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The 2008 Candlelight Protest in South Korea: Articulating the Paradox of Resistance in Neoliberal Globalization

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The 2008 Candlelight Protest in South Korea:
Articulating the Paradox of Resistance in Neoliberal Globalization

by

Huikyong Pang

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation is a speculative analysis of the historical contexts of a social protest, based on the notion of “articulation” advanced in the field of cultural studies. Focusing on the 2008 candlelight protest against U.S. beef in South Korea, my goal is to explore the historical contexts of the protest, which formulate the identity of the protest. Since the U.S. beef deal was approved by the Korean government as a precondition for the Free Trade Agreement between Korea and the United States, the protest has been considered (notably by leftists in Korea) as a resistance against post-colonial overtones and fascist eco-political principle in the era of neoliberal globalization. Instead of understanding the protest from such an essentialist perspective, my research makes a commitment to exploring the exterior factors that drove the possibility of the protest. The notion of articulation, a mode of explanation that moves beyond any linear sort of causality, provides a framework to view the protest not as a unity, but as a linkage of multi-dimensional (political, economic, social, and cultural) elements of historical contexts. Based on my journal entries written during my participation in the protest, and the journal articles about the 2008 protest written by the scholars in Korea, I explored the main characteristics of the protest in comparison with the conventional social movements in Korea, and discovered that the 2008 candlelight protest had featured the “food safety issue,” “participants with heterogeneous desires,” “carnivalesque modality,” and an “ambiguous goal.” From these main features, I inferred four salient axes of historical
vectors (and their forces) including “political democratization and depoliticization,”
“food industrialization and wellbeing fever,” “market liberalization and job insecurity,”
and “advanced communication technology and carnivalesque culture.” My research
findings present that the 2008 candlelight protest is not a definite insurgent element
calling for any deep change in the dominant political and economic paradigm, but exists
as a paradoxical event at the cusp between subordination to and resistance against
neoliberal globalization. The main contribution of my research project entails (1) pushing
the boundaries of communication studies on social resistance by including the notion of
articulation which situates the 2008 candlelight protest within its historical contexts, (2)
developing speculative analysis as a critical and cultural studies method for exploring
structural forces operating in deep layers of our experiences, (3) delineating the new
modalities of contemporary social movements by examining the concrete textures and
hues of the 2008 candlelight protest, and (4) offering new ways of (re)thinking the
principles of efficiency and economic growth by interrogating a case of food
industrialization and global exchange.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

It is nighttime, and a deep indigo sky looms overhead. I am walking amid a crowd of thousands of people; our shoulders bump together and my voice becomes intertwined and entangled with the murmurs, exclamations, and hushed dialogue surrounding me. These people are protesters, just as I am. We slowly make our way toward the Blue House, the sprawling residence of the Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, although none of us truly believes we will be allowed to speak to him. Each of us cups a flickering candle in our hands as a symbol of the peaceful intent of our march, creating a glittering river of protesters that floods the streets and sidewalks from Seoul Square to Sejong Avenue. Traffic has come to a complete standstill.

As we draw nearer to the Blue House, our voices rise, and we chant our slogans more fervently. Our quiet shuffle shifts into a rapid staccato of footsteps as we rush toward the entrance to Samcheong-dong, the location of the Blue House. And there, grimly waiting to meet us, are hundreds of riot police, their buses barricading our destination.

For a moment, the sea of protesters pauses, and silence rolls in like a sudden, thick fog. Then a single voice pierces the air and urges us all to pass through Kyungbok Palace so we can access another road to the Blue House. We surge toward the palace wall and deftly build rough inclines against the wall using stones. Once over the wall, we run
toward the front gate. A massive, heavy crossbar lies forbiddingly across it. But this will not stop us. Together we reach out and, with our united strength, lift the immense crossbar and push open the gates.

But yet again, row upon row of riot police and buses are there to greet us. Nearly ten thousand protesters are present, but not a single one of us can take another step forward.

Later, some protesters, attempting to get a better idea of how many riot police we are facing, try to climb over the buses. This is a mistake. The riot police respond with water cannons. Protesters fall beneath the high-pressure stream of water, which hits them on their torsos, eyes, ears, and mouths. Without real provocation, the protestors are subjected to intense violence, which they take with little resistance. I watch the scene, frozen with horror and disbelief. Beside me stand protesters with tears in their eyes.

This quelling of the protest by the police occurred in downtown Seoul at midnight on May 31, 2008, approximately one month after the South Korean government agreed to resume beef imports from the United States (on April 18, 2008). South Korea (Korea hereafter), the third largest market for American beef, worth $800 million a year (by 1999), suspended its imports in 2003 after an outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), known commonly as mad cow disease. As it was known that eating meat contaminated with BSE is linked to the variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans (a degenerative brain disease), 65 nations including Korea adopted full or partial restrictions on importing American beef products by 2006 (“The Life and Death of BSE”).
In 2007, when the United States was recognized by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) as a “BSE controlled risk country,” nations began to resume opening their markets to U.S. beef. Korea’s resumption of U.S. beef imports, however, was problematic in that its government’s agreement was carried out with only a few restrictions on meat shipments.¹ For example, whereas Taiwan and Japan restricted imports of American beef from cattle older than 20 months, Korea permitted U.S. beef imports from cattle over 30 months of age despite the belief that such beef was at particular risk of carrying mad cow disease, having been raised before the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) completely banned feeding the remains of other cattle in the form of meat and bone meal (MBM), which is known to generate the agent of the disease. In addition, Korea allowed the import of certain cow parts, such as brains, eyes, skulls, spinal cords that were known to contain higher risk of carrying the disease.

Despite the known risks, the Korean government justified its decision by claiming that the U.S. beef market resumption was the country’s best path to economic growth. Korea’s approval of beef imports was, indeed, given for the purpose of expanded trade agreements with the United States. Korea’s desire for the Republic of Korea and the United States Free Trade Agreement (the KorUS FTA hereafter) was accompanied by U.S. insistence on resuming the beef imports. U.S. congressional leaders had warned that they would never ratify the pact for expansive deals unless Korea fully reopened its markets to American beef (and automobiles). Simply put, the resumption of American beef imports was a precondition for the United States’ approval of the wide-ranging trade agreement. Through the KorUS FTA, the Korean government claimed, Korean

¹ On the sanitary rules of the U.S. beef deal approved by Korea in 2008, I referred to Jerenas and Manyin 2.
conglomerates would achieve more opportunities to export automobiles, cellular phones, and other goods to the United States. According to the government, these measures were ultimately necessary for Korea to escape its economic stagnation.

However, with mounting fear of mad cow disease among the Korean public, tens of thousands of people spilled into central Seoul, outraged and concerned about Lee’s decision. Undoubtedly, the government made a misjudgment. Some protesters questioned how the government could attempt to rescue the (capitalist) “system” at the cost of putting its “humans” at risk: wasn’t the (capitalist) “system” supposed to raise the quality of “human” life? Tension mounted between the protesters’ value on safety and the government’s value on economic growth. Marching in the middle of driveways, the protesters blocked traffic completely. As Michel de Certeau states that all bodily articulation, whether spoken or moved, has the capacity to enunciate (5–7); protesters’ bodies, jostling, clamoring, and disrupting traffic rules, were making the rhetorical claim, “We do not want the beef! We cannot allow the foreign virus to threaten our health, brains and lives.”

The steadily increasing number of the participants, however, faced the government’s response of physical violence. The government directed the police to heavily repress the protest. More than ten thousand riot police were released, building barricades with their buses around Seoul Square and Sejong Avenue for the purpose of blocking protesters from marching to the Blue House. They exercised a series of illegal and drastic measures, using water cannons and tear gas in the course of cracking down on the demonstrations. These unjustifiable measures were defended by the government’s claim that the protest was an illegal act in the sense that nighttime open-air assembly is
prohibited by Korean law. The police measures led to the injury of hundreds of protesters and to the detainment of approximately two hundred.

The violent police measures, however, still could not impede the marches of the candlelight protesters; the 2008 protest reached beyond the fences of farms, factories, and ivory towers to general citizens from across the political and economic spectrum. The number of protest participants reached 50,000 on June 5, 200,000 on June 6, 150,000 on June 7, and the rally held on June 10 was climaxed with one million people. Lee’s government was paralyzed by protesters’ outpourings of anti-regime sentiment and sent a delegation to the United States for additional negotiations regarding beef imports.

Finally, a revision of U.S. beef import conditions was made in June of the year. American beef import from cattle 30 months and older was barred from Korea, and an age certification for all meat shipped to Korea was promised. Imports of cattle parts like brains, eyes, skulls, and spinal cords, which are possibly more dangerous, were also forbidden. In addition, Korea won the right in the accord to inspect a sampling of American slaughterhouses—beef that had been in frozen storage in Korea for months could be inspected before heading to stores. Having continued for the three months of summer (from mid-May to mid-August), the 2008 candlelight protest ended, having made its mark as possibly the country’s largest social movement in 20 years.

Research Statement

Surprised at the large scale and continuity of the 2008 candlelight protest, Korean commentators have dubbed it an “unpredicted dramatic twist” in Korean politics (Chae 130; Cho and Park 4; H. Han 12). The Korean public had shown their political inclination

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2 On the revised sanitary rules of the U.S. beef imports through the additional negotiation, I referred to Jerenas and Manyin 8–9; Reuters, “South Korea to restart”; the public issue discussion website in Korea Aagandanet.co.kr.
toward conservatism both through the presidential and general elections. Lee Myung-bak, who officially promised broad-based relaxation of regulations of the financial sector, won the presidency on February 25, 2008, just two months before the protest. The newly elected president had accorded priority to rebuilding Korea’s political and economic alliance with the United States and attempted to remove the “biggest barrier” of the KorUS FTA (resuming beef imports) to mend ties with the United States (Cho, “South Korea will Lift”). This reveals that Korean conservatism has not been tradition-oriented or nationalist, but rather, pursued globalization as a mutation of modernization (Chae 132–3). In the wake of Lee’s achievement of presidency, his Grand National Party also had gained a majority of parliamentary seats in the general election. These election results could be read as the Korean public’s belief of the necessity to step into the swirl of economic globalization in order to revitalize the national economy.

How, then, could so many people, who seemingly had demonstrated a high degree of support for free-market ideology, come to articulate their discontent against economic globalization that took shape in the KorUS FTA? What drove those who had voted for conservatives to invest their time and energy in the protest against market-driven policies? How could middle and high school students, who were already exhausted from the burdens of grade competition and the hectic school schedule, come to jumpstart the protest? How could mothers, who had been the group of citizens working primarily at home as nurturers and caregivers, come to march against a diplomatic policy in the middle of driveways? How much weight did the issue of potential mad cow disease from

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3 In a TV interview, some protesters related that they were politically conservative, but still came to participate in the protest.
American beef carry in the protest? Was the issue weighty enough to lead Korean political history to such dramatic twist?

The government conservatives were shocked facing such sustained opposition to their decision. It became evident that they had not anticipated such a resistance by the question they used for interrogating the arrested protesters from overnight rallies: “Who is pulling the strings behind you?” This question exposes the conservatives’ disbelief that the vast majority of people would have voluntarily left their suburban homes to enter the bustling and sometimes violent protest venues for the purpose of standing against the government’s decision.

The mainstream conservative newspapers hurriedly attempted to answer the question, explaining that the protest was driven by individuals misguided by anti-American forces. In its editorial section, Dong-A Ilbo stated on April 28, 2008 that “some anti-American civil organizations . . . are inflaming public sentiments. . . . In every respect, it is just an anti-American instigation” (my translation). Similarly, Chosun Ilbo reported on May 2 that “the opposition forces to KorUS FTA are reinforcing the danger of mad cow disease in order to block American beef imports and to incite anti-Americanism.” On May 5, it reported that “anti-American forces united to work together, so even middle and high school students, lacking in judgment, are bounding out onto streets with candles” (my translations). Essentially, the conservative newspapers regarded the protesters as puppets whose strings were being pulled by leftist instigators.

However, it does not sound preposterous to define the protest as anti-American movement merely because it was against American beef. It is an old trick for conservatives to exploit the specific history of the Korean peninsula, which had suffered
from ideological antagonism in the contexts of the Cold War. Since the Korean War (1950–3)—a proxy war between South Korea sponsored by the United Nations, particularly the United States, and North Korea supported by the People’s Republic of China with military material aid from the Soviet Union—South Korean conservatives had emphasized extreme hatred toward communism like American McCarthyism, and also drawn an odd equation between “leftist,” “pro-communist,” “pro-North Korean,” and “anti-American” forces. By using this equation as their rhetorical strategy, the conservatives had attempted to erode the bedrock of their opponents by fostering an atmosphere of terror, ultimately in order to maintain their status quo (Chae 134). In Korean political history, once a person or group was labeled “anti-American,” the person or group could easily be considered a rebellious element that would bring detrimental chaos and tragedy to the society. The major newspapers’ stigmatization of the protest as an anti-American movement is in the same vein.

How, then, could the Korean public come to dramatically twist their political standpoints and articulate their discontent against economic globalization? My dissertation project aims to address this question and more on the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest. More than simply summarizing the protest as a pro-health response to global food exchange or detailing what the protest achieved, my research project aims to present the culturescapes that created the possibility of the protest. In other words, rather than defining the protest based on its interior characteristic features, I pay more attention to how the 2008 protest was able to win large and diverse public support, as a path to

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4 The student-led, pro-democratic movements against the military dictatorship in the 1980s were too often the victims of such labeling. The emotion of fear about communism and North Korea, doubtlessly, has been the key tool for manipulating public opinion and enforcing the conservatives’ major decisions in Korea.
reach the identity of the 2008 protest. Stuart Hall’s idea about the “political possibilities of the masses” captures the intention of my research question: “For something to become popular entails a struggle; it is never a simple process. It doesn’t just happen” (“Gramsci’s Relevance” 5). In its simplest form, my main inquiry in this research is about: who/what was pulling the strings behind the 2008 candlelight protest?

However, I am not in search of any singular element of the protest’s historical context, because there is no single structure or dimension of human life that stitches everything into place such that its patterns are indelibly sewn into the fabric of history. In this sense, Lawrence Grossberg’s concept of “articulation,” quite similar to what Hall underlines, is pivotal to my project. The notion of articulation leads us to conceive of an event not as an object but as a process—“its practice, its problematic and its specificity [of an event] can only be understood in response to particular historical contexts” (45). Under the rubrics of “articulation,” an event or practice is placed within a matrix of complex-tangled historical contexts. Articulation is a mode of explanation that moves beyond any linear sort of causality. Accordingly, my research project explores the political, social, economic, and cultural factors during certain historical periods of time that produce the possibility of the 2008 protest, all of which are too complex and contradictory to be conceived in terms of a simple relationship. I attempt to explore these complex factors to formulate the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest. The findings of this research project, I hope, help those who have passions toward democratic designs better envisage the locations and directions of contemporary social movements to map out their plans.

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5 Indeed, I am indebted to Grossberg in this research project. My hope is to further develop his notion by applying it to the 2008 candlelight protest.
In the remaining part of the introduction, I discuss the significance of this research and provide an overview of this project. The concept of “articulation” is discussed in Chapter 2.

**Significance of Research**

Theoretically, my research project extends the boundaries of communication studies on collective resistance by introducing the notion of articulation (advanced in cultural studies) as theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the historical context of an event or a practice. Extant communication studies, particularly those in Korea (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 2), have mainly focused on communication modalities and technologies used in social movements. As “cultural studies” provides a contextualist perspective, the concept of articulation presents a theory of context (Grossberg 45). Gaining a sense of how historical forces play out to influence a practice enables us to more clearly see where struggles are possible and also demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of struggles.

The second theoretical merit of my research project is in the fact that it experimentally places speculative analysis (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 3) as a research method in social science. Empirical and positivist studies are unquestionably dominant approaches to both research and theory construction in social science; “speculation” mostly tends to be frowned upon. I attempt to develop speculative analysis as a critical and cultural studies method for exploring structural forces that operate within deep layers of our daily experiences. Although social structure is real and part of our lives, we cannot understand it through sensory experience or through logical and mathematical treatment of the data obtained from the sensory experience. My argument about the
methodology thus foregrounds the idea that any research cannot be isolated from the researcher’s speculation, based on his or her insights, political stances, and morals.

My research project has four more practical significances. It first calls on readers to rethink the principles of democracy. Korean conservative pundits have been very vocal in the criticism of social protests including the 2008 candlelight protest with their emphasis on “representative/parliamentary democracy” system as an ideal and possible model of democracy in reality. By examining the standpoints of the 2008 protesters, my research project attempts to locate social protest as a method to reinforce representative democratic system, and as a justifiable “civil right of disobedience and resistance” (Nam 261).

Second, my research project delineates the new modalities of contemporary social movements through its focus on the textures and hues of the 2008 candlelight protest, which shares the characteristics of recent social protests in the world such as Arab Spring in 2010, Occupy Wall Street in 2011, etc. First, like the other social protests, the 2008 candlelight protest refused to accept the legitimacy of the existing legal and political order. Second, the 2008 protest was not sharply focused or fiercely committed to a single issue. Rather, it covered various ranges of issues from food safety, social economic inequality, health care, education, journalism to some other neoliberal agenda. This appears to be featured by its participants across political and economic spectrums, deploying heterogeneous desires. Fourth, the 2008 protest, led by information technology-savvy youth, effectively utilized communication technologies (such as the Internet, electronic messaging, blogs, videos, and other sources) to build solidarity, to

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6 The pundits such as Lee Han-gu, Kim Sang-bae, Kim Il-Young, Huh Woo-young, Shin Jung-sub, etc. have taken the position. The details of their opinions will be discussed in Chapter 3.
raise awareness of its issues, and to encourage people to join. Fifty, the 2008 protest utilized new ways of political engagement mixed with cultural imagination (such as irony, satire, and parody) and developed anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian consensus-based politics, all of which became main approaches to protest and activism. Readers of my dissertation project will understand the different angles, qualities, and nuances typified in current social movements from the conventional movements.

Third, my research project draws attention to the postcolonial overtones of globalization with the discussion on the unequal relationship between Korea and the United States in the establishment of the KorUS FTA. Globalization, as a political, cultural, technological, and economic phenomenon, has manifested through neoliberal policies across the world. Globalization fosters growth and technological advancement, creates new forms of network societies and knowledge, and facilitates human interactions, giving people more options through an easier exchange of ideas made possible by the Internet and telecommunications. On the flip side, however, globalization exacerbates the existing power and resource differentials between the global north and south and increases global power disparities and inequitable trade/economic relations. In particular, “free trade”\(^7\) is in the range of neoliberal tools that the major powers in the world (such as the United States, the European Union, financial institutions, transnational corporations, and multinational organizations) have used to drive other countries to conform to their game plan of political and economic domination (Sang-gu Kang 50). Focusing on the protest in Korea against American beef imports, which began in May 2008, my research

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\(^7\) “Free trade” is a market model in which trade in goods and services between or within countries flows unhindered by government-imposed restrictions including taxes and other legislation such as tariff and non-tariff trade barriers. In the phrase of “free trade,” “free” might imply that the global market guarantees democratic equality of opportunities between or among countries without any regulation from any power-groups or power-countries.
project calls attention to one of the consistently problematic aspects of economic globalization—inequality.

Fourth, my research project highlights issues of food safety and sovereignty, caused by food industrialization and global food exchanges. The United States, markedly, has industrialized its food system into large-scale monoculture farms to maximize productivity, and acts as a hegemonic vector in food distribution, leading to critical food safety and sovereignty issues. By focusing on the rallies that voice fears about the possible health risks of U.S. beef (such as mad cow disease), my research interrogates the canonical economic logic of “Homo Economicus” (Herman Daly famously problematized) that currently guides food industrialization and globalization, and calls for a rethinking of ethical meanings made in connection with food industrialization and globalization.

**Overview of Dissertation**

The rest of this research project is organized into six chapters. In Chapter 2, I examine the existing discussions about the 2008 candlelight protest with my critical perspective and explore the notion of “articulation” as a theoretical framework for understanding how the 2008 protest was able to win large and diverse public support. Articulation, which implies “a variation on a history or a political event happens at a juncture of different and distinctive cultural practices” (Grossberg 54), leads me to hypothesize that the articulation of discontent against economic globalization is not simply a discursive unity but a contingent linkage of different vectors and forces of social structures.
In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology of this project. I elaborate on “speculative analysis” as a method to analyze the historical vectors that orchestrated the protest. I define “speculative analysis” as an analysis strategy to infer configuration of likely reality from a number of verifiable elements. I use this speculative analysis strategy to infer the historical vectors and forces of the 2008 candlelight protest (configuration of likely reality), presented in Chapter 5, from its main features (the verifiable elements that I comprehend through my observation of the protest and the extant relevant literatures), presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 describes the characteristic features of the 2008 candlelight protest. Understanding the characteristics of the protest is important in examining the historical context of how the wide range of protest participants came to present their human agency in the form of resistance. This chapter is divided into four sections, each of which respectively examines the different nuances of the protest including: “Issue: Food Safety, Health and Life,” “Participants: Heterogeneous Desires,” “Modality: Serious State and Humorous Protesters,” and “Goal: Leaving Myung-bak Castle.” From these characteristics of the protest, the historical context of the protest is inferred and further discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter 5 portrays the national and international landscapes of South Korea as a canvas for the 2008 candlelight protest. I have categorized this historical context into four subcontexts: “Political Democratization and Depoliticization,” “Global Food Exchanges and Well-being Yol-pung,” “Market Liberalization and Job Insecurity,” and “Development of Communication Technology and the Carnivalesque.” These factors are
the elements that will help me lay out the mold and identity of the protest as well as the meanings made and shared around this historical event.

Chapter 6 summarizes and concludes this research project. Based on the matrix of complex-tangled historical vectors and forces that produced the possibility of the 2008 candlelight protest, my research project presents the paradoxical quality of the 2008 candlelight protest: although it is true that the 2008 candlelight protest was shifting the frame and tempo of capitalist globalization, the protesters were not a definite insurgent element calling for any deep change in the dominant political and economic paradigm. The 2008 candlelight protest exists at the cusp between subordination to and resistance against neoliberal globalization, providing large support for Grossberg’s insight about historical struggles as “neither pure resistance nor pure domination but rather, as caught between containment and possibility” (22).
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2008 candlelight protest against U.S. beef imports in Korea embodies the meaning of the counter-hegemonic struggle against the doctrine of economic growth. The doctrine of economic growth indicates an ideology or attitude that sets economic agendas and increasing efficiency as the overarching goals across the spectrums of society, politics, and culture (Chae 137–40). Achieving social hegemony, this principle has often justified deferring or canceling various social values such as democracy, human rights, safety, and pluralism in Korean history. As Antonio Gramsci astutely states, society, by nature, is not a static, closed system of ruling groups; rather, it is in constant flux, where subjects or agents dynamically deploy struggles to (de/re)construct common sense to achieve hegemony or counter-hegemonies (12). The 2008 candlelight protest symbolically arose from a refusal to accept the Korean government’s apologetics in its decision to achieve economic growth.

Indeed, the issue of protest has been a topic of research in the field of communication studies in that counter-hegemonic discourse formation, social resistance and solidarity all revolve around communication processes and strategies. Through their

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8 I use the concept “hegemony” as the ensemble of interests, beliefs, and practices exerted by the dominant fundamental group, based on Gramsci’s work. Gramsci conceptualizes “hegemony” as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group. Accordingly, in my work, “hegemony” refers to “power” with its legitimacy—power that has the capacity to protect common and shared values (Gramsci 12).
research and praxis, Korean communication scholars have explored different characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest—solidarity it garnered, the modality of its development, and the outcomes/impacts of the protest on the Korean public’s ordinary lives. Of particular note is their finding that ordinary citizens formed their point of view through Internet forums and discussions, and orchestrated the protest through super-efficient communication technologies (such as the Internet, wireless Internet-access devices, personal digital assistants, cellular phones, etc.); the protest, saturated with new communication media, was deployed through its unique communication modalities.

I found that the studies of the protests by communication scholars in Korea have captured a trendy convergence of social movement and information technologies in one of the world’s leading Internet-infrastructure nations, Korea. Communication studies, however, has paid minimal attention to the historical contexts of the Korean protest movement. Information technology (especially the Internet) surely assumed pivotal roles in mobilizing people and contributed to the protest’s development and unique form. I argue that information technology cannot be the singular element to characterize the protest.

Leftist commentators locate the 2008 candlelight protest in its historical context—the neoliberal era—which determines, enables, and constrains the possibilities and effects of the protest. The commentators pay special attention to the fact that the protest was ultimately opposed to the idea of using the KorUS FTA as a means to push Korea further into neoliberalism. Taking the historical context into consideration, the leftist commentators believe that the protest against the KorUS FTA (particularly U.S. beef

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9 In this manuscript, Korean communication scholars and Korean leftist intellectuals refer to those scholars/intellectuals who have had their works on the 2008 protest published in Korean academic outlets.
imports) is a local collective resistance against capitalist globalization, accelerated by neoliberalism.

Although the left-leaning commentators attempt to justify the protest within its historical context, they do not seem to take into account the full range of heterogeneous desires in the protest venues. Not all protesters appeared to be able to rationally engage in the geopolitical calculus of commerce that is likely driven by neoliberal globalization. In this chapter and in my project, I widen the horizons of discussion on the protest by articulating the concept of articulation.

The concept of articulation helps to locate a practice or an event in its complex-tangled historical contexts (within which the practice or the event occurs and on which the practice or the event has influence). By including the concept of articulation, I attempt to push the boundaries of communication studies on social movements that are confined to communication modalities and technologies; simultaneously, I intend to widen the range of discussion on social movements to cover multi-dimensional forces that drive the movements. My effort to develop the concept of articulation as the theoretical framework for my research project, however, does not imply a rejection of the extant perspectives addressed by Korean communication scholars and leftist commentators; rather, I aim to de-articulate and re-articulate the existing discussions on the 2008 candlelight protest.

In the rest of this chapter, I first examine the extant discourses on the 2008 candlelight protest in communication studies scholarship in Korea and then move to the leftist commentaries on the historical contexts of the protest. Then, I elaborate on the concept of “articulation.” This concept, developed in cultural studies, provides theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the multi-dimensional and multi-
directional historical contexts of the 2008 candlelight protest in this research project. Simply put, my aim is to discover the specificity of the political event—the protest—in cultural spaces. I conclude this chapter with research questions that elucidate the goal of my research project.

**The 2008 Candlelight Protest in Communication Studies**

One of the outstanding features of the protest was that various communication technologies were used, including the Internet, mobile phones, Short Message Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS). Most communication scholars in Korea turned their attention to new media, which mobilized a large number of participants and prompted the protest to develop in its unique form. I accessed an online resource website *DBpia* (www.dbpia.com), a scholarly, multi-disciplinary database, and retrieved fourteen essays from the journals in communication disciplines regarding the 2008 candlelight protest. Among the fourteen essays, only two essays discussed how mass media represent the issue of U.S. beef imports; the rest of the essays were devoted to exploring what roles new media took on for the protest.

One of the main strands of communication research on the 2008 candlelight protest is related to how the protesters utilized the Internet as a “public sphere.” Jürgen Habermas’ notion of the public sphere is the most popular theory that has been discussed regarding Internet websites in Korea. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas depicts the emergence of a European bourgeois public sphere spearheading the development of capitalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to Habermas, private individuals publicized and exchanged their views and knowledge on matters of general interests through newspapers, journals,
reading clubs, and in Masonic lodges and coffee houses, without being subjected to coercion. Essentially, the public sphere was a place between private individuals and government authority, open to all, where people could participate in rational-critical debates on issues of public interest. Habermas believed that when individuals accessed the sphere with equal rights and assembled their opinions through rational procedures, they could reach a consensus that would serve as a counterweight to political authority.

With its possibility of democratic control of state activity, Habermas emphasized the significance of the “public sphere.” However, with the transition of the liberal bourgeois society to the modern mass society, the promise of the public sphere declined. The sphere of publicness turned into a site of self-interested contestation for the resources of the state and commerce; for example, journalism began to take on the role of consumer services—striving to entertain customers by providing them with tips and features on fashion, food, travel, etc.

Taking into consideration the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, communication scholars in Korea focused their attention on the space where private individuals came together to have discussions and debates regarding the U.S. beef imports on the Internet. The scholars examined whether the promise of the public sphere as a counterweight to political authority was invoked. The information and discussions on the Internet led many Internet community members to become involved in the protest.

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10 According to Habermas, a new constellation of philosophical, social, cultural, and political developments took shape, extending from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The philosophical progression against classical liberalism coincided with the exposing of contradictions inherent in the liberal constitutional social order. The emergence of state interventionism and the welfare state blurred the demarcation between state and society and subsequently obliterated a clear distinction between public and private. Major socio-economic transformations based on industrialization resulted in the rise of mass societies characterized by consumer capitalism. The serial changes derived the decline of the public sphere.
Park Tae-soun states that the Internet transformed the structure of communication in the public sphere (120–40). Mass media, which has traditionally held a pivotal role in the public sphere, struggles with the gap between producer and consumer, in which social power groups (politicians, government bureaucrats, media powers, among others) may intervene. The advanced communication technology, the Internet, however, provides a space where general citizens can assume the roles of both producer and consumer. Park refers to this transformation of communication structure as the shift from a representative system to an expressive system.

Lee Chang-ho and Jung Eui-chul examined Korean adolescents’ favorite Internet cafés, *Jjugbbang Club* (http://cafe.daum.net/ok211) and *Bizarrerie or Truth* (http://cafe.daum.net/truepicture), and found out that these cafés, while originally established for exchanging information about and pictures of celebrities, played a leading role in the 2008 candlelight protest by urging adolescents to be united (388–424). The cafés’ adolescent members and visitors established special sections for the protest on the websites and promoted public participation by sharing the given times and locations of their protest assemblies as well as narrating their own experiences about participating in the protest. Nonetheless, Lee and Jung conclude that although the Internet cafés demonstrate some features of the public sphere, they fall short of becoming Habermas’s notion of the public sphere. While the Habermasian notion underlines “deliberation”—discussion based on rationality and mature procedures—the discussions in the cafés tended to be based on distorted information and groundless rumors. The adolescents often hurled insults at government conservatives and exaggerated the horror of mad cow disease rather than develop any rational-critical perspective on the issue.
In agreement on the unsuitability of Habermas’s notion of public sphere to the Internet discussions, Hong Seong-gu turns his attention to Chantal Mouffe’s notion of Republicanism (77–118).\footnote{For the details about Mouffe’s notion of public sphere, refer to Mouffe, \textit{The Challenge of Carl Schmitt} (1999).} Mouffe’s notion begins with the acknowledgement that the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, which assumes consensus drawn through rational procedure of consensus (mediating among conflicting interests), suppresses the reality of power relations. According to Mouffe, “the political” is always antagonistic in an irreducible dimension of all social relations. Mouffe asserts that democratic theory needs to acknowledge the ineradicability of antagonism and the impossibility of achieving a fully inclusive rational consensus (Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism). For Mouffe, it is impossible to reach a consensus; even if individuals reach a political consensus, it is only temporary. Ultimately, Mouffe maintains that “the political” resides in conflicts and in the ever-shifting relations between various interests, between changing groupings of “us” and “them” in plural societies. Hong believes that Mouffe’s notion is more applicable to the public sphere encompassing the 2008 protest. While private individuals exchanged their opinions in the non-political Internet cafés such as the aforementioned Jjugbbang Club, and Bizarre or Truth, and in Internet communities such as Daum Agora, Hong believes that power inequality and bullies could not be ignored in the real spaces. Essentially, Hong’s critical agreement is that although individuals worked toward a political solidarity, the process did not necessarily entail rational procedure for a “consensus” founded on equal right.

Kim Ye-ran suggests another concept of public sphere, an “affective public sphere,” as an alternative to the Harbermasian modern notion of the public sphere. With
her inquiry into the process of how individuals with private interests become social and participate in a collective activity, Kim conducted interviews with members of the women’s Internet communities that came into prominence during the 2008 candlelight demonstrations, including Soul Dresser, Hwa-jang-bal, Ssang-Ko, Lemon Terrace, Ssang-eul Ba-ggu-neun yeo-ja-deul (an Internet community for political discussions), and Dae-jang-bu-ung-i (a fan club for Politician Lee Hae-chan) (146–91). Kim states that the women habitually shared private affects, thoughts, and opinions on the Internet in their everyday lives and reached affective consensus. When the Korean government approved U.S. beef imports, the women started to discuss the issue because of the decision’s direct impact on their lives, and turned into political actors for the 2008 candlelight protest. In Kim’s view, individuals construct social minds, social relations, and social activities by sharing individuals’ affects (such as pity, joy, anger, and desire) on the Internet, rather than sharing rational and critical perspectives. Kim finally conceptualizes such Internet space as an “affective public sphere,” meaning the social space in which human emotion, affect, feeling, thought, and opinion are felt, communicated, shared, and activated in bodily and symbolic interactions. Kim identifies the significance of an affective public sphere in its capacity to transform various affects in ordinary lives into political actions.

Another thread of exploring the 2008 candlelight protest in communication studies is related to the source of “intelligence.” In particular, according to Park Sun-mi’s research, the 2008 candlelight protest showed that “intelligence,” which used to reside in a small number of intellectuals and professionals, moved to general citizens, all of whom have incorporated new information technologies into daily life (51–93). In her research, Park analyzes discourses within the Internet portal service Daum Agora and discovers

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12 Bodily interactions indicate interactions of bodily substance such as emotions and affects.
that the masses searched for professional information regarding the issue (e.g., the possible danger of U.S. beef), and in doing so, they constructed their own knowledge through their collective discussions on the Internet. Park states that in the past, the political parties had taken the crucial role and function of “organic intellectual” forming counter-hegemonic discourses to the logics of ruling forces; however, the boundaries between the “organic intellectual” and the masses are no longer clear.

The role of journalists, assumed by general citizens during the 2008 candlelight protest, has also been a research topic of communication scholars in Korea. During the protest, the chances to participate in news production procedures increased from the limited number of mass media workers to general citizens. The extant Internet news websites, Color TV (www.jinbicolor.tv) and Oh My News (www.ohmynews.com), began to provide real-time broadcasting services, and No Cut News (www.nocutnews.co.kr) and Pressian (www.pressian.com) followed them. To understand the shifting role and function of journalism in connection with the Internet’s real-time broadcasting, Lee Chang-ho and Bae Ae-jin conducted interviews with the reporters of the Internet broadcasting service Broadcasting Jockey (BJ) (44–75). According to Lee and Bae, the BJs carried laptops equipped with digital or web cameras and Wibro (wireless Internet technology)\textsuperscript{13} to report all the happenings in the protest venues without any mediation of (mainstream) mass media. Lee and Bae then state that the merit of Internet broadcasting is its capacity to cover a wide range of events that terrestrial national TV channels could never cover, while also corresponding to the requests of the Internet users and media.

\textsuperscript{13} Wibro (Wireless Broadband) is a wireless broadband Internet technology developed by the Korean telecommunication industry. The two Korean companies, KT and SK telecom launched commercial service in June 2006 and the number of subscribers was 100,000 in 2008. (qtd. in Lee and Bae 54).
viewers. Subsequently, Lee and Bae explore a new mode of journalistic performance: with their digital devices, some protesters recorded the events that unfolded before their eyes, and uploaded their recordings on User Created Content (UCC) websites. Such an alternative form of journalism, according to Lee and Bae, has the possibility of surpassing the function of old mass media, which are limited by the deadlines and the formulaic styles of news articles.

