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Protest by Candlelight: A Comparative Analysis of Candlelight Vigils in South Korea

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Abstract: Protest activist leaders must make a series of decisions about the strategies they use; one such decision is the choice of tactic or performance. In many countries and cultures, leaders' choice of tactic is informed by the historical contentious repertoire, arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political actors, often developed over time (Tilly and Tarrow 2006). In South Korea's contentious repertoire, the use of candlelight vigils has become an increasingly prevalent form of protest. Candlelight vigils in South Korea first became noticeable in the 2002 anti-US protests surrounding the deaths of two Korean schoolgirls and again in 2008 in response to the reversal of the ban on American beef imports. In these instances, candlelight vigils were used by left-wing protesters. Candlelight vigils were also used in the 2016-2017 protests around the impeachment of President Park Geun-Hye, however, they were used both by left-wing protesters and in counter-protests by right-wing activists (*Taegeukgi Giphoei*). Thus, this research asks the questions: how has the use of candlelight vigils evolved over time? How and to what extent are the 2016-2017 candlelight vigils different from their predecessors? To explore these questions, we conduct comparative case studies of the 2002, 2008, and 2016-2017 candlelight vigils, with an emphasis on the latter protest. In so doing, this research adds to our knowledge of candlelight vigils as a distinct form of protest and how contentious repertoires evolve over time.

Keywords: South Korea, protest, social movements, candlelight vigils

Introduction

Social movement activists must make a series of decisions about the ways they can reach their goals. One such choice is that of protest tactic or performance. Tarrow and Tilly (2006) define contentious performances as ‘relatively familiar and standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims on some other set of political actors’ (11).

Historically, performances vary widely in their forms, from sit-ins and hunger strikes to marches, demonstrations, and self-immolation. Activists’ performance choices are influenced by their cultural repertoire of contention, a collection of performances assembled over time (Tarrow and Tilly 2006, 11). One form of performance that has become more prevalent in the past two decades is the use of candlelight vigils, a non-violent form of protest that involves participants holding candles or other light sources. Activists and protesters may choose candlelight vigils as a tactic to raise societal awareness and gain government recognition about their issue over other tactics (both violent and other non-violent) for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as a non-violent tactic, it might be less socially destabilizing, garnering more legitimacy from both the government and society at large. Secondly, people may be more likely to join a candlelight vigil because it is non-violent and non-confrontational, characteristics that make them less likely to be repressed (Earl and Soule 2006). Thus, people can join these types of protests with less fear of punishment than other forms of protests (Kang 2012, 242). Finally, in many contexts, candlelight vigils take on a festival-like atmosphere, bringing out entire families and groups of friends (Beja 1998; Yun and Chang 2011; Kang 2012). In this regard, vigils may induce more people to join them than other forms of protest.

The use of candlelight vigils as a protest tactic has moved to the fore of the South Korean protest repertoire over the past few decades, most recently evident in the 2016¹ protests calling for the impeachment of former president Park Geun Hye. There is a bevy of literature about the South Korean candlelight vigils in 2002 (after the deaths of two Korean schoolgirls from a US-base related accident) and in 2008 (following the discovery of tainted beef from the US). However, only a few English-language articles about the 2016 candlelight vigil have been published, mostly in the field of political communication focusing on the use of new internet media in mobilization (e.g. Lee 2018, and Lee 2019). More importantly no English literature to date that attempts to compare these three cases and understand how they have changed over time. Furthermore, the literature on South Korean candlelight vigils has largely avoided attempting to draw conclusions about candlelight vigils as a protest tactic and how the Korean vigils differ from others.

