

## **The Multitude and the Changing Face of Korean Democracy: The 2008 Candlelight Protests and “Swarm Intelligence”**

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### **Introduction**

Manuel Castells, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, concluded that the network has become the dominant organizing paradigm (469-478). This has been facilitated by technological advances in mobile communication technologies and the deep penetration of the internet into our lives. Recently, the examples of the protests of the so-called “Arab Spring” and the Occupy Wall Street Movement have proved that these very same networks made over the internet or on mobile devices can be turned into potent tools for political mobilization and activism. However, preceding both of these were the massive candlelight protests in South Korea from May to August of 2008 that were held in protest of the government’s plan to reopen the South Korean market to the import of US beef.<sup>1</sup> Like the Arab Spring uprising and the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the 2008 candlelight protests show the ability to politically organize across communication networks on the internet.

That such a movement would arise in South Korea, of all countries, is not at all surprising; it is by many accounts one of the “most wired” countries on earth (Shirky 2010, 34). The South Korean government, from 1998 to 2002, invested heavily in the expansion of mobile services and broadband internet connections across the country, often investing in technology that, at the time, seemed too cutting edge and too much of a risk – such as Wi-Fi, DMB, and WiBro (Lim and Lee, 247-248). It is then ironic that the communication tools which were created through intense government investment would later be used as tools of resistance to the government.

To be certain, the candlelight protest of 2008 was not the first instance of cyber political activism to take place in hyper-connected South Korea. Indeed, over the past decade, South Korea has had a history of successful political mobilization over the internet (Lim and Lee 248-250). One such example came in November of 2002, when

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<sup>1</sup> The import of US beef in South Korea was banned in 2003 following the discovery of a cow infected with the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or “mad cow disease”. For a review of the debate over BSE and US beef in the years before 2008, see Hong Sung-gi, pages 104-114.

netizens organized massive candlelight vigils in Seoul in memory of Shin Hyo-sun and Shim Mi-seon, two middle-school girls who were killed when accidentally run over by a US military armored vehicle. At its height, the protests drew as many as 30,000 demonstrators and, as will be discussed below, would presage many of the important aspects of the candlelight protests of 2008 (Kim Won 141).

The 2008 candlelight protests were highly significant for several reasons, but chief among them are how the protests were organized and who participated in them. The protests were organized not by a single activist organization, but by a disparate network of netizens spread across several different chat websites, or "cafes". Thus, networks developed on the internet allowed individuals "to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations" (Shirky 2008, 21). Furthermore, those who participated in the protests, both on- and off-line, were quite different from those who had traditionally protested in South Korean society throughout the 1980s and 1990s – mostly university students and labor union activists. The 2008 protests, in contrast, saw the active participation of a wide range of demographics, even including some – such as middle-aged women and teenagers – many had considered politically inactive (Han 6).

Moreover, the protests did not follow the well-established pattern of protest in South Korea, with "workers or other citizens clashing with riot police" (Aleman 71). Instead, the protesters made use of mobile communication devices and broadband internet to coordinate and employ unique tactics. Also, the same technology, coupled with digital cameras, allowed the protesters to undertake a form of citizen journalism, bypassing the mainstream media in getting their message to the public (Lim and Lee 251).

However, it is not enough to simply recount the individual aspects of the 2008 candlelight protests; taken together, these elements of the 2008 candlelight protests were able to produce a unique and powerful political movement that forced the government to alter its course of actions.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore important to understand the political nature of the candlelight protest. For this, the concept of the "multitude", as described by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, is highly useful in explaining how seemingly isolated, unrelated individuals could come together to form a potent form of political resistance. The protesters who participated in the 2008 candlelight protests could collectively be

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<sup>2</sup> The relentless protests led President Lee Myung-bak to publicly apologize twice and forced the government to limit the import of US beef to cattle less than 30 months old (Kim and Harden).

considered a "multitude" because they were a group of individuals with irreducible differences that, nevertheless, were capable of collective political action. The commonality between the protesters, rather than being based on any shared organizational, ethnic, or class identity, was *created* through communication networks on the internet – a process Hardt and Negri refer to as "biopolitical production" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 93-95).

