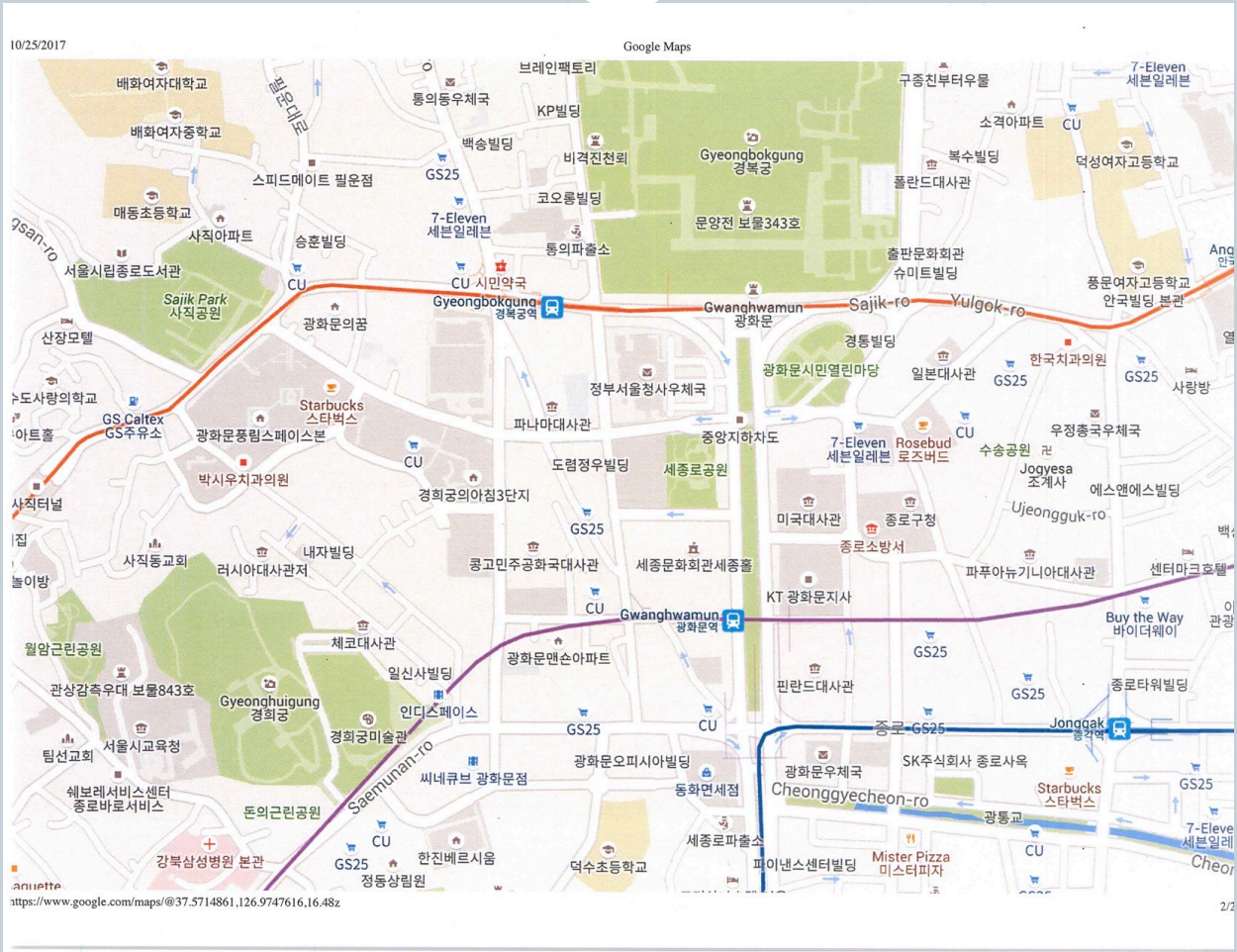
# Kwanghwamun 19<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