Through case comparisons of the 2002, 2008, and 2016 candlelight vigils in South Korea, we attempt to close this knowledge gap by describing the ways in which the use of vigils in South Korea evolved over time. We find that a common thread was the use of online space as a place to organize the vigils and recruit participants. However, leadership roles were played by different actors in the three protests: the 2002 and 2008 vigils were led by NGOs and professional activists while netizens² came to the fore of the 2016 protests. The 2016 candlelight vigils were distinct in two additional ways: the clarity of its goal (force the resignation of Park Geun Hye) and the presence of counter-protests. Through this study, we also attempt to make some observations about candlelight vigils as a tactic more generally. Most notably, we find that candlelight vigils

¹ For clarity, we refer to the candlelight vigil episode surrounding Park Geun Hye's impeachment as the 2016 episode though we acknowledge that the protest continued into 2017.

² We adopt Merriam-Webster's definition of netizen: "an active participant in the online community of the Internet" ("Definition of Netizen," n.d.).

may be used when other forms of protest are inaccessible and are not exclusively tools of leftist protesters but may be used by rightist activists as well. Furthermore, candlelight vigil participants vary widely and may be organized by professional activists or average citizens, often through online organizing. Candlelight vigils may be more appealing to would-be protesters (and organizers) due to their potentially festive atmosphere and tendency toward non-violence.

Candlelight Vigils from a Global Perspective

While much of the literature to date associates candlelight vigils with the South Korean protest repertoire, it is important to note that they are used in other countries as well. By comparing South Korean candlelight vigils to those in different contexts as a starting point, we can discern what attributes pertain to candlelight vigils as a general protest tactic and what is unique about South Korean vigils. Candlelight vigils are also part of the contentious repertoires in Hong Kong and the US. Vigils in Hong Kong are perhaps the most like those in South Korea as they tend to be more overtly political than those in the US. For example, literature suggests that candlelight vigils are held annually in Hong Kong as a remembrance of the Tiananmen Square incident and the still-born Chinese democracy movement of the late 1980s (Beja 1998; Hung and Ip 2012; Ng and Chan 2017). As this example indicates, candlelight vigils in Hong Kong often serve a commemoration function rather than recommending a particular change in policy. This is more like US candlelight vigils than their South Korean counterparts. In Hong Kong, a candlelight vigil is held annually on June 4 to is largely symbolic: it commemorates those who lost their lives in Tiananmen Square, but does not explicitly recommend policy change such as democratization or independence from China. This routinization of candlelight vigils perhaps lessens their effectiveness as a tactic to raise awareness and gain government

concessions: people may be less likely to join knowing that it happens on an annual basis and it does not require a government response. As one protester stated in an interview:

I doubt whether it's worth doing again. I have already joined the Candlelight Vigil for June 4 more than 20 times! The thought that I have after a demonstration is, "I don't need to join again next year." . . . I feel very frustrated indeed. Just as with the July 1 Rally, it has become a ritual now. But the problem is, nothing has changed. (Ng and Chan 2017, 107).

Candlelight vigils in the US run the gamut in terms of the issues for which they are used and their goals. One important distinction between candlelight vigils in the US and those in South Korea is that, for geographic reasons, Korean vigils can draw more participants. Vigils in the US often occur in several major cities while Korean vigils are almost always in Seoul. This has important implications for the tactic's effectiveness: it is easier for a government to ignore or repress smaller dispersed protest events than one large event in the country's capital and largest city.

Candlelight vigils in the US tend to occur after an event although, in more recent years, they are held in response to government policies. For example, candlelight vigils were held after the assassinations of San Franciscans Mayor George Moscone and Harvey Milk, the murder of Matthew Shepard, the rape committed by lacrosse players at Duke University, and the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando (McRuer 2005; Sebring 2007; Morris 2011; Ruanto-Ramirez et al. 2016). In these instances, vigils both commemorated the victims of these and similar events and raised awareness for related issues. For example, the vigils held after the deaths of Moscone, Milk, Shepard, and the victims of the Orlando shooting also called attention to LGBTQ+ rights, the AIDS crisis, and homophobia (McRuer 2005; Morris 2011; Ruanto-Ramirez et al. 2016).

