



*A New Socio-Political Breeze in South Korea:  
The New Right and New Left*

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# Table of Contents

	Page
<a href="#"><u>Acknowledgements</u></a> .....	iv
<a href="#"><u>Executive Summary</u></a> .....	v
<a href="#"><u>Positive Breeze in South Korea's Socio-Political Landscape: The New Right and the New Left</u></a>	
Origins of the 'Old' Right .....	1
Origins of the 'Old' Left .....	2
President Roh and the GNP.... Now what? .....	4
Emergence of the New Right and the New Left.....	6
Stances of the New Right and the New Left:	
What Makes Them Different .....	7
Influences .....	12
Concerns and Assessment.....	13
<a href="#"><u>About the Author</u></a> .....	A-I

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## Executive Summary

Having experienced the ups and downs of both conservative and progressive regimes, a small but growing number of Koreans have concluded that a healthy mix of the two is essential. South Korea's maturation into a democracy with differentiated ideas and opinions has yielded two new groups of people with alternative ideas who are speaking out against the conservative GNP (Grand National Party), as well as against the progressive Uri Party. Labeling themselves the "new right" and "new left," these two groups represent at least 10,000 Koreans, and are visible in scholarly debates, nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, Christian groups, media, internet, and elsewhere. Disappointed by both the right and the left, these movements are gaining momentum within South Korea.

Both the traditional left and right have failed to keep pace with changes occurring in Korea and beyond that began after the Cold War ended. The right resisted economic liberalization and used exclusivity and Korean exceptionalism as its guiding principles. Lacking a concrete agenda after the dictatorships ended and after North Korea began to weaken, the left too retreated to economic, educational, and social protectionism (and refused to prepare for globalization). In support of its unification agenda, it ignored North Korean human rights horrors. Putting national pride over responsible policies, the left also stirs up nationalistic anger by spotlighting historical and territorial issues with Japan, while also calling for an end to the alliance with the United States.

The new left and the new right acknowledge these faults and try to distinguish themselves by adjusting policy in a range of fields, including security, diplomatic relations, North Korea, and human rights. The new right distinguishes itself from the old right by focusing on a universal, global perspective on freedom, open markets and free trade agreements, human rights, noblesse oblig , an objective perspective on history, the rejection of reactionary nationalism, and focusing on positive diplomacy with other countries. The new left recognizes the obstinate ideological line of its predecessors and distinguishes itself from the old left by shifting its focus to North Korean human rights, diplomacy toward Japan and the U.S., and by taking a global view on opening South Korea's market. The common threads for the new left and the new right are North Korean human rights, strategic foreign policy, and globalization of markets. The educational sector, universities, nongovernmental organizations, the media, think tanks, and the legal sector have been influenced more by the new right than the new left.

Both movements adopt a global attitude and are more practical than ideological or nationalistic in both domestic and foreign policy. Since both sides embrace more pragmatic diplomacy, these trends can yield a more positive attitude toward the U.S. and Japan. Despite differences in opinion within and between the new left and the new right, this evolution creates the potential for a more constructive policy debate in South Korea.

The future of these movements depends on several unanswered questions. First, the new right is divided about joining the existing political arena. While some old conservatives (and some new right members) want to fold the movement into the GNP, most new right members remain cautious. It may be more beneficial to make a new political party than to stick to existing ones. A second concern is coherence among the many strands of the new movements. Can they

find sufficient common ground to assert themselves and maximize their influence? Similarly, will they have enough consistency to be credible?

# Positive Breeze in South Korea's Socio-Political Landscape: The New Right and the New Left

By Jiyon Shin

Having experienced the ups and downs of both conservative and progressive regimes, a small but growing number of Koreans have concluded that a healthy mix of the two is needed. Indeed, following South Korea's maturation into a democratic country with a spectrum of ideas and opinions, it has become increasingly difficult to use a simple "conservative-liberal" system to identify political thinking. On every issue, conservatism and liberalism exert influence to varying degrees.<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting this social change, two groups have emerged and are providing new ideas and speaking out against the traditional conservative GNP (Grand National Party), as well as against the progressive Uri party. Labeling themselves the "new right" and "new left," these two groups now account for at least 10,000 Koreans, and are involved in scholarly debates, nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, Christian groups, media, internet platforms, educational sectors, foundations, and politics. Since this phenomenon is new and spontaneous, it is difficult to estimate its precise scale. However, with a public disappointed by both the traditional right and left, these movements are quickly gaining momentum within South Korea. They have great potential to shape the country's socio-political landscape.

This paper begins with an examination of the historic background of the "old right" (conservatives) and the "old left" (liberals) and then traces the roots and the thinking of the "new right" and the "new left."