In his short essay, Jeon Gyu-chan focuses on the new mode of political communicative engagement during the protest (110–29). Jeon draws on his own observation of the protest venues as a journalism scholar and as a journalist to argue that the candlelight protest was a voluntary and autonomous explosion of the masses’ volitions and desires for democracy. In Jeon’s eyes, hundreds of thousands of participants (encompassing women, irregular workers, freelancers, teenagers, seniors, and homeless people) communicated their emotions (such as anger and fear) and affective feelings (delight, sadness, and hatred) through diverse media including the Internet, graffiti, fliers, placards, and T-shirts with slogans. Although the protest was triggered by self-defensive measures of the subjects who were exposed to the potential danger of mad cow disease, the protest dynamically developed into collective festivals. According to Jeon, the protesters maintained independent subjectivities through new modes of communication with indecent, abusive, coarse and vulgar languages contained in satires, jokes, and rumors. Jeon concludes that the 2008 candlelight protest was comprised of complexities of the rational and reasonable and the affective and emotional.

The 2008 protesters were also known to have frequently used personal media such as cell phones with Short Message Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service
(MMS) in organizing the demonstrations. Kang Jin-suk, Jang Ji-hyun, and Choi Jong-min conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen participants, and discovered that the protesters communicated through personal media with their acquaintance-participants and even with strangers to encourage each other to join the protest (13). The researchers came to the conclusion that the protest was initiated and sustained by voluntary participants with the help of personal media, instead of being mobilized by certain organizations or groups as Korean government conservatives claimed.

In summary, communication scholars in Korea claim that the 2008 candlelight protest was an explosion of civil power, with digital media playing the leading roles of developing its unique form. The scholars highlight that the protest was orchestrated by self-mobilization and voluntary participation of ordinary people who became involved in networks on the Internet. However, I argue that communication media is not the only answer to the question of who/what was pulling the strings of the protest. Although communication media were undeniably significant in mobilizing people and leading them to continue to participate in the protest, communication technologies cannot be the (super-) agents, which actualize democratic ideals. Considering that previous social movements in Korean history, especially the student-led pro-democracy movements against military dictatorship in the 1980s, obtained large public support before the emergence of the Internet and other new media such as mobile phones and text message services, information technology is likely insufficient to be touted as the single most important factor that attracted extensive participation during the 2008 candlelight protest.

In the next section of this chapter, I draw attention to the commentaries by Korean leftist

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14 Multimedia Messaging Service is a standard way to send messages that include multimedia content to and from mobile phones. It is available for delivering long text messages, photographs from camera-equipped handsets, and audio and video content.
intellectuals. These commentaries underline the historical contexts of the 2008 candlelight protest.

**The 2008 Candlelight Protest in the Context of Neoliberalism**

Besides the discourses emphasizing communication technologies as the important factors in (re)vitalizing the democratic movements for the 2008 candlelight protest, various other perspectives have attempted to analyze the protest. In particular, Korean leftist intellectuals locate the protest within its historical context and examine the justifiability of the 2008 candlelight protest as a form of civil disobedience. Before discussing the leftists’ commentaries, I review some cultural perspectives on the historical contexts of the 2008 protest in order to contextualize leftists’ commentaries.

In particular, Cho Ki-suk and Park Hye-yun view the 2008 candlelight protest as a cultural clash between materialism and post-materialism (243–68). Through the surveys they conducted with the protest participants, Cho and Park found that, on average, the protesters were more affluent, individualistic, and highly educated than members of the public. By exploring protest participants’ socio-economic backgrounds and other demographic characteristics, Cho and Park attempt to apply the concept of “post-materialism,” advanced by political scientist Ronald Inglehart, to understand the protest. In his book *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (1977), Inglehart uses the concept of post-materialism to explain the attitudes of young, modern-day Europeans and Americans who experienced a long period of prosperity and security in advanced industrial societies (after World War II). According to Inglehart, the young generations in the Western countries are fairly interested in post-material values (such as quality of life, human rights, and environmental issues) and are
actively involved in conventional political actions (such as voting) as well as unconventional political actions (such as protests, rallies, and sit-ins). Based on Inglehart’s concept, Park and Cho conclude that the 2008 candlelight protest was a clash between the protest participants’ post-materialist values and the Korean government’s traditional materialist values (which attempted to achieve economic benefits through the beef imports).

In a similar sense, Hong Seong-tae sees the 2008 candlelight protest as a case of “life politics”: a political action of Korean citizens to protect their health and life as basic human values (129–37). Based on the concept of “risk society” in Ulrich Beck’s work, Hong argues that the citizens live in a society in which they are surrounded by risks driven by modernity. The beef importation dispute, in this context, served as momentum for Korean citizens to realize the unpredictable risks and anxieties in their daily lives. To this extent, Hong concludes that the 2008 candlelight protest was an expression of the protesters’ desires and aspirations for rallies to prevent the possible danger of U.S. beef on their health and life.

In his research paper, Chae Jang-soo specifies the 2008 candlelight protest as a progressive movement but not a leftist one (133–4). Chae distinguishes the pair of conservative-progressive oppositions from the pair of right-left oppositions, although both pairs are often used interchangeably. The conservative-progressive binary indicates the stances and attitudes toward maintenance of the extant order, while the left-right binary is related to “system orientation”—e.g. socialism (a system) is a leftist term, but it is not a progressive one. Based on this classification, Chae conceptualizes the protest as a progressive movement in that it was opposed to government’s “authoritarianism,” and in
favor of “citizens’ political participation,” and “publicness.” In Chae’s view, the protest was not an anti-capitalist (or anti-neoliberal) movement with ideological concerns, but pleaded for civil rights to participate in the decision-making of public policies and for the freedom of assembly.

Cho Ki-suk also claims that the protest was only opposed to undemocratic trade negotiation procedures of the Lee administration rather than the capitalist system (125–48). She supports her claim from surveys of the protest participants’ ideological orientations. She says that the participants’ ideological orientation did not reflect the left-right or class disparity in Western European countries, that there was no evidence to support the notion that participants were intentionally against globalization, and that the participants’ political orientation was found to be progressive.

Leftist intellectual Park Young-gyun, however, argues that these kinds of discourses—interpreting the protest as a cultural clash between materialism and post-materialism, a life politics, the disputes over direct democracy and indirect democracy, collective intelligence, Web 2.0 Generation,¹⁵ and so on—can possibly make the mistake of diminishing the meaning of the 2008 candlelight protest into merely technological and cultural issues. Park asserts that the scholars and commentators, many of whom ignore the political and economic aspects of the protest, neglect their duty to locate the event within its social and historical context. He maintains that the candlelight protest should be understood within its historical context and social structural transformation in the second

¹⁵ “Web 2.0 Generation” discourse was suggested by Korean sociology and political science scholar, Kim Ho-gi. Kim identifies the teenagers as the first movers of the 2008 candlelight protest as “Web 2.0 Generation,” who are familiar with networking and communicating with each other on the Internet. Kim asserts that the teenagers’ attributes were the engine to drive the protest (H. Kim, “Interactive Communication”).
phase of capitalism (driven by neoliberalism). Korean leftist intellectuals share Park’s perspective, which views the protest as an anti-neoliberal movement.

Neoliberalism is a political economic ideology that operates with an emphasis on the reduction of state intervention and the deregulation and liberalization of markets.\(^\text{16}\) As economic system renovation was required with the inflation, unemployment, and a variety of fiscal crises in the 1970s in Western countries (which included Keynesianism as the mainstream eco-political logic), the orthodox liberal ideology of free markets in the global political economy reared its head out in the name of “neoliberalism”; neoliberalism emerged with the rejection of Keynesianism, which had supported state intervention (in Western countries from the 1930s to the 1970s).\(^\text{17}\) As orthodox liberalist Adam Smith postulates about an “invisible hand” to describe the self-regulating nature of the marketplace in his book *Wealth of Nations* (1776), neoliberalism assumes that the market is a complete and progressive order by itself, within which the forces of self-interest, competition, and supply and demand would provide the best outcome for society without government interference. To sum up, neoliberalism is about “the triumph of markets over governments” (Steger 48–9).

Neoliberalism initially appeared as “Reaganomics” and “Thatcherism” in the United States and in the United Kingdom, respectively. In favor of free market, both trends of policies emphasized restructuring toward privatization of social and public services (health care, education, and housing), flexibility of labor market (which weakened laborers’ power), reduction of taxes (which resulted in wealth inequality), and

\(^{16}\) About the notion of neoliberalism, I referred to Sang-gu Kang 90–119.

\(^{17}\) Keynesianism was the dominant political and economic logic during the latter part of the Great Depression, World War II, and the post-war Golden Age of Capitalism (1945–73).
relaxation and elimination of quantitative restrictions on enterprises and trade protections (licensing, etc.). Under the logic of neoliberalism, capital was liberated from governments’ controls, crossing over national territorial boundaries, integrating the world economies into a single free-market global economy. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in this new phase of capitalism, transnational corporations and the United Nations’ bodies, along with multi- and transnational finance and trade agencies—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and so forth—have enhanced their powers, pushing countries deeper into the free market global economy; therefore nation-states no longer have sovereign power over their economies. It became virtually impossible, Hardt and Negri assert, for any government to escape involvement and alliances in the world economy.

Although countries have adopted and reflected neoliberal trends in their policies, they have been unable to overcome their economic depressions. Kang Sang-gu explains that neoliberalism is not a complete theory because it has not been able to integrate “laborers” into its system. The theory has been mobilized by an exclusive segment of social forces or agencies; thus, under neoliberal policies, benefits are concentrated in the hands of those in high-income brackets (Harvey 11). The situations in Korea appeared to demonstrate the incompleteness of neoliberalism. Korea knuckled down to join the global economy in the early 1990s (Sang-gu Kang 90–119). The country adopted a policy of open markets, which brought broad-based relaxation of finance sector regulations, such as permitting companies and banks to attract foreign loans (Sang-gu Kang 90–119).

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18 For details of the integrated world economy, refer to Negri and Hardt, Empire (2000).

19 Pursuing neoliberalism as a market driven ideology, capitalists tend to raise the rate of profit through “flexibility” of the labor market, which results in disempowerment of workers (Sang-gu Kang 90–119).
However, a chain reaction occurred in an unpredictable way: the sudden influx of transnational capital led first to an economy and property bubble in Korea, then to rapid capital flight, and finally to an exchange crisis in 1997.

Subsequently, Korea experienced the peak of neoliberalism through the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the period of the financial-cum-economic crisis. Providing loans to Korea, the institution demanded four major reforms: financial sector restructuring, corporate-sector restructuring, privatization of public corporations, and an enhancement of flexibility in the labor market (K. Shin). These economic restructurings resulted in mergers and the acquisition of big companies in the banking and manufacturing sectors, whose immediate impact was massive layoffs of laborers. Korea eventually succeeded in paying off the debt to the IMF in 2001.

Park Young-gyun believes that the fatigue, which Koreans had felt while passing through the injustices and contradictions of the Western political and economic logic, neoliberalism, materialized into the chorus of voices in the 2008 candlelight protest (106–8). Guided by the logic of neoliberalism, the Korean government gradually transformed itself into an institution that could be controlled by corporations in private sectors. Even regarding the issue of U.S. beef imports, the Korean government failed to act as an elected representative of its people by relinquishing the right to self-inspection for U.S. beef. Instead, the Korean government worked toward liberating the economy from its political control and restrictions, and keeping up with the KorUS Free Trade Agreement, which was a focal component of neoliberalism.

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20 According KoA’s “Struggle against Neoliberalism,” in the process, the United States blocked Korea from obtaining assistance and loans from Japan and forced the intervention of the IMF in order to achieve the rapid restructuring of the Korean economy.
A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a pact between two or more countries to establish an exchange of goods and services unhindered by government-imposed restrictions, including taxes and other legislation such as tariff and non-tariff trade barriers. FTAs have guaranteed freedom for transnational corporations to operate as they please (regardless of the human suffering and ecological costs) while creating widespread social disparities like any other neoliberal institutions (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). 21 The KorUS FTA was on the verge of presenting a large advantage to the giant Korean conglomerates, whereas the agreement would possibly spell disaster for many other sectors of the economy that could not fairly compete with U.S. corporations. While Korean conglomerates would achieve more opportunities to export automobiles, cell phones, and other goods to the United States through the KorUS FTA, American beef imports would starve out Korean beef farmers who could not keep their beef prices lower than U.S. beef from large-scale farms. In this regard, the 2008 candlelight protest, as Park argues, is a significant local struggle against neoliberalism.

Kim Se-gyun and others also believe that the public wrath expressed through the 2008 candlelight protest was not only directed toward undemocratic conditions but also toward the structural forces of neoliberalism that cause hardships among the Korean public, and the pro-neoliberal government that prioritized expansion of market growth over publicness (25–6). Son Suk-chun, on the other hand, states that the protest against U.S. beef imports automatically signifies a resistance against neoliberalism in the sense that mad cow disease is a product of neoliberalism (52). A case of mad cow disease was

21 According to KoA’s “Struggle against Neoliberalism,” the comprehensiveness and depth of many of today’s FTAs often go much further than the WTO. Typically, they cover a huge array of issues and targets, from giving corporations the right to sue governments in Southeast Asia, to legalizing the dumping of American farm surpluses in Central America to raising the cost of life-saving medicines, through longer patent terms in North Africa.
first detected in the United Kingdom, when the UK food security agencies weakened their regulations on agricultural food production under the regime of Margaret Thatcher in favor of free markets. Lending weight to this viewpoint, Kim Chul-kyoo argues that the increasing global food exchanges under neoliberalism have caused food crises, under the guise of food sovereignty and food safety (123–44).

In summary, Korean leftist commentators believe that the driving force behind the 2008 candlelight protest is the economic fascism of neoliberal globalization. It is true that the 2008 candlelight protest was a case of slowing down the tempo of capitalist globalization to the extent that it was opposed to the KorUS FTA. However, does the concept of neoliberalism explain all aspects of the protest? Although a resistance against neoliberalism is one of the critical social and political implications of the candlelight protest, it does not appear to be the singular driving force of the protest. Such an account cannot explain why other movements against neoliberal policies were unable to elicit such strong responses from the public; for instance, the 2006 protests against the KorUS FTA were comprised of a limited number of participants and were mainly led by farmers. I believe the leftist intellectuals tend to confine the meaning of the protest to resistance against neoliberalism. This kind of a reductionist perspective is epistemologically problematic, as it is politically insufficient.

Accordingly, my intention in this research project is to punctuate such a reductionist perspective through my commitment to understanding the protest within multi-dimensional social structures and engagements in culturescapes. In order to avoid the conventional reductionist paradigm, I include the concept of “articulation” as the foundational theoretical lens for my project. The concept of “articulation” leads me to
consider the complex, multiple, and non-necessary historical forces that straddle the 2008 protests. I consider the candlelight protest, as a mélange of the contingent connections between different historical forces surrounding and penetrating the event.

**Multi-Dimensional Contextualist Approach to the 2008 Candlelight Protest**

The concept of articulation was primarily propounded by Antonio Gramsci, and has been elaborated in the works of Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall. Lawrence Grossberg, who has endeavored to establish British cultural studies in U.S. communication disciplines, also developed the concept into a contextualist perspective on an event. Grossberg’s rubrics of articulation lead to an understanding of an event not as an object but as a process “whose problematic and specificity can only be understood in response to particular historical contexts” (45). In this section, I examine the theoretical notion of articulation. I first review the works of Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall before examining Grossberg’s notion of articulation and how his ideation of articulation can be used to conduct a cultural analysis of the 2008 candlelight protest.

Indeed, there is no complete configuration of “articulation.” According to Jennifer Darlhy Slack, who has contributed to a genealogical understanding of articulation, articulation has never been delineated or used as a complete concept, nor has it been configured as simply one thing (114). Instead, articulation is a complex and unfinished phenomenon that has emerged and continues to emerge, foregrounding and backgrounding theoretical, methodological, epistemological, political, and strategic forces, interests, and issues (Slack 114). In the pejorative line of Geras (who has mordantly criticized Laclau and Mouffe’s post-Marxist position), articulation is not
intelligible, as it is applied sometimes to events and sometimes to discourses about events, and it is unclear whether its principles are empirical or logical (27).

The double meaning of the word “articulation” may provide a clue for understanding its theoretical concept: *articulation* primarily means to utter and to express or explain ideas, thoughts, or feelings clearly in words, and secondarily it means a joint or connection that allows movement. The former meaning implies that articulation indicates *discourse* (structures accomplished by subjects’ various practices), and the latter features the shape or form of the discourse that is similar to *a specific linkage*, where parts (ideologies) are connected to one another, but not necessarily. Articulation, thus, is briefly conceptualized as *discourse* (structure) that is shaped as a “unity,” but it is, in actuality, a linkage of “different” elements or ideologies connected to each other (but not necessarily).

Ernesto Laclau uses this concept to “break with the necessitation and reductionist logic which has dogged classical Marxist theories” (Hall “Postmodernism and Articulation” 53). The fundamental tenets of classical and orthodox Marxism are the ideas (1) that history is inevitably progressing towards the fall of capitalism and communist revolution; (2) that the working class will necessarily play the primary role in bringing about such a revolution; and (3) that such historical movement is irreversible. Likewise, classical Marxism relies on two related forms of reductionism: economic reductionism and class reductionism, as Slack notes:

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22 For more discussions of reductions, Slack recommends Hall, “Rethinking the ‘base-and-superstructure’ metaphor,” and “Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance”; Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” 3–16.
Economic reductionism maintains that economic relations, thought of as a virtually static mode of production (the base) controls and produces (determines) everything else in society (the superstructure). Class reductionism holds that all political and ideological practices, contradictions, and so on, in short all that might be conceived of as other than economic, have a necessary class belonging which is defined by the mode of production. Consequently, the discourse of a class and the existence of the corresponding class itself constitute a direct reflection of, or a necessary moment in the unfolding of the economic (116).

Laclau believes that reductionism (specifically class reductionism) failed both theoretically and politically, because actual variations exist in the discourse of classes: not everyone believes what he/she is supposed to believe or act in a way he/she is supposed to act, regardless of his/her class belonging (Slack 114). Essentially, for Laclau, there may not be an “overlap” between class positions defined by capitalism and the political subjectivity (or consciousness) needed for revolution (Ives 458); only contingent and non-necessary connections exist between different practices, between ideology and social forces, between different elements within ideology, and between different social groups comprising a social movement (Laclau 160). To bring into focus a non-reductionist view of class and the assertion of non-necessary correspondence among practices and the elements of ideology, Laclau turns down a simple determination by the “economic.”

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23 Laclau gives an example of the contingent and non-necessary connections as follows: “the discourse on nationalism can be linked to a feudal project of maintaining traditional hierarchy and order; or it can be linked to a communist project accusing capitalist of betraying a nationalist cause; or it can be linked to a bourgeois project of appealing to unity in order to neutralize class conflict, and so on.
Laclau’s passage from economistic and essentialist Marxist roots mainly depends on Gramsci’s work (Mouffe, “Hegemony and Ideology” 168–204). Gramsci’s vision of society is not based on a mechanical model of base and superstructure but involves a complex interaction of relatively autonomous spheres (public and private; political, cultural, and economic) within a totality of attitudes and practices (Lears 571). Society is in constant process, where subjects or agents dynamically deploy struggles to construct common sense to achieve hegemony even as the creation of counter-hegemonies also remains a possible option (Gramsci 12). Gramsci states the following about the dynamic of society in relations to the concept of hegemony: hegemony is “a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop” (Adamson 174).

Among Gramsci’s works, Laclau focuses on his concept of the process by which a dominant class exerts “hegemony” out of an ensemble of interests, beliefs, and practices. A certain class achieves dominance by articulating non-class contradictions into its own discourse and thereby absorbing the contents of the discourse of dominated classes (Slack 119). Articulating (expressing) the interests of social groups is coordinating connections between complex, multiple, and theoretically abstract non-necessary elements. The articulated (enunciated) discourse has no essential class connotation, and the meanings within the discourse are always connotatively articulated (linked) to different class interests, characters, or ideological elements within a discourse at a particular historical conjuncture. In essence, articulation replaces the idea of “representation”; whereas representation suggests the presentation of class interests defined economically and then
re-presented on the political or subjective terrain of consciousness, “articulation” is a process of creating connections between different practices (between ideology and social forces, between different elements within ideology, and between different social groups composing a social movement), and the connection is “contingent and non-necessary” (Hall, “Encoding/Decoding” 129). No single moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated (Hall, “Encoding/Decoding” 129). Articulation, in this sense, points out the problem of determination by underlining that a connection is forged or made in certain circumstances (Slack 119).

From the non-necessitarian and non-reductionist conceptualization by Laclau, Stuart Hall advances articulation into a concept indicating the form of discourse that, under certain conditions, can create a unity out of different elements. For Hall, the form of discourse is a linkage, which is not necessary, determined, absolute, or essential for all time; he notes, “The so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’” (Hall, “Postmodernism and Articulation” 53). Hall asserts that a theory of articulation is a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain historical conditions, to cohere together within a discourse; it is a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects (Hall, “Postmodernism and Articulation” 53). In other words, a theory of articulation asks how specific practices articulated around contradictions that do not all arise in the same way, at the same point, in the same moment, can nevertheless be thought of together (Hall, “Postmodernism and Articulation” 53).
Furthermore, Hall elevates the importance of articulating discourse to other social forces, but he does so “without going ‘over the brink’ of turning everything into discourse” (Slack 121). Hall’s endeavors begin from a critique of Laclau’s later work, which has “a risk of reductionism upward rather than a reductionism downward as economism was” (Slack 121). In Hall’s eyes, Laclau and Mouffe reduce everything else to discourse: “they take a post-Althusserian position positing all practice nothing but discourses; society itself can be analyzed as a series of competing languages; and all historical agents are discursively constituted subjectivities” (“Postmodernism and Articulation” 53).

Contesting “a risk of reductionism upward” in Laclau and Mouffe’s recent works, Hall highlights the Althusserian recognition that “no practice exists outside of discourse without reducing everything else to it [discourse] (my emphasis)” (Slack 122). For Hall, material conditions are, even if not sufficient, the necessary condition of all historical practice (Slack 122). Hall does not believe that struggle is reduced to struggle in discourse, where “there is no reason why anything is or isn’t potentially articulable with anything,” and society becomes “a totally open discursive field” (Slack 122). Hall “pulls articulation back from the extreme, theoretically driven logic of ‘necessary non-correspondence’” (what he calls the “excesses” of theory) and maintains thinking and

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24 Laclau’s contestation against a priori insertion of classes into Marxist analysis continues to appear in his later book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001), which he coauthored with Mouffe, and discloses the nuance of their reduction of everything into discourse. Laclau and Mouffe state the following: “Our principal conclusion is that behind the concept of ‘hegemony’ lies something more than a type of political relations complementary to the basic categories of Marxist theory. In fact, it introduces a logic of the social which is incompatible with those [Marxist] categories” (3).

25 In fact, Marxist critic Geras has also denounced Laclau and Mouffe’s work as relativist, idealist, and anti-Marxist; Geras summarizes their work as “being little more than liberal pluralism dressed in fancy words and postmodern jargon, for being, or just confused” (Ives 456). The critics against Laclau and Mouffe’s post-Marxism include: Geras, “Post-Marxism?”; Palmer, *Descent into Discourse* (1990); Wood, *The Retreat from Class* (1986).
theorizing practices within which are unities—often relatively stable unities” (Slack 122). For Hall, “the ‘unity’ that matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but not necessarily, be connected” (Slack 122). In short, if Laclau and Mouffe highlight the role of the discursive in the process of articulation, Hall worries over the effect of their logic on the politics.

Lawrence Grossberg, on the other hand, advances the concept of articulation into a theoretical frame for identifying a practice or event in the field of cultural studies within the discipline of communication. Grossberg’s idea develops by repudiating a principle of interiority or essentialism that locates the identity of any practice in a structure of necessity. In his book We Gotta Get Out of This Place (1992), Grossberg states that the identity of an event is not intrinsic but is in relation to its various connections to its exterior, to that which is other to it. The identity of an event is not where it is or happens, but at all of those sites where its existence makes a difference in the world. Grossberg believes that an event is identified by the “effects” of the others; he notes that this understanding is derived from the works of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

According to Grossberg, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari place an event in a complex network of effects. An event exists with other events’ effects on it; it also effects elsewhere on the other events. An event is defined by others’ effects or, more precisely, “effectivity” (indicating the multidimensionality of effects). The effects are not guaranteed before they have been enacted, nor are they limited to a single plane or direction; rather, they are exerted on multidimensional and multidirectional fields. To this extent, Grossberg claims that Foucault’s, and Deleuze and Guattari’s ways of
understanding the identity of an event is similar to the concept of articulation. In his view, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari have not found a proper word for their logic (54)

For Grossberg, articulation is a process of forging connections between certain practices and their effects, as well as enabling practices to have different (and sometimes unpredictable) effects. An event or a practice obtains its identity as a result of “articulation” of different exterior elements to it. Grossberg states, accordingly:

Articulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links that practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc. (54).

Articulation, however, not only produces identity on top of differences but also delinks or disarticulates connections as well as rearticulates connections, as there is no necessary “belongingness” in connections. Articulation is “a continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations within which a practice is located” (54). “Each practice is located in a specific place as a set of relations, close to some practices, more distant from other. Its effects will be determined by those relations and distances” (60).

Grossberg suggests that such articulation should be conceived as a linkage of lines or vectors, projecting their effects across the field. Articulation may have different vectors, different forces, and different spatial reaches in different contexts, and it may also have different temporal reaches, cutting across the boundaries of our attempts at historical periodization. “Each vector has its own quality (effectivity), quantity, and
directionality; any practice exists in multiple contexts across the space of a particular moment, articulated into different, sometimes competing and sometimes contradictory sets of relations” (59). Another point that requires special attention here is Grossberg’s regard for “structure” as an important matter; a context is thus “a structural field, a configuration of practices” (60). Accordingly, Grossberg’s concepts of lines or vectors indicate structures.

Consequently, analyzing an event from the perspective of articulation involves (re)constructing the network of relationships of structures into which and within which the event is articulated. This strategy of analysis involves drawing lines or connections, for they are the productive links between points, events, or practices within a multidimensional and multidirectional field. Articulation leads us to dig out the contexts of an event in order to grasp its identity; in other words, articulation offers a theory of structural contexts (4). Therefore, interrogating any articulated practice (or structure) requires an examination of the contexts—namely, “the ways in which the ‘relatively autonomous’ social, institutional, technical, economic, political forces are organized into unities that are effective and are relatively empowering or disempowering” (60).

Based on this notion, Grossberg devotes the remainder of the book to exploring the contexts of U.S. culture—especially popular culture, rock music, and youth culture—where historical vectors and forces project their effects across multidimensional and multidirectional fields. Finally, Grossberg discovers the unlikely confluence between popular culture and the deeply ingrained conservatism of U.S. post-World War II society, which resulted in pessimism over politics and depoliticization. With his deductions, Grossberg argues that popular culture has played a central role in the reorientation of U.S.
politics along neo-conservative lines (402). 26 Neo-conservatives have managed to usurp the libidinal and affective qualities of rock culture for their own hegemonic purposes in the United States.

Gathering up all the aforementioned threads, a theory of articulation, advanced by Grossberg, provides a way to understand an event or a phenomenon as an inter-play of correspondences, non-correspondences, and contradictions of structures as fragments, in the constitution of a unity. Identifying an event thus requires mapping the contexts within which an event or a phenomenon occurs or which influences the development of the event. Mapping the context is not situating a phenomenon in a context, nor is the context something out there within which practices occur or which influence the development of an event (Slack 125; Grossberg 55). Instead, mapping the context is to investigate the exterior vectors and forces of structures, which exert their effects on the identity of an event.

Relying on the notions of articulation, I aim to unravel the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest. This notion does not lead me to see the protest as a coherent unity; the identity of the protest is not intrinsic or guaranteed, but it is an (unpredicted) effect of the conjuncture of disparate exterior events and practices with various contradictory forces, tendencies and positions of social, political, and economic structures. Moving beyond the general identification of the protest as an online social movement or anti-capitalist response, I explore the complex and active vectors and forces that affected the configuration of the protest. Beyond the protest itself, the historical context of the protest

26 Grossberg also notes that “such conservative politics include the growing acceptance of economic and political inequalities and structures of local discrimination against various (but not all) subordinated groups, the attempt to impose minority-held moralities on society, the reduction of freedoms in the name of social values, and the marginalization of radical oppositional groups and alternatives.”
is a play or process in which different and distinctive practices entangle, un-entangle, and re-entangle. Essentially, the 2008 candlelight protest as an utterance of criticism against the Korean government’s decision is understood as a complex, unfinished phenomenon that has emerged and continues to emerge in my research project. The contextual structures of the protest that I will present will address the epistemic blank that communication scholars and leftist/progressive intellectuals’ discussions have left/created. As I embark on my inquiry, I first explore the main features of the 2008 candlelight protest; then, I discuss the historical vectors and forces of the protest; and finally, I let the historical context reveal the identity of the protest. In short, I propose to address the following research questions in this dissertation project:

RQ 1: What are the main discursive and material features of the 2008 candlelight protest as a social movement?

RQ 2: What are the historical structures (the political, the social, and the economic) that produce the communicative possibilities of the 2008 candlelight protest?

In the following chapter, I present a map of how I conducted this research project to engage with these research questions.
Articulation and Speculative Analysis

In my research project, I aim to interrogate the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest, relying on the notion of articulation as my theoretical and methodological framework. The notion of articulation, especially the one advanced by Grossberg that I discussed in Chapter 2, guides us to recognize that the identity of a practice or an event is not intrinsic, but emerges at the intersection of the effects of other practices on it and its effects on others. This approach begins by questioning “a principle of interiority or essentialism which locates any practice in a structure of necessity and guarantees its effects even before it has been enacted” (50). Under the rubric of the notion of articulation, a practice or an event is defined by its connections to its exterior, to that which is other to it (53). The identity of a practice, thus, is not merely where it takes place; it is present at each of the sites in which its existence is produced by the world and in which its existence makes a difference in the world. Applying this notion, I attempt to locate the 2008 protest in its historical context and allow its historical context to articulate its identity.

27 The principle of interiority or essentialism is the view that for any given kind of entity, there are specific traits, all of which are necessary to its identity and function. This view reduces all things to its essentially and fundamentally required attributes.
While the notion of articulation involves “(re)constructing [or fabricating] the network of relationships into which and within which a practice is articulated” (54), I focus more on the historical backgrounds that produced the possibilities of the protest rather than on the effects of the protest on other practices. As presented by the notion of articulation, the identity of a practice relies not only on the production of effects of other practices on it but also on its own effects on others. However, a four-year time frame is too brief to adequately portray the effects of the protest, whose existence, I believe, can produce a more substantial impact over a longer latent period. Accordingly, I direct my efforts toward (re)constructing the historical contexts of the 2008 protest in this research project.

However, (re)constructing the historical context is “not a matter of merely acknowledging its background” (55). (Re)constructing the historical context should be based on the acknowledgement that historical factors crossing the political, social, economic, and cultural fields are connected to each other, in a different shape and at a historical juncture to form a specific context for a particular practice. Furthermore, (re)constructing the historical context should be based on the understanding that the process, in which a context is produced by historical factors, is not singular, unified, or uni-dimensional; it is complex, multi-dimensional, and non-necessary. In other words, a context is a construct by a contingent and non-necessary connection between different historical forces. To this extent, in my research project, I attempt to (re)construct the historical contexts of the 2008 protest by revealing how historical factors had exerted their effects in their trajectories, or the effects emerging from the connections between the factors onto the protest.
In order to lay out the complex process of (re)constructing a context, Grossberg suggests that one examine the context as the field of articulated “vectors” and “forces.” Grossberg states that each vector possesses the quality of its effect and the quantity that has both size and direction; force has a measured strength as it comes into contact with other events or practices (60). Analysis for (re)constructing a context, thus, can be conceived of as producing a map of “the interrelated vectors, each with its own trajectory and strength which define its ability to penetrate into and affect reality” (61). If this notion is applied to my research project, I could conceivably produce a map of the historical vectors—along with their qualities, sizes, and directions—that produced effects on the possibility of the 2008 candlelight protest. Furthermore, the map would be marked with the forces illustrating the strengths of these effects.

In order to draw a map of the historical vectors, I use “speculative analysis,” following Grossbeg’s praxis. I made a decision to choose use this method instead of an empirical study method such as observation or interview, because of my interest in “structures” that shaped the protesters’ experiences. As a configuration of practices, structure in my research project is defined as “habitus” (a concept mainly advanced by Pierre Bourdieu), which refers to “lifestyle, the values, the dispositions and expectation of particular social groups that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life.” Human individuals live and behave in certain ways. While operating as the principles of daily life, habitus (structure) enhances, constrains, and/or limits the possibilities of the practices of human individuals. Structure is real. But, individuals may have neither any control over the rules that guide their lifestyles and behaviors nor any conscious awareness of the ways in which they experience and are affected by the rules
In other words, structural forces are not always simply or directly divulged to our senses. They can be delayed, deferred, detoured and decreased. Accordingly, I believe that we cannot understand structures through sensory experience or through logical and mathematical treatment of the data obtained from the sensory experience. Rather, knowing and understanding structure cannot be isolated from the researcher’s speculation, based on his or her insights, political stances, and morals. To this extent, I attempt to develop speculative analysis as a research method for exploring structures that operate within deep layers of our daily experiences.

In my research project, “speculative analysis” (which is used for the purpose of digging out structures in the deep layers of human experiences) is defined as an analysis strategy to infer configuration of likely reality from a cluster of verifiable elements. I use “speculative analysis” to infer the historical vectors and forces of the 2008 candlelight protest (configuration of likely reality) from the main features of the protest (the verifiable elements that I comprehend through my observation of the protest and my reading of extant relevant literatures). To this extent, my research project is implemented in two steps: First, I examine the main characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest, referring to a personal journal written during my participation in the protest and a reading of literature on the protest. I present this analysis in Chapter 4. Then, from the principal features identified in the first step, I infer the historical vectors and forces that possibly drove the protest and formulated its identity. This analysis, I present in Chapter 5.

The rest of this chapter scrutinizes the processes I adopted in this project: the methods of data collection and analysis that I employed to understand the main
characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest for the first step, and subsequently how I developed my speculative analysis for the second step.

Understanding the Main Characteristics of the Protest

In an attempt to analyze the scope of the 2008 candlelight protest, I refer to my personal journal written during and after my participation in the protest. My personal experience of participation began on May 27, 2008, continued through July 30, 2008, during my summer vacation spent in Seoul. My journal was a 74-page double-spaced script. My initial motivation to participate in the protest stemmed from three imperatives: first, my sense of social responsibility to speak out against the FTA as a citizen and a student of social science, second, my personal fear of mad cow disease, and third, anger upon witnessing the violent measures used by the government to quell the protest.

I held a pessimistic view about the KorUS FTA, which could potentially cause irreparable damages to Korean society, particularly the majority of farmers, workers, and the public in general. The report compiled by the Korean Alliance against KorUS FTA (KoA) noted that among the sectors most likely to be impacted by the economic globalization due to the FTA were the film, broadcasting, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, agriculture, steel, and chemical industries.28 The 2008 protest offered me a pertinent rationale and avenue to express my discontent with economic globalization.