More recently, candlelight vigils in the US have become more like their South Korean counterparts, perhaps inspired by South Korean vigils. For example, in the middle of George W. Bush's tenure as president, faith-based coalitions held candlelight vigils to raise awareness and

support for more humane immigration policies (Espinosa 2007). These coalitions were specifically attempting to pressure the Senate to reject a restrictive immigration bill in the House (HR 4437) (Espinosa 2007, 153). In 2018, hundreds of protesters held a candlelight vigil outside of the White House in response to President Trump's support for and close relationship with President Putin ('Candlelight vigil in front of White House is part of nationwide protest' 2018). While this vigil resembles the 2016 South Korean vigil in terms of its calls to 'demand democracy' and 'confront corruption', it is different in one key way: vigils of hundreds of protesters were held across several cities instead of one large vigil with millions of participants (Jo 2017).

Candlelight Protests in South Korea: Weapons of Society

How and why have candlelight vigils been used over time in South Korea? Hong (2009) explains that the candlelight demonstration is a distinct form of gathering encouraged by the draconian Law on Assembly and Demonstration that prohibits open-air gatherings after sunset. However, the law does allow 'cultural activities' and activists exploited this loophole by calling candlelight demonstrations 'candlelight cultural festivals'. In this section, we briefly explain the social and political context surrounding the massive candlelight protests in 2002, 2008, and 2016, respectively. We compare these three protests based on the diversification of issues and participants, and the development of counter-protests. After describing and comparing the three massive candlelight protests in 21st century South Korea, we conclude that the most recent protest in 2016 should be understood as a continuation from 2002 and 2008 movement since there has been a learning effect among the public in terms of their strategies and solidarity-making.

2002 Candlelight Protests

Many South Koreans remember 2002 as the year of the South Korea/Japan World Cup that was held from May 31 to June 30. It was the first major international sports event that South Korea hosted since the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Korean society in 2002 was relatively stable in many aspects. First, the economy was stable after the country's rapid recovery from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis as it successfully graduated from the IMF bailout³. Politically, it appeared that Korean democracy had matured and consolidated as evidenced by the election of President Kim Dae Jung, a former activist of the democratic movement. In addition, the Korean soccer team's surprisingly good performance bolstered South Korean confidence⁴. In June 2002, people wearing red T-shirts filled Korean streets to cheer for the Korean national soccer team.

Amidst the festive national mood, two middle school girls were struck and killed on the road by a United States Army armored vehicle in June of 2002 on their way to their friend's birthday party (Hankook Ilbo 2018). This accident was not a national issue at first but only attracted attention from the activists in the region near the camp where the incident took place. Participants in the initial protest mostly consisted of the regional labor unions and young students who were the neighbors and comrades of the two victims. It was only after the November trial of the two U.S. soldiers responsible that the deaths of the two girls began to instigate national-level reactions. Although the Korean government attempted to try them in South Korean court, both the driver of the vehicle, Sergeant Mark Walker, and the vehicle's commander, Sergeant Fernando Nino, were judged under the U.S. military's Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)

³ In 2002, most of the economic indexes including the inflation rate, GDP growth rate, and GDP per capita recovered to the level of pre-crisis (World Bank Data 2018).

⁴ The South Korean team made to semi-final in 2002 World Cup; notable because the team had not won a World Cup game before 2002.

according to the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). This agreement stipulates that U.S. military personnel fall under the jurisdiction of U.S. military courts should they commit crimes while performing official duties. Both sergeants were found not guilty of ‘negligent homicide’ (Media Today 2017). Public demonstrations in the street of national anger and sadness followed the acquittals. The first call for candlelight vigils was made in online space. A ‘netizen’ whose nickname was ‘Anama’ called for a candlelight event to commemorate the deaths of the two girls. The initial post written by Anama is as follows: ‘I heard that the soul of dead people become firefly. Let’s fill Gwangwhamoon with our souls. Let’s become fireflies together with Hyosun and Misun [the deceased school girls] in Gwanghwamoon’ (OhMyNews 2016).