## Origins of the 'Old' Right

Although the meaning and messages of conservatives and liberals have changed over time, originally, conservatives in modern Korea backed President Syngman Rhee and his policy of promoting close cooperation between the private and public sectors as well as the regimes of former Presidents Park Chung-hee (1961-1979) and Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1988), or profited from them. Their supporters point to the rapid industrialization that took place and the stunning economic growth that followed.<sup>2</sup> However, these two regimes also brutalized Koreans in the name of national wealth and national security, *Buguk Gangbyeong* (which focused on deterring North Korean attacks). Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly were restricted under the National Security Law and martial laws. Activities or speeches against the government were condemned as "communism," and violators were tracked down and suppressed.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, due to the dispersal of information on North Korean poverty, denial of the existence of North Korea's human rights abuses is impossible. Although South Koreans may agree on facts, they will disagree on whether to approach North Korea with carrots or sticks. This is a remarkable change: in the past, 'liberals' ignored the human rights situation in North Korea because acknowledging it would impede relations with the Kim government and perhaps stall unification.

<sup>2</sup> Per capita annual income grew from \$87 in 1962 to \$4,830 in 1989

During the course of national development, the government heavily intervened in economic matters by dispensing subsidies and government aid, cooperating with certain companies and certain regions that lobbied effectively. Those who enjoyed “protection” from the government had a better chance to develop into larger companies (*chaebols*) and certain regions, such as Gyeongsang (Park, Chun, Roh Tae-woo, and Kim Young-sam all came from there), became wealthier. Strong political-economic ties were forged, which led to corruption, centralization of wealth in certain companies and certain regions, unhealthy regionalism, and excessive interdependence between the government and the economy.

Shaped by the Cold War era, the conservative government’s foreign policy centered on one issue – relations with North Korea. Thus, for strategic interests, South Korea collaborated with the United States to fend off communist influence from North Korea, the Soviet Union, and China. The same security concerns were behind the 1965 agreement between South Korean President Park Chung-hee and Japanese Prime Minister Sato Eisaku, in which both countries normalized relations and decided to move beyond their tragic past, at least at the governmental level. Additionally, trilateral security relations among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan were established throughout the Cold War. South Korea was protected from communist aggression thanks to the alliance. However, since the regimes when being formed needed support from the existing elites, the majority of Koreans who collaborated with colonial Japan went unpunished, and normalization without consent from either war victims or the Korean populace left lasting resentment. Koreans also became weary of the U.S.-ROK security alliance as politicians exploited the North Korea threat to restore domestic order by repressive means, all in the name of security.

After the 1987 June uprising (*Yuwol Hangjaeng*) in which Koreans fought Chun’s authoritarian regime nationwide, democracy became a real option for South Korea: Chun yielded power and the next year a democratic presidential election took place. Nevertheless, the democratic progressives, represented by Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam, split before the elections, leaving the door to victory by Chun’s selected candidate, Roh Tae-woo. Maj. Gen. Roh “served as a good compromise between the previous attempt at democracy in 1960, when the system was gripped in gridlock, and the authoritarian regimes of Park and Chun.”<sup>3</sup> The rule of conservatives continued.

Conservative rule ended with Kim Dae-jung’s election as president in 1997. The conservative legacy continues in the current opposition party, the Grand National Party (GNP), which has its origins in the party that existed during Park’s rule.

### **Origins of the ‘Old’ Left**

While the “old” right conservatives were in power, those who fought for freedom and democracy were considered liberals or leftists. Yet having experienced the brutalities of authoritarian regimes, the majority of Koreans during that time probably had their heart on the “left.” People from all walks of life formed student unions, teachers’ unions, workers’ unions, lawyers’ unions, and opposition political groups to oppose the authoritarian regime. The

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Baker, *Korea: Challenges for Democratic Consolidation, the Asia Pacific: A Region in Transition* (APCSS, 2004), p176



National University Students Representative Union (*Jundaehyup*, which was reorganized as *Hanchongnyun* in 1993), Lawyers' for a Democratic Society (*Minbyun*), Families of the Democratic Movement Society (*Mingahyup*), and the Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union (*Junkyojo*) are some of the organizations created in the 80s; these organizations still exist. The radical and moderate left shared beliefs at first, but as South Korea began to transition into a democratic country, the moderates blended into mainstream society, while the radical left remained on the left. The following discussion focuses on the original nationalistic (radical) left, especially during the '60-'80s.

Industrialization was the driving force of the Park regime. Those who did not benefit from the five-year development plans turned against the government, protested the centralization of wealth, and demanded its redistribution. While the government regarded development as its first priority and distribution as second, radical liberals asserted that the government should carry out development and redistribution simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

The left sought freedom of speech, assembly, and thought. The government periodically cracked down on unions and organizations with military and police forces under the National Security Law or used martial law. Anti-governmental activities were framed as communist activities. As a result, many Koreans were opposed to the government.

Consequently, South Koreans identified those who overlooked the human rights disasters in South Korea and those who were close allies of the government as threats to individual freedom. In addition, South Korea's virtual ally, Japan, never came to be considered an ally by the Korean people, despite official normalization in 1965. United States Forces in Korea (USFK), or the U.S. in general, was the next target of hatred. Although Koreans generally shared anti-American sentiment, the fire at the U.S. Cultural Center in Pusan in 1988 and other anti-American protests were perpetrated by radical leftists during the 1980s. The radical left also argued that South Korea could achieve independence and unification when the USFK withdrew troops from the Korean Peninsula.