The concept of "swarm intelligence", used by Hardt and Negri to explain how the multitude can conduct coordinated resistance while lacking a central authority, can help us to understand how the various groups of netizens were able to coordinate their actions and to employ unique protest tactics. Furthermore, the case of the 2008 candlelight protests – with its extensive use of mobile communication devices, broadband internet connections, and various blogs and websites for sharing user-created content (UCC) – illuminates how swarm intelligence is constructed.

Finally, the collective action of the multitude during the 2008 candlelight protests points to important developments in democratic participation in South Korea – chief among these is that political mobilization through networks on the internet has become a standard practice. Furthermore, the networks have opened the door to new forms of democratic participation, such as "part-time activism" (Lim and Kann 101) and "virtual" participation (Lim and Lee 253). These new practices of democratic participation have given a stronger voice to those who had been previously politically ignored, such as teenagers and women. Therefore, the 2008 candlelight protests are a significant indication of the future directions of democratic participation in South Korea.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Multitude**

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri conceived of "the multitude" as a form in which individuals retain their separate identities yet are capable of collective action (2004, xiv). The collective action of the multitude is not structured like a normal hierarchical movement which requires the leadership of some vanguard. In these two aspects, we can see that the multitude lends itself to the interpretation of the 2008 candlelight protests because it helps to explain how a movement like the candlelight protests could have been so successful despite the lack of a clear, strong central authority.

*The Multitude* was written by Hardt and Negri as a follow up to their explication of "empire," which represents "network power" of the dominant nation-states, supranational institutions, and major capitalist corporations (2000, 3-21). "Empire" is the system that ensures the stability in which the globalized capitalist political economic structure can

thrive. Though the nation-state still survives under Empire, the sovereignty of the nation-state is diminished, and nation-states are subordinated into a severe hierarchy.

The multitude is also composed of networks of collaboration across nations and continents, but it is framed in the vocabulary of resistance and is the alternative to empire. The multitude can be likened to other conceptions of resistance, such as 'the people' and 'the masses,' however multitude is different in that, while it contains the potential for powerful collective action, its component members retain their individual identities – unlike 'the people' who are subordinated to a nation-state, or 'the masses' who are formed into a unitary structure in order to act (2004, xiv).

Because the multitude is composed of different individuals with disparate identities, the "common" must be constructed in order to maintain cohesion. This process is termed "biopolitical production," and it is the act of individuals coming together to share knowledge, making it "common" (2004, xv-xvii). This in turn produces new knowledge, which is then communicated again. Biopolitical production thus is the spiraling network of communications producing and reproducing the "common" which binds the multitude. The prefix "bio" is significant because it indicates that such production is not merely an economic process of constructing material goods, but also includes the construction of the so-called "immaterial" – information, knowledge, ideas, images, relationships, and affects – and touches social, economic, political and cultural facets of life (2004, 65).

Biopolitical production is done through the process of "immaterial labor" - labor which produces knowledge and relationships – which, as Hardt and Negri noted, has become the hegemonic labor practice in post-modern societies (2004, 113). The production and maintenance of relationships and networks is increasingly important not only economically, but also socially, culturally, and – as we shall see below – politically as well.

The desire for true democracy is central to the multitude. It is a 'bottom up' response to the 'top down' order imposed by Empire, and therefore, the structure of the multitude tends to be more democratic and based on collaboration. Lacking what would traditionally be considered a head or a command, centralized decision making is replaced by more diffuse leadership (2004, 100). Far from being a riotous, violent mob, however, the multitude produces order through the communications process of biopolitical production. The lack of a central command has been quite perplexing for many states and entities who have found themselves under the coordinated assault of the multitude, and the South Korean government in 2008 was no exception.