The two US soldiers were acquitted on November 20 and 22, respectively. On November 26, massive rallies started in Gwanghwamoon square, Seoul. Tens of thousands of people came out to the streets holding candles in their hands. The advent of the candlelight protest brought significant changes in Korean protest culture in many aspects. Most importantly, there were notable differences in the characteristics of the participants in 2002 compared to the previous protests: most participants in the 2002 candlelight protest were ordinary citizens, many of whom were teenagers and young adults motivated by the activism in online communities. Before 2002, protests often involved mass protests of national-level labor unions and farmers unions against inimical governmental policies. Male-dominated and hierarchical organizations largely participated in the street rallies. While the previous street protests projected violent images of clashes between protesters and police shooting teargas, ‘the candlelight offered a new platform that enabled protesters to convey their seriousness of intent through peaceful means’ (Kim 2017).

However, the later phases of the 2002 candlelight vigils became co-opted by the organized labor unions as well. The labor unions and student organizations were the major

leading forces of the Korean democratization movement in the 1970s and 1980s and for that reason they had vast amount of experience organizing anti-government protests. However, once these ‘experts’ of mass mobilization assumed leadership of the candlelight vigils, the vigils lost their inclusiveness and the horizontal relations between the participants that enabled ordinary citizens to join the protest (OhMyNews 2016).

2008 Candlelight Protests

After having two left-wing presidents from 1997 to 2007, the South Korean electorate chose Lee Myung Bak, the candidate of the right-wing party (Grand National Party), in December 2007⁵. After his inauguration in February 2008, Lee quickly implemented conservative policies in many areas, especially in trade and education⁶. The negotiation for the U.S.-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) officially began in February 2006 under president Roh Moo Hyun and was finalized in April 2007. Left-wing political parties and progressive civic groups had expressed their concerns about the potential negative consequences of the FTA such as the degradation of labor rights and environmental regulations (Cho 2008). Concerns about Mad Cow Disease (also known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)) became especially prevalent among the public because the activation of the FTA meant that the Korean government would have to resume the importation of U.S. beef, which was forbidden since the 2003 outbreak of BSE in the U.S. The public fear about U.S. beef was amplified following the circulation of information about U.S. cases of Mad Cow Disease online, despite some of it being fake news (Lee 2010).

⁵ Lee received 48.7% of the votes.

⁶ For example, in April 2007 the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology revived 7 am and 7pm classes in middle school and high school, which had been banned by the previous administration since 2004.

It was in this context that the Lee administration finalized the FTA negotiations which would allow the import of U.S. beef, including the parts of the animal that had been considered high risk. The lack of a quarantine clause for the imported beef by Korean authorities was perceived as the most problematic.

The newly agreed-upon regulations on beef importation was announced on April 18, 2008 and mass rallies against it began on May 2, organized by a coalition of civil society organizations called 'The National People's Movement Headquarters for impeachment of Lee Myung Bak'. Teenagers who had been participating in candlelight protests against the revised education policy since April joined the anti-FTA protest. The candlelight vigils quickly developed into a national movement as they originated from concerns about food security and health, concerns that are ubiquitous. A previously uninvolved group of citizens participated in these protests *en masse*: mothers. Mothers with their babies in strollers and their young children by their hands went to the streets to protest the government's helter-skelter approach to a problem that could endanger the health of their children. Members of apolitical online clubs, such as clubs for people who have double-eyelid surgeries, went to the street in 2008. Many members of these clubs had never participated in political protest before. Due to the various types of participants and issues involved, the 2008 protest was considered a 'post materialist' movement by some observers, making it distinct from other Korean protests (Hong 2008; H. K. Kim 2008; Yang 2008; Cho 2008). Others, however, considered the 2008 protests as aligning with traditional South Korean political protests since the majority of participants expressed their anti-government sentiment and self-identified with left-wing political ideology (Lee 2010).