The radical left argued capitalism opened the door to foreign influence, which harmed Korea. By opening the market, they believed South Korea would become dangerously dependent on foreign markets. The left rejected globalization in the belief that they would protect the Korean market from becoming vulnerable to foreign exploitation.<sup>5</sup>

For the nationalistic or radical left, unification with the North was the ultimate goal. Since the North was ahead of the South in the '60s and '70s, they believed unification was better than national development because without unification, there would be limits to national development and even democracy. To them, the regime in the South was more of a threat than

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<sup>4</sup> Kim Ilyoung, "Hanguk Jungchi eui Saeroun Inyum juk Jwapyo rol Chajaseo: 'New Right' wa 'New Left' guligo Gongtongdwen Jipyong euroseooui Jayujueui" (Searching for a New Ideological Focal Point for South Korean Politics: 'New Right,' 'New Left,' and Liberalism as a Common Ground. 한국정치의 새로운 이념적 좌표를 찾아서: '뉴라이트', '뉴레프트'), *New Right Thinknet Paper 4 (January 2006)*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Bipanjeok Shigakeseo Bon New Right Undong (looking at the new right movement in a critical perspective) by Kim Ho-ki.

the North. Some even actively accepted the North's Juche ideology; the *Jusapa* will be discussed later.

Although there were differences in the degree to which the radical liberal minority and the moderate liberal majority would act upon their beliefs, for both sides, democracy and freedom were the ultimate objectives. The will of the Korean people was almost achieved when Chun yielded power and Roh was elected through democratic means. Korea solidified its status as a democracy when Kim Young-sam in 1992 became the first president with a civilian background.

Before he became president, Kim Young-sam allied with the Roh government and with Kim Jong-pil (Park Chung-hee's righthand man) to create a new party (*Minchu Jayu Party*). Kim Young-sam became president and made efforts to further democratize South Korea by embracing checks and balances. Here, the line between conservatives and progressives blurs. Though originally a progressive democracy activist, Kim Young-sam was elected with the support of Roh's conservative party. Thus, South Korean presidents were conservatives and there was no alternation in power until Kim Dae-jung (often referred to as "DJ") was elected president in 1997. If Kim Young-sam's presidency laid the foundation for institutionalizing democracy, DJ's presidency demonstrated that true democracy had been finally achieved. When DJ's successor, Roh Moo-hyun, won the presidency, it was seen as the "culmination of a textbook case of democratic consolidations."<sup>6</sup>

### **President Roh and the GNP... Now what?**

When Roh was inaugurated, there were hopes that he would end political corruption and regionalism and help Korea become more independent from external powers. His campaign was based on anti-American rhetoric, and made much of the incident in which two schoolgirls were accidentally run over by a U.S. military vehicle, which exacerbated ill will toward the U.S. However, after becoming president, he has conducted a pro-alliance foreign policy by dispatching troops to Iraq in spite of domestic opposition, by pursuing a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries, and by using pro-alliance rhetoric. That may have been natural: Roh had to be practical and support the alliance in the prevailing geopolitical environment in which the U.S. is Korea's security partner. Nevertheless, he lost the support of progressives.

He and his Uri party also met overwhelming opposition from the conservatives when making failed attempts to push controversial domestic policies, such as abolishing the 50-year-old National Security Law, moving the capitol to Chungcheon Province, waging "war against the media" (specifically against the conservative dailies *Chosun Ilbo*, *Joongang Ilbo*, and *Dong-A Ilbo*), passing a law that would punish collaborators during the Japanese colonial period and past dictatorial regimes, and by putting territorial disputes between Japan and South Korea at the center of that relationship, which has stimulated nationalism. These controversial policies and his frequent rhetorical blunders managed to alienate both the right and the left in Korea.

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<sup>6</sup> Baker, *op cit*, p. 178.

As a result, the president's Uri party was badly beaten in local elections May 31, 2006. The results were so bad the election has been called the "5.31 Tsunami."<sup>7</sup> The GNP won by a landslide, dominating the vote with the exception of two regions (Honnam and Jeju). Immediately after the elections, a nationwide survey of 1,000 people reported that 50 percent believe the Uri party's poor showing was a result of President Roh's inept national management; 33 percent blamed the Uri party for being unable to carry out its duties.<sup>8</sup> President Roh's approval ratings have plummeted since his inauguration and have been hovering around 25 percent<sup>9</sup>, reaching 14 percent<sup>10</sup> at the lowest point.

In contrast, the GNP gained popularity after its win in the May 31, 2006 elections: its approval rating reached its highest at 50 percent. However, since the GNP's popularity has fallen to the 30~40 percent range<sup>11</sup> (which is still quite high) in the latter half of 2006 due to scandals, conservatives see the GNP's rise as a reaction to Roh's mismanagement in the political and economic sectors rather than as an indication that Koreans are becoming conservative as a whole. Conservatives lament the 10 years out of power and are being careful not to make hasty moves. They realize the need to change their image and stance because Koreans clearly avoided them in the last two presidential elections. Also they are aware that their old tactics of relying on regionalism and security issues to win do not work now that the Cold War is over and generational changes are occurring, since the knowledge-based society allows for a more comprehensive and liberal perspective, and that support cannot come only from a limited group of people, but must be nationwide and can be mobilized via the internet, as occurred during Roh Moo-hyun's presidency.