However, my involvement in the protest was not entirely based on such a geopolitical calculus. It was partly visceral; I was fearful when I learned of the possibility of mad cow disease in U.S. beef. People around me talked and worried about their diet,

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28 For more details about the possible results of the KorUS FTA, refer to KoA, “Road to an Undesirable Deal.” The KoA, comprised of over 300 organizations, including trade unions, farmer’s groups, NGOs, and social movement groups, has presented their seven concerns regarding the KorUS FTA in the report.
and I encountered an overwhelming amount of information about U.S. beef and mad cow disease regarding the route of transmission of mad cow disease, potentially infected food, and other physical risks caused by the disease. Although government conservatives have argued that the information on the Internet is largely groundless, I felt afraid at that time, and even tried to trace back to whether I had consumed the tainted beef. I could not understand why the Korean government had even brought down the quarantine standards for imported beef previously instated based on the Koreans’ concern about U.S. beef.²⁹

Further, my experience with and my witnessing of the riot police firing tear gas, using water cannons, and arresting protesters evoked the moral courage to protest against the government. My hostility peaked when I heard that an elementary school student had been arrested by the riot police. The following is an entry from my journal; it provides a glimpse of my “participation” and helps me locate myself and my intent with respect to the protest.

*At around 6:30 p.m. on May 28, my first day of participation, I arrived at Seoul Plaza in downtown Seoul. Thousands of people held candles in one hand and pickets in the other that read “Cancel the Contract!” and “Myungbak Out!” Middle and high school students in uniform and mothers with their babies in strollers passed me by. A staggering number of flickering candles brought to my mind the urgency of the issue more than the two previous candlelight protests that I had joined in 2004—one against the impeachment of the former President Roh Mu-hyun and the other protest pushing for discontinuation of the Iraq war. On*

²⁹ This information is from the website of People United Against Mad Cow Disease (www.antimadcow.org).
that day, however, I was forced to leave the protest venue early due to fatigue after a long flight.

On the second day, I met with two friends from my master’s program on the campus of our old school, and together we departed for downtown Seoul. After a roughly 45-minute trip by subway and by foot, we arrived at Seoul Plaza at around 6:00 p.m., the opening time of the rallies, which had been organized to accommodate the work schedule of the participants. My friends and I lit the candles provided by People United against Mad Cow Disease and took a seat on the ground of the square. We chanted slogans and listened to free speeches by the protesters; however, our physical distance from the speakers and the density of the crowd around us prevented us from hearing the speeches clearly.

As enough protesters gathered around 8:00 p.m., we began to march along Se-jong Avenue. Numerous flags representing civil organizations, Internet communities, and college student councils led the march forward, and we followed them. Chanting the slogans and singing protest songs, we reached Jong Avenue on the way to Blue House, the residence of the Korean president. At this point, however, our movement was halted as dozens of police buses blocked our path. Consequently, we turned around and marched in the opposite direction from which we came. As soon as we arrived back on Sejong Avenue, however, I realized that we protesters were completely besieged by riot police. We stopped in our tracks, unable to move forward; it was dark. At that moment, a pacification broadcast shattered the silence through a megaphone to warn the protesters off the venue. The water cannon beside the speaker was aimed at us.

According to Kyunghyang Shinmun, there were twenty thousand protesters on that day.
Thousands of us hurriedly linked together, arm-in-arm, to protect ourselves and hold our ground against the police’s charge. The gentleman whose arm was linked with mine informed me that the police would attempt to ram through us to separate our unified group into smaller ones: once the single, large group of protesters was divided into smaller groups, protesters would grow fearful and vulnerable in smaller numbers, and therefore they would soon leave the venues. I was not aware of this development as I had left early on my first day of participation. We drew out every ounce of energy to resist the cold, steel shields with which the police tried to drive us away. Tensions mounted but could not persist for a long time. It was past midnight when some of the protesters began to untangle their arms and leave the venue; the police made little space to let them go. As I left the venue with my two friends around 1:00 a.m., I felt sorry and guilty for not staying behind with those who did so. The next morning, I discovered that 80 people who had stayed back were arrested and put behind bars. This troubled my conscience and these three imperatives motivated me to participate in the 2008 protest for three months.

Throughout the course of my involvement in the protest, I was accompanied by one or two of my friends. We always met up on our old campus to travel downtown together, pulling out of the venues around by midnight to catch the last subway. When we stayed longer, we would take a taxi to return home. Because I was often famished after the marches, I sometimes packed snacks for all of us; otherwise, we had kimbab and donuts from peddlers who weaved through protesters, selling food for 1,000-2,000 won (around U.S. $1–2), or
noodles for 3,000-5,000 won (around U.S. $3–5) at food carts in the middle of streets teeming with protesters. Occasionally, we received free food from citizens’ generous donations. We used common lavatories near subway stations or bathrooms in a hotel close to the sites.

Upon returning home every night, I compiled and updated a timeline that illustrated the tensions between protesters and the government in the journal on my laptop. In the journal I also included my reflections on the daily incidents and episodes, on protest activities (such as slogans, songs, and jokes), and on the stories that I picked up from the conversations I shared with my friend-participants at the protest venues. Further, I connected my laptop to the Internet to use the online services of the two newspapers Kyunghyang Shinmun and The Hangyore as my main sources in drawing a big picture of the protest. I believed that these two newspapers were reliable in that they appeared to represent the citizens’ voice, which was excluded from the process of the national-level decision-making. Since I had no concretely preconceived research project at the time of the participation in the protest, my journal was filled with non-linear and fragmented narratives and ideas written in Korean (my mother tongue). After I returned to the United States for the beginning of a new semester following my participation in the protest, my journal was translated into English.

I extensively utilized the scholarly works of Korean scholars to contextualize the protest. I accessed an online resource website DBpia (www.dbpia.com) and retrieved 444 essays in different fields (communication studies, political science, sociology, women’s studies, etc.) through January 10, 2012, using the key word Chot-bul (candlelight)—as the protest is referred to in different ways, including candlelight protests, candlelight
rallies and candlelight demonstrations, among others. These essays demonstrate that the 2008 candlelight protest provoked a wide scope of scholarly interests and has been examined from different field-related analytical standpoints. Through their observations of the protest and interviews of the protesters, the scholars of my shortlisted essays underline the distinctive characteristics and socio-political meanings related to the protest.

However, following a thorough reading and re-reading of the 444 essays, I removed those that were less relevant to my project and decided to use only 106 of them for my data analysis. For instance, scholars, such as Lee Han-gu, Kim Sang-bae, Kim Il-young, and others, argue that the protest was triggered both by a TV program’s unprofessional treatment of information about mad cow disease and by the exaggerated and groundless rumors about the disease on the Internet. Their essays describe the 2008 candlelight protest as an anti-American, anti-regime, and violent resistance, which caused a great deal of damage to the Korean democracy and economy. They also emphasize that any political dispute would deter foreign economic investors and even damage the shopping districts lined on both sides of the protest venues. I eliminated these scholarly journal articles, because these perspectives were not consistent with my research interest and politics.

As I embarked on my inquiry, I found that the texture of the 2008 candlelight protest was not homogenous or linear; it was too layered and heterogeneous to be readily organized in my mind. I thus compared the 2008 candlelight protest with the traditional social movements in the 1980s in Korea, in order to grasp its salient features. I also focused on four distinct categories: (1) the main issue, (2) the participants, (3) the modality, and (4) the goal to characterize the protest. According to Jeong Tae-seok, these
four categories have been used to understand the specificities of the shifts from Old Social Movement to New Social Movement and from folk movement to civil movement in European countries (255). I found these four categories useful for my study in that they help me mark stark historical changes between the conventional social movements in the 1980s and the 2008 protest.

In Chapter 4 of my dissertation, I present a canvas of main features of the 2008 candlelight protest, compared to those evident in the traditional/conventional social movements in the 1980s. Dividing the features into the four categories, I explained the main characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest under four headings: “Issue: Food Safety, Health and Life,” “Participants: Heterogeneous Desires,” “Modality: Serious State and Humorous Protesters,” and “Goal: Leaving Myung-bak Castle.” Subsequently, I conducted a speculative analysis to speculate on the vectors that framed and were framed by the 2008 protest.

**Speculative Analysis for Drawing the Historical Vectors**

For the second step of my research project, I examined a compilation of the historical vectors and forces that created the communicative possibilities of the protest. The characteristic features of the protest that I identified in Chapter 4 provided the entry points for a speculative analysis that I conducted to elaborate on the historical vectors. While reviewing and comparing the main features of 2008 candlelight protest with those of the conventional protest in the 1980s, I focused on the national and international contexts of the 1990s and the early 2000s of Korea in order to find a diverse range of general structural transformations and specificities of Korean society that might have enhanced, constrained, and/or limited the 2008 candlelight protest. I began to draw a map
of the driving vectors and forces of the 2008 protest. In order to make the vectors clearer, I retrieved my fragmented memories of multiple historical events and configurations of social and cultural practices in Korean history. I also dared to imagine the relations between historical events and the protest. Once I had identified four salient axes of historical phenomena that exerted their interrelated influence on the 2008 protest, I drew a closure on the map.

I finally labeled the four axes as the following themes: “Political Democratization and De-politicization,” “Global Food Exchanges and Well-being Yol-pung,” “Market Liberalization and Job Insecurity,” and “Development of Communication Technology and the Carnivalesque.” These four vectors, I believe, are the elements that formulated the contours, curves and angles of the 2008 candlelight protest—that is, the answer to the question, “Who/what was pulling the strings of the 2008 protest?”

In Chapter 5, I recounted how the vectors, with their directions and forces, maximized and at the same time restricted the possibility of the protest. In order to flesh out my account of the historical vectors of the protest, I used my extant knowledge on Korean history as well as the “snowballing technique.”31 Just as “a rolling snowball grows over time,” whenever I needed more information than I had, I constantly referred to extra sources that contained historical facts of Korea. After locating the bibliographical sources referenced by the aforementioned scholarly articles that I used, I continued to acquire additional sources in a successive chain of sources.

31 Regarding the notion of snowball techniques, I owe a lot to Dr. Mahuya Pal. In her doctoral dissertation titled “Fighting from and for the Margin: Local Activism in the Realm of Global Politics,” she used snowball techniques for recruiting interviewees. Her dissertation information was passed on by the potential interviewees themselves in the subsequent chain of referrals as they helped her recruit participants.
Speculations on Speculative Analysis

I do not maintain that my story about the 2008 candlelight protest has the comfort and security of completion. I completed the map of driving vectors, but was aware that it was an incomplete completion. The end of my story is the beginning of other stories, just as the beginning of my story is the end of others. Any story about the context of a practice can never have a simple beginning and a precise end. The story that I tell about the protest, therefore, is inherently partial, polysemic, inventive, and experimental. My account of the 2008 candlelight protest is only part of a larger body of the often-sophisticated ways in which Korean society has accepted and reacted to globalization.

I am also aware that my account of the 2008 candlelight protest is not isolated from my personal background: an international student from Korea at a university in the United States, a woman, a member of the lower middle class in both countries, and aged in the late thirties. My body, already worn down from the demands of schoolwork in a foreign country, was again directly exposed to the possible danger of food (beef), and this affected my perspectives on the Korean government’s approval of U.S. beef imports. My social class, which does not allow me the ability to afford organic and expensive agricultural products contributed to my perspective on U.S. beef and the 2008 candlelight protest. My position, life value, and the theories and knowledge that I had obtained through my study influenced the points of view, the way of interpretation, the question raised, and even the sources selected in this research project.

At the same time, I acknowledge that the analysis of the historical context of the 2008 candlelight protest in this project reshaped who I was. I passed through the golden age of economic development in the 1980s of Korea as an adolescent without a thorough
understanding of military dictatorship. I was a freshman in college in Korea in the early 1990s, when the pro-democratic movements had already begun to decline. I was a member of new generation Shin-se-dae that emerged with the precipitately developing popular cultures at that time, along with an expanding consumer culture.\footnote{More details of Shin-se-dae will be discussed in Chapter 5.} In the wake of my graduation from college, I faced the financial-cum-economic crisis in 1997, which led me to dedicate myself to earning a living through exhausting part-time jobs. Under the discipline of a bureaucratic management system, I did not resist any authoritarian rules, invisibly suppressing my subjectivity and naively neglecting social and political issues. In short, I was an individual raised through the periods of conservatization rapidly spreading in Korea. My reflections while working on this project, however, persistently led me to ponder about where I was and where I was heading. The journey of this research project was a constant practice of (re)placing myself in new contexts that are available for de-articulation and re-articulation regarding the issues of social protest, democracy, and empowerment of subjects.

Through these interactions between me and my research project, and also in attempting to challenge the generalized assumptions about the protest and introducing extraneous matters into understanding of the 2008 candlelight protest, my research project includes “too many arguments and interpretations and not enough evidence” (as Grossberg notes regarding his own project). Despite the newly emerging speculative-analysis trend that celebrates subjective and fragmented stories, empirical and positivist studies are unquestionably dominant approaches to both research and theory construction in the contemporary academic worlds of Korea and the United States. The majority of journal articles in sociology, political science, and communication studies in both
countries draw on scientific language and the scientific method. In the face of such trends, "speculation" as a research method tends to be renounced.

Korean scholar Lee Kap-yun, for instance, sets the tone for empirical and positivist studies (9). According to Lee, the extant academic approaches to the 2008 candlelight protest are mostly based on hermeneutic and interpretative frameworks in favor of the protest, and lack methodological rigor. Lee reinforces that authentic knowledge is derived from the processes of obtaining data through sensory experience and treating such data through logical and mathematical methodology. Lee’s views demonstrate the perspective of positivism, an epistemological and methodological stance of science. From the positivistic perspective, a researcher’s job is to draw a hypothesis from a theory and prove that hypothesis through the discovery of evidence that is observable with the human senses. A researcher should describe the world as it exists to produce verifiable, accurate, consistent, and value-neutral knowledge, regardless of any politics or morals held by the researcher.

However, I believe that empirical and positivist studies are limited in that they lack the capacity to prove any abstract ideas, laws, orders, and principles beyond observable facts and relationships. It may not be possible to discover any general law from human and social realities through rigorous scientific methods, or to classify them into systematic categories, because human reality is always dynamic, complex, multi-layered, and even tortuous.

Such limitations of empirical and positivist studies can be further discussed in regards to some research conducted by Korean scholars on the 2008 candlelight protest. In fact, Lee Kap-yun’s research explores the social and demographic characteristics and
the political orientation of the 2008 candlelight protest participants through strict scientific procedures, uncovering that the protest participants were mostly members of young generations, from the Honam region, among the supporters of the opposition (progressive) party, and among individuals with a high interest in democratic issues. Finally, Lee concludes that the 2008 protest represents the established political cleavages pertaining to regional origin, generation, and ideological orientation (99). Using rigorous methodological standards on the same subject, other researchers such as Cho Ki-suk and Park He-yoon, and Huh Tai-hoi and Jang Woo-young, arrived at different results. According to these scholars, the protest participants were initially motivated by their pursuit of post-materialist values, such as quality of life and better lifestyles, rather than by conventional political issues such as regional, generational, and ideological conflicts (Cho and Park; Huh and Jang). These scholars therefore reach the conclusion that the 2008 candlelight protest displays the collision between the Korean public’s post-materialist value (e.g. quality of life and better lifestyle) and the government’s materialist value. On the other hand, scholar Kim Wook argues that the protest was triggered not only by the established political cleavages (ideological conflicts) but also by post-materialist values (33–59). These differing research results on the same topic lead me to question and rethink the possibility of producing authentic knowledge that is verifiable, accurate, consistent, and value-neutral.

In my opinion, Lee does not appear to have reflected on the basic epistemological questions that have been raised in post-empirical and post-positivist scholarly spaces.34

33 One thing needs to note: regionalism has caused social conflicts in Korean political history.

34 Post-positivism is an epistemological and methodological stance that critiques, opposes, and rejects central tenets of positivism. Unlike positivism that asserts that the natural and social worlds can be
How do we know what we know? Can we think or know outside of the reigning terms of our cultural experiences, world views, and dominant social order? Can we have simple or innocent access to the world sphere outside of our positions? We can only know the ostensibly knowable worlds through our own familial, cultural, and religious frameworks within which our identity and morality have been built. Our perceptions, bodies, and hearts are always haunted by what we already have known, no matter how hard we attempt to leave it behind; the knower and the known can never be separated. A research analyst is another social actor standing in specific historical and social conditions that affect the representation of social ideas. The research objects do not exist “out there,” but are themselves a product of socially and historically mediated human consciousness. Accordingly, analysts will all tell different stories depending on the positions from which they survey the scene and the resources that they have available to them. In this sense, a fixation with empiricism, positivism, and objectivism may be a work of fantasy.

To that extent, I do not intend to present my research project as an outright account of the 2008 candlelight protest. Instead, I attempt to adopt a reflexive approach in my research project and take the perspective of critical and cultural studies, which accentuate what ideas research promotes. Significance of research does not depend solely on the rigorous procedures of scientific method. In my project, significance of research is placed on the effects of the work: what a work reveals and conceals, what it renders imaginable, and where it takes readers.

understood through application of scientific method, post-positivists reject these assumptions and question just about everything the positivists “know” to be true. Post-positivism assumes that the world is ambiguous, infinitely complex, variable and open to interpretation (“Post-positivism”).
CHAPTER 4:

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 2008 CANDLELIGHT PROTEST

This research project examines the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest against U.S. beef imports in Korea. One might wonder why the protest unfolded with “candles” just as in Figure 1 below. In Korea, candles became symbolically loaded as citizens’ social movements since the 2002 candlelight protest against the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Korea and the United States. This 2002 protest developed from candlelight vigils to memorialize the deaths of two young girls caused by an armored vehicle of U.S. forces during a military drill. As it was revealed that the two U.S. soldiers responsible for the deaths were tried at military tribunals at a U.S. military base in Korea and acquitted by a jury trial consisted only of U.S. citizens, the candlelight vigils turned to the candlelight protest urging the U.S. military to hand over the two soldiers to the Korean authorities (Tsche 322). Subsequently, the protesters demanded a revision of the SOFA, which specified that the United States held the primary jurisdiction over crimes committed by soldiers while on duty. Numerous candles, not only those of activists but also of general citizens, filled the square in downtown Seoul, in order to resist against U.S. superpower.

Since then on, a stream of candles became a symbol of social movements in Korea. In 2004, two more large-scale candlelight protests were held. One protest was
against the impeachment of President Roh Mu-hyun, supported by the conservative party, while the other was opposed to Korea’s decision to dispatch troops during the Iraq War upon the request of the United States. In these two protests, the Korean public had demonstrated their political passion as well as their ability to lead reformative protest using “candles,” which represent the peaceful atmosphere of protest venues. Like the previous protests, the 2008 candlelight protest also demonstrated the Korean public’s political passions. The first article of the constitution, which the protesters rhythmically chanted holding candles, summarized its meaning as a progressive method to compensate the defect of representative political system: “South Korea is the republic of Korea. All power resides in the people! All power is derived from the people!”

![Image of the 2008 Candlelight Protest in Downtown Seoul](http://blog.naver.com/han_seok?Redirect=Log&logNo=120052974042)

**Figure 1. The 2008 Candlelight Protest in Downtown Seoul:** the 2008 Candlelight protest march on Sejong Avenue on 15 June 2008. Source: http://blog.naver.com/han_seok?Redirect=Log&logNo=120052974042.

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35 The first candlelight protest occurred when President Roh Mu-hyun was impeached, while the other candlelight protest that occurred that year was for citizens who were against Korea’s decision to dispatch troops during the Iraq War upon the request of the United States.
With its extensive size and duration, however, the 2008 candlelight protest has merited special attention from journalists, political commentators, and human and social science scholars, all of whom attempted to identify the protest and its social meanings. My research project also aims to join the efforts of identifying the protest and finding socio-political meaning. Rather than finding the identity and social meaning of the protest in itself, however, my research project, by applying the notion of “articulation” as the fundamental theoretical background, attempts to locate the 2008 candlelight protest within its historical context. Subsequently, I attempt to formulate its identity and social meaning through an understanding of exterior vectors and forces.

As a preparatory stage before uncovering the multidimensional historical contexts of the 2008 candlelight protest, I examine the main characteristics of the protest in this chapter. In order to understand the main characteristics of the protest, I refer to my personal journal written during my participation in the protest in the summer of 2008, and consult the news articles from the two Korean newspapers, Kyunghyang Shinmun and The Hangyore, and 106 Korean scholarly articles written about the protest. I study the main characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest by comparing the latter with conventional social movements in Korean history and in terms of four categories: (1) main issue, (2) participants, (3) modality, and (4) goal, which are organized under the four headings of “Food Safety, Health and Life,” “Heterogeneous Desires,” “Serious State and Humorous Protesters,” and “Leaving Myung-bak Castle.”
**Issue: Food Safety, Health, and Life**

Even after the modern political system was established (following the end of the Japanese Imperial rule in 1948 and the Korean War in 1953), Korea suffered under the controls of authoritarian or military dictatorial regimes, which attempted to pass constitutional amendments to exempt them from presidential term limits until the 1980s. The regimes made attempts to justify their continuation by using the tragic experience of the Korean War, the threat of an invasion from the North. When they were confronted with opposition, they declared martial laws and arrested opposing members of parliament and anti-government groups after accusing them of being pro-communist and pro-North Korean forces. Hence, one of the main threads of social movements in Korea rose against unjust social outcomes and ideology of the authoritarian regimes. Opposing the authoritarian regimes, pro-democracy movement participants primarily demanded civil rights for referendum (Jung and Kim 10).

Another thread of the main issues of the social movements was the collectivist struggle for justifiable wealth redistribution. Despite political and social unrest, the Korean economy continued to flourish under the authoritarian regimes, which led to a rapid industrialization and an export-oriented economic plan over the past thirty years. As the per capita GNP increased, the overall quality of life of the Korean population was enhanced. However, the economic growth was based on the capitalist exploitation of low-income laborers, which was maintained for competitive prices of products. During the country’s industrialization and urbanization, the social groups of small-business owners, workers, farmers, and others were also alienated. Justifiable redistribution of wealth was one of the main themes of conventional social movements in Korea.
The main issue of the 2008 candlelight protest was different from these two issues. In fact, the 2008 protest presented a wide range of grievances against President Lee’s unpopular leadership style and his new policies. The protesters criticized Lee’s wealth-based cabinet appointments and pushed President Lee to drop much of his neoliberal agenda, which included plans to privatize health insurance and public enterprises (water and electricity), to reform the systems of education and mass media (specifically terrestrial broadcasting), and to build a canal (called the Grand Korean Waterway). In addition, the trade unions attempted to incorporate their issue of the instability of employment of contract workers into the 2008 candlelight protest. Likewise, the 2008 candlelight took on the character of citizen protest, but it did not articulate the political agenda throughout the entire time. Rather, the 2008 protest proclaimed the character of consumer protest, principally revolving around the issue of “food safety.” In this section, I attempt to convey the idea that the issue of the 2008 candlelight protest was “food safety.” Let me begin discussion in this section by recounting Korea’s status of U.S. beef imports.

Korea, formerly the third largest market for American beef and worth $800 million a year (by 1999), suspended the imports of American beef in 2003 after an outbreak of BSE (mad cow disease) in the United States as explained in the beginning. BSE leads to deterioration of the brain and spinal cord as well as a range of other symptoms affecting the whole body, eventually resulting in death of the infected animal.

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36 During the 2008 candlelight protest, the government attempted to control freedom of speech by appointing their people as the heads of broadcasting stations of KBS and YTN.

37 People argued against President Lee’s plan to build a canal called the “Grand Korean Waterway,” explaining that it is not proper to build a canal in a geographically small nation that is a peninsula surrounded by water which already enjoys a highly developed transportation infrastructure.
Additionally, human consumption of BSE-contaminated beef results in new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD or nvCJD). The infected human experiences a rapid decline of mental functioning and movement before reaching death. After the first case of BSE was detected in a dairy cow in the state of Washington in the United States in 2003, sixty-five nations, including Korea, imposed full or partial restrictions on importing American beef products.

Korea revisited the issue of U.S. beef imports in 2006 when the negotiations of the Republic of Korea and the United States Free Trade Agreement were initially announced. Korea and the United States, under the former regimes of both countries, Roh Mu-hyun and George W. Bush, desired for the KorUS FTA with the expectation that the treaty would be of political and economic benefit to both countries. The negotiations for the agreement, however, were halted as the United States insisted on resuming U.S. beef imports for the expansive trade agreements, while President Roh hesitated to lift the beef import ban with the concerns regarding the health of the Korean public. Roh’s decision was influenced by the fact that two more cases of BSE-infected cattle were reported in 2005 and 2006 in the United States.

Lee Myung-bak, newly elected as Korean president in 2007, however, placed a premium on the FTA. Taking it into a serious consideration that the United States had

38 The disease was named after the researchers who first identified the classic condition. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) can be grouped into two types: “classic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD)” and “new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD).” While classic CJD is not related to mad cow disease, the infection that causes the disease in cows is believed to be the same one that the causes new variant CJD in humans.

39 Korea, which had heavily depended on imports for beef from the United States, found Australian beef as an alternative.

40 President Roh with his left-leaning inclination also sought to create autonomy from the United States.
been endowed as a “BSE controlled risk country” by the OIE\(^{41}\) in 2007 (ahead of Lee’s election), Lee approved the beef deal without disclosing relevant information (the draft of the agreement and the specific results of each round of negotiations) to the Korean public (Kim and Cho 15). Lee’s approval of U.S. beef imports was revealed to the Korean public after he had signed the unfavorable contract which included a new version of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) for imported beef.

The new quarantine standards for importing U.S. beef were lower than the standards in other countries such as Taiwan and Japan, both of which had reopened their markets to U.S. beef ahead of Korea. There were three main problems in the contract conditions. First, the quarantine standards allowed the import of U.S. beef products from cattle of all ages: whereas Taiwan and Japan restricted imports of American beef from cattle older than 20 months, Korea allowed imports of cattle older than 30 months, which were believed to be at particular risk of mad cow disease. It is generally known that prion, the agent of the disease, is generated from cattle that are fed with the remains of other cattle in the form of meat-and-bone meal (MBM) (Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* 75). Once the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) learned that the MBM practice caused BSE in cows, they began to ban the practice (Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* 75). However, at that point in time, cattle older than 30 months were those that had grown before the FDA had completely banned MBM. Second, cow parts in which the mad cow virus typically resides, such as brains, eyes, skulls, spinal cords, all of which had been defined by the OIE as Specified Risk Material (SRM), were allowed to enter

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\(^{41}\) The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) is the intergovernmental organization responsible for improving animal health worldwide. This office was created through the International Agreement signed on January 25, 1924, with the need to fight animal diseases at a global level. This office was originally created in the name of the Office International des Epizooties (OIE); in May 2003, became the World Organization for Animal Health, but it keeps its historical French acronym OIE (www.oie.int).
Korea. Third, Korea did not have the right to ban U.S. beef imports even if a new case of BSE was found in the United States in the future.

The Korean public plunged into a sense of fear, uncertainty, and mistrust as the risks of mad cow disease were covered in MBC’s *PD Su-cheop* (the Producer’s Journal, a Korean television news magazine similar to CBS’s *60 Minutes*). Aired on April 30, 2008, the episode “Is American Beef Really Safe from Mad Cow Disease?” alleged that reopening the Korean market to American beef would expose the Korean public to the threat of mad cow disease. The program reported the details of mad cow disease, including the fact that Koreans, in particular, are genetically vulnerable to mad cow disease at rates 2–3 times higher than other ethnic groups\(^\text{42}\); the human form of mad cow disease is easily transmittable through blood transfusions and by consuming powdered soup base in instant noodles, using cosmetic products made with cow derived collagen, and consuming gelatin capsules in medication. The program also featured video footage of sick cattle being led to slaughter in the United States and an interview with the mother of Aretha Vinson, a deceased American woman who might have died from vCJD.\(^\text{43}\)

Riding a wave of fear stirred up by the TV program, people began to search for relevant information about the U.S. beef deal and mad cow disease and posted their

\(^{42}\) This claim was based on the information that around 200 cases of those who deceased of the human version of mad cow disease (vCJD) belonged to a genetic group of \(M\ M\) (homozygous)—among the three types of polymorphism of human prion protein gene (PRNP), \(V\ V\) (homozygous), \(M\ M\) (homozygous) or \(M\ V\) (heterozygous). Since another study shows that 94.33% of the Korean population has the version of the MM gene, it was claimed that the Korean population with \(M\ M\) gene are more susceptible to developing prion disease (mad cow disease) after BSE prion exposure than any other ethnic group.

\(^{43}\) In fact, it was later pointed out by prosecutors who filed a lawsuit for libel against MBC’s *PD Su-cheop* that there were two important mistakes in the program. The cattle in the footage might not have had any connection to mad cow disease, but they were downer cows, which under similar conditions are also routinely slaughtered in Korea. Also, video footage contained a translation error: Korean subtitles stated that Aretha Vinson, a deceased Virginian woman likely died from vCJD (related to mad cow disease), while in actuality, Vinson’s mother explained in English that her daughter had died of CJD (not related to mad cow disease).
findings on the Internet (Kim and Cho 2). The following list of statements contains information spread on the Internet about mad cow disease; I collected these statements mainly from the Internet portal site Agora of Daum, which was most popularly used as the public sphere by citizens during the protest.

- **Prion, the transmissible agent of mad cow disease is highly stable:** it resists freezing, drying, and heating at normal cooking temperatures, and even resists pasteurization and sterilization that normally kill viruses and bacteria.
- **Once infection occurs, the incubation period lasts four to five years and ultimately is fatal to cattle within weeks to months of the onset of the disease.**
- **In human cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD or nvCJD), symptoms such as depression, difficulty walking, and dementia occur and progress rapidly.**
- **There is no effective treatment for the disease.**
- **All prion diseases are fatal. Animals and humans who develop a prion disease will certainly die of it** (my translations).

Badly misjudging the situation, however, President Lee reacted with the statement, “We are to eat quality U.S. beef for a low price!” Lee’s statement was based on the notion that American beef from large-scale feedlots with the aid of heavy government subsidies was intended to be cheaper than Korean beef from small farms. His remark only enraged the public; they criticized Lee, saying “Lee does not even know the meaning of food safety. The quality of the food we consume and its impact on our health is referred to as food safety.”
More information (listed below) about the gravity of the situation, the route of transmission of mad cow disease, potentially infected food, and other physical risks caused by the disease was published on the Internet.

- The beef that will come to Korea is different from the beef that is consumed in the United States.
- Mad cow disease could be induced with a 100% fatality rate by consuming 0.01 grams of specified risk material.
- Mad cow disease may be transmitted through kissing. It could also be transmitted through contacted of soiled diapers or sanitary napkins of individual carrying the virus.
- Even vegetarians in the U.S. have died of mad cow disease.
- 94% of Koreans would contract mad cow disease if they consumed infected beef.
- The entire population of Koreans will die (my translations).

Finally, a small group of female middle and high school students with candles took to Cheonggye Plaza in downtown Seoul on May 2 to urge the government to cancel the contract. These teenagers related on a TV interview that they had come to protest with anxiety about their lives. Once the beef arrived in Korea, the teenagers believed, it would be used by restaurants, especially the companies in charge of providing them with lunches at school, which were known to use inexpensive ingredients. In free speech sessions, they presented the horror of their possible death: “I have only lived for 15 years!” The teenagers insisted the government renegotiate with the United States, chanting “Nullify the Contract! Withdraw the Notification (of the U.S. beef imports) (my translation)!” Further:
I will be 21 years old in five years. It will be the time for me to enjoy freedom, crisscrossing a college campus. I have been making strenuous endeavors [to enter a college], so I don’t want to die in my time of freedom. I don’t want to lose the people who I love (my translation) (qtd. in Y. Choi 201) (Please note that the five-year incubation period is not from scientific expertise, but demonstrated through the Internet discussions).

As the information about mad cow disease spread to Korean pop groups’ (e.g. Tong Vang Xien Qi, Super Junior, Shin-hwa) fan-club websites, teenagers also began to worry about their idols contracting the disease (Y. Choi 201). The fans expressed their sentiments, crying, “oppa(s) will run into danger” (qtd. in Y. Choi 201). One fan said:

*I want to see Tong Vang Xien Qi once more. I want to continue to see the people who I love, and I don’t want TVXQ to be sick* (my translation) (qtd. in Y. Choi 201).

As the protesting public established the fact that the entire population of Koreans would die, Lee’s government held a press conference about U.S. beef safety in order to quell the fears. The Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MFAFF) and the Ministry for Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs (MHWFA) were in charge of releasing the government’s statement (May 2, 2008), the gist of which was that the outcries of the teenage protesters were driven by groundless rumors about mad cow disease and provoked by the unprofessional and unscientific treatment of information by

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44 The literal meaning of *oppa* is “elder brother” from a female perspective in Korean. However, it is not limited to family in the community-oriented Korean culture, but often extended to males in general. Females use *oppa* (elder brother) to address older males close to them (encompassing elder brother, both boyfriends and just friends). The male celebrities referenced above, who are often older than teenage girls, are routinely referred to as *oppa(s)* by teenage girls.
mass media (particularly MBC’s *PD Su-cheop*), Internet users, and political parties with political intentions. The following is an excerpt from the government’s press conference:

*Although our decision to alleviate SPS standards to import U.S. beef was made based on international standards and scientific proofs [by OIE], it is very regretful that some are questioning the safety [of U.S. beef] without foundation. . . . We believe there is some political intention by a certain entity that is trying to intensify the confusion surrounding the U.S. beef issue. It is certainly regretful that some media and political parties are trying to magnify the risk of mad cow disease to terrify the public.* (qtd. in Kim and Cho 16–7).

Subsequently, the major national newspapers *Chosun Ilbo, Dong-A Ilbo,* and *JungAng Ilbo* said the protesters were being instigated by anti-American forces. *Dong-A Ilbo* stated on April 28, 2008 in its editorial section that “some of anti-American civil organizations . . . are inflaming public sentiments. . . . In every respect, it is just an anti-American instigation” (my translation). *Chosun Ilbo* reported on May 2 that “the opposition forces to KorUS FTA are reinforcing the danger of mad cow disease in order to block American beef imports and to incite anti-Americanism,” and on May 5 stated that “the anti-American forces united to work together, so even the middle and high school students, lacking in judgment, are running into the streets with candles” (my translations). The conservative major newspapers, then, pointed out particular entities as the anti-American forces, which had tried to throw the nation into chaos: MBC’s *PD Su-cheop,* the *Hangyore,* the *Kyunghyang Shinmun,* the Internet portal site *Agora of Daum,* the opposition party United New Democratic Party, civil organizations such as *Korean*

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45 According to U Seok-gyun, various scientific research results have shown that most of the rumors on the Internet are true. For example, the majority of people who contracted nvCJD had MM genetics which are most common to Koreans (219).
Teachers Educational Worker’s Union and other left-leaning and progressive groups (Nam 258).

The conservative newspapers also delivered the advertisements, co-sponsored by the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MFAFF) and the Ministry for Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs (MHWFA), promoting the safety of U.S. beef. The following is an excerpt of an advertisement run in DongA Ilbo on May 5:

_The beef that will be imported from the United States is identical to the beef that is consumed in the United States! There have been 350 million U.S. cows consumed for the last 10 years worldwide, but there was no mad cow disease! The beef that is being enjoyed by 300 million Americans, 2.5 million Korean-Americans, and people in 96 countries worldwide will be imported to Korea! Mad cow disease will not and cannot enter [Korea]! The government will take the responsibility and protect our people’s health!_ (qtd. in Kim and Cho 17).