The 2008 candlelight protest was more inclusive in terms of gathering participants from a variety of social groups because it was not technically a 'protest' or 'demonstration' but a

‘cultural event’ in which famous singers and entertainers performed in support of the ideas on a street stage (Yun and Chang 2011, 150). Anybody who wanted to speak could speak on stage no matter whether they were high school students or housewives. Participants played Korean traditional instruments and games with each other. This festive atmosphere enabled a sense of solidarity among protesters.

Table 1: Comparison of demography: participants of 2008 candlelight protest and general public. (Source: Cho 2008, 253)

Demography		Participants of candlelight protest (%)*	General public (%)**
Monthly income (Currency: South Korean Won***)	Below million	2.60	9.21
	More than 1 million, less than 2 million	15.70	18.12
	More than 2 million, less than 3 million	22.20	21.92
	More than 3 million, less than 4 million	21.70	19.23
	More than 4 million, less than 5 million	14.50	12.35
	More than 5 million	23.20	19.17
	N	1,156	6,200 (households)
Education	Middle school diploma or less	8.9	32.26
	High school graduate	14.30	34.03
	College graduate or more	76.90	33.71

	N	1,181	41,716,764
Age	16-18	9.40	8.15
	20s	38.00	19.27
	30s	28.90	21.57
	40s	18.40	21.08
	50s or above	5.40	29.92
	N	1,326	38,055,306

*The numbers for participants of candlelight protest are based on the on-site survey conducted by Drs Cho Gi Suk (Ehwa Women’s University, South Korea) and and Lee Hyun Woo (Sogang University, South Korea)

**The numbers in monthly income of the general public are based on the result of survey conducted by Statistics Korea, national census agency, for the first quarter of 2008. The numbers in education and age of the general public are based on the 2005 census.

***1 US dollar is equivalent to 1,100 South Korean Won approximately therefore 1 million won is about 900 US dollar.

The result of the surveys in Table 1 indicates that the participants of the 2008 protests were wealthier, better educated, and younger than the general public. However, these characteristics are not enough to draw any conclusions about whether protesters held post materialistic values. Additionally, it is difficult to find one unified cause because participants’ motivations for joining the protests varied greatly, from concerns about food security to dissatisfaction with the revised education policy to the resignation of President Lee and to frustrations with Korea’s relationship with the US. Ultimately, this mixture of motivations caused division in public opinion about the candlelight protests.

The protest that started as a peaceful cultural festival became violent as it continued. Small groups of participants marched toward the Blue House and clashed with police on May 25,

2008⁷. Police dispersed the demonstrators by using sprinkler trucks, claiming that it was because the protesters occupied the street illegally (Hangyeore 2008). Subsequently, criticism against Lee Myung Bak became the major issue of the protest, rather than the FTA negotiations or food security. From May 24 to 27, about 200 students and citizens were arrested, though most of them were subsequently freed after getting reprimanded for their actions by the police (Hangyeore 2008). However, some protesters destroyed the police bus and doused water on the police during a confrontation (Hangyeore 2008). Police announced that 19 police cars and buses were damaged, and 37 policemen were injured. For their part, protesters said that more than 20 of them were injured. The candlelight protest ended by late June 2008 because of the clashes between the police and protesters.

2016 Candlelight Protests

The election of president Park Geun Hye in 2012, the daughter of the former authoritarian leader, Park Jung Hee, maximized the political division in Korean society. For the people who were nostalgic for the Park Jung Hee era, an era of economic growth and the “miracle of the Han river,” she was embraced with high expectations. On the other hand, for those who fought for democratization, the return of Park Geun Hye to the Blue House seemed like a return to a dark chapter in Korean history. This societal division intensified after the Sewol ferry sinking in April 2014 when 304 passengers were dead, most of whom were high school students. Since Park’s Blue House did not substantially react for seven hours after it received the first report about the sinking, many citizens blamed Park for neglecting her presidential duties.

⁷ The Blue House is the executive office and official residence of the President of the Republic of Korea and is located near Gwanghwamoon square.