The left's expectations of Roh were disappointed, and the right's belief – that an amateur liberal government would fail – was confirmed. Koreans believe that something must change and would like to put their trust in an established political group but are suspicious of existing groups because of the history of ideological feuds and the incompetence both have demonstrated. As both parties' support bases erode, a socio-political movement is emerging and has the potential to be an alternative power base, or even to provide a new direction for Korea. Members of this new movement reject traditional conservative-liberal divisions. Both find fault in the conventional left and right wings, and these groups are trying to create a new entity untainted by ideological relics and aiming for more practical and pragmatic policies.

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<sup>7</sup> "Public Sentiment Should Come First," *Maeil Kyungje*, June 4, 2006,

<http://english.mk.co.kr/englishRead.php?sc=70000011&cm=Economy&year=2006&no=206454&relatedcode=>

<sup>8</sup> According to a poll research institute Mbizon C&C under the direction of the broadcasting company MBC.

<sup>9</sup> Poll by Munwha Daily and the Korea Society Opinion Institute showed only 25 percent of the public currently approves of Roh's handling of the presidency. Support for the Uri Party is down to 19 percent and less than 20 percent of survey respondents said the party has a chance to win the 2007 presidential election.

-Excerpt from Bruce Klingner, "South Korean President Battles Lame Duck Status," *Policy Forum Online* No. 05-78A (Sept. 27, 2005): <http://www.nautilus.org>

<sup>10</sup> Poll by Korea Society Opinion Institute (June 2006).

<sup>11</sup> "Party Support, GNP 48%, Uri 15.5%," *Hanguk Ilbo*, Oct. 3, 2006  
<http://news.hankooki.com/lpage/politics/200610/h2006100317245421000.htm>

## Emergence of the New Right and the New Left

Participants and organizations of the new right and the new left are not fixed; there is no single main organization on the right or the left. Instead, there are voluntary groups from all sectors with similar political beliefs. The New Right movement began with the launch of the Liberty Union (*Jayu Ju'eui Yeondae*) in November 2004, which was headed by Shin Ji-ho and Hong Jin-pyo (former North Korea sympathizers – *Jusapas*, who are Korea's leading new right intellectuals). *Dong-a Daily News*, one of the prominent conservative newspapers in South Korea, gave the movement the name the "new right." Political groups and policy institutes such as the New Right Union (led by Reverend Kim Jin-hong), and the National Council for Upgrading Korea added to the new right network. The new right movement quickly spread through a range of fields. From the religious sector, Rev. Suh Kyeong-seok joined the movement with his organization, Christian Social Responsibility. The New Right Think Net, a think tank for moderate conservatives was established; the Text Book Forum was launched; the Liberal Teachers' Union (with 5,000 members) was launched; the New Right Parents' Union was also launched. All this demonstrated that the educational field was ready for change, while the interest of the legal sector was shown by the Lawyers for Citizens; the Korean University Students' Politics and Diplomacy Research Association and the New Right Youth Association showed youth wanted positive change in Korean politics; *Upkorea*, *Daily NK*, and *Zeitgeist*, delivered news from the perspective of the new right; and the New Right National Alliance and New Right Foundation consolidated the movement.

Then the new left arrived. On Sept. 4, 2005, the New Progress Union was launched, which was quickly followed by a moderate progressive think tank, Jounjungchaek Forum (Good Forum), launched Jan. 17, 2006. Although the representative of the Good Forum, Lim Hyuck-baek, rejected the title "new left," conservative newspapers *Chosun Ilbo*, *Jungang Ilbo*, *Donga Ilbo*, and the like began labeling the organization to contrast with the new right. Starting a little after the new right movement, the new left has slowly been growing.

Initially, the new right aimed at "presenting a fundamentally free-market, conservative vision of South Korea's political economy for policy makers,<sup>12</sup> and to guide old right conservatives to a better path with updated ideas. Choi Byong-il, a professor at Ewha Woman's University and a representative of the New Right Alliance, stated that its objective was "not to let another leftist government be in power." The main goal of the new left is to provide an alternative development model by accepting changes that come from globalization and opening up for freer trade, and ultimately to achieve sustainable development. New progressives, who dismiss the "failed Roh government," aim to prevent the GNP from reclaiming the Blue House.