- 19<sup>th</sup> century Yukcho Kōri





# Kwanghwamun



# Old Political Activism of 1980s and 1990s (chaeya, undongkwŏn, etc.)



- **386 generation (삼팔육세대)**
  - Originally named after the 386 Intel processor (first 32 bit processor introduced in 1985), but later defined as “people in their 30s born in the 60s who went to university in the 80s”—that is the activists of the 1990s who became the center of the Rho Mu-hyŏn administration (2003-2008)
  - University activism in the 1980s
    - ✦ People joined intense study groups in college where they were indoctrinated into some version of radical politics
    - ✦ Joining demonstrations took commitment and courage
      - Violence common, arrest a danger, could ruin you and your family’s prospects
    - ✦ Activists had intense dedication and an attitude of self-sacrifice for the good of the nation

# Old Protests—Conveyers of the Nation’s Political Ideals



- Young men (sonyŏn 少年 c. 14-20, ch’ōngnyŏn 青年 c. 15-35 = 젊은이) and young women (sonyŏ 少女)—modern subject to revive national glory (from about 1910)
  - Educated youth “resist injustice and confront the leadership for the future of the nation”
  - High school students most of marchers in March 1, 1919
- Park Chung Hee (1961-1979)
  - Strict ideological education combined with martial training to instill anticommunism, patriotism, and productive nationals
  - Historical education—division of Korea blamed on North Korea, while US credited with liberating Korea and saving it during the Korean War

# National Charter for Education 국민교육헌장



“We are born with the historic mission of national resurrection and prosperity. Revitalizing today the spirit of our ancestors, it is the time to establish self-reliant independence internally and contribute to human prosperity externally. In this we clarify our outcome and make it our educational index. . .

Our life’s road is patriotism and love of the nation through a spirit of thorough anticommunist democracy that is the basis for realizing the ideals of the free world.

우리는 민족 중흥의 역사적 사명을 띠고 이 땅에 태어났다. 조상의 빛난 얼을 오늘에 되살려, 안으로 자주독립의 자세를 확립하고, 밖으로 인류 공영에 이바지할 때다. 이에, 우리의 나아갈 바를 밝혀 교육의 지표로 삼는다.

반공 민주 정신에 투철한 애국 애족이 우리의 삶의 길이며, 자유 세계의 이상을 실현하는 기반이다.

# Protest Narrative of Korean Youth



- 4.19 (1960) Student Revolution
- 1965 demonstrations against normalization of relations with Japan
- 1970s *minjung* discourse validated the “common people who were politically repressed” as agents of Korean history
- 1980 Kwangju Uprising
- 1987 torture and death of Park Chong-ch’öl ignited demonstrations in which a tear gas grenade killed Yi Han-yŏl—June 10<sup>th</sup> Inch’ŏn demonstration
  - ✦ Picture of June 9<sup>th</sup> Seoul demonstration page 29

# Postauthoritarian Neoliberal Era Youth



- Older generation had to work underground, were committed, and were willing to endure violence and possible arrest
- Neoliberal youth after democratization no longer had to fear arrest and repression
  - Could express sympathy for North Korea without danger of arrest
  - Could criticize the US and question the alliance with the USA
  - Could denounce the government

# Neoliberal Reforms Changed Labor Markets



- **Kim Dae Jung Democratic Party regime 1998-2003 paradoxical for supposed labor supporters**
  - South Korea forced to open financial and commodities markets
  - Influx of foreign corporations created anxiety with competence in English now more important than ever
  - Labor markets restructured with large-scale layoffs
    - ✦ Women bore much of this as they were fired and then rehired as “temporary workers” with less pay and fewer benefits (only one member of family could stay, so wife often had to leave)
    - ✦ Lifetime positions with benefits difficult to get, so many college leavers took freelance work
    - ✦ Quotas on college admissions were lifted in 1980s so that college degrees became devalued and not a sure thing for employment