However, public opinion of Park Geun Hye became united against her when the relationship of Park Geun Hye and her friend Choi Soon Sil surfaced was revealed, resulting in mass candlelight demonstrations in Seoul that demanded Park's resignation in late October 2016. Suspicion about the mysterious relationship between Park and Choi was raised before, but the discovery of Choi's tablet PC that contained texts of the president's speeches and policy draft was smoking gun evidence of Choi's illegal and habitual interference in presidential decision making and Park's abuse of authority. The JTBC, a cable TV channel, reported the discovery of Choi's tablet PC in their nationally popular news show on October 24, 2016. The first candlelight vigil against President Park began on October 29 and continued every weekend until March 11, 2017 when the impeachment motion of Park was approved.

In 2016, citizens moved carefully with a one unified goal: to make Park Geun Hye step down. More than ten million people participated in the protests in between November and December with active participation of 1,500 NGOs and other civic groups nationally (Kim 2018). The 2008 candlelight protests included women and teenagers as new groups of protesters; in 2016, the new group of candlelight protesters were people with right-wing political ideologies. Unlike in 2002 and 2008 when labor unions and political groups took over the leadership of the vigils from ordinary citizens, the protest was run by ordinary citizens. Even labor unions and political parties restrained themselves from projecting their own political agendas. The police and legal authorities allowed protesters to rally very close to the Blue House this time. Together, these actions prevented the violent confrontations that plagued the 2008 vigils and made protest participation more equitable and enjoyable for participants⁸. People joined protesters in the

⁸ Even though there were some minor clashes between protesters and polices, mainly because some protesters insisted to go over the police line set 1km in front of the Blue House (Pyun 2016, Lee et al. 2016), no one was severely injured. The 2016 candlelight protest received international recognition for "non-violence" including the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Germany's oldest political foundation which awarded its annual Human Rights Award

streets after work and during the weekend with their friends and family. Participants relished being part of the protest to change history but in their own ways: some people held the flags they made with apolitical slogans such as ‘people who came here alone’ or ‘people who love beetles’ (Kim 2018). As in the 2008 protest, many singers and entertainers participated in the protest and performed on stage. Many of them wore a yellow ribbon to commemorate the victims of the Sewol ferry sinking.

At first, the protesters demanded Park’s resignation. In response, Park released a statement that she will not resign and instead will leave her fate to the decision of the National Assembly (Kim 2018). After the release of this statement, a record-breaking number of people gathered on December 3 to protest, approximately 2,320,000 people in total (Kim 2018). The National Assembly approved the impeachment of Park with a clear majority (78% or 234 out of 298 votes). The number of participants decreased after Park’s impeachment, but mass protests continued every weekend until the Constitutional Court approved the impeachment motion on March 10, 2017.

Table 2: Demography of participants of 2016/7 candlelight protests (source: Lee 2017, 86)

	Variable	Participant rate (%)	Number of respondents
Age	20s	30.3	211
	30s	29.3	215
	40s	29.7	249

Prize to the 17 million people who participated in the candlelight rallies in 2016. Sven Schwersensky, resident representative at the nongovernmental foundation’s Korea office said at the award ceremony: “The peaceful exercise of democratic participation and in particular the civic right of peaceful assembly are the essential components of democracy” (Ock 2017).

	50s	23.4	239
	60s and above	10.6	287
Education	Middle school diploma or less	9.0	100
	High school graduate	15.8	291
	College graduate or more	28.8	642
Household income (Won)	Less than 1,200,000	5.3	94
	1,200,000-2,500,000	23.0	183
	2,500,000-3,500,000	23.9	218
	3,500,000-4,500,000	17.7	175
	4,500,000-7,000,000	30.2	258
	above 7,000,000	31.7	183
Occupation	Agriculture	4.8	42
	Self-run business	24.2	219
	Sales	25.8	92
	Blue collar job	28.3	356
	White collar job	33.1	223
	Student	31.1	106
	Housewife	11.2	223
	Not employed	17	106

Table 2 demonstrates similarities in demographic characteristics between the 2008 and 2016 participants: young, highly educated, and affluent people. Thirty percent of respondents in their 20s, 30s, and 40s said they participated in the 2016 protest while only ten percent of respondents in their 60s and older participated in the protest. Almost thirty percent of respondents who have at least a college degree participated in the protest. Additionally, more than thirty percent of the respondents whose monthly household income exceeded \$4,000 said that they participated in the protest while thirty three percent of the respondents who participated in the protest were white-collar employees.