Many of the new right movement's leaders have leftist backgrounds: in the '70s and '80s they fought anticommunist dictators. The main leaders, such as Shin Ji-ho, Hong Jin-pyo, Han Ki-hong, and Kim Young-hwan are intellectuals in their late 30s or 40s, or are from the so-called 386 generation: people in their 30s who attended college in the '80s and were born in the '60s, who converted from communist inclinations (*Jusapa*) to conservatism. Since the 386 generation provided the main support base for Roh's victory, the new right wishes to be called "486s" (since

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<sup>12</sup> Byong-jick Ahn, "South Korea's New Right," *Wall Street Journal* (June 7, 2006).

there are many people in their 40s in the movement). Also, former civil right activists like Rev. Kim Jin-hong and Suh Kyeong-suk, who are now ministers, have been leading the new right movement. One of the core mentors, Ahn Byong-jik, chairman of the board of directors of the newly established New Right Foundation (created by an alliance of six new right organizations, including the Liberty Union, Textbook Forum, Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights, and the Liberal Educational Movement Association – [names translated by the author]), was considered a progressive economist who influenced progressive socialists. He converted from socialism to capitalism in the '80s and has been promoting new perspectives on conservatism that prodded the 386 – or the 486-ers – to abandon their faith in communism.

The pioneers of the new left movement, such as Lim Hyuck-baek and Kim Hyeong-ki (now in their 50s), are progressive intellectuals who contributed to the policies of the Roh Moo-hyun government in the Presidential Policy-Making Advisory Council: Kim worked on decentralizing regional power, while Lim worked on policy management. However, as Roh's policies began to falter, they formed a policy institute, the Good Forum, to provide alternatives to Roh's policies.

### **Stances of the New Right and the New Left: What Makes Them Different from the Old**

These groups claim to be fundamentally different from the old schools. It is too soon to tell if they will live up to that claim, but the groups are quickly becoming larger, and their beliefs do differ from those of the past. As mentioned, the old conservatives contributed much to South Korea's economic growth, and prevented communist aggression. Yet, they were also responsible for compromising individual freedoms, unevenly distributing wealth, creating unhealthy ties between the economic and political sectors, and for mending ties with Japan without properly compensating victims. After the Cold War ended, the conservatives failed to keep pace with ideological change brought about by globalization. They were passive to changes triggered by the end of the Cold War. They insulated South Korea from global competition, relying on government regulations and the conventional social notion of exclusivity.

Meanwhile, the old left emphasized individual freedom and fought against dictatorship, fought for redistribution of wealth, unification with the North, and independence from foreign powers. But without a concrete, well-elucidated agenda after the dictatorship ended, and after North Korea began to weaken, they too embraced economic, educational, and social protectionism and refused to prepare for globalization. They turned a deaf ear to North Korean human rights horrors, and even overlooked them in favor of unconditional pro-North Korea, pro-unification beliefs. Appealing to nationalist sentiment, the left asserted that being independent from alliances is crucial for South-North unification and that the alliance with the U.S. should end. Putting national pride over practicality, the left also stirs up nationalistic anger by spotlighting the historical and territorial issues with Japan.

	Old Left		Old Right
Government role in economy	Redistribution of wealth	Governmental intervention in the market acceptable	Development of certain sectors
Priorities & threat perceptions	Individual freedom as main priority Repressive government seen as threat		Security as main priority Communist aggression from the North seen as threat
Alliances with Japan & the U.S.	Against alliances with the U.S., Japan Against colonial collaborators ( <i>Chinil</i> ) that are Pro Japan		Pro alliance with the U.S., Japan
Globalization & free markets	Skeptical of globalization, capitalism, and industrialization		Agrees with capitalism, export-oriented markets, industrialization Weakly agrees with globalization, opening markets (relies on government protection for limiting such phenomena)
North Korea	Unification as priority ⇒ From the time that North Korea became destitute, the old left began to ignore the human rights situation, believing that it would delay unification		North considered as main enemy

**Table 1: Characteristics of the conventional left and right in South Korea**

Even after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, parties from the left and the right showed little enthusiasm to embrace changes in technology and ideas. They have been hesitant to change and passively react to the rapid changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The new left and the new right acknowledge this situation and try to distinguish themselves by making positive adjustments to their thinking. What then distinguishes the new right and the new left from the “old” right and the “old” left?

The new right “see themselves as centrists or moderates. They do not regard themselves as anti-communist like traditional conservatives.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike conservatives in the ‘60s and ‘80s or contemporary conservatives, the new right tends to actively promote individual freedom and human rights. New rights are indignant about South Korea’s silence regarding North Korean human rights for fear of provoking the North Korean government, and they urge South Korea to take action. In fact, the new right pioneers initially focused on criticizing North Korea’s repressive regime – Choi Hong-jae, Hong Jin-pyo, and Shin Ji-ho, and other North Korea human rights activists in South Korea launched the Liberty Union in November of 2004. Compared to other nongovernmental organizations for North Korean human rights, it was the first time that an NGO overtly took a wider view on human rights. Normally, conservatives tried to induce

<sup>13</sup> Paul F. Chamberlin, “Korea’s New Right Movement?” Good Potential, Challenging Future (April 2006).

empathy for North Koreans but only appealed to humanitarian issues. The new union not only highlights humanitarian concerns, but also points to other factors pertinent to security in South Korea. It argues that unconditional engagement with the North, and its manifestation in the Sunshine Policy, dilutes reality to the point that Koreans do not think of the North Korean regime as a threat. Thus, the union concludes that South Koreans should think about North Korea in two ways: there is the repressive Kim regime and poor North Korean citizens stripped of freedom.