The conservative newspapers’ assertion about the safety of U.S beef, however, only served to diminish public faith. Earlier, in resistance to the previous administration of progressive president Roh Mu-hyun who initiated the negotiation of the FTA with the United States,46 Chosun Ilbo, JungAng Ilbo, and DongA Ilbo had influenced the public to believe “American beef is not safe.” But their sudden change in claim that “American beef is safe!” to support conservative Lee’s administration was not convincing to the public.47 Although the newspapers emphasized that the United States had been named as

46 In fact, Roh was the president who emphasized democratic values (such as “discussion”), but at the same time, he pursued the KorUS FTA despite oppositions from his traditional leftist constituency.

47 Regarding the point, Kim Jong-young maintains that the boundaries between science and politics were blurred surrounding the issue of mad cow disease. Whether American beef is safe was not actually a matter of fact but a matter of value for politics—the risk of mad cow disease was judged not by scientific standard but by rationale (109–52).
a “BSE controlled risk country” by the OIE, this organization itself admitted that the
nature of the BSE agent was still a matter of debate (Y. Kang 269–97). The OIE stated on
its website that insufficient information was available to make any precise prediction
about the future number of BSE and vCJD cases (“Prion Diseases”). It is for this reason
that other countries such as Taiwan and Japan, which had resumed their U.S. beef
markets ahead of Korea, demanded higher quarantine standards. How, then, could the
conservative newspapers confidently assert that “American beef is safe”?48

In order to calm the public, the government explained that American beef would
be labeled, not just in food markets but also in restaurants; people would not have to
purchase American beef if they do not want to. Protesters, however, responded, “Once
we open the market to U.S. beef, we won’t be able to control its distribution to make sure
of its safety” (qtd. in Kim and Cho 17). Government too often exaggerates its ability to
control the risk situation to maintain people’s confidence, but the protesters were already
aware of the fact that imported agricultural products had often been disguised as locally
produced; it had not been possible for the government to completely trace the routes of
distribution of imported products.

In a bid to push harder, around seventeen hundred civic organizations and Internet
communities, in solidarity, set up Kwang-woo-byeong Daeh-chaek we-won-hoe (People
United against Mad Cow Disease: www.antimadcow.org) on May 8. People United
against Mad Cow Disease offered candles, pickets, and emergency medical assistance for
the increasing number of protesters. At the same time, house wives in Gwa-cheon city

48 According to Rho Jin-chul, people are more terrified by “unknown” risks. In this sense, the
Korean public’s response to the risk of mad cow disease, which plunged into fear, is normal and general
(not exceptional or irrational). Rho postulates that such response is not a temporary phenomenon, but a
repetitive social mechanism.
began a campaign by putting up banners on their apartment balconies, reading “Against importing American beef.” American food restaurants such as McDonald’s and Outback Steak House ran newspaper advertisements declaring that they did not use American beef.

The protesters’ acts influenced the general public’s opinion of President Lee. Although Lee was elected as president not long ago, his approval rating plummeted to nearly a single digit number (Kim and Cho 2). President Lee sent a delegation to the United States to seek modifications through additional negotiation (on May 13) to tighten food safety regulations; and made a public apology (on May 22).

On May 24, protesters moved from Cheonggye Plaza to Seoul Square to stage overnight rallies. The protesters gathered in the square and took Sejong Avenue to march toward the Blue House (the Korean president’s residence), chanting “Cancel the Contract!” and “Lee Myung-bak Out!” In response, Lee released riot police. Using their buses, riot police built barricades around Seoul Square and Sejong Avenue for the purpose of blocking protesters from marching. They used water cannons and tear gas, and arrested those who remained at overnight rallies. According to detained protesters, during interrogations, they were asked, “Who is pulling the strings behind you?” The actions by the government revealed both the government’s lack of awareness of food safety and the old-fashioned political belief that there were anti-American instigators behind the protesters.49

After the government’s violent quelling, on May 30, hundreds of mothers with their infants in strollers came out and stood at the frontline of protesters. In a TV interview, a woman stated that she joined the protest in order to prevent her children and

49 During the military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, this question had been the query used for purging the opposition’s struggles for democratization (Yong-taek Jeong 31–3).
family from eating foods that were possibly unsafe to eat. The participation of the women—domestic primary caregivers, keepers of health, and supporters of their working husbands and children, who had supposedly focused primarily on their everyday lives and devoted most of their time and effort to their families rather than to other external matters in Korean society—signified the urgency of the issue as well as the fact that the protest was not entirely political as the government conservatives had claimed.

As the number of participants increased day by day, the protest virtually paralyzed Lee’s administration. Lee offered another official apology to the public with his promise to make efforts to secure safety of food. Finally, the delegation sent to the United States was able to secure a revision of U.S. beef import conditions through an additional negotiation, and announced the details of the revised conditions on June 21. The revised SPS through the additional negotiation forbade import of beef from cattle aged 30 months and older, and an age certification for all meat shipped to Korea was to be provided. Imports of cattle parts (including brains, eyes, skulls, and spinal cords) that were possibly more susceptible to carrying mad cow disease were also forbidden. In addition, Korea won the right in the accord to inspect a sampling of American slaughterhouses; beef that had been in frozen storage in Korea for months could now be inspected before heading to stores.

50 The interview with the mother is available at http://www.vop.co.kr/A00000292910.html. Moreover, in Kim Jinsoo and Cho Moonhee’s research, Interview Mom G related, The first thing I concerned is what my husband and daughters eat at work and school for lunch. We don’t know where the beef that food companies and restaurants are using is coming from,... I don’t believe what our government is doing is right, and it seems that nobody from the government authority is explaining that clearly (qtd. in Kim and Cho 18).

51 Regarding the supplementary articles approved by the U.S. minister, I referred to the public issue discussion site in Korea, www.agendanet.co.kr.
The 2008 candlelight protest ended after three months. In a magazine interview, a participant in the protest, a member of the Internet community 82 Cook.com, stated how the government’s approval of U.S. beef imports got her involved in politics:

*Politics had sounded grandiose. Politics had seemed to be far from me and to have nothing to do with me. I became aware that politics is our life at a time, I won’t forget even after Lee’s regime. Lee did the thing that no one could have done single-handed. He made us experts [of politics] (my translations) (qtd. in Mun 21).*

**Participants: Heterogeneous Desires**

In conventional pro-democracy social movements against the authoritarian regimes, college students assumed a pivotal role. According to Gu Hae-guen, the student activists joined hands with the alienated social groups, such as workers and farmers (158–65 qtd. in Jung and Kim 10). As mentioned earlier, during the dictatorial regimes, the economic growth created inter-regional conflicts as well as wide structural gaps between the rich and the poor, and the urban and rural regions. Student activists at the time fought against the inequality of wealth and authoritarian rule (Jung and Kim 2). Essentially, in the conventional social movements for pro-democracy and justifiable wealth redistribution, students, labor unions, and farmers along with left-intellectuals and political opposition parties were the leading actors.

The 2008 candlelight protest, however, went beyond the farm fences, the factory walls, and the ivory towers to people from all strata of life: teenagers, Internet users, celebrities, social activists, reservists, college students, women and their infants, laborers, and religious leaders. Furthermore, even as food safety was a common thread of the
movement, these different groups appeared to have different intentions behind their protests for food safety. It seems that participation of numerous people from across the political spectrum is a common hallmark of the contemporary social protests just as Occupy Wall Street in which “[a]nti-capitalism, lack of health care for the uninsured, tuition hikes at public universities, and many other complaints share the stage” (Linsky). In this section, I attempt to detail the profiles of the 2008 candlelight protest participants, who/which groups of individuals came to join the protest, and what roles each of the groups assumed during the protest.

First of all, in the 2008 candlelight protest, middle and high school students were one of the most salient groups. When U.S. beef imports were approved by Korean president Lee Myung-bak, it was a high school student under the Internet user name Andante, who suggested a signature-seeking campaign for the impeachment of President Lee in Daum Agora, one of the most popular Internet portal sites in Korea (http://agora.media.daum.net) (on April 6). More than a million people visited the website and signed the petition in less than a month (Cho and Kang 326). It was also fifty-one middle and high school students who first took to the streets to voice their concerns. Holding candles, this group of teenagers, summoning people to the plaza in downtown Seoul, acquired the nickname Chot-bul-so-nyeo (candle girls). They became the icon of the 2008 candlelight protest.

Whereas the role of middle and high school students was prominent, college students in their twenties, who once led pro-democracy movements against military dictatorship until the 1980s, did not emerge at the front during the 2008 protest. Commentators began to reprove these individuals for lacking in interest and enthusiasm
about the political and social issue at hand (Kang, “[Where Did the College Students]”; Sang-jin Jeon; Chan-ho Oh). Commentators believed that, as the prolonged economic depression had swelled the ranks of the unemployed, individuals in their twenties were focused on their own personal issues, explained by the term self-management, as a means of preparing for the job market.\(^{52}\) Neglecting any issue that did not benefit their current status, these individuals were more concerned with short-term issues such as achieving a high GPA, English scores, and other accomplishments required for finding a job. As if confirming this viewpoint, the Internet newspaper Redian (redian.org) carried out an interview with a college student who stated “I fear unemployment more than death in 10 or 20 years (the incubation period of mad cow disease).”

It appears that college students, who had taken the role of society’s primary intellectuals, were no longer the site/bodies of knowledge production. During the 2008 candlelight protest, the most influential sources of information were Internet communities (the general public). With the announcement of the Korean government’s approval of U.S. beef, Internet users galvanized forums to define the situation, to clarify the risk of U.S. beef, and to organize the protest. In particular, Daum Agora served as the starting point for discussions related to U.S. beef importation issues, and it took on the role of the essential glue that bound together the many organizations and individuals by providing an open space for debates (D. Lee 93).\(^{53}\)

\(^{52}\) According to Kang Sung-ryul, 95% of twenty-somethings were projected to have only temporary contract positions and only the remaining 5% would have permanent positions (“[Where did the College Student]” 152).

\(^{53}\) According to research results by Media Today in regards to Internet discourse about mad cow disease from May 3 to June 2, Daum Agora was the most popular information source, the homepage of Democratic Labor Party was the second most popular, the Naver discussion bulletin was third, and DC Inside was fourth.
It is noteworthy here that Korean media scholars drew on the concept of “collective intelligence” advanced by Pierre Levy in order to characterize the shift of knowledge production from college students, power brokers, and social intellectuals to Internet community members. In his book *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace* (1997), Levy postulates that the advanced technology that constructs cyberspace shifts the society of an information economy into the society of a social economy (an economy based on human interactions). In the society of a new economy, the unfettered human interactions of ideas and knowledge (irrespective of physical locations) reach “collective intelligence” through the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals. Now, “intelligence” in the society of a social economy turns to be collective, which is based on the notion of a collective or plural “cogitamus (we think),” not a Cartesian model of thought highlighting the singular idea of “cogito (I think)” (Terranova 43). Based on Levy’s idea, the media scholars perceived constructions of collective intelligence by Internet users during the 2008 protest. Even the government conservatives recognized the great influence of the Internet. Although they held negative views on the protest, they insisted that the 2008 candlelight protest was the result of “nationwide Internet hype” or “digital populism [surrounding groundless rumors about mad cow disease].”

Information regarding the protest spread throughout online community websites that were not even politically oriented, such as *My Club* (an Internet community for exchanging information about women’s lifestyle), *Soul Dresser* (fashion), *Hwa-jang-bal* (the real painted ladies—makeup tips), *82 Cook.com* (cooking tips), *Lemon Terrace*
(home interior decoration),\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ssang-Ko} (plastic surgery), \textit{SLR Club} (photography), \textit{MLK Park} (baseball), \textit{DVD Prime} (movie), and so on. These websites all functioned as the main information channels for the protest.

Accordingly, a large number of protesters were comprised of Internet community members, such that People United against Mad Cow Disease (www.antimadcow.org) was formed not only by civil organizations but also by Internet communities. Participation of Internet community members also served as the momentum for the protest to develop along with cultural events and to draw celebrities. Korean celebrities, such as singers Kim Jang-hun, Yun Do-hyun, Lee Seung-hwan, and Shin Hae-cheol, and movie actresses Kim Bu-sun and Mun So-ri, visited the cultural events as part of the protest, and encouraged the protesters with their speeches and performances. In particular, actress Kim Min-sun expressed solidarity with protesters by displaying her dislike for U.S. beef on her Internet mini-homepage. Cultural events continued throughout the protest: on June 21, there was an overnight music concert (held by a civil organization Mun-hwa Yon-dae), emceed by the famous film director Byeon Young-ju, and featured performances of musical groups \textit{No-rae-leul Chat-nun Sa-ram-deul} (Song Hunters: my translation) and Huckleberry Finn, and singer Son Byeon-hue.

Voices of women operated in the foreground and background of the protest, oscillating between online and offline. As mentioned above, the middle and high school students who first took the protest venues were women. Also joining the protest were various women who were the members of female Internet cafés (that were mentioned above, including \textit{My Club}, \textit{Soul Dresser}, \textit{Hwa-jang-bal}, \textit{82 Cook.com}, \textit{Lemon Terrace},

\textsuperscript{54} The Internet café, \textit{Lemon Terrace}, was launched on February 26, 2008 for exchanging information of home interior decoration, cooking, and over all lifestyles.
On the Internet, the members of these cafés encouraged each other to cancel their subscriptions to the major national newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo*, *JungAng Ilbo*, and *DongA Ilbo*), which took the government’s side on the U.S. beef import issue. They also boycotted commercial products advertised in those conservative newspapers, shared the list and phone numbers of the companies that placed advertisements of their products in the conservative newspapers, and encouraged each other to make protesting calls to the companies. They threatened the companies to never purchase their products if the companies continued to use the conservative newspapers as their advertising platforms.

In addition, the members of *Soul Dresser* collected funds to place an advertisement opposing American beef imports in the progressive newspapers the *Hangyore* and the *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (respectively on May 17 and 19).

Participation of these women also created unusual scenes of social protests. For example, women with heavy makeup, high-heels, fashionable outfits, and shiny purses marched in the protest group, under the flags saying *Ssang-Ko*, indicating an Internet community for exchanging information about plastic surgery; *Hwa-jang-bal* (the real painted ladies), an Internet community for exchanging information about makeup tips; and *Soul Dresser*, another Internet community for exchanging information about luxurious products such as clothing and designer accessories. These women, in my mind, had been those with a great penchant for the care of their own bodies and the key figures

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55 At that time, many people unsubscribed from the mainstream newspapers. In Kim and Cho’s research, one of the interviewees, Mom G noted as follows: *First thing I did after I recognized the issue, I stopped subscribing to some of the conservative pro-government newspapers that were not covering the issue very well, and started to read some others that cover the issue better because I thought getting and understanding the information was very important.* (Kim and Cho 12).

56 *Ssang-Ko* is the abbreviated compound for cosmetic eyelid surgery and plastic surgery of the nose, each of which is called respectively *Ssang-ga-pul* and *Ko-su-sul* in Korean.
of excessive consumptions of goods for their personal gratification, but during the protest they were one of the groups of the leading actors.

On May 27, after the fierce battles between riot police and protesters, a group of male youth, in military reserve uniform joined the protest. Because it is mandatory for nearly all Korean males to serve six to eight years in the reserves (after completing the mandatory two-year national military service), most Korean men own military reserve force uniforms. Claiming that they came to protect Chot-bul-so-nyeo (candle girls)’s voices from the government’s violence, these uniformed youth controlled traffic. They ran toward the head of marching protesters and formed blockades made from their extended arms in a row on driveways, so the other protesters could march safely. In doing so, they obtained the nickname Oppa-bu-dae (a troop of elder brothers). While the troop of oppa(s) was comprised of 40 military reservists at the beginning, 200–300 reservists had joined by May 31 (Han and Heo 62).

However, appraisals about Oppa-bu-dae’s presence in the protest were ambivalent. Many protesters welcomed the troop of oppa(s), dubbing them “body guards” and “stars,” and applauded their support when the troop of oppa(s) controlled traffic. Commentators also took notice of the fact that most of the oppa(s) were individuals in their twenties; having previously been criticized for not leading this protest, they were

57 They were indeed the members of the Internet café Military Reserve Force Defending the Republic of Korea (http://cafe.daum.net/korea20080526).

58 As older male, the male in military reserve uniforms were referred to oppa(s) by teenage candle girls.

59 The troop of oppa(s) was described as “star” by the Seoul Shinmun on May 31, 2008, and as “bodyguard” by the Korean Economic Daily on June 1, 2008 (Han and Heo 62).
now rising to show their passion for this political issue.\(^{60}\) On the other hand, some protesters felt uncomfortable by the mere presence of military uniforms, recalling the social movements quelled by military forces in Korean history. Moreover, a few commentators criticized *oppa-bu-dae* for reproducing and stereotyping unequal traditional gender roles of women and children as those in need of protection.\(^{61}\)

As the fierce battles between riot police and protesters continued, on May 30, hundreds of mothers, pushing their children in strollers, joined the street protests. They said they joined the protest to prevent their children and families from eating foods that were possibly unsafe for consumption and obtained the nickname *Yu-mo-cha-bu-dae* (a troop of strollers).\(^{62}\) Although some people viewed the participating mothers in the protest as an emerging, new, significant subject of social movement, some feminists felt that the mothers’ claim (that they had joined the protest for their husbands’ and children’s health and food safety) anchored their positions at the margins of society by still placing their husbands and children as the connection between them and the nation-state (Han and Heo 62). Possibly, the mothers’ claims negated their own importance while elevating the unit of the “family.”

\(^{60}\) The scholars who focused on the appearance of the individuals in their twenties in the protest venues are as follows: Oh 360; Sung-hwan Kim 21. Kim additionally notes by June, the protest also included participants who were in their twenties, thirties and forties.

\(^{61}\) Han and Heo believe that the candlelight protest did not exist in the public sphere in which individuals participate with their freedom and equal rights, but it functioned as a social and cultural ritual or performance that reproduced unequal gender roles (2).

\(^{62}\) The interview with the mother is available at http://www.vop.co.kr/A00000292910.html.
Meanwhile, the scenes of protest were covered in Internet real-time news broadcast, evoking greater sympathy and drawing more citizens. Play-by-play announcers from the Internet press—such as Radio 21, Color TV (run by New Progressive Party), Oh My News (www.ohmynews.com), No Cut News (www.nocutnews.co.kr), Pressian (www.pressian.com) and Popular Opinion—reported the unrest (Kang, Jang and Choi 13). The recordings at the protest venues were instantly posted and delivered to those who had not yet joined the protest, evoking their moral responsibility (Cho and Kang 311–32). Some protesters I had met at the protest testified that they came to join the protests after reading about or watching videos on the protest through the Internet. Media scholars Lee Chang-ho and Jung Eui-chul state that citizens reached “collective excitement,” while writing their comments on the postings, the activity of which is called daet-geul-nol-yi (play with comments) in Korean (457–91).

In addition to the news reports on the Internet, general citizens performed as “news reporters” by taking photographs, taping videos, conducting interviews, and providing coverage through their Internet blogs. The User Created Content (UCC) website, Africa (www.africa.com) was one of the popular video sharing platforms throughout the protest. Interested in the blurred boundary of journalism “experts,” Lee Chang-ho and Bae Ae-jin conducted interviews with citizen reporters and disclosed that

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63 According to Jeong Yong-taek, numerous new flags (including the flag saying “Agora, a Shrine for Discussion” of Daum Agora and “Are You An Educated ‘Woman’?” of Soul Dresser) appeared in the protest venues on the day after a video clip aired, showing the extreme measurements the police used to quell the protest (10–1).

64 Interviewee Mom N, in Kim and Cho’s research, also stated that she was affected by the live broadcast of the protest through the Internet as following: “I watched the live broadcast of the candlelight vigil protest held in downtown Seoul via blogs and internet forums almost every night. I also became a member of more than 10 different social network sites to support this movement. Texting to my friends to another thing I do to encourage their participation whenever there is a new protest scheduled” (Kim and Cho 14).

65 Daet-geul means “comments” in Korean and Nol-yi means “play” or “game.”
the new journalists intended to report all the happenings in the protest venues from their own viewpoint, without any mediation or exclusion of major mass media (44–75). In this way, the 2008 candlelight unfolded, encompassing general citizens beyond social activists, and the number of protesters rapidly escalated and exceeded 10,000 by May (Yong-take Jeong 11).

During the 72-hour relay rallies from June 5 to June 7, 50,000 protesters gathered on June 5, 200,000 on June 6; and 150,000 on June 7. Protest attendance peaked to over a million on the rally held on June 10 in celebration of the 21st anniversary of the 1987 June Movement, which helped end military authoritarian rules at that time: approximately 800,000 candles packed the entire districts surrounding Tae-pyong-ro in Seoul; another 300,000 protesters were present in the outlying cities.

The huge number of protesters continued to push the Lee administration; a delegation was sent to the United States for additional negotiation and reached a revision of U.S. beef import condition. However, the revision of the U.S. beef deal did not placate all protesters; some protesters still remained downtown, demanding a complete renegotiation (not an additional negotiation of the deal) to win better assurances to prevent mad cow disease. Disregarding their voice, the government posted the news of opening of the Korean market to American beef in the official gazette on June 26, and officially resumed American beef imports (for the KorUS FTA) on July 1.

This time, laborers, one of the traditional social movement subjects, stood out. Cheol-gang-no-jo (the Korean Metal Workers’ Union: KMWU, which represents workers at 240 companies including the country’s four major automakers) held a two-hour work strike, demanding a new beef deal as well as better working conditions. In fact,
laborers and trade unions, who were the main actors of the conventional social movements, had participated in this protest from the onset. According to Huh Young-gu, a leader of Min-ju-no-chong (the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions: KCTU), union leaders had taken part in all-night sit-in demonstrations in Cheonggye plaza, while also encouraging union members to join the protest (87). However, Huh continues that it was difficult to expect an actual commitment of workers’ time since most had been pressured to handle demanding work schedules under the conditions of the waning economy. Still, trade unions had taken a role in the protest. On June 13, the KCTU attempted to block distribution of U.S. beef by leading the transportation union on a general strike, refusing to transport U.S. beef that had been imported and stored in frozen storage in Korea for months and were heading to stores. On June 25, 146,000 members of the KMWU went on a 5-day general strike against the KorUS FTA (Y. Huh 87).

The trade unions were not the only group that had played an active part during the 2008 candlelight protest from the conventional social movement leaders. In free speech sessions, I had seen the protester speakers who introduced themselves as farmers. Although they were not the main pillars of the protest, they played a part in the background of the 2008 protest. Beef farmers in Korea initiated the protest against U.S. beef imports as the previous government of Roh Mu-hyun began negotiations on the KorUS FTA on February 2, 2006, which hinted at a detrimental effect on Korean farmers.

As the protest dragged on even after the additional negotiation, violence from the police grew fiercer. Protesters witnessed an increase in the use of police bus barricades,

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66 Historically, farmers have been one of the leading groups in conventional social movements in Korea, as they had not been a privileged group in the society during rapid industrialization and urbanization. Regarding this point, I will have further discussion in Chapter 5.
water cannons, tear gas and arrests. The growing police brutality incited the involvement of religious groups. After grand-scale collisions between protesters and police from June 28–29 (particularly after the government announced the reopening of the Korean market to American beef in the official gazette), Roman Catholic priests from the Catholic Priests Association for Justice (CPAJ) held an outdoor Mass at City Hall Plaza in Central Seoul, and led a crowd of at least 5,000 on a winding march. Some priests fasted and prayed. The Mass terminated the violent mood of the protest. The government and the police had no reason to interrupt the religious event. Meanwhile, the beef imports were resumed on July 1. On July 3, Christians joined in the protest and on July 4, and a Buddhist circle joined the protest and calmed the furious protesters. On July 5, the religious circles led 200,000 participants in a non-violent, peaceful march (K. Lee 96).

Overall, the 2008 candlelight protest proceeded with floods of different groups of people: a wide range of generations, men and women, families, school students and their parents, office workers, farmers, unionists, citizens, musicians, celebrities, reservist soldiers in uniforms, religious people, activist groups of many different political stripes, and non-political Internet communities. Each group possessed its own desires and demands. Some people strolled in the manner of flâneurs in the protest venues, while others marched resolutely towards the Blue House. Secondary school students worried over their school lunch; some participants were against the government’s authoritarian attitudes; mothers joined the protest with concerns about their children’s school meals;

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67 The Catholic Priests Association for Justice (CPAJ) has contributed to democratization of Korean society. Following the model of Liberation Theology established in the Latin American states, the Korean Catholic church became a haven for those opposing the military dictatorships. The issues of democratization and evangelism were conflated and some church leaders went so far as to lead protests against the authoritarian regimes. It was also possible largely due to governmental agencies’ reluctance to use military force against the church.
workers demanded wage increases; Internet users blamed the government for its lack of communication; activists tried to enlighten people about the notion of neoliberalism. These protesters spontaneously came together, creating a diverse unitary protesting American beef imports.

**Modality: Serious State and Humorous Protesters**

Regarding U.S. conventional social movements, Marty Linsky states “the great movements of the 1960s in civil rights, women’s rights, and opposition to the Vietnam War narrowly focused, well organized, strategically brilliant, and while attracting large numbers of people, managed by people who took on authority roles and made essential decisions, albeit often with significant consultative processes.” Just as they were, the traditional Korean social activists for prodemocracy and balanced wealth distribution unfolded focused, well organized, and strategic protests. Social activist groups and trade unions, on the basis of their political theories and lines, played leading roles in mobilizing protesters; protesters were unified around their leaders; their activities followed a strict order, displaying organized marches following the flags of their leaders. With militant mind-sets, protesters cried out against military dictatorship, raising wildly radical and drastic slogans while pumping their clenched fists in the air. As demonstrations escalated into pitched battles with the police, protesters broke police lines, wielding steel pipes and throwing fire bombs in retaliation against the violent quelling by police forces, who had used cold shields, water cannons, extinguishers, and tear gas on the protesters.

The 2008 candlelight protest, however, developed cultural activist practices such as culture jamming, subverting, rebel clowning which call upon irony, humor and the

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68 Lee Jong-gu describes that the participants in the previous social movements “were part of an organizational pyramid with central persons leading the demonstrations” (321–32).
carnivalesque. The 2008 protest did not point to a single, unifying political issue. Rather, the protesters degraded the government authorities through their sense of humor and collective laughter; the government, reacting angrily, violently, and autoritatively, looked foolish. In this section, I explore the modalities of the protest, which are different from those of conventional movements. To understand the essential features of the modalities, it is now important to look back to the time of Lee Myung-bak’s election as the 17th president of Korea.

Lee Myung-bak was newly elected as Korean president in February, 2008, with an oath to revitalize the national economy and to strengthen Korea’s relations with the United States (which, he argued, had been weakened by the two previous regimes). Lee claimed that he would restore better relations with the United States as a means for economic revitalization: he planned to sign the KorUS FTA, for which negotiations had been initiated but not finalized by previous President Roh in 2006. Despite the United States’ coercive demand to resume beef imports, Roh hesitated to lift the beef imports ban because of concerns regarding the health of the Korean public. The KorUS FTA negotiations, thus, did not go smoothly; the relationship with the United States was weakened, and President Roh was often accused (by Korean conservatives) of being too nationalistic and anti-American.

Boasting of his confidence about building an amicable relationship between Korea and the United States, President Lee bragged about the invitation from President George W. Bush to the U.S. presidential retreat Camp David, Maryland. Lee was the first Korean leader to be invited to Camp David. Even days before the visit, Lee’s aides billed the meeting with President Bush as a momentous event—one that never would have been
granted to leaders like Roh. Subsequently, a photo of Lee shaking hands with Bush upon his arrival at Camp David hit the major conservative newspapers, leading the reader to assume the two men forged close ties. More pictures were released, including one of Lee driving a golf cart with a big smile on his face, sitting right next to Bush. The pictures were presumably intended to illustrate Lee’s capacity to fortify Korea’s relationship with the United States.

Lee’s efforts to display his closeness to President Bush, however, was greeted with shouts of derision for then Korea leader kowtowing to the U.S. president, as it was disclosed to the public that Lee reached a settlement in regards to the U.S. beef import issues. The U.S. beef import deal approved by a new president behind closed doors angered the public, especially those who value democratic decision-making. Internet users morphed the photo of Lee at Camp David using Photoshop to create an exponential number of sarcastic parody images and spread them throughout various Internet websites. One of the images that I have encountered was a remake of the poster from a Korean film, originally titled Nae “Yeo-ja” Chin-gu-reul So-gae-ham-ni-da (Let Me Introduce My “Girl” Friend), abbreviated Yeo-chin-so. The female character in the original poster was replaced by Bush’s face, and Lee’s face replaced the face of the male character. The title on the poster was also altered into Nae “Mi-kug” Chin-gu-reul So-gae-hap-ni-da (Let Me Introduce My “American” Friend) with the abbreviated title, “Mi-chin-so” which also means “mad cow” in Korean. The public’s rage began to unravel through parody images.

The humor spread on the Internet was no different from the atmosphere of the 2008 candlelight protest on streets.\(^6^9\) The 2008 candlelight protest began with middle and

\(^6^9\) In fact, this feature might be different from the image of the protest constructed by the South Korean mainstream press by foreign press (such as CNN and USA Today). They have played up the violent
high school students holding candles in Cheonggye Plaza, urging the government to renegotiate with the United States to change the unfavorable conditions of U.S. beef importation. The slogans that the teenagers chanted, however, were as jaunty and certainly different from those of civil organizations and groups who joined the protest following the teenagers. If civil organizations and activists chanted, “Overthrow the Regime!” “Impeach Lee Myungbak!” “Traitor Lee Myungbak!”, teenagers chanted, “Eat Mad Cow Yourself [President Lee]!” “Set Back Lee Myung-bak, Hoola Hoola~” (E. Cho 65), “Send Mad Cows to the Blue House!” “I came here skipping study hall (which was mandatory for most secondary students),” and “We are a troop of Zombies from MadCow.net!” The Korean teenagers avoided the same canned phrases and favored lilting, speedy, and short sentences. From the advertising of cosmetics company Skin Food, “Not to be taken orally. Please apply on your skin” (my translation), the teenagers made a parody phrase, “[American beef] Not to be taken orally. Please apply on MB [Lee Myung-bak]” (E. Cho 65).

The protesters wrote cutting, witty and humorous satirical remarks on their pickets and placards, and wrote and sang comical songs to mock and deride President Lee, his administration, and the police. One of the songs popular among protesters was the one that Singer An Chi-hwan made by adding melody to a poem, whose lyric is following:

If I go to the hospital with mad cow disease,

I could not afford treatments due to privatization of health insurance.

I would just die because I do not have money and landed estate.

Please cremate my body and scatter the ashes on the Grand Korean Waterway.

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On Internet websites, protesters called Lee “tone deaf” since he had never opened his ears to the protesters’ voices. Lee was also labeled “2MB”—the number 2 being pronounced “Lee” in Korean, and “MB” being the initials of Myung-bak—, as the protesters were slyly stating that Lee’s intelligence quotient (IQ) is only 2 mega-bites (2MB), leading him to unintelligently sanction import U.S beef with lowered quarantine standards. In order to make fun of Lee, whose physical appearance, the protesters argued, was comparable to the appearance of mouse or rat, they chanted “We field mice apologize [for the stupid decision] on behalf of the rat. Let’s catch the rat! Zzig Zzig Zzig (squeaking)!!” These tactics were not intended to rationally make sense, but such a bewildering array of activities broke down the solemnity of President Lee into bits and pieces (Kenny 4).

The 2008 protesters also intentionally disrupted and disoriented “consensus reality” through their practices of cultural activism (Routledge 443). As police alerted protesters about their impending crushing through a megaphone, protesters spurred the police to sing, chanting “Live music please!” Protesters shouted at the water cannons aimed for them “Soap and hot water please!”, joking that water cannons served as portable showers during the hot summer season. They also placed flowers in the jackets of the police officers who stood still with blank looks on their faces to form a human barricade. When blocked by the police, protesters chanted “Detour, when you are blocked!” turning around and proceeding in alternate directions to the Blue House. These practices “de-programmed normative spatial functions and consensus realities by articulating new imaginaries and meanings” (Routledge 443).

70 Police normally announced that they would take stern actions against protesters who did not scatter but remained to participate in “illegal” acts.
Protesters dubbed the police bus “chicken cage” because the bus featured a wire enclosure. When the police attempted to arrest protesters, some voluntarily turned themselves in so they could ride on the police bus. They took photographs of themselves on the “Chicken Cage Tour” to upload on the Internet. Fliers spread on the Internet, advertising a set of tour packages: “Free Visit to the Chicken Bus and the Police Station.” One time, a rumor spread on the Internet that the “candle sellers” were pulling the strings behind the protest. Women participants from Internet cafés (such as My Club, Soul Dresser, Hwa-jang-bal, 82 Cook.com, Lemon Terrace, Ssang-Ko, and the like) assigned each other “homework” to make protest calls to the companies, threatening to boycott the products of the companies if the companies continued to use the conservative newspapers as their advertisement platforms. Standing before the line of frightening police forces, protesters resorted to mordant humor, which relieved the tension. In such a way, the protesters (temporarily) transformed spaces of intimidation and coercion into “clown spaces of play and mockery” (Routledge 443).

Meanwhile, we protesters also “called upon Situationist-inspired tactics of détourment (Buser and Arthurs 4). During lulls in clashes between protesters and police, I arranged a time and place to meet my friends, my master’s thesis advisor, research advisors, and master’s program colleagues who I had often encountered in the protest venues. We sat in circles on the square or in the middle of streets, “closing roads to traffic,” hanging out with bottles of beer and soft drinks that we had purchased at corner shops (Buser and Arthurs 4). Other protesters also sat in their own circles as if they were at a picnic. Musicians played six-holed bamboo flutes, accordions, and Korean percussions, while a dance troupe romped on a temporary platform to songs blaring from
loud speakers. It was an impromptu concert of young protesters, dancing and singing for onlookers; audiences joined in the performances by clapping to the beat, and some audience members creatively made impromptu drums out of water bottles as musical instruments. Elaborately costumed dancing figures gracefully sashayed between the circles of spectators. We protesters were “taking over streets and turning them into pulsing, dancing, temporary carnivals” (Duncombe 68). These activities in the protest venues, “transform[ing] so-called dead motorway into living human space” (Buser and Arthurs 4), fashioned “sensuous solidarities” (Routledge 443).71

At the other extreme of this exhilarating atmosphere of the protest, however, the government and government conservatives displayed a stern demeanor. At a press conference on May 13, the police chief Uh Cheong-su stated that the candlelight festival in Cheonggye Plaza did not simply appear to be a cultural event because people in the plaza carried pickets and chanted rebellious political messages. He asserted that the event was an illegal action, citing the Law on Assembly and Demonstrations that bans assemblage in the square or the streets without prior notification to the appropriate authorities. He continued that the police would take strong actions against the illegal protest participants as well as the instigators of the protest. The Democratic Labor Party, the Confederation of Korean Trade Unions, the Federation of Street Vendors, and Korean Teachers’ Union (which had led social movements for democracy and civil rights since 1960) were pegged as the instigators of the protest.