# “Sunshine Policy”



- Kim Dae Jung visits P’yŏngyang in June 2000 as part of “Sunshine policy” (got Nobel Peace Prize for this)
  - Title comes from Aesop’s fable “The North Wind and the Sun”, though the official name of the policy was “The Reconciliation and Cooperation Policy Towards North Korea” 대북화해협력정책
  - Content:
    - ✦ No armed provocation by the North will be tolerated
    - ✦ The South will not attempt to absorb the North in any way (no 흡수통일)
    - ✦ The South actively seeks cooperation and promotes reconciliation with North Korea
    - ✦ ROK willing to help North Korea now in order to get cooperation later



# Change in Social Attitudes



- By the 1990s college students began finding their environment more competitive than the past
  - It used to be “if you were admitted you would graduate” and students often relaxed once they were in college
  - Often students spent more time drinking and socializing in activist study groups and in political activity that they did on their studies
- As the labor market become more competitive and college degrees more common, which college you attended and how well you did in college started to become more important
  - College students withdrew to their studies and became less civic minded

# Development of the Internet



- By 2002 game playing on the internet was widespread (PC-bang—internet room)
- During the Asian currency crisis newly graduated students couldn't get a job
  - The Kim Dae Jung administration created work for educated youth digitizing government archives  
(신지식인/고학력실업자를 위한 공공근로 사업)
- Daum.net and Naver.com from 1997 and 1999
- On-line forums and discussion groups (Agora)
- On-line news sites (Pressian and OhMyNews)
- Satirical sites (Ttanji ilbo satirized Chosŏn Ilbo)

# Increasing Youthful Disillusionment with the USA



- **February 2002 George Bush visited the ROK right after his “axis of evil” (State of the Union) speech linking Iraq, Iran, and North Korea**
  - Some South Koreans began to see the US as a barrier to peace in the context of Sunshine policy
  - US was simultaneously trying to sell fighter aircraft to South Korea
  - Kim Tongsoŋ disqualified in 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics in favor of Japanese-American Apollo Ohno
- **October 2002 Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visited P’yŏngyang**
  - Claimed P’yŏngyang admitted a secret HEU enrichment program contrary to the 1994 Agreed Framework between the US and North Korea
  - Both the US and North Korea subsequently declared the dead dead
  - While negotiations restarted with the Six Party Talks of 2003-9 no subsequent agreement was reached

# Death of Misöni and Hyosuni



- June 13, 2002—Tank convoy from Camp Casey near Tongduch'ön ran over two middle school girls on a narrow lane
- Girls deaths captivated Korea, but not right away
  - Initial preoccupation with the World Cup May-June hosted by Japan and Korea hosted (Korea came in 4th)
  - South Korean fans in red t-shirts called Red Devils 붉은 악마 viewed matches on Jumbotrons in Kwanghwamun creating intense feelings of national solidarity—7 million in street that night
  - Late November US Military Court Martial found the drivers of the tanks not guilty of negligent homicide (a type of charge not found in South Korea jurisprudence)
    - ✦ South Korean courts and prosecutors had no jurisdiction
    - ✦ This outraged students who had no detailed knowledge of SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement)—there seemed to be no accountable party

# SOFA



- **Status of Forces Agreement**
  - US negotiates a SOFA with all countries in which the US has troop deployments
  - US-ROK SOFA provides for special entry and visa procedures for US personnel, exemption from South Korean income tax for military personnel, and the right to important items duty-free (such as at PX)
  - US military are subject to Korean laws and jurisdiction except during the performance of official duty, but the US requests jurisdiction from the Koreans in most cases involving military personnel (which the Koreans can grant or not, but usually do)
- In the case of Hyosuni and Misōni the personnel involved were on official duty, and thus were tried for negligent homicide by US military court martial (something that would also be true in the United States for soldiers on official duty)