There is a division of opinion among the new right on the National Security Law (NSL). This law, which is seen as a relic from the authoritarian past, is a top issue because President Roh has been pushing to abolish it. Some new right organizations such as the New Right Union believe the law should be preserved; others believe the law should stay with adjustments. Kim Il-young from the New Right Thinknet calls for ending the paradox whereby conservatives believe in North Korean human rights, but not their own. He argues South Korea has grown into a democratic society capable of self-censorship. Despite some disagreement between the new right organizations, it is crucial that there is an exchange of opinion on changing, or even getting rid of, the National Security Law among the new right. It is unlikely that an “old right” would even consider changing the NSL.

The new left also believes strongly in human rights and unlike the nationalistic progressives (old left), they think North Korean human rights should be addressed. Integration between the two Koreas is still a crucial issue, but they think that the old left made a mistake in ignoring or deliberately denying the Kim regime’s human rights violations. Lim Hyuck-baek said that progressives should not take the route of “strategic apathy” or “paternalism” toward North Korean human rights because human rights are a universal value. He underlined the importance of practically improving the human rights situation, and argued that the South-North problem should not be approached through ideologies, but by a sustainable and peaceful process.

The new right and the new left both criticize the Roh government for failing to maintain good relations with other countries. They are upset that Roh’s foreign policies are undermined by domestic comments that appeal to nationalism. Both groups deplore Roh’s foreign policy with Japan as well as with the U.S. Ahn Pyong-jik insisted that even though the Yasukuni Shrine visits and the Dokdo issue stir strong emotions, these should not be the focal points of discussion between South Korea and Japan. Ko Yu-hwan, a professor at Dong-guk University and one of the leading figures of the Good Forum, stated that “in order to stabilize peace on the peninsula... ROK-U.S. relations should be strengthened and South-North relations should be developed simultaneously.”<sup>14</sup> Ko, part of the “new left,” acknowledges that in an era of “complex interdependence,” South Korea should befriend nations on a case-by-case basis,” it should use the military alliance with the United States, economic cooperation with Japan, and economic exchanges with Russia and China; South Korea should exert its energy to achieve peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia. In that sense, both movements are practical; especially when it comes to diplomacy, pragmatism, not ideology or nationalism, is the base of their thinking.

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<sup>14</sup> Ko Yu-hwan, “Nambuk Hwahae Hyuplyuck Jungchaek eui Jisokkwa Gyunhyeongjeok Shilyong Weikyo” (South-North rapprochement), *Good Forum Resource online* (March 22, 2006).

Economics is a more disputed field: the new right believes in small government, free markets, and development, while the new left believes in strengthening the government's role in less vigorous private sectors, while lessening government involvement in innovative private sectors. A trait that differentiates them from the old left and right is that they both accept the competition that comes from globalization. They are not relying as much on the government, as the old would prefer. Both sides acknowledge that FTAs are beneficial for enhancing the quality of the market, for increasing capital, and for making Korea a more competitive country. They both believe Seoul should work more to integrate with the world. Good Forum alluded to the Scandinavian model for the social economic sector, noting how Sweden maintained its economic growth and solved taxation, welfare, and employment issues in the midst of globalization. They believe neo-liberalism will promote economic growth and then the notion of giving back to society voluntarily will be the next hurdle. Both the new left and the new right agree with the concept of "noblesse obligé," a mode of behavior very different from that of economic moguls in the past.

The new right view of Korean history is neither excessively grim nor unrealistically rosy. They do not view the colonial history as a period marked only by victimization as the old left does. They believe that since the left focused on creating an educational ambience in which the focus is on the victim, hyper-nationalism may have resulted. Although they think highly of the economic development of the '60-'80s, they believe the military regimes were immoral in using force and oppression as a tactic. The new left is more critical of the Park regime: Lim stresses that industrialization and economic plans were an excuse for authoritarian leadership, and that it is not acceptable.

So far these movements have demonstrated new thinking in a variety of fields, including security, diplomatic relations, the North Korea issue, and human rights. The new right distinguishes itself from the old right by focusing on a universal, global perspective on freedom, the open market and free trade, human rights, noblesse obligé, an objective perspective on history and rejection of reactionary nationalism, and focusing on positive diplomacy. The new left recognizes the obstinate ideological line of its predecessors, and intends to distinguish itself by shifting its focus on North Korean human rights, a diplomatic approach to Japan and the U.S., and a global view on opening South Korea's market. The commonality between the thinking of the new left and the new right is the emphasis on North Korean human rights, strategic foreign policies, and globalization.