To explain how the multitude resists, Hardt and Negri borrowed from the realm of biology by using the term "swarm intelligence". They described it thus:

When a distributed network attacks, it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then disappear back into the environment. From an external perspective, the network attack is described as a swarm because it appears formless. Since the network has no center that dictates order, those who can only think in terms of traditional models may assume it has no organization whatsoever - they see mere spontaneity and anarchy... ..If one looks inside a network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational, and creative. It has swarm intelligence (91).

'Intelligence,' in this sense, is social rather than individual, and it is dependent on communication across networks. The individual components communicate and coordinate with each other and from this network arises collective behavior, despite the lack of a central command. This "multitude of different creative agents" is able to not only to achieve collective action, but is capable of unique and flexible tactics of resistance that a single hierarchically structured organization is not (92).

## **The Multitude and the 2008 Candlelight Protests**

### **Online connections: Biopolitical Production and Communication Networks**

In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells described a struggle between the Self and the Net (1-25). However, as Kazys Varnelis notes, in today's "networked culture" the network has become an integral part of one's identity (152-153). With the rapid expansion of social-networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, individuals increasingly construct their own identities within various overlapping online networks. South Korean society has been in the forefront of this trend of developing "networked" identities through the explosion of SNSs and cafes (Lim and Lee 248).<sup>3</sup> The development of these online social networks is important not so much in the content of *what* is shared, but rather in the *actual act of sharing*. Youths sharing content on the internet are "building the capacity to connect, to communicate, and ultimately, to mobilize" (Shirky 2010, 38). It is precisely these online networks across which South Korean netizens were able to "communicate" and "mobilize" for action during the 2008 candlelight protests and, by

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<sup>3</sup> South Korean social-networking sites such as Cyworld and iloveschool were both founded in 1999, predating such well-known SNS as Friendster (2002), Myspace (2003), and Facebook (2004).

doing so, engage in the biopolitical production that would form the basis of the multitude that was mobilized for protest.

Long before the first candlelight in Cheonggye Plaza in Seoul, political debate – and later political mobilization – had already begun in chat rooms, blogs, and cafes in cyberspace. Following the South Korean government's announcement of the resumption of beef imports from the US on April 18, netizens took to the internet chat rooms to voice their opinions, debate, and criticize the government's policy. However, the act of individuals posting comments or opinions on an online message board does not alone create a political movement. Shirky suggests that successful online movements advance through progressively more difficult stages: from sharing to cooperation to collaborative production to collective action (2008, 49-54). Kim Kyung-Mi and Park Youn-Min, in regards to the 2008 candlelight protests, referred to this process as "convergence participation", and divided it into three "convergences" (156).

The first convergence was at the level of media and involved the coming together of mass media and new individualized interactive media on the internet. Individuals took content viewed in the mass media and then repackaged and reproduced it by posting it on a blog, joining a discussion forum, or commenting on a message board. Individuals, in their roles as "prosumers" (Toffler 284), not only performed the task of distributing mass media material, but even augmented it by commenting on, editing, and remixing it (Lim and Kann 95). This pattern is clearly visible following the airing of MBC's highly controversial episode of *PD Notebook (PD Soocheop)* entitled "American Beef: Is it Really Free of Mad Cow Disease?" on April 29. In the hours immediately after the airing of *PD Notebook*, the number of messages posted on the anti-government website antiMB doubled to over 1,200 (Kim and Park 163).

One of the main sites where this online debate took place was Daum's<sup>4</sup> public debate portal called "Agora"; a website which Chang Woo-young, drawing on the ideas of Jürgen Habermas, described as an "online public sphere" (2012, 3-7). Agora attracted a massive number of unique visitors leading up to and throughout the protests<sup>5</sup> and had

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<sup>4</sup> Daum is one of the major internet portal sites in South Korea.