# The Court Martial



- Sergeant Fernando Nino was a spotter looking out the top of the tank to see things to avoid and relay the message to the driver
- Sergeant Mark Walker was driving the tank, but had limited visibility and would not have been able to see the girls
- Sergeant Nino radioed the presence of the girls on the road to Walker
- The radio link was defective, and Walker didn't get the message, so he didn't take evasive action
- Under US law the jury would have had to find negligence to hold Nino or Walker guilty
  - Criminal negligence could be something like not following normal safety procedures, being criminally impaired (say, intoxicated), or criminally distracted (say, texting)
  - Since the two defendants were following proper procedure and the cause was an equipment defect for which they were not responsible they were both acquitted
- To many Koreans, however, the fact the nobody was found responsible was incredible

# Candlelight Demonstrations



- Vernacular way of dealing with lack of accountability
  - Initial proposal was to use candlelight vigil to assuage the souls of the dead and make penance—a kind of a funeral ceremony
    - ✦ In Korean folk belief the soul of a person who had a “bad” death can return to haunt the living and thus needs to be assuaged and encouraged to go “to a good place”
  - This was combined with images of an alternate international reality that could be of democracy, equality, and peace
    - ✦ Frustration with Korea’s lack of weight in the world system was heightened by the whole series of events
  - The vigils became a nightly event through November
  - When PKC (Pan-Korean Community) and other radicals joined in the protests, however, younger protestors tended to withdraw, as PKC was seen as too radical
    - ✦ N.B. “Pan-Korean” 범민족 means both North and South Korea together, and groups using this name often advocate unification through confederation, withdrawal of US troops, and revision of the National Security Law (that makes it illegal to have contacts with or praise North Korea)

# Were the Protests Anti-American?



- **Right 우익 (Chosŏn Ilbo 朝鮮日報)**
  - Changed its critical tone after President Bush made an apology and the paper began deploring the “irrationality” of the protests
- **Left 좌익 (Hankyoreh 한겨레신문)**
  - The paper over-interpreted the demonstrations as political protests against the US
- **Both left and right saw the protests as anti-American, but Kang criticizes this interpretation (pp 61-64)**
  - Kang says the protests were more about emotional grievances than politics
  - The point was mourning, pinpointing responsibility, and revising the SOFA agreement



# Effect?



- Roh Mu Hyun won the presidency in 2002
  - He had initially been seen as too liberal, but after the protests his views seemed more mainstream
    - ✦ He questioned the importance of US troops for Korea
    - ✦ His opponent Yi Hoech'ang was an elite, and his sons had evaded military service
  - Roh became a “metonymic figure”
    - ✦ metonymy is a figure of speech in which a part is used to represent a whole—say “crown lands” for lands owned by the monarchy
    - ✦ Roh became a metonymic symbol for a more democratic, egalitarian, self-assertive nation

# Remembering the Demonstrations (2006)



- Participants remembered taking part without prior intention or identification with the cause
  - Some mobilized online
  - Some participated casually because crowds were peaceful and festive
- How people talked about what they felt at the time
  - Ŭnha—passion and true sense of justice that now can't be recaptured
  - Chongsu—surrounded by protestors while waiting for a bus (connected without sharing a collective identity)
  - Many recalled the feeling of solidarity during the World Cup
  - Many connected vigils to *kŭkki hullyŏn*—five-day training camps where on the final night they had a candlelit ceremony in which a designated speaker would eulogize the comfort, security, and love they took for granted (especially from parents)
    - ✦ In this way the candlelight vigils seemed familiar and safe

# Ambivalence



- Some worked from old political action plan
  - Devoted activism, physical and social cost for participants, radical political claims
- Those who had passed through military service thought vigils were infiltrated by anti-American activists or spies
  - Indoctrination in the military made them think US military involvement in Korea is necessary, and anti-Americanism is inappropriate
- Others saw the movement as superficial
  - Didn't require enough sacrifice of participants
  - People were simply enjoying the culture of the public sphere and snapping selfies
  - Older activists saw the “degeneration of protest culture”

# Post-Authoritarian Movement Repertoire



- Internet captivation that motivates activism tends to be temporary
  - Potent method for expressing unarticulated feelings, but not remembered along ideological lines
- Not a new generation of activists equipped with the internet and anti-Americanism
- Candlelight protests became a well-established repertory expressing many things