	New Left	Common ground	New Right
Government role in economy	To ensure fair play, the government should limit its role in productive sectors, yet should intervene in less productive sectors.	Capitalism and a market economy are important for development.	More focus on free market economy with less intervention from the government.
Priorities and threat perceptions	Human security in Korea is as important as human rights in North Korea.	Human rights are a central concern.	South Korea will have to adjust the National Security Law
Alliances with Japan and U.S.	<i>Chinil</i> (former collaborators with colonial Japan), Dokdo, textbook issues are deplorable, yet they should not be the exclusive focus of ROK-Japan relations. ROK-U.S. relations should be strengthened for Korea's future. Practicality over nationalism.		
Globalization and free market	Compensations should be made for those hurt by free market competition.	Free trade is important. Use globalization to further national interests.	Pro-globalization, pro-market, less government intervention.
Approaching North Korea	First develop South Korea, continue engagement (peace and prosperity policy) with North Korea, consider unification in the future.	First, develop South Korea. Peace on the peninsula is crucial (no nuclear weapons).	Carrots and sticks when it comes to North Korea. Take gradual and careful steps for unification.
Socio-economic concept	Find the Third way for Korea's socio-economy.	Nobless obligé, anti-corruption, anti-government-business connections as in the past.	Pro-development, yet some brakes on excessive competition in the market.
Perceiving the past	National development was an excuse for Park and Chun's regime.	Military regimes' human rights policies were a disaster and unacceptable.	Park regime is responsible for the sacrifice of Koreans who sought individual freedom and human rights, yet its economic achievement was remarkable.

**Table 2: Characteristics of the new left and new right in South Korea**

## Influences

Thus far, the educational sector, universities, nongovernmental organizations, the media, scholarly think tanks, and the law sector have been influenced more by the new right than the new left.

Since Korea has been under the influence of the left now for over a decade, students are exposed to an educational front that is leftist in its teaching. The Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union (*Junkyojo*) has been a strong presence since it was founded in 1989 and has been inculcating students with leftist views from textbooks that argue the U.S. is an enemy that is blocking Korean unification. According to the Ministry of Education's website of April 2006, textbooks from elementary to high school do not contain incidents such as the North Korean infiltration of 1999 (Yunpyung Sea fire exchange) and 2002 (West Sea fire exchange), during which both North Korea and South Korea sustained casualties. Though some might regard the omissions as understandable because they are recent, the textbooks include other significant events such as the 2000 Summit between the two countries. There are teachers' guidelines on how students should be taught about North Korea through cultural and political approaches, but the guidelines fail to address military issues.<sup>15</sup> A high school teacher during a Korean language class showed an MBC program on how American GIs deliberately ran a tank over two Korean students in the summer of 2002. The new right perceived this as a detrimental trend and took action to change this by organizing a scholarly forum that called for textbook materials to take a more objective perspective. The Textbook Forum was launched Jan. 25, 2005 with the goal of addressing this situation. Teachers also formed a new union: the Liberal Teachers' Union. The new New Right Foundation's first plan is to republish *Zeitgeist* (*Shi Dae Jeong Shin*) with a special edition on "How to Change Korean Modern Textbooks."

Universities have also been influenced by the new right; there are professors' unions opposed to the National Association of Professors for Democratic Society; there are student councils that are not part of the dominant student organizations connected to the National University Students Representative Union (Jundaehyup, reorganized as Hanchongnyun in 1993). North Korean human rights disasters, which were previously taboo for Hanchongnyun-related student councils as a result of ideology, are on open display, as occurred during an event by the student council in Ewha Women's University in the early 2000s. A student based nonprofit organization, the University Students' Politics and Diplomacy Research Association, led by Kim Jung-hoon, believes in post-ideology – which is neither right, nor left, but free of ideologies. Some members of this association are from the Democratic Labor Party, yet the organization has been promoting ROK-U.S. relations by hosting international conferences to provide solutions to widespread anti-American sentiment and focusing on ROK-U.S. relations.

Lawyers' for Citizens has provided an alternative to the Lawyers' for a Democratic Society (Minbyun) – another leftist organization comprised of lawyers. Scholars have formed associations, such as the AnMin Forum, 21C Earth Net, New Right Think Net (new right), and the Good Forum (considered a new left organization), with hopes for positive change in society

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<sup>15</sup> Jiyon Shin, "Consolidating an Alliance Worth Saving: Threats and Solutions for Both ROK and the U.S.," *Issues & Insights* (Pacific Forum CSIS, 2006).

and eventual freedom from ideologies. *Upkorea* and *Zeitgeist*, *New Right dot com*, and *DailyNK* have been using the internet; their power was made clear by 386, *Roh Sa Mo*<sup>16</sup> which helped Roh Moo-hyun's presidential election.

Although the new right has been divided on whether to interact with the GNP, the GNP has shown much interest in the new right. Former Seoul Mayor Lee Myeong-bak showed up at the launch of the New Right Foundation; seven GNP members, Kim Jung-hun, Yu Seung-min, Park Se-hwan, Park Seung-hwan, Yu Jeong-bok, Jung Du-eon, and Ju-Seong-young, formed an organization of the middle right; and several GNP members have made statements to the effect that "What the new right is saying is exactly what I mean."<sup>17</sup> Rev. Kim Jin-hong openly supported Seoul Mayor O Se-hun and Gyeonggi Provincial Gov. Kim Mun-su after they were elected. A policy think tank similar to the Heritage Foundation in the U.S. has appeared in the GNP: the Yoeido Research Institute. It was formed in the 1990s, yet recently it announced its intention to become an opinion leader for the middle right in an attempt to overcome the ideological strife between the old right and left. There have also been ambitions to be part of the political scene: Park Jong-chan, New Right Union representative of Bucheon City Province, and New Right dot-com columnist Kim Ick-kyum, competed with three other GNP candidates in the special election as a GNP candidate in Gyeonggi Bucheon Sosa on July 26, 2006, although another GNP member, Cha Myeong-jin, won.