The government added to the prevailing tensions by directing the Seoul Education Office to send schoolteachers to Cheong-gye Plaza to coax the teenagers to scatter and go

71 According to Routledge, sensuous solidarities are generated through diverse bodily movements and techniques, and are indicative of both the performative character of activist subjectivities and the content of activists’ public (political) performances.
“back onto the right path” (Sung-hwan Kim 19). The national prosecutors declared that they would criminally prosecute those who were involved in spreading so-called “mad cow horror stories” on the Internet as well as organizers of candlelight protests against American beef imports (Kerr).

On May 24, protesters moved from Cheong-gye Plaza to more spacious Seoul Square to hold overnight rallies. Thousands of protesters gathered in Seoul Square and took over Sejong Avenue to march toward the Blue House. The government released 10,000 riot police with water cannons. It was on May 31 when the police launched a vehement attack on the protesters. Since it was the second day of my participation in the protest, I clearly remember the situation in the venue. The police blocked the protest march; the protesters were surrounded by police in a flash and pushed by the police, a slowly tightening circle formed around them. The police directive over a megaphone said that protesters would be crushed unless they dispersed. Protesters’ confrontation with the police continued for a long while. As the night shifted into the next morning, police forces exercised a series of illegal and drastic measures in the course of cracking down on demonstrators. According to a video clip taken by a protester and subsequently posted on internet news sites, on June 1, a police officer in combat boots stomped on the head of a fallen woman protester while blocking the camera that was recording the scene.\textsuperscript{72} The police pushed protesters with their shields, shot water cannons, and arrested and arbitrarily detained protesters. When the police released the detained protesters, they issued traffic tickets to protesters for interrupting traffic by marching on the road.

Leaving a number of demonstrators injured, these measures were not only undemocratic but also violated safety regulations. The police directly shot water cannons onto a protester within the short distance of 3 meters, although police equipment management restricts the use of water cannons within 15 degrees and within 20 meters of a person. One protester, who had been struck in the face by water cannon from only 10 meters away, had his eardrum split. Civil organizations claimed that the riot police and the government abused human rights.

The protesters devoted themselves to recording and broadcasting the government’s violence, which became a newly common tactic across contemporary movements such as Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street, etc. Instead of responding violently to the government’s violence as in the past, technologically savvy citizens in the 2008 protest took on the role of “citizen reporters,” taking photographs and taping videos of the scenes of forcible winding-up of the protest. The protesters also conducted interviews and published all of their findings on their blogs and Internet community websites. All of these journalistic activities demonstrated that the police were certainly violating human dignity, which caused citizens outside the protest to feel indignant and morally inclined and to eventually join the protest.

Since it was organized by voluntary participants rather than being mobilized by social activists or civil organizations, the 2008 candlelight also proceeded in a decentralized and fragmented form without a single center pulling the strings. The protesters rejected any trail of activists to lead their protests. The Democratic Labor Party, the New Progressive Party, and a socialist activist group Da-ham-gge all attempted to guide the protest, but they received only indifferent responses. The protesters arranged
themselves in autonomous, horizontal relations refusing hierarchical rules used in the conventional social movements, just as “nonhierarchical consensus-driven process” turned to be a common feature of current social protests (Linsky). The 2008 candlelight protest appeared to fulfill Fox and Miller’s theorization of postmodern public administration as “a move from centripetal to centrifugal, centralization to fragmentation, common units towards incommensurability, difference rather than likeliness, universals to hyper-pluralisms, fragmentation instead of generalized units of analysis, Newtonian to Heisenberg quantum physics, and causal theory to un predictable analysis of microcosms” (Fox and Miller 52–70 qtd. in Boje 431–58).

Due to the lack of leadership, the development of the 2008 protest was footloose and fancy free: chanting slogans were not synchronized; the protesters’ flags were even fashionable as the members of Ssang-Ko, a plastic surgery web community, carried a shiny pink flag symbolizing their café community; the attire of protesters varied and was often different from the conventional apparel of protesters—some women were in mini-skirts and high heels, which were not typical attire for social movements, while some male youths were in their military reserve force uniforms in a “laughable” sense because it contradicted the protests of the past in which the military were quelling the protests.74 Another new face to the protest scene was the hundreds of mothers who took to the frontline of the protests, marching with their infants in strollers. Some protesters paraded in cat costumes in order to mock President Lee, while others dragged a computer mouse caught in a mousetrap in the marches.

73 They were nicknamed “a troop of mini-skirts” and “a troop of high heels.”

74 They were indeed the members of the Internet café named Military Reserve Force Defending the Republic of Korea (http://cafe.daum.net/korea20080526).
The two biggest rallies (held on June 5–7 and June 10) exemplified the atmosphere of the protest venues featuring “carnivalesque protest and the humorless state” (Bruner). Protesters held 72-hour relay rallies from June 5–7, named “National Picnic,” which indicated the rallies’ relaxed ambience, and people casually joined. I attended the rallies with former colleagues from my master’s program; the purpose of our attendance was also socializing. Some protesters built makeshift tents or unfolded paper boxes and newspapers to use as mats on the lawn of Seoul Square in front of City Hall. Sitting in circles, respective group members shared snacks and drinks while chatting. Balloons flew overhead, carrying banners that said “Judgment day for Lee Myung-bak” and “Renegotiate the beef deal!” It appeared that some families participated in the protest as part of their family outings: one father walked hand in hand with his children, while another father carried his son on his shoulders, walking around the protest venue as if it were a park. Here, Peter Dahlgren’s view of politics resonates with my perception of the protest: “Politics becomes not only an instrumental activity for achieving specific goals, but also an expressive activity, a way of asserting, within the public sphere, group values, ideals, and belongings” (155).

Another large rally was scheduled on June 10, in celebration of the 1987 June Pro-democracy Movement, which had ended the rule of the former military government and resulted in democratic presidential elections. As People United against Mad Cow Disease had unfolded campaigns for gathering a million candles (protesters), police were on the highest alert. Thousands of police officers were deployed in Central Seoul to build

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75 “Carnivalesque protest and the humorless state” is the title of the journal article written by Lane Bruner.
barricades across the main boulevards, especially Sejong Avenue, along which the protesters had marched.

Figure 2. The Barricades Made of the Shipping Containers: The government is moving shipping containers to Sejong Avenue to make barricades to block protest marches. This photo is taken by Jeon Mun-su, and posted on the website of Min-jung-eui So-ri (www.vop.co.kr).

They brought shipping containers (Refer to Figure 2) and secured them to the ground with iron nails, filled them with sandbags, and coated them with oil. As if that was not enough protection for the president, the police then parked police buses in front of the shipping containers as an additional barrier. While the police constructed the barricades, citizens bantered about how Lee was building his fortress to shut out his people, and nicknamed the barricades *Myung-bak San-seoung* (Myung-bak Castle) as a symbol of President Lee’s refusal to communicate with his people. The nickname Myung-bak Castle was originally used by Internet users on *Daum Agora* but soon generated a number of derivatives, one of which was *Yong-jeop Myung-bak* (Welding Myung-bak), a term

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76 The word *Myung-bak San-seong* combines the first name of Lee Myung-bak and a Korean word that means “mountain fortress wall,” with the latter part referring to the rows of shipping containers. The term was first used by Internet users almost instantaneously beginning on June 10 (KST).
that ridiculed his directives for police to weld the containers together to prevent protesters from squeezing through. Furthermore, police positioned buses to block subway entrances and alleys leading to the rallying points, and cordoned off plazas and intersections, where large crowds had gathered since May 24 (Cho, “Beef Protest Turns”).

As anticipated, on that day (June 10), numerous protesters gathered in Seoul Square to begin their march down Sejong Avenue. The protesters were unwavering in their attempts to break through the barricade to reach the Blue House. A group of protesters, angered by Lee’s overreaction to the situation, tied ropes to one of the buses in an attempt to flip it over (as Figure 3 shows), but they were arrested before they could complete the task.

![Figure 3. The Protesters Resisting against Barricade: A group of protesters are pulling the ropes tied to one of the buses to flip it over. This photo is taken by Jeon Mun-su, and posted on the website of Min-jung-eui So-ri (www.vop.co.kr).](image-url)

Then, the protesters filled sandbags at a construction site approximately one mile away from the protest venue. They formed a human conveyer belt of about sixty people to transport the bags to the protest site. The sandbags were then stacked in front of the
police buses to construct steps to the top of the barricades. The incline was nicknamed *Kuk-min To-sung* (the People’s Castle). Those who climbed on the bus waved flags symbolizing the groups that they represented.

![Protesters Weaving Flags on the Top of Barricades](image)

**Figure 4. Protesters Weaving Flags on the Top of Barricades:**
Protesters are waving flags symbolizing the groups that they represented, on the top of the barricade buses. This photo is taken by Jeon Mun-su, and posted on the website of *Min-jung-eui So-ri* (www.vop.co.kr).

However, the police immediately responded by shooting water cannons at the protesters who were on the top of the buses. While the force of the water initially toppled the protesters’ flags, the protesters persevered, frantically raising their flags. However, their efforts failed. The protesters could not withstand the deluge of the cannons and finally tumbled to the ground.

However, the protesters did not lose their sense of humor. They began to decorate the barricades with large Korean national flags, photographing themselves in front of the flags, and with fliers stating “This is a new border for our country. From here starts the United States of Korea.” Some protesters unfolded newspapers to make mats and took
seats in circles to relax and to have chats with other protesters. Meanwhile, some people weaved through the milling crowds to hand out kim-bab (seaweed rice rolls), bottled water, and chocolate bars from citizens’ donations. This protest, in fact, had been supported by citizens’ donations. The kim-bab which my group shared was from a member of the Internet community *DC Inside* (www.DCinside.com). The member, whose user name was *Dok-shin-nyeo* (spinster), maintained a fund raising effort online and had collected 60,180,000 won (around $60,180) to provide the protesters with snacks (D. Lee 93). Also, individuals at the protest, as well as thousands of others not present, simultaneously flocked toward the Internet homepage of the Blue House and the government agencies; these websites ceased to function in a minute when they were overwhelmed by a rush of hits.  

However, after a revision was made to original version of the FTA with the United States, the government’s violence escalated. Police worked harder to block the protesters with their buses and shields; used water cannons more frequently, fired liquid gas (which had been used against antigovernment demonstrators during the military dictatorships of the 1970s and ‘80s and against labor activists of the 1990s), and sprayed fire extinguishers to disperse the protesters) (Cho, “Beef Protest Turns”). The police buckled down by arresting more protesters. According to a news reporter of *Oh My News* whom I had met in the protest venue, the police shot water cannons containing a phosphorescent pigment to mark protesters. After getting pelted by water cannons, she had tried to hide in a subway but was caught by police who were looking for protesters who had run away.

77 The homepages that the protesting netizens visited included those of the ruling Grand National Party, conservative newspapers such as *Chosun Ilbo*, *JungAng Ilbo*, and *Dong-A Ilbo*, the National Police Agency and Public Prosecutors’ Office, and the companies that advertised in the conservative newspapers.
Figure 5. The police Spraying Tear Gas toward Protesters: The police are spraying tear gas from the police car toward protesters. This photo is taken by Jeon Mun-su, and posted on the website of Min-jung-eui So-ri (www.vop.co.kr).

The protesters’ plight exacerbated as the rainy season began at the end of June. Police no longer needed to use water cannons. Protesters, who were already fatigued by the long journey of the protest, barely shielded their flickering candles from the rain. I was growing weary from the inclement weather and cumbersome rain-coats. My feet often grew soggy and swollen; to take rests, I had to sit down on the wet ground. Riot police constantly pushed and shoved us, even in the rain. It seemed that protesters began to lose hope that our presence would cause Lee to change his plan. Daily attendance in the rallies dwindled; the rallies were eventually limited to the weekends.

On August 15, protesters held the 100th demonstration, the last rally. In one final humorous act, protesters carried pickets with the pun, “It is our 100 day anniversary. Let us part!” and blew out their candles.\textsuperscript{78} I believe that the political maneuvers of the 2008

\textsuperscript{78} Many young Korean couples tend to celebrate their 100th day after they become a couple because the relationships are often short lived. In this situation, the protesters wittingly acknowledged this monumental anniversary date.
candlelight protest can be featured by the term, “the carnivalesque,” coined by Bakhtin to indicate the literary tendency that subverts authority and dominant power not in rational or systematic ways but through chaos.\(^{79}\) The 2008 protest, rather than drawing on grandiose narratives, reasonable ideological lines, or other spiritual or intellectual elements, degraded and disrespected the government’s authority (encompassing neoliberal globalization) through irony, parody, and satire. These carnivalesque tactics, some people might say, are too cynical, divisive, detached or damaging to “serious” discourse, but Amber believes that “the use of these forms create discursive spaces and engages” (qtd. in Jenkins). The carnivalesque, which generates humor and laughter, possibly enables passive spectators to participate and engage in certain issues. Even if spectators did not wire their brains to perceive their meanings, the carnivalesque directly hit the bodies of the protesters, immediately evoking the spontaneous impulses of the body, their “laughter.” Terry Eagleton states “laughter is the very type of expressive somatic utterance, an enunciation which springs straight from the body’s libidinal depths” (27).

**Goal: Leaving Myungbak Castle**

It appears that the deepening of the authoritarian regimes’ repressions in Korean history gave rise to the deepening of the oppositions’ ideas. The leading actors of the social movements in the past collectively struggled for political and economic democracy, with their military mindset, in a serious manner. Particularly, the largest-scaled conventional social movements—such as the April 19 Revolution in 1960, the Gwangju Popular Uprising in 1980, and the June Democratic Uprising in 1987—were as radical as

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\(^{79}\) The term, the carnivalesque, refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* [1968]).
they were steered to either overthrow or threaten the erstwhile authoritarian/military
dictatorial regimes (Jong-ryul Choi 227–70; Yong-taek Jeong 10–1). The 2008
candlelight protest, however, grew organically, and fizzled out in the end, which left me
questioning what the goal of the protest was. In this section, I discuss the goal of the 2008
candlelight protest. I begin with a discussion on the ideological direction of Lee’s
government, which approved U.S. beef imports in 2008.

Lee Myung-bak was a presidential candidate who set up the revival of the Korean
economy as his most important election promise. The centerpiece of Lee’s economic
revitalization promise was his “Korea 747 plan,” which was named for its goals: to bring
7% annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP), raise Korea’s per capita income to
$40,000 USD, and make Korea the world’s seventh largest economy during his term. His
personal image as a former famous business chief executive of *Hyundai Engineer &
Construction* as well as a self-declared “C.E.O. of the Korea, Inc.” inspired widespread
public confidence in his ability to restore the national economy. Lee won the Korean
presidency on February 25, 2008. Public confidence in Lee’s ability also led his
conservative Grand National Party (currently called Saenuri Party) to garner the majority
of parliamentary seats (153 out of 299 seats) in the general election on April 9, 2008.

Lee declared that he would save the national economy, which had weakened
during the “lost decade” of two former leftist administrations. Although the two leftist
regimes of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Mu-hyun had adopted neoliberal policies, Lee
believed that these regimes’ strategy of exercising government regulations on markets
had led to mismanagement of the national economy. Accordingly, Lee’s naming of the

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80 Regarding the economic policies of the two regimes of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Mu-hyun, I will
 have discussions in Chapter 5.
previous regimes as “the lost decade” marked his intention to pursue a free-market ideology in earnest.  

Lee presented his market-friendly ideology under the name of *Pragmatism*. Under this principle, Lee planned a range of new politics, including privatization of public enterprises (health care, water, and electricity), competitive education reforms, and pro-business economic reforms. Essentially, “MB-Nomics,” the series of Lee’s economic plans that highlighted a reduction of government regulation of the economy, sounded similar to “Reaganomics,” the “neoliberal” economic policies promoted by U.S. President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s.

Establishing the rebuilding of Korea’s economic alliance with the United States as a means of revitalizing the national economy, Lee planned on finalizing the negotiations of the KorUS FTA, which had been initiated in 2006 under the previous regimes of Roh Mu-hyun and George W. Bush. U.S. congressional leaders had warned Roh’s administration that they would never ratify the pact for expansive deals unless Korea fully reopened its markets to American beef (and automobiles). Resumption of the market to U.S. beef was suggested in the initial stage of the negotiations, but Roh hesitated due to Korean citizens’ concerns about the risk of mad cow disease in U.S. beef. Lee Myung-bak, however, made a decision to remove the biggest barrier to mending ties with the United States. On April 18, 2008, Lee approved the agreement to resume U.S.

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81 Free-market ideology refers to the idea that unfettered capital movements are the best and most natural way for realizing individual liberty and material progress in the world. It is achieved through the framework of “small government and big market,” accompanied by tax cuts, deregulation, liberalization of foreign investment, etc. It is also called neoliberalism. For more details on neoliberalism, please refer to Chapter 2.
beef imports with alleviated quarantine standards for the beef, acceding to the demand of George W. Bush.  

Lee attempted to justify his decision to open the market by stating that through the KorUS trade agreement, Korea would leap into the position of a great economic power by reaping huge economic benefits: U.S. financial commitment would increase employment and productivity, which would raise national competitive power in the global industrial society, and grant Korean conglomerates (such as Samsung and Hyundai) more opportunities to export automobiles, cellular phones, and other goods to the United States. Citing the statement of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, the government also emphasized that Korean exports to the United States would rise by 12 to 15 percent per year. The government added that the agreement would allow Korea to retain its memberships in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Group of Twenty (G-20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, which Korea had tirelessly pursued for a decade. It appeared that Lee believed that globalization of markets was the only path to an expansion of economy and prosperity for all.

As the details of the decision to resume U.S. beef imports became known to the Korean public, Lee (who had the image of the hero of saving the public from the

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82 The newly revised Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) has been detailed in the first section of Chapter 4.

83 The OECD is an international economic organization of committed to democracy and the free-market economy, providing a platform to compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problem, identify good practices, and co-ordinate domestic and international policies of its members.

84 The G-20 is a forum of international economic development that promotes discussion between industrial and emerging-market countries on key issues related to global economic stability. It was established in 1999 to systemically bring together industrialized and developing nations to discuss key issues in the global economy. I refer to the bulletin board of the French G-20 presidency website (www.g20.org).
economic downturn) came to be perceived as a devil incarnate threatening Korean national pride as well as public health (Jong-ryul Choi 227–70). Newspapers such as the *Hangyore* and the *Kyunghyang Shinmun* reported that the Lee regime had agreed to a “humiliating” concession, which had come under American pressure and disregarded the concerns of citizens. On the Internet, people vilified Lee for forfeiting national dignity, reflecting the government’s “U.S.-friendly ideology.” Since much of the Korean public started to believe that they would be infected with mad cow disease and would soon die, Lee’s plan for revitalizing the national economy no longer made any sense. Lee was only a fanatic supporter of economic growth.

In Cheonggye Plaza in downtown Seoul, a group of middle and high school students had gathered, urging the government to cancel the contract. According to Kang Nae-hui, these teenagers, in fact, were the members of seven youth organizations—including *21Se-gi Cheong-so-nyeon Gong-dong-che Hee-mang* (21st-Century Youth Community Hope) and *Cheong-so-nyeon Da-ham-gge* (Youth Altogether) (my translations) and others—which had already been aware of the irrationality of Lee’s economic principles (Nae-hui Kang 55). These students came out to the plaza in protest when Lee’s educational reform plans were announced.

The Korean secondary education system, being highly focused on college entrance exams, had grown overly competitive; most teenagers had been exhausted from the burdens of grade competition and the hectic school schedule of 7:00 a.m.–11:00 p.m. Lee’s market ideology, however, included plans to intensify excessive competition among them, effectively transforming them into study machines (K. Song 62; Go et al.

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85 This perspective was reflected in the progressive newspapers *the Hangyore* and *Kyunghyang shinmun*. 
25–6). The Lee government planned to add an hour to the school day (the zero hour class), to segregate students by skill levels and to increase the number and quality of magnet schools. The teenagers in the plaza had been initially motivated to protest against such proposed educational reforms. However, when the approval of beef import was known, they steered their focus toward the U.S. beef import issue because they were faced with a situation where they could not even eat their school lunch with peace of mind while knowing that the companies in charge of providing their lunches at school would use possibly unsafe American beef. With the entangled issues of neoliberal education plans and U.S. beef imports, the teenagers cried out, “Let me get some sleep, Let me get some food!” and “Retreat mad education, Retreat mad cow!”

The protest that had begun from the fear of mad cow disease snowballed into a wide range of grievances against Lee’s unpopular leadership style and new market-friendly policies overall. Lee’s wealth-based cabinet appointments were firstly criticized: most of Lee’s political appointees were wealthy, so there were concerns and public hostility against the possibility that Lee’s appointees would favor policies protecting the rich while failing to address the needs of the underprivileged. Protesters also suggested a “1+5 strategy” which was named from its purposes: keeping the original purpose of the protest against U.S. beef imports, they wanted to present five additional oppositions to Lee’s neoliberal plans of privatizing health insurance, privatizing public enterprises

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86 According to Choi Jong-ryul, the teenagers were guided by 2MB Tan-haek Tu-jaeng-Yon-dae (People United for the Impeachment of Lee Myung-bak; my translation), which had been protesting since Lee’s election on December 22, 2007 (256).

87 These appointees were mostly chosen from the nation’s southeast region (Gyeong-sang-buk-do and Gyeong-sang-nam-do), which is known as a GNP stronghold.
(water and electricity), reforming education, constructing the Grand Korean Waterway, and controlling mass media.

Furthermore, the trade unions attempted to incorporate their issues, which were also in the line of neoliberalism, into the 2008 candlelight protest. The trade unions had carried out strikes against abusive sweatshop conditions at a number of companies, including Kiryung Electronics, Koscom, E-Land, Home-Ever, and KTX (Sung-hwan Kim 21). Even before the 2008 protest started, the working conditions at the companies had exacerbated in concert with neoliberalism: for example, the production line workers at Kiryung Electronics Factory were to assemble Sirius Satellite Radios to be exported to the United States. However, around 250 of the workers were hired as so-called temporary workers, who “have no rights, earn less than half of what regular permanent workers do [around $600 per month], and can be arbitrarily fired at the drop of a hat” (Korea National Labor Committee). The pace was so frantic that workers dared not lift their heads; workers could not even use the bathroom. For women, conditions were even worse, as married women were limited to only three-month contracts so they could be fired if they became pregnant. Recognizing that these conditions had been backed by the eco-political principle of neoliberalism, the workers at the Kiryung Factory had organized a local union to fight back, and affiliated to Korea’s largest union, the progressive Korean Metal Workers Union from 2005. The trade unions attempted to incorporate their issue into the 2008 protest.

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88 An important part of Lee’s platform was the Grand Korean Waterway project (which he believed would lead to an economic revival) to construct a 540-kilometer (340 miles) long canal connecting Seoul and Busan, two of South Korea’s largest cities. Against President Lee’s plan, people argued that it was not proper to build a canal in a geographically small nation that is a peninsula surrounded by water, and that already had a highly developed transportation infrastructure. Concerns of possible negative environmental impact were also suggested.
However, all of these struggles against neoliberal policies during the protest were defied by the government. Rather than carefully listening to the public opinions, the Lee government harshly delivered counterblows. The government stigmatized the protesters, stating that the teenagers, who initiated the protest, were manipulated by anti-American/anti-regime forces; mothers with strollers were those who used their babies for their political ends; the Kyunghyang Shinmun and the Hangyore, MBC’s PD Su-cheop, the Democratic Labor Party, the New Progressive Party, and the Internet portal site Agora Daum were the instigators who stirred up the public to join the illegal actions.

Furthermore, prosecutors opened the doors for the government’s repression of freedom of speech by filing a lawsuit for libel against MBC’s PD Su-cheop. Prosecutors argued that PD Su-cheop had deliberately distorted facts and/or fabricated information, emphasizing two allegations: first, while the program featured video footage of sick cattle being led to slaughter in the United States, the cattle in the footage were not those with mad cow disease but downer cows which under similar conditions are also routinely slaughtered in Korea. Second, in the video footage, Aretha Vinson, a deceased Virginian woman, was described through Korean subtitles as having likely died from new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (nvCJD) (related to mad cow disease), while in English, Vinson’s mother said that her daughter had died of CJD (not related to mad cow disease). The Korean Communications Commission (KCC) directed MBC to apologize on air for its mistranslation. Prosecutors, politicians, and conservative newspapers

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89 Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) can be grouped into two types: classic or new variant disease. While classic CJD is not related to mad cow disease, the infection that causes the disease in cows is believed to be the same one that causes new variant CJD in humans (PubMed Health).

90 At that time, the head of KCC was Choi Si-jung who worked for President Lee’s election campaign.
pressed MBC to issue a formal apology to admit that it provided the public with pieces of wrong information. Although the conservatives only accentuated the minor mistakes the program made, I believe that journalists’ job is to inform people of any possible social risk.

Lee’s government further asserted its authority by repressing freedom of speech. Some Internet commentators, specifically members of Agora Daum (Agorarians) were imprisoned under the pretext of spreading so-called “mad cow horror stories” on the Internet (Kerr). Those who led the campaign to stop subscriptions to the conservative newspapers Chosun Ilbo, Jung-Ang Ilbo, and Dong-A Ilbo and the members of anti-Lee Myungbak café were threatened by the police for further investigation (Sung-hwan Kim 23). Civil organizations that opposed the KorUS FTA were cut off from their access to government subsidies. Police also combed the offices of civil organizations including People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy and Korea Alliance of Progressive Movements, which had helped in organizing the protests, and prosecuted them for their infringement of the Assembly and Demonstration Act regulations (Je-wan Kim 125–69). Not only were the organizations taken to criminal court, they were also taken to civil court, as owners of stores in the shopping districts along the protest venues filed damage claim suits against People United against Mad Cow Disease (Je-wan Kim 125–69). Lee’s government also attempted to appoint his supporters as presidents of KBS (a terrestrial broadcaster) and YTN (a cable broadcaster), replacing the existing presidents. The situation was similar to that of the Cold War governments of Central Europe, well-known for suppressing political dialogue. Padraic Kenney, who examined the historical details

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91 Regarding the mistranslation of the interview with Vinson’s mother, there have been other interviews and articles from United States media that show that she believed that her daughter Aretha Vinson might have suffered from vCJD (related to mad cow disease).
surrounding the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern European countries, describes the Cold War governments of Central Europe in 1989 as the sites of an “incessant monologue” that was ruptured “not with persuasive argument, but with a cacophony of insistent and derisive voices” (5).

In order to shut down the protesters’ voices, the government even released riot police and directed them to heavily quell the protesters. The police blocked the protesters’ marches with their buses and shields, and shot extinguishers, water cannons, and tear gas to scatter protesters. The police violence was fierce enough to receive a negative assessment from an international human rights organization. Amnesty International released a report confirming cases of human rights abuse committed by the riot police, including use of excessive force, arbitrary detention, intentional suppression of protesters, brutal and non-humanitarian treatment and penalties, and a lack of medical treatment for detainees. Many protesters were injured and 1,045 protesters in total were arrested.

Government conservatives fervently alarmed the public of the possible damages on national economic conditions and on private business sales. They tried to stimulate popular worries about sagging growth and rising inflation with surging prices of oil and other raw materials. In addition, they highlighted that the 2008 candlelight protest scared off foreign investors and big business, both of which would be helpful for reviving the national economy. The Korea Economic Institute, affiliated with the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI) announced that the direct damage of the candlelight protest on the Korean economy had reached 668.5 billion South Korean won, and the total amount of direct and indirect damage would reach 1.9228 trillion Korean won (Chae 139). These statistics eventually led to small businesses lining up on both sides of the protest venues
to file damage claim suits against the state and People United against Mad Cow Disease. Regardless of the democratic value of the protest, the protest was only accused as the element that inflicted great loss on daily economic activities, disrupted the prospect of the KorUS FTA, and scuttled the opportunities for Korea to leap into the position of a great economic power.

Besides these severe damages, however, I do not see any significant achievement of 2008 candlelight protest. First, the candlelight protest did not fully achieve the right for food safety. In the previous chapters, it was mentioned that after the additional renegotiation with the United States to revise the U.S. beef import conditions, the government bragged of its accomplishments with the statement that its results were similar to the deals Japan and Taiwan had reached. In fact, however, there were other stories behind the government’s swagger. In actuality, the trade negotiators, who were sent to the United States, confronted the U.S. Congress, which refused to back down (Kerr). After much wrangling, the negotiators were offered only a temporary voluntary agreement by U.S. ranchers not to export beef from cattle older than 30 months as well as to provide an age certificate for all meat shipped to Korea. These conditions, however, were not even written into the accord but orally promised (Kerr). Although the safety right regarding Specified Risk Material (SRM)—cattle parts like brains, eyes, skulls, and spinal cords, in which the mad cow virus mainly resides—was changed, it was not significantly altered: dangerous parts of cows (such as the backbone and internal organs) were still permitted to enter Korea. Even in regards to the right to inspect, Korea won the right in the accord to inspect only a sampling of American slaughterhouses.
Some protesters including myself still remained in Seoul Plaza to demand a complete renegotiation to win better assurances to prevent mad cow disease. We believed that the revised deal was simply the government’s trick to quell public anger without solving the real problem. The government, however, responded with even fiercer physical violence. The police were constantly arrayed in downtown Seoul to block the protesting marches with their shields and buses. The police even made their presence apparent by thunderously banging their shields on the roads before collisions with protesters. They continually used water cannons and liquid tear gas more often than before to disperse the protesters; and buckled down on arresting the protest leaders and detaining protesters day after day. As a rainy season began, we protesters were growing tired. The daily rallies slowed down into rallies only on weekends. As a number of protesters suffered physically and mentally from the violence inflicted upon them, we broke into several groups of hundreds, engaging in sporadic marches. My group marched to the National Police Agency, protesting violent measures, and later to broadcasting stations of KBS and YTN to protect freedom of speech, as the government attempted to appoint their people as the heads of these stations.

Meanwhile, the government posted the reopening of the Korean market to American beef in the official gazette on June 26, driving grand-scale collisions between protesters and police from June 28–29. These collisions subsequently led to the involvement of religious circles: Roman Catholic priests began to lead a crowd of

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92 Protesters said that the situation surrounding the 2008 candlelight protest reminded them of the political situation of public peace and safety in 1989, called Gong-an-jung-guk in Korean. After consecutive unauthorized visits of South Koreans to North Korea in 1989, the then government strongly and sternly responded by extending the application of National Security Law and reinforcing investigations of left-wings. The government established National Security Planning and a special investigation headquarters made of police and prosecutors to investigate the opposition groups and the members of student-led movements in the name of eradicating leftist pro-communist forces. The political situation rapidly became conservative. This tragic history seemed to be repeating during Lee’s reign.
protesters on a winding march, while Christians and a Buddhist circle followed to join. However, the involvement of these religious groups not only calmed down the police’s violence but also transformed the furious sentiments of protesters into docile temperament. While peaceful marches transpired on the protest venues, beef imports were officially resumed on July 1; the beef products, which had already been imported and kept in warehouses in Korea, began to circulate on July 2.

People United against Mad Cow Disease ultimately made an announcement of the citizens’ victory on July 15. But to me, it sounded ironic to say that it was the citizens’ victory. The 2008 candlelight protests fizzled out without any serious achievement. Although the protest was triggered by food safety issue, the protest did not behold the agenda throughout whole time: soon after the protest ended on August 15, Korea quickly became the second largest import entry of American beef in the end of August 2008, and the third biggest by 2010. Although trade unions attempted to incorporate the issue of contract workers—trade unions and civil organizations distributed printed materials to educate the protesters about how neoliberalism has affected workers—, many of the protesters did not appear to take the issue into their serious consideration. Also, civil organizations attempted to incorporate discussions on Lee’s neoliberal plans—including privatizing health insurance, privatizing public enterprise, reforming education, etc.—into the protest, but the protests did not attempt to topple down the Lee administration. The 2008 candlelight protest did not seriously influence elections or political discourse either, considering that the person who won the 2012 presidential election for the next term was from the same conservative party as Lee Myung-bak. All of these tell that the 2008
candlelight protest did not question or rethink the social terrains and principles of neoliberalism.

Marty Linsky, who has criticized the Occupy Wall Street movement in terms of its lack of leadership, would probably have given the same comments regarding the 2008 candlelight protest. The 2008 protest failed to “take[e] the next steps and creat[e] real impact. It may be necessary for those who want to move any social movements forward to listen to Linsky’s statement: “the presence of authority is essential in order to move this work forward. Someone, or some ones will have to provide some of the functions of authority—direction, protection and order—so that the movement can begin to make hard choices, create priorities, allocate human and financial resources, and keep the anarchistic outliers from undermining the potential outcomes.”

In the same vein sense, Korean scholar Lee Dong-yon states that the biggest rally on June 10 synopsizes the watered-down, vague goal and result of the 2008 candlelight protest. As mentioned earlier, the 2008 protesters held the biggest rally on June 10 in celebration of the 21st anniversary of the 1987 June Movement. During their march, they faced Myung-bak San-seoung (Myung-bak Castle) made of shipping containers and layers of police buses which blocked Sejong Avenue leading to the Blue House. Protesters attempted to climb over the wall of Myung-bak Castle with their determination to pass through, but several of their trials failed. Milling around in front of the wall, the protesters began to decorate the barricades with flags and fliers, photographed themselves, and even unfold newspapers to make mats to take seat on. Although the rally borrowed motifs from the 1987 June Movement in 1987, which strongly fought against and eventually obtained agreements from the military regime, protesters did not persevere to
overcome the wall. Lee Dong-yon interprets that the protesters had another big imaginary wall in their minds, blocking them from moving forward. Protesters left Lee behind safely staying in his Myun-bak Castle; Lee did not need to drop any of his plans or give up on his market ideology. As Choi Jong-ryul states, “economic growth” was a euphoric mumbo jumbo outside the scope of questioning or rethinking among the Korean public (267).
CHAPTER 5:
A MATRIX OF THE COMPLEX-TANGLED HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

This chapter discusses the vectors and forces that drove the 2008 candlelight protest. In the previous chapter, I discussed the main characteristics of the 2008 candlelight protest, which were classified into four categories: the main issue, participants, modality, and goal. In contrast to conventional social movements in Korean history, the 2008 candlelight protest dealt with the issue of food safety, and featured a wide range of participants, who engaged in spontaneous, provocative, and carnivalesque modality of resistance, and pursued a vague goal. What, then, were the historical factors and practices that shaped the 2008 candlelight protest in Korea? Based on the notion of articulation, I argue that the characteristics mentioned above were driven by complex and multiple layers of historical forces. Since I cannot reproduce the entirety of contexts that preceded the protest, I selectively discuss four conspicuous contextual facets in recent Korean history, including political democratization and depoliticization, food industrialization and *Well-being Yol-pung* (wellbeing fever), Internet politics and carnivalesque culture, and neoliberal globalization and job insecurity. In this chapter, I explain how these four facets shaped the event.
Political Democratization and Depoliticization

I start my discussion by examining how democratization and the end of ideological politics were pivotal elements that shaped the 2008 candlelight protest. During the post-liberation period (after Japan’s surrender to the Allied Powers in World War II), Korea experienced serious ideological conflicts between the left and the right: the United States Army Military Government (USAMGIK) temporarily ruled South Korea, while the Soviet Union occupied the North. The Korean peninsula was a symbolic place representing Cold War confrontations in East Asia. According to Sa Eunsuk, at that time, both anticommunist right-wingers (backed by pro-Japanese Koreans) and left-wingers (backed by peasants and workers) intended to build a state in each of their own ways; finally, the communist Korean People’s Republic was founded in the North, while a liberal democratic state (as an anti-communist state) was built by the U.S. Occupation in the South (Sa 4–7). This social setting of unrest eventually led to the tragic experience of the Korean War (1950–3), which affected every single aspect of Koreans’ lives, including politics in Korea.