Comparison of the 2002, 2008, and 2016 Candlelight Vigils

The candlelight protest has become the primary mode of public demonstration in South Korea since the turn of the century. It was the 2002 protest that first attracted massive public participation nationally. In 2008, even more people went to the street wielding candles and in 2016, more than 10 million people gathered to protest in candlelight, surpassing 2008’s large numbers. Though the debated issues were different each time, the same tactic, candlelight vigil, was used. The increase in the number of participants and the successful outcomes of the protests testifies to the effectiveness of candlelight vigils as a protest tactic in the South Korean context. The repetition of national-level candlelight vigils created learning effects: Korean netizens fostered a participatory mindset, developed their own online culture, and internalized new values and ideas (Kim and Kim 2009).

Table 3: Comparison of the 2002, 2008 and 2016/7 candlelight protests

	Initiative/pre senting issue	Bigger/expan ded issue	Participants	Tactics	Counter protest
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2002 (started in June but became national protest in late November.)	The deaths of the two schoolgirls and acquittal of the two US soldiers	Anti-US, Demand for revision of SOFA	Students, labor union members, users of internet communities	Candlelight vigil	Not visible
2008 (May to July)	The president (MB)'s decision to reopen Korea's market to U.S. beef imports	Anti-government, Anti-US, Anti-neoliberalism, Sustainable life, and food security	Initial mobilization was based on internet communities (mostly non-political)	Candlelight vigil and performances	Some but not visible
2016/7 (October 2016 to March 2017)	Resignation then impeachment of President Park Geun Hye	Anti-government, Restoration of democracy	Initial mobilization was based on internet communities, Participation from all political spectrum	Candlelight vigil and performances	<i>Taegeukgi Giphoei</i> (Well organized and clearly showed the political/age cleavage)

We compare the three candlelight protests focusing on two aspects: 1) issues and the diversification of participants and 2) the existence of counter-protest. First, both the candlelight vigils in 2002 and 2008 were initiated by public sentiment toward the U.S. In 2002, the major target of the protest was mainly the U.S. government while in 2008 the Lee administration was mainly blamed for their recklessness in the FTA negotiations. On the other hand, the participants differed between the two protests. The 2002 candlelight vigil involved many of the usual participants: students and labor unionists. However, the 2002 vigil was the first time that netizens were actively involved with mass protests. Average citizens increasingly participated in the 2008

and 2016 protests, eventually taking a leading role in the 2016 vigil. Additionally, the protest site took on a festival atmosphere in 2008 and included famous actors, singers, and entertainers; this element remained in the subsequent 2016 vigil

Even more people participated in 2016 candlelight protest. As in 2008, the 2016 protest was aimed at the Korean government. In fact, it was the first massive candlelight vigil that did not concern anti-U.S. sentiment. This time, the goals of the protesters were singular instead of diversified: the resignation and impeachment of Park Keun Hye. In 2016, the degradation of democracy that allowed an abuse of power by President Park was accepted as a tragic and pressing issue by most Korean citizens. Two-hundred and thirty-four members of the National Assembly out of 300, including 60 members of the ruling party, *Sanenuri*, voted for the impeachment of President Park. This reflected the ‘candlelight public sentiment.’ The protesters were unified and goal-oriented (Kim 2018). Even though the 2016 protest lasted for about six months, no participant was arrested or injured. Furthermore, after the final decision of the Constitutional Court, the one million-person protest peacefully ended.