The new left and the new right held a large conference on March 29, 2006. Leading opinion makers from the Textbook Forum and the Good Forum were brought together by the host, Korea Forum for Progress (headed by Nam Deok-oo). Each forum had four presenters and held a lively debate that covered Korea's nation building process, industrialization, and democratization, and provided recommendations for South-North Korea relations, Northeast Asian regional security, and Korea's economic growth. Both demonstrated their divergence from old perspectives on various subjects, but there was hope on both sides that these people could talk and exchange views, and show flexibility on certain issues.

## Concerns and Assessment

Several issues are critical to the future of the new right and new left movements.

First, the current new right movement is divided on whether to become involved in the existing political arena. Shin Ji-ho, Liberty Union representative, firmly stated that it would not let the new right organization be involved with the GNP. Rather than hastily diving into politics as the New Right Union has shown signs of doing, Shin argues that this movement would be better served by not directly connecting with the "old" and cultivating a neutral image. There are signs the GNP wishes to be part of the new right movement, or vice versa; if this phenomenon continues, the movement could deteriorate into a political novelty act that could be seen as mere opportunism. As the movement has penetrated a range of fields, it is crucial that the new right and the new left show patience, and continue spreading their ideas with a long-term goal of making changes, and not embracing short-term goals that will only last until the next election.

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<sup>16</sup> *Roh Sa Mo* is a group of political supporters for Roh Moo-hyun, begun before his presidency in 2002. With its strategic network online and offline, *Roh Sa Mo* greatly contributed to Roh's election.

<sup>17</sup> Kim So-hee, "New Right, Hannaradang eul Heundulda," *Hankyoh* 21: Politics section (December 2004).

From a long-term perspective, it may be more beneficial to make a new political party than to stick to existing ones.

As they are new movements that lack a central organization, it is understandable that there are many opinions within the movements. Any organization or any politician can borrow the title “new right” or “new left” and claim to be part of the movements. Shin Ji-ho denounced the New Right Union in June 2006, claiming that the union lacks political independence and that the word ‘union’ is incorrect because it implies it is a union of all new right organizations, which is not the case. He said that it is better to regard the New Right Union as a fake. An ambitious plan to establish a new right NGO network has dissipated since late June because of disagreements on who will be a member. While it is natural that a democracy will have numerous opinions, as time passes, the movements should concentrate on coherence among organizations to further consolidate and gain credibility.

Another concern is that the new right and the new left will have to be consistent in their efforts to spread their views more widely throughout society. The influence and credibility of their ideas – and their ultimate impact – will depend on consistency. Thus, concentrating on creating practical policies, as they are doing, and alternatives, rather than mere criticism, will help sustain the movements. Then, regular citizens will be able to trust the intentions of the movements.

It is unclear whether the new right or the new left will make a drastic change in Korean society. Their novelty attracts attention but there are also great possibilities. Both movements deserve credit for their global attitudes and flexible stances on ideological issues, as well as for their attempts to be more practical instead of ideological or nationalistic. Since both sides tilt toward pragmatism in their stances on diplomacy, it is reasonable to expect that one result of their growing influence will be more positive relations with the United States and Japan after the 2007 presidential elections in Korea. Despite the differences in opinions within these movements, the rise of the new left and the new right create the potential for more constructive competition within a society that has been dominated by black and white logic. Kim Hyeong-ki explained that “regardless of whether it is considered left or right, we will compete with the new right on whether a certain policy is better to enhance the quality of life.” Instead of being tied to beliefs the old left or the old right have embraced for over half a century, the new right and the new left can become a positive influence on the socio-political and economic culture of Korea.

## About the Author

**Jiyon Shin** is a member of the Pacific Forum's Young Leader Program, and served as a Vasey Fellow at the Pacific Forum CSIS in the summer of 2006. Currently an undergraduate at Ewha Women's University, she specializes in International Studies, focusing on diplomacy and security in Northeast Asia, and spent a year as an exchange student at University of Hawaii 2005-2006. A policy advisor at the Korean University Students' Politics & Diplomacy Research Association (KPDRA), she was also the chief representative of the Ewha Women's University group of KPDRA, and vice president of KPDRA, where her research included relations between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK), and anti-American sentiment among ROK's young generation. Ms. Shin was a member of the North Korea Security Research Group in Ewha Women's University, and assisted several international conferences related to North Korean refugees, and the UN ministerial conference on sustainable environment at the Environment and Sustainable Development Division office of UNESCAP.