The first Korean President, Rhee Syng-man, assumed power in 1948 and established a far-right anticommunist state system. Rhee’s regime was seemingly democratic at its inception; but, it soon turned to be autocratic as he sought to cement his control of the government (qtd. in Jung and Kim 3). With the second election ahead

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93 According to Sa, from 1945 to 1950, the left wing and the right wing political parties disputed a series of issues including: anti- or pro-trusteeship rule, whether to eliminate the pro-Japanese colonial rule group or not, and the differences between communism and democracy as forms of government. While the left and right wing political groups were disputing these ideas, a war broke out in 1950 between the South and North—the Korean War. From 1950, the left was wiped out from the South.

94 Jung and Kim explain the establishment of the far-right anticommunist strong state system with three causes: First, Rhee removed middle-of-the-road nationalists as well as the left-wing forces, and set up anti-communist organizations controlled by the government in various sectors of society. Second, the
after his first presidential term, Rhee declared martial law based on his main policy of anti-communism, arrested opposing members of parliament, demonstrators, and anti-government groups after slandering them as Communists who pursued a conciliatory approach towards North Korea. Anti-communist approach worked; Rhee won the subsequent election in 1952. Rhee thereupon fraudulently pushed through constitutional amendment to exempt himself from the eight-year term limit, and was once again re-elected in 1956.

These practices caused the formation of opposition parties to counterbalance Rhee’s authoritarian rule and motivated the Korean public to join the democratization movements. In particular, college students took massive collective actions, as social intellectuals, displaying more sensitive responses against Rhee’s dictatorship and also his anti-communist ideology than other social groups (Jung and Kim 4). Meanwhile, Rhee rigged the presidential elections in 1960 in order to prolong his third term, as his lack of any clear plan or suggestion for economic and social development prevented him from gaining public support.95 As Rhee’s disputable practices were revealed to the public, students, laborers, and citizens resorted to the streets to protest against the result of the election and to force Rhee to resign from the presidency. Especially after the discovery in Masan Harbor of the dead body of a student activist killed by a tear-gas shell fired by the police, the rally developed into a national movement, called the April 19 Revolution,

number of forces skyrocketed to 600,000 due to the Korean War. Third, anticommunism became internalized in the minds of the people to be a considerable degree through the experience in the Korean War.

95 It has been known that the ballot boxes had been stuffed with votes for the government candidates even before voting took place.
against the regime.\textsuperscript{96} The April 19 Revolution finally brought a democratic transition by transferring power to a civilian government.

The presidential power, however, was once again seized by the military government of Park Chung-hee through a coup d’\textsuperscript{\textregistered}tat in 1960. The Park regime convinced people that the newly built civilian government failed to implement effective reforms and only brought about endless social unrest and political turmoil, which would make the country collapse into communism. The experience of the Korean War left “Koreans permanently scared and ‘colorblind,’ unable or unwilling to distinguish between social democracy and brutal Stalinism” (B. Kim 67). Park thus used the public’s communism phobia to deflect their attention from his unjustifiable seizure of power. Furthermore, in order to offset the lack of legitimacy of his seizure of power, Park aggressively promoted economic development policies. By resorting to extreme coercion and governmental competence, Park’s regime fostered economic development; the rapid economic growth led to comparative political stability as the majority of people credited President Park Chung-hee for the industrialization and economic development of Korea.

However, after winning two elections respectively in 1963 and ’67, Park, seeking a third term, amended the constitution that had limited the presidency to two terms. This action provoked huge student demonstrations. Students launched a full-scale campaign, and the opposition party and dissident leaders made joint efforts. In spite of such efforts, Park was again re-elected in the 1971 presidential election. Against the prolonged one-

\textsuperscript{96} On April 11, 1960, the dead body of Kim Ju-yul (a high school student who had disappeared during the Masan rioting of March 15) was found in the harbor at Masan by a fisherman. It was disclosed that Kim’s skull had been split as a tear gas grenade had penetrated Kim’s eyes to the back of his head. This fact indicates that the police had shot the tear gas at an angle less than 45 degrees, which could be fatal. Rhee’s regime tried to censor news of this incident, but it could not halt the spread of information in the end.
man rule, the protests grew larger and stronger with politicians, intellectuals, religious leaders, laborers and farmers all joining in the movement for democracy (Jung and Kim 6).

The *Yushin* Constitution (the Revitalizing Reforms constitution), which Park adopted under the pretense of national security in 1972, aggravated the situation. The *Yushin* Constitution was marked by the enormous powers granted to the president: the president could be elected through indirect election; the term of presidency was extended to six years with no restrictions on reappointment; the legislature and judiciary were controlled by the government; the president had the right to appoint one-third of the National Assembly and the right to declare ultra-constitutional emergency provisions (H. Cho 4, 6). Students and activists for democracy continued their demonstrations and protests for the abolition of the *Yushin* Constitution. Dissidents organized a movement to petition for a constitutional amendment, and started a campaign to obtain signatures for the petition from one million citizens (H. Cho 4, 6). In the face of continuing popular unrest, Park’s administration promulgated emergency decrees and arrested hundreds of dissidents. In the process, however, new radical opponents armed with a radicalized ideology began to grow and lead the struggle for pro-democracy as well as pro-reunification (which was opposite to the government’s anti-communist ideology). The deepening of the authoritarian regime gave rise to the deepening of the opposition’s ideas and movements.

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97 Park’s military authoritarian government as a ‘hard dictatorship from 1961 to 1979 can be divided into two phases: the first phase (1961–72) when formal democracy existed, although limited, and the second phase, the ‘*Yushin System’* (1972–9), when formal democracy was very restricted and the government armored itself by high level repression and coercion (H. Cho 4, 6).
When Park was elected for another term by indirect election in 1978,\textsuperscript{98} he was met with more demonstrations and protests that occurred nationwide (Jung and Kim 8). Unexpectedly, however, the demonstrations provoked internal conflicts within the power bloc concerning what measures to take against the uprisings; this internal schism ironically led to the assassination of President Park by one of his closest associates in 1979 (H. Cho 4). The 18-year rule of Park’s military regime came to an end.

Presidential power, however, was once again usurped by Chun Doo-hwan from neo-military forces through his 1979 coup d’état. Enraged citizens launched protest activities, complicating the lack of legitimacy of presidential power; Chun declared martial law. Then, a huge uprising erupted, largely in the city of Gwangju. Chun dispatched martial law troops, isolated the city from the rest of the country, and brutally quelled the protest. His orders resulted in 154 deaths, 74 people went missing, and 3,310 were injured, including individuals who were arrested or detained; the number of victims totaled 5,063 (qtd. in Jung and Kim 9). Chun constantly removed a large number of politicians who were critical of his forces, closed universities, and further curtailed the press. Then, he was elected through an indirect election by an electoral college hand-picked by himself. His regime however, faced successive movements throughout his term (Jung and Kim 10).

Meanwhile, student movements grew in intensity. According to Jung Hae-gu and Kim Ho-ki, student movements became “radicalized” and “scientific” (Jung and Kim 10). College students started to form unions and to promote democratization and self-

\textsuperscript{98} Responding the proliferated movements, Park proclaimed Emergency Decree No. 9 in 1975. Under Emergency Decree No. 9, those who criticized or denied the \textit{Yushin} Constitution or demanded its amendment would be arrested without warrant and sentenced to imprisonment. This led the democratization movement to be at a standstill, which became the base of his winning the election in 1978.
regulation on campus. They also regarded theories, political lines, strategies, and tactics as important, and held incessant debates over various theories and tactics within activist circles. In addition, student activists consolidated their movement with the enlarged labor movement.\textsuperscript{99}

The development of the labor movement was related to the situations surrounding the rapid economic growth that Korea had achieved over the past thirty years. Carrying forward industrialization and urbanization, Park Chung-hee’s regime singled out big business conglomerates for preferential treatment,\textsuperscript{100} and alienated large groups of small business owners, workers, farmers, and others, which created wide structural gaps. The urban poor and peasantry began to attempt to express their voices (Jung and Kim \textsuperscript{8}). The rapid economic growth during Chun Doo-hwan’s regime further widened the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and rural regions, and escalated inter-regional conflicts. Moreover, as some conglomerates such as Samsung and Hyundai raised labor wages, the power of laborers grew and they started to unify through labor unions, giving rise to labor movements against the inequality of wealth and authoritarian rule (Jung and Kim \textsuperscript{2}).\textsuperscript{101} It was with this enlarged labor movement that the student movement consolidated.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{99} As part of the struggle for student-labor solidarity, thousands of college students left school to engage in factory work as disguised workers in order to participate in the labor movement themselves or to support workers (Gu 158–65 qtd. in Jung and Kim 10).

\textsuperscript{100} At that time, the monopoly system of a minor number of big business conglomerates led to an increase in the per capita GNP.

\textsuperscript{101} Jung and Kim state that “the profound social changes resulted from the successful compressed industrialization further increased demand for democratization” (2).

\textsuperscript{102} As part of the struggle for student-labor solidarity, thousands of college students left school to engage in factory work as disguised workers in order to participate in the labor movement themselves or to support workers (Gu 158–65 qtd. in Jung and Kim 10).
The consolidation of students and laborers led to a democratic movement that
deployed through the “largest democratic coalition” in 1986 (Jong-ryul Choi 293–6). Not
only the alliance of students and laborers but also the opposition party and dissidents
(including the politicians removed from the political arena by Chun’s regime) joined the
pro-democracy movement. These alignments proposed a constitutional amendment for
the direct election of a President as the initial platform for democratization. Chun’s
regime condemned their efforts as a riot committed by communist revolutionaries, and
embarked on a large-scale repressive operation to arrest protesters (Jung and Kim 9). The
government’s extreme repression against the democratization movement resulted in
serious violations of human rights at that time.

To make matters worse, nearing the end of a seven-year term, Chun announced
his choice of Roh Tae-woo—an accomplice in Chun’s 1979 coup d’état—as the
subsequent president. The public designation of Chun’s successor was seen as a final
affront to the delayed and deferred process to revise the Korean constitution to permit the
direct election of the president. Numerous people ran toward the streets and held a
nation-wide democracy movement, called the 1987 June Democracy Movement, the
biggest movement in Korean history. It was based on a coalitional movement led by
multiple groups. College students, labor movement activists, politicians from the
opposition party, dissidents and church people joined the movement and demanded an
array of reforms including an end to martial law, a direct election of a President as part of
democratization, an increase for minimum wage, freedom of press, and even reunification.

103 The 1987 June Democracy Movement was especially intensified as a student Lee Han-yeyol,
who had attended Yonsei University, was seriously injured and eventually killed as a tear gas grenade
thrown by the police penetrated his skull.
At the end of many phases of collisions between the protesters and Chun’s government, a compromise was finally reached. Chun and his nominee Roh Tae-woo succumbed to the oppositions’ demands and announced the Declaration of Political Reforms called the “6.29 Declaration.” This measure called for direct presidential elections, but Chun and Roh’s decision to accede to the demands, indeed, was driven by their belief that Roh could win the competitive election as well as their unwillingness to resort to violence before the 1988 Olympic Games, which was to be held in Korea (Jung and Kim 14).104

Roh was duly elected President through direct elections in 1988,105 and it was big progress toward democratization. Subsequently, more measures for democratization were taken: the arbitrary exercise of the president’s power was reduced in favor of the power of the National Assembly, and the central role of the military authorities was partially retreated. A political party system based on popular support was initiated; civil society regained autonomy and developed (Jung and Kim 15). Then, presidential power was once again peacefully transferred to a civilian government of Kim Young-sam through another direct election held in 1993. The emergence of civilian government marked the end of military rule; in such a way, democracy was gradually settling down in Korean society.106

104 According to Jung and Kim, “Chun Doo-hwan regime accepted democratization and direct election of President” and could not reverse or repress the June Democratic Uprising in 1987 because several million citizens across the country were involved (14).

105 There were two main reasons why Chun’s nominee Roh Tae-woo, a person from the military, was elected. First, there were divisions of the two candidates, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam, within the opposition party. Second, the day before the election, Korean Air Flight 858 exploded when it was flying to Bangkok; and, it was announced that it was caused by a North Korean conspiracy. This accident created a profitable environment for Roh Tae-woo—military regimes had always used anti-North Korean ideology.

106 According to Cho Hee-yon, the Korean democratic transition was not a complete withdrawal of the authoritarian force at that time. Although the civilian government of Kim Young-sam substituted for the military-backed president, it was not full democratization: Kim merged his Peaceful Democratic Party with
Ironically, however, such democratization of the society reshaped the Korean public’s political passion, especially in three senses. First, fierce protest and large-scale coalitions disappeared in the early 1990s. In tandem with the adoption of referendum (a direct election) and the advent of a civilian government, people lost the common goal of social movement; democratization movement was no longer persuasive to the public. This decline of social movements was also connected with the international situation surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union Bloc. The end of the Cold War resonated with a broad skepticism about the ideology of the Left. It made individuals feel difficult to enter into any explicit ideological struggle or political resistance (Jung and Kim 14). The 1990s, likewise, was one of the most politically changing decades in Korean history (H. Cho 4).

As college students withdrew from social movements, civil society was transformed (Shin and Chang).107 Civil organizations emerged and began to lead civil movements beyond the pro-democracy campaigns that featured the 1970–80s’ social movements. A variety of civil organizations, including *Kyung-sil-ryun* (Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice) in 1989,108 *Hwan-kyung-woon-dong-yon-hap* (Korean...
Federation Environmental Movement) in 1993, and Cham-yo-yon-dae (People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy) in 1994, emerged and gradually expanded civil movements to almost all sectors of society. Such transition into civil society struggle of the 1990s placed social movement in qualitatively different political contexts, which extensively galvanized new movements such as the women’s movement, environmental movement, cultural movement, etc. (Ho-gi Kim 95–104).

Second, the political democratization led not only to the moderation (or end) of ideological struggle but also to the emergence of a pro-capitalist tendency and development of popular culture (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). It may be noted that the 1990s were a turning point in Korean popular music. In the early 1990s, foreign popular cultures such as American rap, rock, and techno music flowed into Korea; Korean pop musicians began to incorporate American popular music styles in their music.” Especially, the trio boy band, Seo Taiji & Boys showed the experimental kind of music made of a different variety of musical sounds and styles with the American, with flashy dance moves and modern fashion style. Their sound paved the way for the Korean popular music and their footsteps followed by a wave of hip hop and R&B artists and so-called idol bands: young boy and girl bands. An unending parade of commercialized popular cultures encroached into the daily rhythms of the Korean youth through

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109 The Korea Federation for Environmental Movements (KFEM) was founded in 1993 as a non-profit organization in Korea that focused on environmentalism and pursued activities include raising awareness of environmental issues.

110 Founded in 1994, the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) is a civil organization dedicated to promoting justice and human rights in Korean society through the participation of the people. Established following the demise of the succession of military regimes for over 30 years, and the election of the first civil government, the PSPD serves as a watchdog against the abuse of power (www.peoplepower21.org).

111 As hip hop and R&B artists, there were Jinusean, Deux, 1TYM and Drunken Tiger, and idol bands included H.O.T, Sechs Kies, S.E.S., Fin.K.L, NRG, Taesaja, Shinhwa and g.o.d.
television spectacles, and reshaped the youth’s passion and sentimentality toward pursuing their own life styles. In doing so, the Korean youth also rejected the previous generations’ values such as ideological dedication as well as social norms such as collectivism and hierarchy (H. Jeon 262–81).

The term *Shin-se-dae* (New generation) was coined in the period to indicate the Korean youth who were constructed and shaped by new social and cultural settings after the country’s democratization. *Shin-se-dae* is also called “post-386 generation” (or “post-Cold War generation”). The so-called 386 generation referred to those who were in their thirties (3) at the time the term was coined, who had attended university in the 1980s (8), and who were born in the 1960s (6). This cohort is well educated and politically active; they toppled the military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan and built democracy in Korea through a series of movements in the 1980s. The 386 generation spent (or even sacrificed) most of their youth fighting for democracy, leaving a shared generational experience of shed blood, sweat and tears in one way or another. *Shin-se-dae*, however, was the substantial beneficiary of the nation’s democracy. This new generation had issues, which were quite different from that of the 386 generation. Members of this generation were regarded as “open-minded, practical, confident, individualistic, and strong in self-expression” (Sun-young Park). The 386 generation, however, had a pessimistic speculation about the political role of *Shin-se-dae*: from the viewpoint of the 386 generation, *Shin-se-dae* was placed in a directionless trajectory, after saying farewell to political struggles and ideological issues (Sun-young Park). Just as Grossberg in his book *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* discovers the unlikely confluence between popular culture and the deeply ingrained conservatism of U.S. post-World War II society leading
to disillusion with politics and depoliticization, it appeared that development of pop music in Korea drove the youth away from politics.

Kim Dae-jung’s presidency, which began in 1997, led to a further depoliticization by bringing an un-authoritarian atmosphere to society. Kim Dae-jung had long been an alternative to the authoritarian regimes. As a head of the opposition party, Kim had received immense support from the public by castigating the authoritarians’ abuses of power and the social inequities. Since he had led social movements against the authoritarian regimes, Kim had also been subjected to frequent political persecution and stayed in jail for four years. After having been elected, Kim achieved remarkable progress in human rights improvement and promoted the “Sunshine Policy” (to North Korea) in the post-Cold War atmosphere. As Kim Dae-jung’s regime was considered as a substantial democratic transition in Korean politics (as well as an ideological turn), it was natural that political oppositions were dying down (Jung and Kim 9).

It was not until 2002 that a large-scale social movement re-emerged. In Chapter 4, I have mentioned that the 2008 protest, the protest with candles, originated from the 2002 candlelight protest, which developed from candle vigils in memory of two middle school girls killed by an armored vehicle of U.S. forces during a military drill. The 2002 candlelight protest drew much support from the public, manifesting a restoration of political passion among the Korean public. As mentioned, the 2002 protest set up

112 Kim Dae-jung also founded the National Human Rights Commission (Jung and Kim 9).
“candlelight” as the symbol of social protest and gave rise to the series of the public’s
political engagements in the 2000s in Korea.\footnote{In 2004, two more candlelight protests were held: one protest was against the impeachment of President Roh Mu-hyun, supported by conservative party, while the other was opposed to Korea’s decision to dispatch troops during the Iraq War upon the request of the United States.}

However, the protest had a different quality than that of conventional movements. Prior to the political democratization in the late 1980s, there had been anti-American movements. The students and reformists who developed anti-American movements as part of the democratization movement in the 1980s “espoused an intense anti-Americanism overlaid with leftwing and sometimes pro-communist rhetoric” (Sorrock). Essentially, the demonstrated anti-American sentiments were entangled with grand narratives as well as a series of historical incidents including the U.S. intervention in the Korean War and its role in the persistence of the North and South division. For instance, as it became known that the United States supported the authoritarian rule of Chun Doo-hwan over the Gwangju Democratization Movement,\footnote{It has been known that the United States supported the military dictator, Chun Doo-hwan whom the Gwangju democratization movement was against, and was also complicit in the brutal crackdown that followed.} students and reformists condemned the U.S. base’s presence in Korea and reinforced their views by bringing up the reports of the U.S. military’s massacres of Korean civilians in the past (Tsche 335).\footnote{Especially, the Nogeunri Massacre, which occurred at the early stage of the Korean War in 1950, was brought up. At that time, South Korean refugees were killed by U.S. Cavalry Regiment at a railroad bridge near the village of Nogeunri, 100 miles southeast of Seoul. It has been known that the orders to fire on refugees were given out of fear of enemy North Korea infiltration (Tsche 335).}

In 1985, a group of student activists occupied the U.S. Cultural Center in Seoul, staging a
sit-in protesting the United States’ tacit support for Chun’s neo-military forces (Jung and Kim 10).\footnote{According to Jung and Kim, Chun’s regime, in response, constantly attempted to lead people to believe that anti-American activists were radicals or North Korean sympathizers, dangerous elements of society (Jung and Kim 10).}

In contrast to the conventional anti-American movements, the 2002 candlelight protest did not connect its issue to accumulated grievances over historical incidents or ideological grand narratives (Shorrock). Rather, the 2002 protesters were inclined to collectively vent moral responsibility of citizens by blaming the United States for no hesitation in ignoring the human rights of Koreans regarding the death of the girls.\footnote{In her research on the vernacular discourses of the 2002 protesters, Jiyeon Kang has stated a different opinion. She believes that during the 2002 protesters as post-Cold War generation collectively imagined themselves as a collective opponent of perceived Cold War politics (172).} Then, the 2002 candlelight protest, while once calling for a revision in the SOFA, ended with U.S. President George W. Bush’s apology as a response, without any change to the agreement. This shows that the 2002 candlelight protest likely represents a new type of politics without any ideological engagement. Dahlgren’s observation summarizes the atmosphere of political engagement during the 2002 protest: “The ostensible political apathy and disaffiliation from the established political system for many citizens may not necessarily signal a disinterest in politics per se” (155). Such a new face of politics, I believe, had been driven by the democratization and the newly emerging un-authoritarian atmospheres.

I believe that the political democratization, the end of ideological politics, and depoliticization were manifested in the 2008 candlelight protest against U.S. beef imports. The main issue of food safety in the 2008 protest is not the same kind of issue of the ideologically oriented conventional social movement; the issue of everyday life emerged...
as the subject of politics. Just as the 2002 protest did not include the traditional anti-American historical resentments, the 2008 protest did not develop into an ideological struggle. While the U.S. beef import was placed in the central line of power inequality in the global society, the 2008 protest did not seriously problematize the post-colonial overtones as its main issue. Although the U.S. beef import was an outcome of neoliberalism, which had rapidly socially and economically polarized the Korean society, the 2008 protest did not raise any ideological questions about neoliberalism (Sung-hwan Kim 21).

The 2008 candlelight protest drew to a close without any critical conclusion. In past social movements, the deepening of the authoritarian regime gave rise to the deepening of the opposition’s ideas: the largest-scale conventional social movements—such as the April 19 Revolution in 1960, the Gwangju Popular Uprising in 1980, and the June Democratic Uprising in 1987—either threatened or overthrew the dictatorial regimes. The 2008 candlelight protest, however, did not even develop into an all-out struggle against the authoritarian Lee Myung-bak regime. Instead, the 2008 protest fizzled out merely with the modification of beef import conditions through an additional negotiation. The 2008 candlelight protest did not make a radical statement of political resistance. Hence, I tend to believe that the democratization and the depoliticization from the end of the 1980s ground the current political horizon and shaped the society’s ideologies in the 2000s as well as the 2008 candlelight protest.

**Food Industrialization and Well-being Yol-pung**

During the period of rapid economic development in the 1970s and 80s, farmers lived in near poverty in Korea. Pursuing industrialization- and export-oriented policies,
the Korean governments neglected agriculture and attempted to control the prices of agricultural products. The government even imported cheap agricultural products to secure export markets for major companies. Accordingly, the government’s attempts to liberalize trades of agricultural products often resulted in farmers’ bloody riots (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). In fact, Korean farmers participated in demonstrations even when negotiations on the KorUS FTA were initiated (Hudson). And these kinds of farmers’ movements were collective struggles for justifiable wealth distribution and right to life, reflecting the politics of class divisions based on left-right ideology.

Although farmers, once again, would most likely be victims of the domestic agricultural market opening in their competition with American beef producers, the 2008 candlelight protest did not deal with the political-economic issue around agriculture markets, as much as it did advocating “food safety.”

How, then, did “food safety,” which had been in the domain of everyday life rather than a political issue in the Korean context, come to be the main issue of the social protests? Tracing back to how food has been historically located in Korea, I attempt to show, in this section, how food safety became the main issue of the 2008 candlelight protest. I begin by examining the predated phenomena of industrialization, food industrialization in particular, as modern projects after World War II in the United States and the political and economic situations surrounding the increased global food-exchanges, which cannot be separated from the issue of food safety in the 2008 protest.

By leading the Allies to victory in WWII, the United States achieved global hegemony in international societies. U.S. global hegemony was largely supported by its
The United States achieved economic growth based on its modern industrialization model of Fordism and the eco-political principle of Keynesianism (summarized as national protectionism). Fordism was originally devised by Ford Motor Company (by adding the moving assembly line to Taylorism, featured by standardization of tools, division of work between workers, and hierarchy between the management and the labor) to make mass production possible, allowing the company to provide affordably priced products to average consumers. The grand-scale production through Fordism worked with the political economic principle of Keynesianism. As many countries in the world, including Korea, adopted industrialization models followed in the United States and sustained their national coherence by adopting Keynesianism, it became possible for the United States to maintain global hegemony. It was also through the Bretton Woods system that the United States became a leading actor regulating world trade. The Bretton Woods system indicates the fixed exchange rates anchored by the U.S. dollar’s convertibility into gold at a fixed price (Harvey 11). Through all these conditions, the United States enjoyed the post-war Golden Age of Capitalism (1945-1973).

The industrialization pattern of Fordism was also applied to the agricultural production in the United States. Most systems in the United States have been revised to

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118 It is also known that U.S. hegemony was supported by the gold it collected from all over the world through weapon sales in WWII.

119 Keynesianism—the work of John Maynard Keynes—developed at the onset of the Great Depression during the 1930s, drew its motif from the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union, and reached increased support for government’s economic control as a means of securing rapid industrialization (Fischer, Ranta, and Veigh 837–80).

120 Taylorism was first suggested by Fredrick Taylor (although he did not call it that) as a scientific management in his book Principles of Scientific Management (1911), but it is known that the system had been in use for at least a decade prior to that.

121 Keynesianism came to define the 1950s and 1960s in western countries (Fischer, Ranta, and Veigh 837–80).
increase efficiency and productivity for economic growth—as if proving McKibben’s statement, “economic growth became nearly a religion by the early twentieth century in the United States” (6). Thus, farming took a monoculture system. Monoculture farming is a structured agricultural practice that focuses on a single crop or plant species over large-scale farms and for a large number of consecutive years (Pollan, “Food Issue”). Whereas traditional farms required many hands and more time to grow grains and raise livestock, the monoculture system allowed for large harvests (of grain and grass such as corn, soybeans, wheat and rice) from farm machinery with minimal labor. And while traditional farms sometimes could not reap a good harvest due to droughts or floods, the monoculture system, within which crops grow faster with chemical fertilizer, could produce greater yields. Such monocultures of grain led to the monoculture of animals. Animals were removed from polyculture system farms and placed into large-scale concentrated feedlots in which a single species of a farm animal is raised. For certain, one of the cheapest ways to raise animals is to gather them all in the same place where one worker can take care of tens of thousands of animals (McKibben 60).

However, this monoculture system, based on a shift from solar (and human) energy on the farm to fossil-fuel energy, gave rise to serious troubles. In traditional farms, sunlight nourished grains and grasses; photosynthesis was used to replenish soil and to combat pests; every calorie we consumed was from photosynthesis (Pollan, “Food Issue”). Contrarily, in a monoculture system, chemical fertilizer (made from natural gas) and pesticides (made from petroleum) are used because they are cheaper and easier to use than sun-based fertility (Pollan, “Food Issue”). Distanced from their usual feeds of grasses and grains, animals rely more on various commercial feeds including antibiotics,
hormones, pesticides, fertilizers, and protein supplements. The monoculture system is also detrimental to the environment. Whenever farmers clear land for crops and till the soil, large quantities of carbon are released into the atmosphere and contribute to greenhouse gases. In addition, animal waste, which used to be regarded as a precious source of fertilizer to spread on crop fields, became a toxic threat polluting the land and the water (Pollan, “Food Issue”). Within traditional farms, sunlight nourished grains and grasses; animals on pastures harvested their own feed; animals then nourished soil. Now, however, chemical fertilizer nourishes grain and grass; antibiotics, hormones, pesticides, fertilizers, and protein supplements are served to livestock. What we finally eat are fossil fuels—that is, oil—and antibiotics and hormones (Pollan, “Food Issue”).

I believe that the basic assumption of the canonical economic logic, which Herman Daly famously problematized, caused food safety threats (“Homo Economicus”). According to Daly, the basic assumption of the canonical economics, “Homo Economicus,” indicates self-centered individuals isolated from community both in the social sense (of interrelationships), and in the ecological sense (of mutual dependence of species in the natural world). Such economic thinking operates as the logic of civilization in industrial society, with the understanding that it will lead to self-efficiency and productivity. In the process, the society loses moral and ethical responsibility for others, and food becomes a risk, even as food safety problems hit the headlines of newspapers.¹²²

According to Pollan, however, the monoculture system in the United States was not just a product of the free market but of a specific set of government policies (“Food Issue”). During the reign of the Nixon administration (1969–1974), high food prices

¹²² Tainted spinach, poisonous peanut butter, and the attack of the killer tomatoes have been problematic in the United States; Korea had been alarmed about cases of swine flu, bird flu, etc. (Krugman).
presented a serious political peril; federal policies began to support the monoculture system in order to promote maximum production of commodity crops. The goal of the government policy for monoculture was to provide cheap and abundant food to supermarkets. Essentially, such grand-scale food production through industrialization, at that time, was managed by the government under the political and economic principle of Keynesianism.

The government also distributed huge quantities of produced food to poor populations through food aid programs or offered food at cheap prices to paying consumers across the United States (Pollan, “Food Issue”) In other words, mass food production led to mass consumption. In parallel with the mass production of food, the number of supermarkets grew, automobile and refrigerator industries developed, so that urban consumers could purchase food in bulk from supermarkets, carry the huge quantity using automobiles, and stockpile them in refrigerators to consume the stored food over the long haul (C. Kim 136). In the process, food producers and consumers drifted farther and farther apart from each other (C. Kim 136); the long distance required more processing and packaging of food, which degraded freshness and nutrition.123 Distance between producers and consumers of food grew even larger as the global exchange of food increased. Global food exchange first began as part of the American food aid program as food surplus at the initial stage of industrialization was distributed to third world countries (C. Kim 136).

123 It appears that food safety threats are embedded in every single part of the modern food system. I would like to share the following little ditty which summarizes the message of Upton Sinclair’s “The Jungle,” which is about the condition of meat-packing industry in 1906 in the United States. I have found this ditty from Paul Krugman, “Bad Cow Disease,” The New York Times, June 13, 2008.

Mary had a little lamb
And when she saw it sicken
She shipped it off to Packingtown
And now it’s labeled chicken
Korea was one of the beneficiaries of the program in the 1950s, post-Korean War, and deepened reliance on U.S. agricultural products, while pursuing industrialization in the 1970–80s. In the 1970–80s, the overarching goal of Korea was to surrender to an apparatus of power that would be supportive of the emerging industrial and Fordist economic order; the government showed little interest in its domestic agricultural sector and imported cheap American agricultural products such as meat and most grains, including wheat, corn and soybean, except the staple grain—rice. With the imported cheap wheat, Korea developed the (unusual) food industry of ra-myun (instant noodle) to provide food for the sweatshop production workers, who were often banned from drinking water during the work, which would make them use the bathroom more often, and from spending much time cooking food.\(^1\) As members of working class often sacrificed their health and quality of food to invest more of their time and energy in national industrialization, food was considered in terms of its efficiency and convenience for cooking, storage, and carriage in Korea.

Entering the 1970s, there was a seismic shift in the global economy (especially in the economies of the western countries), which subsequently led Korea to be more vulnerable to food safety issues. U.S. global hegemony began to be questioned. In the face of inflation, unemployment, and a variety of fiscal crises in western countries in the 1970s, the existing eco-political principle of Keynesianism was questioned; attention was drawn to the reemerged free market ideology in the name of neoliberalism, which places an emphasis on the reduction of state intervention with the belief that the market is a

\(^{124}\) Kim Chul-kyoo insightfully states that American cheap wheat has spread throughout the world and played a crucial role in forming the working classes.
complete and progressive order by itself.\(^{125}\) As free market and free trade are encouraged under this logic, the Bretton Woods system (which had supported U.S. power) broke down in 1971: the system’s “fixed” exchange rates were incompatible with free flows of capital (Harvey 10). The U.S. industrialization model of Fordism was subsequently questioned in that it resulted in unskilled, bored, and alienated laborers.\(^{126}\)

Despite the fact that U.S. global hegemony turned to be controversial, the United States emerged as the number one agricultural exporter, depriving other agricultural export countries, which used to be third world countries, of opportunities (C. Kim 128). By keeping its mass-producing industrial system, U.S. agricultural products could retain their low prices. The increased global food exchanges have generated greater threats to the environment, food sovereignty, and food safety. It is worth noting the harmful effects related to global warming caused by carbon dioxide that is emitted into the atmosphere in the process of transportation (Grossman and Krueger). The resulting climate change is detrimental to all life, water quality and causes soil pollution and ecosystem degradation, hampering agricultural productivity (Berthelson). As the transnational agricultural conglomerates also came to govern the food system; local agricultures were destroyed, and food dependency increased, worldwide, especially in the Southern countries (C. Kim 130). Paradoxically, the third world countries which had developed their economies to be independent from colonial contexts had grown to be more reliant on U.S. food imports. Beyond the scope of environmental pollution and the threats to food sovereignty, the

\(^{125}\) The details of neoliberalism are discussed in Chapter 2.

\(^{126}\) Responding to the crisis of Fordism, a post-Fordist model was suggested. Characterized as a “flexible system of production” (FSP), post-Fordism was established by the Japanese automobile company, Toyota. By including new information technologies, post-Fordism was able to quickly respond to the whims of the markets, composed of different groups of consumers with their various senses of taste and fashion, instead of investing on the mass production of a single product (Sang-gu Kang 80–1).
farm products, freely crossing international borders, have increased the possible spread of diseases related to farm products. Due to its increasingly complicated nature, global food circulation has become less transparent (C. Kim 123–46).

In fact, mad cow disease, which triggered the 2008 candlelight protest, perfectly condenses the contradictions of both food industrialization and globalization. Mad cow disease is a result of excessive commitments to increasing efficiency in modern industrial cattle farming where various commercial feeds had been used to fatten cattle. The Korean government’s approval of U.S. beef without enough right for inspection displays the vulnerability of the Korean food system. Mad cow disease soon drove the upsurge of public fear in Korea, since food distribution in such case is not traceable and accountable.

Likewise, as entering into the very heart of significant economic sphere, food has caused serious problems and called even for political questions (Morelli). There have been anti-capitalist movements questioning the world agriculture at the WTO conferences in Seattle in 1999 and in Cancun in 2003, causing the conference meetings to collapse (Morelli). According to Pollan, by 2008, more than 30 nations had experienced food riots due to American food through the global market, and one government had fallen (“Food Issue”).

127 In the United Kingdom, most affected by BSE cases, more than 179,000 cattle have been infected and 4.4 million slaughtered during the eradication program as well as 166 people had been killed by vCJD by October 2009. Since 1989, when the first case was reported outside the UK, total 13,286 cases of BSE have been reported in native cattle in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland; six cases of vCJD have been reported in France and one each in Canada, Ireland, Italy and the United States. Starting in 1996, bans prevented the sale of food and food products containing beef from the UK to other countries and lasted for 10 years before it was lifted on May 1, 2006. For more details of BSE, refer to the reports on the website of the International Office for Epizootic Disease (www.oie.int).