Secondly, the level of counter-protest against the initial candlelight vigil varied over the three candlelight protests: In 2002, no counter-protest against the initial vigil was visible. It was in 2008 that the groups who were against the candlelight vigils appeared in the public eye and confronted vigil participants. However, in 2008 the counter-protest was perceived as a fringe movement, not comparable with the candlelight protest. For instance, around 1,900 members of the Korean Defoliant Comrade Club (KDCC), a conservative group consisting of victims of the defoliant used in the Vietnam War that focuses on social issues, attempted to enter the KBS and MBC buildings armed with iron bars and a liquefied petroleum gas tank to ‘stop... prejudiced

broadcasting' (Lee et al. 2010). The KDCC clashed with candlelight protesters once but it was only sporadic.

In 2016, however, the counter-protest became a significant force. Supporters of president Park, the majority of whom are from the older generation and fundamental Christians, organized a clearly visible counter-protest against the candlelight vigil. Since counter-protesters wielded the national flag of South Korea, *taegeukgi*, '*Taeguekgi giphwoi* (national flag rally)' became the official name of the counter-protest. The online community named 'the gathering of people who love Park Geun Hye' organized the protest with many other conservative organizations against the impeachment movement. On November 19, participants of this counter-protest gathered in front of Seoul Train Station. The candlelight vigil dissipated after the final decision of the Constitutional Court on March 10, 2017, but the counter-protest remained afterwards to protest the decision of the Constitutional Court. Right after the March 10 impeachment approval, many participants of the *Taeguekgi* rally were involved in violent confrontations. On that day only, four people were killed, and more than 31 policemen and participants were injured (Lee et al 2017, 49).

Conclusion

The candlelight vigils in South Korea in 2002, 2008, and 2016 share many common threads: in fact, one might argue that they are linked together rather than three distinct protest episodes (Kang 2012). We argue that the increased inclusiveness, peaceful solidarity among the participants, lack of violence, and strong and clear goals is the consequence of learning from the previous protests. In both 2002 and 2008, the candlelight vigils started as peaceful protests initiated by ordinary citizens (netizens) online. However, as the issue became diversified, the

vigils were co-opted by the labor unions or the violence of small groups of participants. Conversely, netizens remained in a key role throughout the 2016 episode. Another key distinction of the 2016 candlelight vigil from the previous ones, was that despite the diversification of participants, the protest had a singular goal: force Park to resign. The clarity of this goal is likely at least partially responsible for the large number of participants in the 2016 candlelight vigil compared to its predecessors. Finally, the 2016 candlelight vigil is also distinct because there was a visible counter-protest movement. This counter-protest, *Taegeukgi giphoei*, indicates the potential ability for far-right voices in Korea to become an organized political force.⁹

Given the enormity of candlelight vigils and their current dominance in the South Korean protest repertoire, the South Korean experience offers insight about this protest tactic that should be explored in different contexts to discern what is distinct about Korean candlelight vigils and what is true of candlelight vigils generally. We offer two specific avenues for further research. First, online spaces were key venues for candlelight vigil organizing, which may be true of vigils specifically or protests generally in the 21st Century. However, we need to examine candlelight vigils in other contexts to gain a greater understanding of vigil organizing. Furthermore, the South Korean experience suggests that candlelight vigils are increasingly being organized horizontally (by netizens and ‘ordinary people’) instead of vertically (by social movement activists). Is this true of vigils in other places? What impact does this type of organizing have on mobilization? Secondly, candlelight vigils are increasingly used in South Korea due to a political opportunity structure that restricts other types of protest performances. Exploring candlelight

⁹ In the 2020 Korean general elections, the release of Park Geun Hye was the major agenda item for radical right parties, though none of them succeeded in gaining a seat. The counter-protest against the 2016-2017 candlelight movement has facilitated the emergence of the Korean far-right movement.

vigils in other contexts may expose other reasons for the use of this tactic over others such as marches and demonstrations.

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