128 Morelli identifies that there are three types of food problems: the lack of access to sufficient quantities of food to satisfy minimum human need is referred to as food poverty; the quality of the food we consume and its impact on our health is referred to as food safety; the control of the world’s food resources is known as food security.
Meanwhile, Korea also opened up more of its agricultural markets to secure export markets for major companies as well as to become part of the world economy (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). The result was that “by the late 1980s, roughly half of South Korea’s agricultural needs of agriculture—mainly wheat and animal feed corn—were imported” (“Agriculture”). Along with swelling imports of beef, pork, chicken and dairy products, the Korean publics, who had traditionally mainly consumed rice and other grains, increased their consumption of meat. Joining in the OECD in 1996, Korea became one of the major food importers. Korea’s rate of self-sufficiency is in the lower ranks among the OECD countries, and currently imports 80 percent of its grain from the four transnational grain conglomerates (Cargill, Archer Daniel Midland, LDC, and Bunge), and more than 90 percent of its food from overseas, including almost all of its wheat and corn (Berthelesen).

As a counter-response to food industrialization and global exchanges, public concern on food safety heightened in Korea, just as the international attention to food security and industrialized farming which began in the mid-2000s. The increased public concern for food safety and a safe ecosystem in Korea from the beginning of the 2000s is called Well-being Yol-pung (wellbeing fever). Well-being Yol-pung began with a popular television documentary series titled Good Eating, Good Living, aired in 2002, which catapulted hidden dangers in daily food, caused by industrialization production processes, into the forefront of the public conscience. By issuing warnings against environmental and human health risks of industrialized food, the documentary led people

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129 In his article, Seong-tae Hong states that the Korean public’s interest in “wellbeing” began from the middle 1990s (132).
to be more aware of their daily diet, which was directly connected to their health, body, life, and reproduction.

The people around me at that time increasingly said that what was important in food was not its efficiency and convenience but its quality. They diligently abstained from flesh and meat, and found food with no-trans fat, no-cholesterol, and less-saturated fat in order to avoid physical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure among others. As the Korean ancient principle of Shin-to-bul-i—the belief that domestic farm products are the best for the body—was reinstated and often talked about, they also desisted from eating western fast food such as hamburgers, pizza, donuts, fried chicken, and Coke, which had occupied a large part of the Korean public’s diet. Urban people attempted to find food grown closer to where they lived, or even experimented with alternative forms of farming. In the metropolitan city of Seoul with endless skyscrapers, people grew vegetables using flowerpots and the rooftops of their dwellings. As such, the Korean public, who during the industrialization had borne the demanding work with Hun-ry Jeong-shin (hungry spirit), began to feel concerned about the quality of food.

However, Well-being Yol-pung soon led to enormous business opportunities; business corporations expanded the markets of wellbeing products. A growing number of companies released organic food products, health supplements and materials, and opened body fitness and management clubs and skin care shops. Sports dance and jazz dance flourished, as did advertising for salutary endeavors to maintain health and good body shape. Business marketing even reached “life style” by developing various kinds of “wellbeing projects,” convincing customers that they needed to escape from their busy
daily life and relieve the stresses of a hectic business schedule. From 2003, yoga, meditation, thermal spa, and aroma therapy boomed for relaxing and unwinding. A welter of information regarding health care, healthy food recipes, and meditation was shared through Internet blogs; books for wellbeing management were released and sold like hot cakes. Fabric and clothing businesses developed new pro-healthy materials. *Well-being Yol-pung*, certainly, swept through the country, entering into every facet of life of the Korean public and placing itself as *Well-being Mun-hwa* (wellbeing culture)

I believe that wellbeing culture, which had resided in the daily life of the Korean public since the early 2000s, laid down the building blocks for the 2008 candlelight protest. As Grossberg states, daily life can be stronger and more powerful than the rational plan (45). It is for the reason that such a great many people, all of whom sank in silence when Korean farmers initiated demonstration against the KorUS FTA in 2006, held candles when President Lee Myung-bak approved the resumption of U.S. beef with the alleviated SPS (the quarantine standards). When the details of the resumption of the beef deal were revealed, the Korean public, who became active consumers of wellbeing products, alertly searched for more information about U.S. beef and mad cow disease, and posted their findings on the Internet to share with others, just as they had sought and shared wellbeing information through Internet blogs.

The 2008 candlelight protest grounded on wellbeing culture has shown the features of consumer protest where power rests in the collective buying power of consumers and not merely in the media coverage given to political protest. At the beginning of July during the protest, the Korean Women’s Association United and four other civic group coalitions launched a nationwide campaign to boycott U.S. beef and
vowed to make the country free of mad cow disease, declaring “We will oust American beef feared to carry mad cow disease from our dinner tables without fail” (Hyung-jin Kim). Protesters also encouraged each other on the Internet to cancel their subscriptions to the major national newspapers (Chosun Ilbo, JungAng Ilbo, and DongA Ilbo), which took the government’s side on the U.S. beef import issue. They boycotted commercial products advertised in those conservative newspapers, shared the list and phone numbers of the companies that placed advertisements of their products in the conservative newspapers to make protesting calls to the companies.\textsuperscript{130} The 2008 candlelight protest is a hybrid of citizen protest and consumer protest.

I also believe that it was because the 2008 candlelight protest was sort of consumer protest that the protest did not pay much attention to the issue of employment instability faced by contract workers, which trade unions attempted to incorporate into the protest.\textsuperscript{131} Wellbeing culture has not problematized widening gaps between classes. In fact, as business corporations found enormous opportunities in the cultural phenomena of wellbeing, they began to launch luxury products targeting the upper class. A new term, \textit{Well-being-jok}, was coined to indicate wellbeing enthusiasts—consumers of quality goods and services, generally members of relatively upscale and well-educated populations, and residents of Gang-nam, the metropolitan area south of the Han River in

\textsuperscript{130} At that time, many people unsubscribed from the mainstream newspapers. In Kim and Cho’s research, one of the interviewees, Mom G noted as follows: \textit{First thing I did after I recognized the issue, I stopped subscribing to some of the conservative pro-government newspapers that were not covering the issue very well, and started to read some others that cover the issue better because I thought getting and understanding the information was very important} (Kim and Cho 12).

\textsuperscript{131} The details of the trade unions’ attempts to incorporate their issue into the 2008 protest are in Chapter 4.
Seoul. In major up-market districts for *Well-being-jok*, so-called “wellbeing house(s)” were built with a noble image and sat at the top of fine views of mountains, rivers, or parks. Across the cracks of the dense forest of skyscrapers and high-rise apartment buildings, these wellbeing house(s) reminded of “green” ecological initiatives and often contained luxury facilities such as indoor golf courses and fitness clubs (Jong-yul Seo). The full options of wellbeing business were available for *Wellbeing-jok*, but not for the average Korean public. Just as wellbeing culture had developed without any consideration of the widening disparities of life quality and food culture between social classes, the 2008 protest ignored the abusive sweatshop conditions at a number of companies, which the trade unions had carried out strikes against.

Interestingly, the fact that the 2008 candlelight protest was grounded on wellbeing, shows that the protest has a contradictory connection with capitalism. Wellbeing fever emerged as a counter-action to capitalist projects of food industrialization and globalization, but was fuelled by the rampant exertions of capitalist marketing desires. Ironically, again, wellbeing fever took the role of the foundation for the protest fighting against economic globalization. In other words, wellbeing fever, articulated by capitalism, was disarticulated from capitalism and rearticulated to the resistance against capitalism. In doing so, welling fever took the focus of the 2008 candlelight protest away from left-right ideological debate; the protest fell down to a mere element of the processes in which capitalism constructs and deconstructs itself.

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132 These wellbeing enthusiasts are similar to Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) in the context of the United States, which indicates a particular market segment of population who pursues sustainable life style.
The Carnivalesque Oscillating between Online and Offline

In the first section of this chapter, I explored how the democratization of Korean politics and the end of the Cold War led to depoliticization of the youth during the 1990s. The depoliticized Korean youth, I believe, began to be repoliticized to hold and participate in large-scale protests in the 2000s, in tandem with the emergence and development of communication technology, especially the Internet. However, the format of social movements practiced by the repoliticized youth was different from that of conventional social movements as the youth developed their political passion in the new environment which new communication media set up as well as an un-authoritarian social setting after the end of military dictatorship. In this section, I focus on how the development of new communication technology under the un-authoritarian social climate altered the landscape of political engagement of the Korean youth, and how the youth refined and displayed their sense of humor through collective activities both on and outside the Internet, finally affecting the 2008 candlelight protest. In order to best understand the collective sense of humor engaging in politics, I first explore how freedom of speech has been repressed in Korean history.

“Freedom of speech” was a huge target of repression of dictatorial governments in Korean history. The authoritarian Korean governments repressed press, publication, assembly, and association (Sa 1). Conservative ideologies, a product of the Cold War era, were constantly used as the means for repression of speech and freedom. During the Rhee Syng-man regime (1945–60), in particular during the Korean War period, “the Korean press was subject to strict military censorship, and the Korean press consequently lacked

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133 I believe that the Internet provides the general citizens the opportunities to deploy their political opinions. As the citizens who used to be readers/viewer of mass media turned to be writers/producers on the Internet, they possibly became more politically engaging.
diversity in its content” (Youm 881 qtd. in Sa 8). After the armistice in 1953, Rhee Syngman continued to restrict the media in various ways. He outlawed leftist newspapers based on his basic ideology of anti-communism, issued press guidelines, arrested reporters and publishers who contributed to spreading public dissatisfaction and criticism of the authoritarian regime, and introduced a licensing system for publishing newspapers (Sa 2–3).

Under the military regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, more severe restrictions were exerted on freedom of speech, specifically the press. Based on anti-communist ideologies, the military regimes resorted to martial laws and emergency decrees as an effective means of preventing the press from criticizing or reporting any criticism of the government (Youm 887 in Sa 8). The Park Chung-hee administration, through the National Security Act, established some topics, such as political relations, military conditions, factions within the military, role of security agencies in politics, and the activities of dissident organizations, as taboo so that individuals could not freely talk about them (Savada and Shaw). After Park adopted the Yushin Constitution in 1972, he used emergency decrees to penalize those who critiqued the government, and he merged and closed down news agencies and provincial newspapers (U.S. Library of Congress in Sa 10). Park also led a wholesale dismissal of reporters from two major newspapers, *Dong-A Ilbo* and *Chosun Ilbo* (both of which were leading newspapers at the time), in order to stop them from reporting on popular opposition to the Park government as well as to suppress their struggle to protect press freedom (Sa 4).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ According to Sa, one-hundred thirty-four journalists had to leave the *Dong-A Ilbo* and thirty three journalists had to leave the *Chosun Ilbo* in 1974.
Having notoriously come to power through the massacre of Gwang-ju citizens in 1980, the subsequent Chun Doo-hwan government established the most thorough control of the news media in Korea (U.S. Library of Congress in Sa 7). In order to usurp presidential power through a coup d’etat, Chun declared martial law, closed universities, banned political activities, and intensified control and surveillance over the mass media through the comprehensive National Security Act (U.S. Library of Congress qtd. in Sa 10). Chun also restricted the media’s ability to criticize the government or power group. To make control easier, he even merged three independent news agencies into a single state-run agency (currently called Yonhap News Agency), closed numerous provincial newspapers, forbade central newspapers from stationing correspondents in provincial cities, merged two independent broadcasting companies into the state-run Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), and banned and closed highly acclaimed opinion journals (Sa 8). Chun continuously forbade the Christian Broadcasting System network from providing news coverage not related to religion (Sa 8). Meanwhile, the major conservative newspapers, the Chosun Ilbo and the Dong-a Ilbo, etc. (which had once collaborated with Japanese colonialists in the past) took the role of political favor rather than siding with civil rights (Youm 881 qtd. in Sa 8).

Freedom of speech was, to some extent, established through a series of protests for democratization in the 1980s. The 1987 June Prodemocracy Movement in particular led to a relaxation of restraints in the press. The subsequent President Roh Tae-woo’s “6.29 Declaration” (of political reform responding to the June Movement) eliminated past vestiges of authoritarian rule by revising laws and decrees to fit democratic provisions. At the time, along with the fact that university autonomy was recognized and that
restrictions on overseas travels were lifted, freedom of press was more expanded. In the line of democratic attempts to achieve freedom of press and counterbalance the major conservative newspapers, a daily newspaper called the *Hankyoreh* was founded in 1988 with its alternative political perspective. Subsequently, the civilian government established in 1993 ushered in an un-authoritarian atmosphere in society and granted the press greater freedom, allowing a new generation of journalists to investigate sensitive subjects—for example, Chun Doo-hwan’s Gwangju massacre (U.S Library Congress in Sa 10).

During this change in political climate, the Internet emerged and rapidly developed in Korea. There were a couple of advantageous conditions that accounted for the rapid development of new communication technology: the Korean government had poured billions of dollars into constructing extensive information networks from the late 1990s so that a highly wired social environment became available to average Korean citizens. The fact that Korea had/has a highly urbanized and dense population was advantageous for networking (T. Kim). Since the early 1990s, the government also applied its policy to promote privatization and deregulation in general to the information technology (IT) sector so that the Internet could rapidly expand for economic purposes. Many businesses utilize the Internet for services such as social media, shopping, banking, and especially cultural media (TV drama, movies, songs, games, etc.) and education (T. Kim). Under such conditions, Koreans became technology-savvy.

Considering that Korea was/is an Internet powerhouse in the world, the Korean public, particularly liberals, had huge expectations for the new communication media to realize freedom of speech by providing alternative information that had been excluded by
the mainstream mass media under the authoritarian regimes. Liberals pinpointed that the Internet was/is open to those who had political motivations and would open up avenues to overcoming the historical experience of limited freedom of speech and democracy (T. Kim).

_Ddanzi Ilbo_ (www.ddanzi.com), founded in 1998 as an alternative political news website, might have been the starting point of efforts to direct the Internet as the driving power to upgrade democracy. _Ddanzi Ilbo_ began to counterbalance the high-walled mainstream political discourses by engaging in political debates with its alternative political stance. Hijacking public discussion out of hands of authority, _Ddanzi Ilbo_ also developed an unconventional way of political engagement. Just as its name _Ddanzi_, meaning (a) “carping tongue,” the news website presented political opinions and critical perspectives on social power groups through cheekily ironic stunts, utilizing expletives, jokes, vulgar vocabulary, and comic cartoons with irony, parody and satire. Although its indecent and obscene language was sometimes criticized by feminists, _Ddanzi Ilbo_’s daring attacks on the conventional politics through its flashes of wit, which led to development of communities of loyal fans eager to hear its opinions articulated in its own languages, who are called _Ddanzi pe-in(s) (Danzi addict(s))_.

Another online news website, _OhmyNews_ (www.ohmynews.com) was founded in 2000 with its unique motto: “Every Citizen is a Reporter.” While displaying its intention to address its alternative political perspectives from general citizens rather than from the minority social elite groups of professional journalists, _OhmyNews_ deployed an open source style of news reporting in which amateurs could participate in news production.

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135 Pe-in(s), rather than signifying the original meaning “a disabled person or a bum,” the term refers to a person who is hooked on to and almost addicted to the Internet, forming social networks almost exclusively in cyberspace with people with similar interests.
and public debate. In the same year, another news website, Pressian (www.pressian.com), was founded with the intention to present alternative political perspectives through in-depth analysis of events and phenomena. Likewise, throughout the early 2000s, a diverse range of Internet news websites and political webzines constantly emerged and contributed to the wider dissemination of alternative political perspectives and critical opinions.

The blossoming news services on the Internet began to permeate through the Korean public’s daily routines, spaces, and times of social and cultural life. Based on their interests and tastes, the public located or even opened up Internet websites, read postings, posted their ideas, exchanged information, and socialized with fellow members on certain websites. Although the Internet could not promise a quick fix for democracy, it certainly offered viable possibilities for civic interactions, politicizing the public’s political passions.

DC Inside (www.DCinside.com) was one of the Internet websites that developed the politicized Internet users. This website was originally established for the commercial purpose of selling electronic gadgets and goods, such as digital cameras. At its initial stage, the site attracted relatively small groups of experts and zealous consumers of electronics. But before long, this site had become a playground for its regular visitors, who often posted their comments about electronics they had purchased and pictures they had taken with the gadgets. The regular visitors also uploaded composite photographs, which they created through Photoshop and other software. In order to attract more

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136 According to the website front page, about 20% of the site’s content is written by the 55-person staff, while most of the articles are written by other freelance contributors who are mostly ordinary citizens.

137 Regarding DCinside, I referred to the journal article, Pang, “Cyberspace and Minority.”
viewers to their postings, they used various materials such as well-known cinematic and popular cultural images, the images of celebrities and politicians, and incorporated their whimsical sense of humor into their works. Once parody images were found to be hilarious, they were viral—they were copied, relayed, and disseminated by visitors to other websites.

The devotees of *DC Inside* were called *DC pe-in(s)* (*DC Inside* addict(s)). This group of people was politically literate, and rivals to *Ddanzi pe-in(s)*. They galvanized cyber forums for socially and politically significant situations, and provided their opinions. However, their way of political engagement was similar to *Ddanzi pe-in(s)*’ in that they mixed politics with cultural imagination by creating parody images and addressed their political opinions through slangs, phrases in special rhymes that they created, and non-grammatical combinations of words that challenged conventional language rules. I believe that this unconventional mode of political practices reflects the un-authoritarian political climate as well as the characteristics of the Internet.

The Internet provides different circumstances from those of conventional media. First, the Internet shifted the subjects of political discourse production from the expert to the general citizen. While newspapers—considered as the standard conduits of political information—selectively present experts’ and pundits’ opinions, the Internet provides opportunities to members of the general public to voice their opinions. If newspapers and hand-written posters (principally used by the student bodies who led prodemocracy movements against military dictatorships) offered “authority” to the small groups of expert commentators, the Internet breaks the authority into bits and pieces. Moreover, the Internet is spontaneous. On the Internet, people are generally freed from their everyday
identities as highly disciplined social roles are exchanged or discarded. The Internet space thus signifies a breaking away from the ordinary time, hierarchical ranks and privileges, and all official worlds. This kind of liminal realm of freedom offers people opportunities to express their nonconformist opinions in rebellious ways.

The new way of political engagement was extended from the Internet to offline platforms. The 2002 FIFA World Cup (hosted by Korea and Japan in cooperation from May 31 to June 30) served as a base station for expanding the new-styled political passion to the public “square.” As the first World Cup held in Asian countries, the 2002 World Cup excited the Korean public from the outset. As the games were in progress, the Korean public became fervent, watching the stunning consecutive victories of the national team. As large companies sponsored the setup of large television screens in the square in downtown Seoul, scores of wildly enthusiastic people came out to watch the games together. The crowd on the streets collectively cheered for the Korean team, chanting slogans, singing songs, dancing to the rhythm of the cheering songs, waving national flags, and clapping red balloon sticks. Some wore face paint and costumes made of Korean national flags, while most wore red shirts symbolizing the soccer fan club of Korean team Bul-geun-ang-ma (Red Devils). Automobiles were decorated with two traffic cones, generating the image of Red Devils. The traffic on Sejong Avenue along the square was paralyzed by the jubilantly moving and dancing bodies overflowing from the square, especially during the days and nights of the Korean team’s matches. The moving and dancing bodies were not the modern bodies which had been intimidated by political and social authorities.
The modern bodies of the Korean public had been disciplined by the martial laws of military dictators and for modern industrialization. The bodies were trained to internalize social norms and to vitalize them to become those of laborers for the successful progression of capitalistic systems and economic growth. During the industrializations, the bodies of the Korean public were made to feel guilty and shamed when they were off-work, and were supposed to yield roads lined bumper-to-bumper with vehicles, which never yielded even an inch to human bodies. Contrarily, the dancing and moving bodies in the middle of drive ways during the World Cup season were the bodies experiencing liberation from the social rules as if they had been at a carnival.

This collective festival during the World Cup games, for certain, marked a radical shift away from the authoritarian social atmospheres surrounding the political assumptions of “mass rally” and “red color” in Korean context. The authoritarian regimes had generated excessive hatreds toward communism and stigmatized any collective mobilization as a pro-communist movement (B. Kim 67). The World Cup event, however, pulled the masses to squares and streets, eliciting their enthusiasm for collective participation in encouraging sports teams and replacing the chronic syndrome of “agoraphobia” in public mentality with festive imagination. The red-colored uniforms during the season also appeared as a symbol marking the end of the long-standing communism phobia called Red Complex (Jung-min Choi). The color red symbolized passion and dynamism during the season.

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138 Korea has long been viewed as an outstanding model of economic development. Despite poor resource endowment and a large population, a colonial legacy, the devastation following the Korean War, chronic political instability, and the protracted military confrontation with North Korea, South Korea has made an impressive ascension in the international economic system, becoming the 13th largest economy and the 8th largest trading state in the world in a relatively short span. I believe that beneath the economic miracle lay human capital investment.
Furthermore, the 2002 World Cup was an awakening for Korean citizens’ passion for (re)organizing political power. In the previous section, I mentioned that the candlelight protest has its origin in the 2002 candlelight vigils driven by an accident in which two middle school students were killed by an armored vehicle of U.S. forces during a military drill. The accident occurred during the 2002 World Cup games, and was discovered by the Korean public after the season. The lack of attention received by the accident on time led to a collective feeling of guilt among the Korean public: enjoying the sports event, the public failed to pay attention to the death of the girls. Cheering the Korean team, the public grew entangled with the nationalistic sentiments, which were patched up together into the hostility toward the foreign force, as they found about the incident. At the moment, internet user nicknamed Ang-ma suggested candlelight vigils to cherish the memory of the two deceased girls. Varied groups of people spontaneously declared their solidarity on the Internet and rushed back to Seoul Square, but this time with “candles.” Subsequently, the candlelight vigils evolved into protests to urge a revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and Korea, as the two U.S. soldiers responsible for the deaths were acquitted in a jury trial.

The atmosphere of the 2002 protest venues had different hues than those of conventional social protests against U.S. forces. Whereas the anti-American protests in the past were generally mobilized and disciplined by activists and deployed with immense fighting spirits, stones, sticks and fire bombs. However, the majority of the participants in the 2002 candlelight protests were Internet community members; Cyber pe-in(s) from Ddanzi Ilbo, OhMyNews, Pressian, and DC Inside also joined. As the Internet community members displayed a real bearing on the mobilizing capacity of the
movement, the atmosphere of the protest was peaceful, individualistic, and decentralized. The manner in which the protesters peacefully carried candlelight vigils in night-time rallies was reminiscent of the cheering rallies held during the World Cup season, albeit without the clamor and chaos.

Some protesters grew more playful during the 2002 protest. *DC pe-in(s)* created a wide variety of parody images and spread them throughout the Internet—one image that I have seen on the Internet depicted an armored vehicle running over the U.S. president George W. Bush. *DC pe-in(s)* along with other Internet users collectively rushed to the website of the White House to “hit” on the postings and caused the website to be overwhelmed by a rush of hits. Unlike the conventional anti-American rallies in which participants carried Korean national flags (Jung and Kim 10), during the 2002 protest, *DC pe-in(s)* carried flags bearing images of cute puppies, which had nothing to do with the theme of the protest.

I believe that the classical notion of the “public sphere,” which had been most popularly applied by Korean scholars to discussions of political engagement, is rather poorly equipped and unimaginative to tackle the ungrammatical political passions mediated through the 2002 candlelight protest. The classical notion of the public sphere, developed by Jürgen Habermas, indicates the place between private individuals and government authority, open to all, where private individuals publicize and exchange their views and knowledge on matters of general interests; they have rational-critical debates on issues of public interest and reach a consensus (that could serve as a counterweight to political authority). However, the way of political engagement during the 2002
candlelight protest did not follow traditional model or pattern of political communication, nor was it full of rational deliberations as Habermas outlined.

Rather, the concept of the “carnivalesque” advanced by Mikhail Bakhtin appears to be more applicable to its culturescapes. In Bakhtin’s development of the literature term of the “carnivalesque” based on “carnival,” a medieval festival, he focused his attention on the grotesque body as a carnal body with reasoning and piety removed. For Bakhtin, grotesque elements of humanity in carnivals destroy social hierarchies and privileges of everyday life, and present political possibility of initial impulses of the body. Just as the carnivalesque subverts authority and dominant power through chaos (rather than in rational or systematic ways based on grandiose narratives), the 2002 protesters exerted their political power through artistic carnivalesque tactics.

I believe that this new style of politics shaped throughout the 2002 protest was put to practice during the 2008 candlelight protest. Most of the participants in the 2008 candlelight protest were also members of Internet communities. Even the communities without any political orientation joined the protest; the protest organized by voluntary participants proceeded in a decentralized and fragmented form without a leader who pulled the strings. Despite the government’s violent acts, the 2008 protesters utilized their sense of humor. Just as in the 2002 protest, the 2008 protesters degraded the government’s authority by weaving together parody images, comical songs, satirical jokes, mockeries, and derision. The collective laughter of the tumultuous crowd was the most potent weapon of the 2008 protesters to disrespect and humiliate the Korean

139 The term, carnivalesque, was originally coined by Bakhtin to refer to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos.
government, which represented the prevailing economics of neoliberal globalization of the time.\textsuperscript{140}

According to Amber Day, the carnivalesque tactics such as satire and irony have been increasingly centralized in contemporary politics (in the United States). In her book *Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (2011), examining today’s parodic news shows—e.g. Jon Stewart’s humorous but hard-hitting interviews, Amber states that a renaissance is taking place in political satire in the United States: as political parody, irony, and satire have surged in popularity in recent years, they have become complexly intertwined with serious political dialogue. Subsequently, “fans are avidly coalescing around these forms, fervently keen to hear the critiques made, and drawing pleasure form the communal affirmation” (Amber). M. Lane Bruner also relates that the carnivalesque had been popularly used as protesting techniques in surprising and dramatic fashion during the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, and were subsequently reemployed at “anti-corporate globalization protests in locations ranging from Seattle, Washington, to Davos, Switzerland, by members of groups such as Carnival against Capitalism, the Ruckus Society, Reclaim the Streets, and Art and Revolution” (139). Buser and Arthurs also state that carnivalesque practices have been typified in the alter-globalization and anti-capitalism movements including summit disruption protests, Global Days of Action and the Occupy movement (3).

The carnivalesque tactics reinvigorated in politics, in a way, evidently opened up the space for political debate and even popularized the issue of the 2008 protest. But, it simultaneously made the protest, like a historical carnival, a work of paradox and

\textsuperscript{140} I will rework on this reference later. According to Boje, the “carnivalesque” has been used for resistance to globalization. The carnivaleques four themes: the tumultuous crowd, the world turned upside-down, the comic mask and the grotesque body.
ambiguity. In a historical carnival (from which the carnivalesque is derived by Bakhtin), hegemonic social roles and usual restrictions on public behavior were officially relaxed and reversed, but the suspension of social rules was only temporary. The sphere of the historical carnival was separate from everyday life, so that it did not succeed in ultimately disturbing social rules. It is true that the carnivalesque humiliated and degraded the government’s authority during the 2008 candlelight protest, but, as if echoing the historical carnival, the humiliation and degradation (through the initial impulse of the body without an ideological struggle) was too light and volatile to make a radical statement. Participating in the 2008 candlelight protest, enjoying the carnivalesque humor and laughter, to be honest, I was confused about the direction of the protest. This might well mean that the link between the carivalesque and its power to act as resistance is at best an ambivalent one. This may be why people say “the presence of irony signals a cynical distrust of politics and a lack of real engagement or sincerity,” and “the blending of the serious and the satire only serves cheapen the discourse” (Amber 15).

Neoliberal Globalization and Job Insecurity

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that Korean leftist commentators believe the driving power behind the 2008 candlelight protest is the economic fascism of neoliberal globalization. From their perspective, the 2008 protest against the KorUS FTA was a resistance against capitalist globalization. However, I expressed my doubt about the idea that neoliberalism was a singular driving force of the protest. Although I do not agree with the leftist intellectuals by confining the meaning of the protest to a pure resistance

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141 To put it delicately, Bakhtin distinguishes carnival from spectacle as following: “Carnival is not a spectacle everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people seen by the people; they live in it, and. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the law of its own freedom.” However, to me, this sounds too idealistic.
against neoliberalism, I believe that the influence of neoliberalism on Korea was one of the critical social and political implications of the candlelight protest. In this section, I explore how the current Korean economic conditions, reframed by neoliberalism, expanded and limited the potentiality of the 2008 candlelight protest.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Korea (which remained one of the poorest countries in the world after the Korean War) gained the momentum of economic development. Park Chung-hee, who had unjustifiably seized presidential power, pushed ahead with his economic plans to strengthen the political stability of the nation (Kwan-s Kim 4). The centerpieces of Park’s economic plans were improvements in industrial structure and export-orientation (which were well suited for the country’s poor natural resource endowment and tiny domestic markets), and the state played a key role in promoting industrialization and exports. The government first selected a small minority of businesses to receive its support and then provided them with a loan arranged from foreign capital (from the United States as well as Japan).¹⁴² The chosen businesses received preferential treatment from the government, became conglomerates, called Chaebol(s) in Korean, soon came to dominate the domestic market, and led Korea to constantly achieve rapid growth in industrialization and to become more competitive in the world economy. Since the United States provided East Asian countries with special tax preferences under the Cold War system at the time, the Korean economy flourished until the 1980s.

¹⁴² The government’s concentration was placed on the basic and light industry at the initial five years of the economic plan. With the labor-intensive manufacturing industry, Korea could develop a competitive advantage. Its concentration moved to heavy industry in the second five years plan, and then to heavy-chemical industry for the next five years.
Under the subsequent regime of Chun Doo-hwan (in 1980s), due to “three prosperous conditions”—the devaluation of the Korean won, low interest rates of foreign loans and the low price of oil—the Korean economy flourished on a previously unseen scale (KoA, “Road to an Undesirable Deal”). Chaebols such as Hyundai Motors and Samsung Electronics, which worked in the electronics, semiconductor, and automobile industries, sprang up, creating a positive cycle of expansion of exports: economic benefits from exports, the domestic return of profits, investment and domestic growth, and economic boom (Moon and Mo 25). The fruits of the export boom returned, to some extent, to workers in the form of rising wages. Increases in workers’ income improved their standard of living and expanded their opportunities and aspirations for education. Those who received higher education were absorbed by the rapidly growing industrial and commercial sectors.

Meanwhile, under the Chun regime, the Korean economy underwent economic liberalization and capital market opening (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). This marked a radical turn away from the economic model of the Park regime, in which the state played a key role in promoting industrialization and export-led economic growth and in protecting the domestic market (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”). Whereas the Park administration’s centralized plans had control over capital, credit, interest rates, finance, and labor in promoting industrialization and export-led economic growth, Chun emphasized opening the national economy to foreign capital, and free operation of the market without government control (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”).

From 1989, the economic growth in Korea slowed down as Korea’s key exports (such as semiconductors, steel, and ships) became stagnant (owing to rising inflation,
appreciation of the Korean won, and the recession of the world economy). At the start of the 1990s, Korea encouraged capital inflows to finance its growing current account deficits (Moon and Mo 25). There was also international pressure to open its market from newly emerged international organizations as well as the United States (Woo-Cumings). It was the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of GATT and the advent of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (the membership of which Korea had pursued) that brought demands for Korea to open its financial and capital market to the world economy (KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism”).

In 1996, under the Kim Young-sam government, Korea implemented further financial deregulation and capital market opening as part of the requirements to join the OECD (Kihwan Kim 3-4). As neoliberalism became the main political economic principle, the world organizations dismantled national borders in terms of economy. Korea confronted an irresistible demand to be united under a single logic of rule of neoliberal globalization, and then adopted a policy of permitting companies and banks to attract foreign loans. With the market opening, there was a sudden influx of transnational capital, most of which were short-term foreign currency debts of financial institutions; this led to an economy and property bubble. However, this ultimately paved the way for Korea to face thorn-bushes of economic depression and job insecurity, as a chain reaction occurred in an unpredictable way.

At the time, a financial crisis had begun in Thailand and was spreading through other Asian countries in mid-1997. The situation engendered a sense of economic

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143 The Uruguay Round was the 8th round of multilateral trade negotiations (MTN) conducted within the framework of the GATT, spanning from 1986 to 1994 and embracing 123 countries as “contracting parties.” The Round transformed the GATT into the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Round came into effect in 1995 and has been implemented over the period to 2000 under the administrative direction of the WTO.
insecurity. Observing the situation in Asian countries, foreign investors lost confidence in the Korean financial market and began withdrawing investment funds from domestic financial institutions (Kwan-s Kim 7). As foreign capital continued to pull out, domestic stock prices plunged and the exchange rate soared (Kwan-s Kim 7). Concerned about the continued depreciation of the won, foreign as well as domestic investors panicked and fled the stock market, creating a vicious cycle of plummeting stock prices pushing the value of the won down further. The Korean government was unable to preserve the value of the Korean won. Meanwhile, the banking sector was burdened with non-performing loans as its large corporations were funding aggressive expansions (Kwan-s Kim 7). The credit rating of Korea continued to drift down. Several big businesses (Hanbo, Sammi, Jinro, Kia Motors, Daewoo Motors, etc.) failed to ensure returns and profitability and asked for emergency loans from the government, but the government could not secure new funds from international markets, nor could it have maturing loans rolled over (Kwan-s Kim 16). Finally, Korea plunged into a financial-cum-economic crisis with insolvencies in a number of financial institutions and widespread bankruptcies in the corporate sector in 1997.

In November 1997, confronting a big slump in the Korean economy, President, Kim Dae-jung asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans. As part of its agreement with the IMF, the Korean government pledged to take neoliberal reforming measures (Moon and Mo). Based on the theory of neoliberalism, economists detected that the main culprit of the economic crisis is the state-centered economic systems, established from the initial stage of economic development.\(^{144}\) According to this logic,

\(^{144}\) According to the report of KoA, in the process of confronting the crisis, the United States blocked South Korea from obtaining assistance and loans from Japan and forced the intervention of the
the Park regime’s selection and promotion of certain sectors of the economy led too many production units to crowd into only a few sectors of industries, whereas many worthwhile economic projects failed. The centralized systems also allowed the chaebol(s) to over-borrow loans, putting themselves in an unstable debt-equity position and arousing a high rate of external debt for the national economy. The systems caused problems even in the financial sector: the financial resources allocated by the state to the targeted firms made bankers grow lax in examining loan applications, particularly from chaebol(s) (Kwan-s Kim 4).

Identifying the government’s poor management of the economy as the very source of the 1997 economic turmoil, Korea took structural reform measures encompassing the four sectors of banking, corporate, trade, and labor (Kwan-s Kim 17). The fragilities of the corporate and financial sectors were considered special, serious issues. The financial sector reform included the elimination of government-initiated loans, the removal of all governmental restrictions on foreign borrowings by domestic firms, and the enhancement of transparency in banking transactions (Moon and Mo). In corporate restructuring, conglomerates were to streamline their business activities (focusing on their own specialties) and were subjected to stricter disclosure rules and financial market discipline to make the Korean economic system more transparent and accountable.

The immediate impact of the economic restructuring was massive layoffs of laborers (K. Shin). In the corporate restructuring process, many companies were sold off

IMF in order to achieve the rapid restructuring of the South Korean economy, following the neoliberal logic.

145 It is also known that the centralized systems favored the production of assembly-type exports (Kwan-s Kim 17).
and carried out structural adjustments (for decrease in production). Furthermore, the labor law was revised to provide firms with explicit conditions for layoffs of laborers and flexibility in deciding work hours (Kwan-s Kim 17). An enormous numbers of individuals were laid off; some of them were reemployed, but on a contract basis as temporary job workers in deteriorating working conditions (J. Song 37–65). The percentage of contract workers rose to higher levels than permanent position workers (Nam 267). The tradition of lifetime employment was shattered, arousing a constant fear of being laid off. Workers also had to succumb to the pressure of huge pay cuts or freezes, which resulted in a drop in their real income.\footnote{146}{The real income of an urban household during the third quarter of 1998 plunged to its lowest levels in 35 years (National Statistical Office, 27 qtd. in Kwan-s Kim 16).}

Meanwhile, the high interest policy, the main part of the IMF bailout package, forced social polarization. The objective of interest rate elevation was to induce investors to keep their savings in domestic currency and to additionally attract foreign investment, in order to stabilize the value of the Korean won (Kwan-s Kim 14). While stabilizing the currency market, this policy made chaebols that already had a high debt-equity ratio go bankrupt; smaller firms, which had depended on the chaebols for business, confronted plummeting sales or bankruptcies as their big business customers cut back on production and investment (Kwan-s Kim 15–6).\footnote{147}{It is for this reason that a series of the IMF reforms is called the “IMF cold wave” (Kwan-s Kim 15–6).} On the other hand, ironically, the high interest policy enriched the domestic capitalist class—a few rich who could continue to live off their bank deposits with higher incomes—in the midst of the economic turmoil (Kwan-s Kim 15–6).
Passing through all of these measures, Korea eventually succeeded in stabilizing the currency market and paying off the debt to the IMF in 2001, escaping from its retrenchment program. However, the neoliberal reforms did not lead to a full-fledged economic recovery: bankruptcy of small firms was still frequent even after all the reforms. Continuous corporate restructuring and downsizing gave a further rise in unemployment.¹⁴⁸ Job insecurity and the downfall in labor wages not only constricted economic activities but also hurt the livelihoods of people and their dependents: families were broken, there were higher incidences of poverty, property-related crimes soared, and even suicides increased (Kwan-s Kim 17). While the wealth of the rich increased under the high interest policy, the income gap between the rich and the rest widened. This inequality, in turn, widened the discrepancy in job opportunities based on income and education level, which helped to solidify the gap between rich and poor (KoA, “Road to an Undesirable Deal”). Consequently, the western principle of neoliberalism swept the country and left the public with social polarization, job insecurity, dwindling labor wages, devastating work rhythms, and danger of losing public utilities and corporations.

I believe that such an altered landscape of the Korean economy improved and at the same time, limited the possibility of the 2008 candlelight protest.¹⁴⁹ First, the

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¹⁴⁸ In analyzing a census on the economically-active workforce implemented by the Korean Statistical Office in August 2001, the Korean Labor and Society Institute (www.klsi.org) estimated the number of irregular workers to be 7.37 million, constituting 55.7% of total workforce. In March of 2008, the number of irregular workers was 800 million (the labor groups’ estimation was 8.69 million, and the government’s estimation is 5.64 million).

¹⁴⁹ In the wake of the IMF crisis, in 2002, the Korean government sought to break up the public Korea Electric Power Corporation, and sell the parts once this break-up was complete. It also announced a plan to divide the rail industry into a facilities sector and management sector and privatize it, and a plan to privatize the public Korea Gas Corporation. In response to this, the labor unions of Korea Railroad Corporation, Korea Electric Power Corporation and Korea Gas Corporation went on strike simultaneously to stop the privatizations, and carried out a historical struggle in February 2002. If their struggles had not taken place, almost all public corporations in Korea would not be privatized. KoA, “Struggle against Neoliberalism.” Indifference from politics was exemplified in the social movement that the Korean
economic condition influenced the roles of laborers during the 2008 candlelight protest. Leaders of trade unions first joined the protest, based on their understandings of the possible negative influence of the KorUS on workers: while opening the doors for Korean conglomerates to increase their international trades, the FTA would hurt Korean small scaled businesses, which would not be able to compete with U.S. large businesses. The small declining corporations would attempt to reduce their productions to survive, which would lead either to lay-offs of workers or increase of labor market flexibility. Recognizing this possible scenario, trade unions leaders joined the 2008 candlelight protest from the onset and encouraged their members to join. However, the union members could not make a big commitment of time and energy to the protest under the pressure of demanding work schedules under the depressed economy.

I also believe that the middle and high school students who first took to Cheonggye Plaza to urge the government to cancel the contract of U.S beef imports were those who had been affected by the neoliberal situation (Kerr; K. Song 62; Go et al. 25–6). The severity of unemployment and unsecure economic conditions had concluded in intensification of competition in school education, since ordinary Koreans believed that good college ranks would contribute to career opportunities. Gearing toward a competitive college admissions process, private after-schools and tutoring programs had rapidly expanded. The after-schools and tutoring programs foisted more burdens on the school students, who were already exhausted by a study schedule of 7:00AM–11:00PM in a common day for the average Korean public school student (Kerr).

Confederation of Trade Unions staged against the worsening labor condition at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997. The movements did not rise up en masse.
According to Chu Joo-hee, students' burdens of grade competition and hectic schedule had directly affected their diets (245–70). Going back and forth between their public school and private after-schools without enough breaks, middle- and high-school students could not help but depend on instant and fast food in many cases, which possibly cause mal-nutrition and unbalanced over-nutrition. Korean secondary school students had suffered from various types of eating disorders, obesities, and other diseases. Particularly, the less fortunate teenagers relied on school meals, often called “trash meal,” made of cheap ingredients as well as transgenic ingredients such as super corn, super beans, etc. (260). To this extent, Chu Ju-hee states that Korean teenage girls had become “monsters,” who eat “Frankenstein” food, which they could not avoid due to crowded school and work schedules (Chu 260).

It is for this reason that teenagers ran toward Cheonggye Plaza to cry out against the government when the Lee regime announced a series of education reform plans (including proposals to add an hour morning class to the school day, to segregate students by skill level, and to increase the number of and quality of magnet schools, all of which would exert more detrimental effects on their life) (Jong-ryul Choi 256). These planned reforms would intensify excessive competition among teenagers and drive them to be complete studying machines and rely more on “Frankenstein” food.

The Lee government’s approval of U.S. beef imports increasingly distressed the students by putting them in a situation in which they could never eat their school lunch with peace of mind (Chu 245–70). Before the approval of the beef imports, the students had already relied on bad diets including instant and fast food due to their hectic school

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150 According to Choi Jong-ryul, the teenagers were guided by 2MB Tan-haek Tu-jaeng-Yon-dae (People United for the Impeachment of Lee Myung-bak; my translation), which had been protesting since Lee’s election on December 22, 2007.
schedules, consequently suffering from various types of eating disorders, obesity, and diseases (Chu 245–70). Teenagers, overwhelmed by all of the government plans, could do nothing but cry out “Stop Mad Education, Stop Mad Cow Disease!”

Moreover, the KorUS FTA would further frustrate students from less fortunate economic background. The KorUS FTA would be the chance to introduce more private American-based testing services to the Korean admission processes (Thomas Kim 20). The American-based test would further entrench or exacerbate the economic inequality between students because such a test would increase the demand on students to seek extra-curricular courses from private programs (Thomas Kim 20). Additionally, the Lee government’s approval of U.S. beef imports pushed the teenagers into a situation in which they could never eat their school lunch with a peace of mind (Chu 260). Facing the woeful predicaments, teenage students could not but run towards the streets to cry out “Let me get some sleep! Let me get some food!” and “Stop Mad Education! Stop Mad Cow!”

However, an event or phenomenon that shapes the thoughts and responses of one generation or group is not necessarily transmitted to another. The stagnant economic condition, on the other hand, during the 2008 protest, silenced others, particularly individuals in their twenties. Traditionally, the younger generation, especially college students, was considered to be leading actors of social movements with their liberal and progressive ideas. At historically significant moments of social movements, college students fought at the forefront of struggles, disclosing evidence of the students’ understanding of their own power and capability to influence society. Especially as student unions in colleges steered pro-democracy movements against authoritarian
governments, individuals in their twenties became a powerful source of influence among the people of Korea. During the 2008 candlelight protest, however, as mentioned, individuals in their twenties appeared relatively inactive in comparison to their predecessors. Just as Korean commentators offered an explanation for the slowing activity of individuals in their twenties (Kang, “[Where did the College Students]”; Sang-jin Jeon; Chan-ho Oh). I also believe that lack of participation by individuals in their twenties was connected to the influence of the ranks of unemployment due to prolonged economic depression. As there had been a high unemployment of university graduates, college students in their twenties, with a huge sense of economic instability and job insecurity, dedicated themselves to rigors of self-management. They prioritized achieving high GPAs, TOEIC scores, and English scores, accomplishments that fulfill the job seekers’ requirements over the political or social issues that did not benefit their current status (Oh 370).

How, then, could we understand teenagers and individuals in their twenties, who had experienced the same historical economic structure, took different roles during the 2008 candlelight protest? Oh Chan-ho, here, suggests that difference in their emotions should be taken into consideration (370). Oh states that the individuals in their twenties were those who had been born during a time of rapid economic growth and had spent their childhood in a prosperous environment, but had experienced the 1997 Asian finance crisis in their teen years (370). They witnessed their fathers being kicked out of jobs and their families collapsing. Accordingly, while teenagers were motivated to voice their discontent with the social condition, individuals in their twenties stayed silent because of their emotional fear. Consequently, the economic dislocations from the early 1990s in
Korea opened the possibilities of the 2008 candlelight protest formation and at the same time confined the possibility of its resistance and rebellion.

**Figure 6. The Historical Vectors of the 2008 Candlelight Protest:** The Historical Vectors of the 2008 candlelight protest include “political democratization and depoliticization,” “food industrialization and wellbeing fever,” “market liberalization and job insecurity,” and “advanced communication technology and carnivalesque culture.”
CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION

An Articulation of Discontent about Globalization

My research project was in a way aimed at understanding the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest. The 2008 protest began following the Korean government’s decision to resume U.S. beef imports in April 2008, which had been suspended its imports in 2003 after an outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was detected in the United States. Korea’s resumption of U.S. beef imports was problematic especially because Korea’s agreement was carried out with fewer restrictions on meat shipments than the countries that resumed their U.S. beef markets ahead of Korea. With fear of mad cow disease mounting, a large number of Koreans gathered in a square in downtown Seoul, urging Lee Myunbak’s government (which approved the beef imports) to renegotiate the unfavorable terms of U.S. beef importation. The protest against U.S. beef imports continued for the three months of summer (from mid-May to mid-August) in 2008, and the candlelight was finally blown out as the beef import conditions were revised through renegotiations by delegations of the two countries.

The 2008 candlelight protest is now notably recorded as Korea’s largest social movement within 20 years; the protest dominated public attention and drew a staggering response from journalists, political commentators, and human and social science scholars,
all of whom attempted to analyze the protest through their own perspectives. Mainstream conservative newspapers declared that the protest was driven by individuals misguided by anti-American forces. On the contrary, Korean leftists and progressive alliances asserted that the protest, ignited by the government’s approval of U.S. beef imports, was indeed critical of neoliberal globalization. I found that despite the contrasting tones of the conservative and progressive parties regarding the justifiability, both believed that the protest was a “resistance” either against the dominant eco-political logic.

The protest against the U.S. beef imports was undeniably a resistance to the economic fascism of neoliberal globalization in that it was in opposition to the KorUS FTA: the beef trade deal was arranged for the purpose of expanding trade agreements with the United States. In my research project, however, I aimed to explain views on the identity of the protest and explore whether the 2008 candlelight protesters’ articulated discourse comprised merely a resistance against neoliberal globalization. The notion of articulation that I use in this research project as my theoretical lens guides me to suggest that an articulated (enunciated) discourse has no essential connotation, but has its meanings on the top of articulated (linked) different elements within the discourse at a particular historical juncture. Hence, I attempted to retrieve the historical features and culturescapes that created the communicative possibility of the protest in order to (re)define the 2008 candlelight protest.

In the following sections, I summarize my speculative analysis in the context of the theoretical and methodological impulses I adopted in my research. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on the contribution of my study to the field of communication studies.
How to Uncover the Identity of Articulation

Serving as the theoretical and methodological framework, the concept of “articulation,” informs my research project. Grossberg advanced the concept of articulation into a theoretical frame for identifying a practice or event: articulation is a process of forging “contingent and non-necessary” connections between certain practices and their effects, as well as enabling practices to have different (and sometimes unpredicted) effects (52). This means that the so-called ‘unity’ of an event or a practice is, in actuality, the articulation of different, distinct elements, which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary belongingness. Based on this notion of articulation, we can think of an event not as an object but as a process, which “can only be understood in response to particular historical contexts” (Grossberg 45).

Worth noting here is that Grossberg has suggestions, regarding using the notion of articulation. First, an articulation can be conceived as a linkage of lines or vectors, projecting their effects across the field. Articulation may have different vectors, different forces, and different spatial reaches in different contexts, and it also may have different temporal reaches, cutting across the boundaries of our attempts at historical periodization. Second, Grossberg regards “structure” as an important matter for the notion of articulation (45). Said another way, analyzing an event engages drawing lines or connections of structures, for they are the productive links between points, events, or practices within a multidimensional and multidirectional field.

Keeping the rubrics of articulation in mind, I drew specific plans for my research and included “speculative analysis” as the methodological framework. I applied this method of speculative analysis for digging out historical contexts comprised of
“structures” (Grossberg 60), which are not uncovered through empirical study methods such as observations or interviews. While operating as the principles of daily life, enhancing, constraining, and/or limiting the possibilities of human practices, “structures” do not simply or directly divulge their operations. I used this speculative analysis strategy to infer the historical vectors and forces of the 2008 candlelight protest (configuration of likely reality) from the main features of the protest (the verifiable elements that I comprehend through my observation of the protest and the extant relevant literature).

Main Characteristics of the Articulation

As I embarked on my inquiry, I examined the main (discursive and materialist) features of the 2008 candlelight protest in Chapter 4. I juxtaposed the 2008 candlelight protest with the conventional social movements in the 1980s (the period in which social movements were most vigorous in Korean history) to highlight the salient features of the 2008 protest, and put them into four categories: (1) the main issue, (2) the participants, (3) the modality, and (4) the goal. I found these four categories useful for my study in that they helped me mark stark historical changes between the 2008 protest and the conventional social movements in the 1980s in Korea.

As the features of the 2008 candlelight protest, I first uncovered “food safety” as the main issue of the protest, an unparalleled feature in comparison to those of conventional social movements. In the 1980s, demonstrations concentrated on calls for pro-democracy, human rights, and justifiable wealth redistribution against the authoritarian regimes. Demonstrations since the mid-1990s were more often centered on the issues of workers’ right, globalization and free trade, presence of U.S. forces in Korea, among other topics. These issues were also suggested during the 2008 candlelight protest,
but in such a large spectrum of issues, “food safety” was the most prominent theme running throughout the entire time. Participants constantly stated that they had voluntarily joined the protest with their health concerns and food morals.

Second, the participants of the 2008 candlelight protest encompass the different political, economic and cultural spectrum. It was sparked by the middle and high school female students, supported by hundreds of mothers pushing their children in strollers, and extended to the women who marched with makeup, high-heels, fashionable outfits (such as mini-skirts), and shiny purses (all of which were not typical attire for conventional social movements). Celebrities, including singers, a movie star, and a film director encouraged the protesters with their speeches and performances; a group of male youth in military reserve uniforms controlled traffic to ensure the safety of the marching protesters; Internet community members carried protest pickets with hilarious jokes; families casually joined the protest and made the protest mood peaceful; religious leaders attempted to protect the protesters from violent measures of suppression. Even farmers and workers, the subject of conventional social movements, played their roles in the protest the entire time.

Third, the 2008 candlelight protest utilized festive stances, rhythmical voices, and humor as its approaches, instead of militant mind sets, stones and fire bombs, fliers, ideological lines, slogans, and clenched fists. While the government continued to use violence, to establish its authority during the 2008 candlelight protest, the protesters showed nonchalant attitudes toward violence. Active participation of Internet

151 As mentioned, the 2008 protest evolved into a platform for demonstrating against the current administration’s planned neoliberal policies as a whole, including privatization of public enterprises (health care, water, and electricity), competitive education reforms, and pro-business domestic economic reforms. Trade unions also tried to incorporate the issue of contract workers, a neoliberal project, into the protest.
communities and individuals modulated the atmosphere of the 2008 protest toward peaceful marches, an absence of hierarchy, and constant employment of creative sense of humor. The protesters’ chants and marches were not in unison; they avoided the canned phrases of traditional chanting slogans, instead opting for lilting, concise slogans that could sound exuberant; the protesting slogans, pickets, placards, and songs were witty and satirically humorous.

Fourth, in comparison with the conventional social demonstrations, the ultimate goal of the 2008 candlelight protest appeared “vague.” The large-scale conventional social movements threatened to overthrow the authoritarian regimes, but the 2008 protest lost steam in the end without achieving much. The candlelight protest did not even fully achieve the right for food safety. The candlelight was only blown out when the U.S. beef import condition was slightly modified through an additional negotiation.¹¹⁵² Soon after the government officially resumed U.S. beef imports, Korea quickly became the second largest import entry of American beef in August 2008, and the third biggest by 2010. The protest did not question the mainstream structures built by the dominant political and economic paradigm, neoliberalism. The protest did not call for a transformation of mainstream structures that oppressed the common citizen, although farmers and workers attempted to inform and awaken the general protesters about the possible impacts of neoliberal globalization. Moreover, the protest did not ultimately lead Lee to drop his neoliberal policies (including privatizing health insurance, privatizing public enterprise, reforming education, etc.) which would limit Koreans’ everyday life.

¹¹⁵² Although Korea obtained more safety right through the additional negotiation, in actuality it was not a significant change. Dangerous parts of cows (such as the backbone and internal organs) were still permitted to enter Korea. Even in regards to the right to inspect, Korea won the right in the accord to inspect only a sampling of American slaughterhouses.
Drawing on these characteristics of the protest, I co-opted and reconstituted the driving vectors and forces of the 2008 candlelight protest through my speculation; I discussed my findings in Chapter 5 and present a summary of it in the following paragraphs.

The Driving Vectors and Forces of the Articulation

The goal of Chapter 5 was to explore the historical contexts of the 2008 candlelight protest. Since the main characteristics of the protest were understood in comparison with conventional social movements of the 1980s, I examined the national and international contexts of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the time period between the two different types of the social movements. By comparing and analyzing the main features of the 2008 candlelight protest and those of the conventional protest in the 1980s, I attempted to find historical vectors and forces which created the possibility of the 2008 protest. Focusing on the configurations of practices between the 1990s and the early 2000s in Korea, I found four salient axes as the driving vectors: “political democratization and depoliticization,” “food industrialization and wellbeing fever,” “market liberalization and job insecurity,” and “advanced communication technology and carnivalesque culture.”

Political Democratization and Depoliticization

First, I considered “political democratization and depoliticization” which began in the early 1990s as one of the elements that shaped the protest. After gaining independence from the Japanese annexation in 1948, Korea had been led by authoritarian regimes (who unjustifiably usurped power and attempted to exempt themselves from presidential term limits). Through the blood and sweat of constant pro-democracy
movements, the Korean public eventually ended the long history of oppression by military dictatorships and obtained civil rights especially for presidential referendum in the late 1980s. The biggest nation-wide democracy movement, the 1987 June Democracy Movement, was the moment in which the Korean public gained power to push for democratization. This event evidently opened up avenues to ground the current society’s sense of political democracy.

One of the notable features within such a democratized and un-authoritarian social setting, however, was rapid development of popular culture. During the 1990s, new styles of Korean pop music emerged, incorporating American pop music styles like rap, rock and techno, grabbing Korean youth’s attention, encroaching into their daily life, and reorganizing their passion and sentimentality toward their own life styles (H. Jeon 262–81). The term *Shin-se-dae* (new generation) was coined to indicate Korean youth who were shaped by the un-authoritarian political climate after democratization and the blossoming popular culture. The emergence of *Shin-se-dae* created a widening generation gap by rejecting the previous generations’ values and norms, such as ideological dedication, collectivism, and hierarchy, and by being open-minded, practical, confident, individualistic, and strong in self-expression (Sun-young Park). The generation’s optimism and vividness, I believe, shaped the modes of the 2008 candlelight protest in terms of its lack of hierarchy and the use of a sense of humor.

The un-authoritarian political climate after democratization, on the other hand, constrained the force of the 2008 candlelight protest. Ironically or naturally, in tandem with democratization, Korea went through depoliticization. The frequency and size of political movements decreased, as people lost the common goal of former social
movements—“pro-democracy.” Even outside the country, the collapse of the Soviet Union Bloc affected the domestic political passions, generating broad skepticism about theoretical backgrounds and ideological struggles of leftist political lines, which students had drawn on to lead pro-democracy movements. The advent of the civilian government in the early 1990s further diminished the persuasiveness of the democratization movement of the public and drove Korean youth far from politics. The Korean youth, from the perspective of the old generations (who were politically passionate to topple the military dictatorship through a series of movements in the 1980s), said farewell to political struggles and ideological issues. Not surprisingly, the 2008 candlelight protest fizzled out without making any radical statement of political resistance. Whereas the conventional social movements tended to develop into large-scale resistance trying to overthrow the dictatorial regimes, the 2008 candlelight protest did not fully develop into an all-out struggle against the authoritarian Lee Myung-bak government, which made the decision to import U.S. beef to secure export markets for big Korean corporations.

*Global food Exchanges and Wellbeing Fever*

I speculated that “global food exchanges and wellbeing fever” was another canvas to portray the protest. *Well-being Yol-pung* (wellbeing fever), which indicates the increased public concern for food safety and a safe ecosystem, initially emerged as a counter-action to food industrialization and global exchange. Food had become a commodity for mass production and mass consumption, as the industrialization patterns of Taylorism and Fordism had been applied to agricultural production in the United States. Subsequently, food began to be globally exchanged as countries were incorporated into global open free markets. As Korea had opened up its agricultural
markets to the world’s farm products, the possible spread of diseases related to farm products and their security became a hot issue in Korea, as in other countries.

In the process, the Korean public became increasingly aware of hidden dangers in daily food from the early 2000s. The ancient principle of *Shin-to-bul-i*—the belief that domestic farm products are the best for the body—was reinstated and often talked about. Regarding wellbeing management, a staggering amount of issues and information including healthy food recipes and meditation was shared through books and Internet blogs; the Korean public began to invest their time and energy, which had once been dedicated to industrialization and modernization, to creating new life styles in their daily routines. This cultural trend truly swept through the country, entering into large facets of quotidian life of the Korean public.

Manifesting such a cultural trend, the participants in the 2008 candlelight protest expressed their health concerns regarding the U.S. beef deal. As mentioned, when the U.S. beef deal was approved, the Korean public actively expressed their concerns on food safety, health and life. Those who were in the protest, through TV and newspaper interviews, emphasized their health concerns, relating fears and worries about possible mad cow disease.

This cultural zeal for quality of life, on one hand, contributed to broadening the range of the subjects of social movement but beyond the fences of farms, but at the same time, wellbeing fever made the protest politically ambivalent. In a way, the candlelight protest is politically progressive, especially in the sense that it was against the post-colonial overtones of the United States acting a hegemonic vector in global food distribution, but at the same time, it embedded conservative streaks in the protest. Just as
wellbeing fever had opened up possibilities to the business sector and enlarged various wellbeing product markets comprised of exorbitant prices targeted at the upper (or upper-middle) class, and just as wellbeing culture was heated by the rampant exertions of capitalist marketing desires, neglecting possible class conflicts, the 2008 candlelight protest (driven by wellbeing fever) skimped over the issues of widening class gap and justifiable wealth distribution, which unions attempted to incorporate into the protest. The unlikely confluence of wellbeing culture (turned to be subordinated to capitalism) and a social resistance (against capitalism) led such issues not to be taken seriously during the protests.

*Information Technology and the Carnivalesque*

The ambivalence of the 2008 candlelight protest is further fuelled by the information technology and the carnivalesque culture developed between the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The Korean government poured billions of dollars into constructing extensive information networks from the late 1990s, and eventually built a highly wired social environment available to general Korean citizens. The government also applied the policy of promoting privatization and deregulation even to the information technology (IT) sector so that the Internet could rapidly expand for economic purposes. Under such conditions, Koreans became technology-savvy. Such situation opened up opportunities for the Korean public to achieve freedom of speech to counterbalance the views of the mainstream mass media. The public began to express nonconformist and even rebellious views on the Internet, which granted them openness and anonymity to some extent.

One interesting fact here was the emergence of carnivalesque culture on the Internet, re-politicizing the depoliticized Korean youth as well as reshaping political
patterns. Specifically, an alternative political news website, *Ddanzi Ilbo* was founded in 1998 and began to engage politics by galvanizing forums and publishing political comments. However, its method of political engagement was unconventional; unlike serious comments and criticisms in conventional politics, *Ddanzi Ilbo* presented its political opinions and critical perspectives through expletives, jokes, coined vulgar vocabularies, and comic cartoons. *DC Inside* (www.DCinside.com), which was originally founded as a commercial website to sell electronic gadgets and goods such as digital cameras in the early 2000s, also turned to creating political comments through technologified parody images, comic songs, and satirical phrases as well.

I believe that the carnivalesque culture developed on the Internet fed into the 2008 candlelight protest. The participants demonstrated their ability to lead the reformative project by organizing the protest through the Internet, without any mediation of civil organizations. The new style of political engagement was also evident in the mode of the 2008 candlelight protest. Instead of rational arguments based on grandiose narratives, the 2008 candlelight protesters artfully used “carnivalesque” tactics. Protesters relentlessly joked that water cannons served as portable showers during the hot summer season, dubbed the police bus (which had a wire enclosure) “chicken cage,” and even voluntarily turned themselves into ride on the chicken cage.

In a way, such carnivalesque culture popularized the issue of the protest, simultaneously making the protest a work of paradox and ambiguity, just as a historical carnival. In a historical carnival, hegemonic social roles and usual restrictions on public behavior were officially relaxed and reversed, but the suspension of social rules was only temporary. The sphere of the historical carnival was separate from everyday life, so that it
did not succeed in ultimately disturbing social rules. As if echoing the historical carnival, the 2008 protest’s humiliation and degradation through the initial impulse of the body were too light and volatile to evolve into radical struggles. This makes me speculate that the link between the carnivalesque and resistant power is not fixed, straight, unbroken, or continuous.

*Economic Depression and Job Insecurity*

The economic depression in the late 1990s and the subsequently adopted neoliberal policies were also structural pre-conditions that ironically both expanded and constrained the possibility of the protest. As mentioned above, the political democratization in 1987 was followed by economic liberalization and the adoption of neoliberal policies from the early 1990s in Korea. In particular, the first civil government of Kim Young-sam made the decision to join in the OECD in 1996; in order to maintain its membership of OECD, the government adopted a policy of an open market, which brought broad-based relaxation of finance sector regulations such as permitting companies and banks to attract foreign loans. However, a chain reaction occurred in an unpredictable way: a sudden influx of transnational capital led first to an economy and property bubble, then to rapid capital flight, and finally to a financial-cum-economic crisis in 1997.

Confronting a big slump in the Korean economy, the subsequent government established economic reform and a restructuring recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided loans to Korea. The economic restructuring resulted in mergers and the acquisition of big companies in the banking and manufacturing sectors, whose immediate impacts were massive layoffs of laborers,
increase of “flexibility” of the labor market, and plummeting working conditions. As the percentage of temporary job workers became higher than that of permanent job workers, the idea of a lifelong workplace gradually disappeared (Son, “Journalism in the Neoliberal Era” 49–76).

The unsecure economic conditions, I believe, also served as the entryway to the 2008 candlelight protest. The severity of unemployment and economic conditions had escalated into an intensification of competition in school education (which would lead to better chances of finding jobs). The small group of middle and high school students, who first took to the streets for the protest, was comprised of the victims of the cut-throat competition in the education system. With burdens of grade competition, the students had moved back and forth between their public regular schools and private after-schools and tutoring programs, which had rapidly expanded in an effort to prepare students for the competitive college admission process. The Lee government’s approval of U.S. beef imports increasingly, further, distressed the students by putting them in a situation in which they could never eat their school lunch with peace of mind (Chu 245–70).

Teenagers, overwhelmed by all of the government plans, could do nothing but cry out “Stop Mad Education, Stop Mad Cow Disease!”

The stagnant economic condition, on the other hand, silenced many people during the protest, particularly individuals in their twenties. Traditionally, the younger generation, especially college students, had led social movements with their liberal and progressive ideas. During the 2008 candlelight protest, however, individuals in their twenties appeared relatively inactive in comparison to their predecessors. Lack of participation by individuals in their twenties was connected to the influence of the
depressed economic conditions. Having faced social polarization, job insecurity, dwindling labor wages, devastating work rhythms, and danger of losing public utilities and corporations in the swirl of neoliberal globalization, the individuals became more concerned about their own economic wellbeing and less concerned about social and political issues. Unlike teenagers, individuals in their twenties, who had witnessed massive lay-offs and family breakdowns during the economic downturns in 1997, appeared to be in constant fear of unemployment even during the 2008 candlelight protest.

Summary

In my dissertation project, guided by the rubrics of “articulation,” I investigated a matrix of complex-tangled historical vectors as the canvas on which the contour of the 2008 candlelight protest was drawn. I found the 2008 protest situated at the node of the four salient vectors of historical events and phenomena between the 1990s and the early 2000s, including “political democratization and depoliticization,” “global food exchange and wellbeing fever,” “developments of communication technology and carnivalesque culture,” and “market liberalization and job insecurity.” These vectors show that the identity of the 2008 candlelight protest is not simply a discursive unity but a contingent linkage of different vectors and forces of social structures. It is constituted “on the top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices” (Grossberg 52). The fragmented historical vectors in the political, economic, and sociocultural arenas converged into the regular pattern of mundane life of the Korean public from the early 1990s; the ordinary life and culture, through which the Korean public had traipsed, framed the contour and texture of the 2008 candlelight protest.
The paradoxical qualities of the historical vectors additionally shaped the 2008 candlelight protest into an event of contradiction and ambiguity. The vectors have paradoxical qualities: they cater to the mainstream social paradigm in some sense, but also they are articulated into different, sometimes competing and sometimes contradictory sets of relations with the mainstream logic. The 2008 candlelight protest, which reflected such paradoxical qualities, exists at the cusp between subordination to and resistance against neoliberal globalization, providing large support for Grossberg’s insight about historical struggles as “neither pure resistance nor pure domination but rather, as caught between containment and possibility” (52). This contradictory and ambiguous identity of the protest ultimately debunks the dichotomy of resistance and subordination, on which the conventional, ideology-oriented perspectives habitually rely.

**Contribution**

Communication studies have engaged with social movements in the sense that social resistance has concomitant with the formation of counter-hegemonic discourses, as well as the enactment of human agency against structure. Korean communication scholars have engaged the 2008 candlelight protest as a social resistance and discussed how the Korean public formulated counter-hegemonic discourse, set up the entry point of solidarity, and developed the movement with its unique communicative modalities, based on new communication technologies. These scholars have generally conceptualized the 2008 candlelight protest as an explosion of civil power grounded in digital media in a highly technology-developed country.

Although the extant communication studies grasped the trendy convergence of social protest and new communication technologies, I believe that communication media
cannot be the only answer to the question of who/what was pulling the strings of the protest, nor can it be the only (super-) agents to actualize the democratic ideals. Information technology (especially the Internet) surely assumed pivotal roles in mobilizing people and contributed to the protest’s development and unique form, but considering the previous social movements in Korean history which obtained large public support before the emergence of the Internet and other, information technology is likely insufficient to be touted as the single most important factor that attracted extensive participation during the 2008 candlelight protest.

To this extent, I designed my research project to centralize historical contexts in identifying the 2008 candlelight protest and moved my attention to the discussions of Korean left intellectuals, who have situated the 2008 protest within its historical context. The leftist intellectuals have located the 2008 protest within its historical context of neoliberal globalization, and conceptualized it as a revolutionary action against the contemporary eco-political principle. This kind of conceptualization, however, reflects economic reductionism and does not reach an adequate explanation of the heterogeneous texture of the protest.

The recognition of the limitations of the extant discussions on the protest led me to include the notion of “articulation,” which provides a contextualist perspective with consideration of multi-dimensional forces (Grossberg 45) in my research project. In this research, guided by the notion of articulation, the 2008 candlelight protest is identified by the interwoven complexities of political, social, economic, and cultural factors. My research findings, which show that the 2008 protest is not merely a resistance against
neoliberal globalization but an event driven by the stream, formulates the paradoxical quality of the protest between progressive and conservative lines.

My research findings that conceptualizes the 2008 protest, in a way, as a progressive resistance against neoliberalism globalization, and at the same time as a conservative mark provide better explanations about the situations surrounding the 2008 candlelight protest. Not many of the protesters took the issue of contract workers into their serious consideration, nor attempting to topple down the Lee administration, which planned on neoliberal policies such as privatizing health insurance, privatizing public enterprise, reforming education, etc. Even considering how the tide has been turning after the protest, my research findings help us draw a better picture of our location and direction. Soon after the protest ended on August 15, Korea quickly became the second largest import entry of American beef in the end of August 2008, and the third biggest by 2010; in the 2012 presidential election in Korea, a person from the same conservative party as Lee Myung-bak won for the next term. If the 2008 candlelight protest was merely an explosion of civil power against neoliberalism through digital media, how all the situations could come as these cases? The 2008 candlelight protest is not a pure resistance that entirely questions or rethinks the social terrains and principles of neoliberalism.

My research findings about the 2008 protest also represent the trendy features of contemporary social movements. Unlike the conventional social movements, narrowly focused, well organized, strategically serious (Linsky), like the 2008 candlelight protest, the contemporary social protests including Arab Spring in 2010 and Occupy Wall Street have utilized new ways of political engagement mixed with cultural imaginativity (such
as irony, satire, and parody) and developed anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian consensus-based politics. My research findings attract attentions to such new approaches to protest and activism, which circumvent the standard conduits of political information, fostering and constraining political conversations among the youth.

In doing so, my findings emphasize the importance of exploring historical contexts of social movements in communication studies for dynamically articulating, de-articulating and re-articulating an event and practice. Moreover, my research findings contribute to developments of the theoretical notion of articulation and speculative analysis as a methodological frame in social science. The notion of articulation has created confusion among scholars, as Slack states that there is no complete configuration of “articulation,” and Geras has made pejorative comments on the unclear usage of it. My research findings locate the notion of articulation as a theoretical framework with respect to understanding the identity of an event and a practice as an unfinished phenomenon that emerges and continues to emerge within complex historical contexts. The findings of my study also confirm applicability and practical vitality of speculative analysis as a methodological term in critical and cultural studies scholarship, for examining historical vectors and forces as structural forces that operate within deep layers of our daily experiences.

I hope that all of my research findings are useful for those who have the intention to map out their plans for more radical social movements. Chantal Mouffe’s rumination on democratic struggles, in her journal article, captures my research intention: “What will help us to better envisage the main challenge facing democratic politics today: how to
create democratic forms of identifications that will contribute to mobilize passions towards democratic designs” (26).
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