<sup>5</sup> 4,998,099 in April, 6,534,129 in May, and 7,120,142 in June. In comparison, the "debate room" of Naver, South Korea's number one portal site, drew just 45,000, 38,000, and 42,000 for the respective months (Chang 2012, 13).

the majority of messages posted online regarding the import of US beef<sup>6</sup> (Chang 2012, 11-13). Furthermore, of the netizens who posted messages in the political debate chat room of Agora, a vast majority (69.6 percent in May, 76 percent in June, and 80.9 percent in July) only contributed once (Chang 2012, 15), displaying a "Long Tail" pattern that suggests a diversity of views and opinions (Anderson). Clearly, websites like Agora had become a place for online deliberation for a large number of netizens and were important in the setting of public opinion regarding the issue of US beef imports.

The second convergence occurred at the level of communication and involved the convergence of rational and emotional communications (Kim and Park 160). In addition to posting and reposting information (such as articles about the restrictions of US beef imports in Japan and Taiwan, video clips of BSE-infected "mad cows", etc.), netizens posted highly emotional messages as well (Kim and Park 163-165). The number of emotional posts (posts expressing "anger", "anxiety", or "fear") on Naver blogs about US beef imports began to sharply rise in the days following the airing of *PD Notebook* on April 29, reaching a peak around the time of the first street protests (165). The use of emotion in the mobilization of support for the protests, particularly among middle and high school students, would prove very important. In a survey of participating middle and high school students, a majority listed emotional reasons for joining the protest – 56.1 percent cited anger at the Lee Myung-bak government and 14.6 percent cited fear of BSE (Kim and Lee 24).

This outpouring of emotions on cafes and message boards tapped into preexisting emotions of various groups on the internet. For example, anger expressed at the South Korean government echoed the anger that many middle and high school students felt toward the newly established Lee Myung-bak government's recently announced education policy (Jeong; Yun and Chang 145). Also, the anxiety expressed about the dangers of US beef resonated with housewives who were concerned about food safety and the health of their families (Chae and Kim 83). The sharing of these emotional responses helped to cement a sense of community across online networks and was highly important in the process of biopolitical production.

Many of the cafes and blogs on which these communications took place originally had

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<sup>6</sup> Of the 28,800 messages regarding the import of US beef posted on debate boards, 67 percent were on Agora. DCinside received the next highest number of posts at 11 percent (Chang 2012, 11).

little to do with politics. Among teenagers, two of the most popular websites for discussing US beef imports, 'The Bizarre or The Truth' and 'JjukBbang', were sites focused on entertainment news (Yun and Chang 155). Among the married housewives that participated in the protests, many of them got information from the website 82cook, which is focused on housekeeping (Chae and Kim 77). This shows that the biopolitical production that produced the multitude that participated in the 2008 candlelight protests was conducted across a wide range of preexisting social and cultural networks. Furthermore, the case of the 2008 candlelight protests displays the political potential of seemingly non-political networks.

Thus, a community had been constructed on the internet consisting of ties that were what Mark Granovetter would describe as being "weak" to "absent" (1363). However, through the process of shared communication – biopolitical production – the necessary connections were made in order to create commonness among all participants, despite their widely different identities. This is a community which, as Shirky noted, could not have even been conceived of – let alone constructed – before the recent advances in communication tools and high-speed internet (2008, 47-48). The community, however, had not yet formed into a multitude – for that, it would have to move beyond the sharing of information to collaborative action and, finally, to collective mobilization. The following stage represents Kim and Park's third convergence, which occurred on the level of activism: the convergence of online and offline activism (166-167). As Hardt and Negri note, biopolitical production created subjectivity for the members (2004, 189). It was at this point that collective action, through the 'swarm intelligence' of the multitude, was possible.

### **Mobilization and Participation: 'Swarm Intelligence' and the Collective Action of Individuals**

In contrast to the intuitively expectable pattern of protest of 'organize, then take action', the 2008 candlelight protests mostly followed a pattern of 'take action first, and then organize'. Indeed, many of the organizations that would become central to the candlelight protests, such as the Baby Stroller Brigade<sup>7</sup> and the Candlelight Girls<sup>8</sup>, were

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<sup>7</sup> Originally suggested by a netizen on the website AntiMB, the Baby Stroller Brigade was a group of middle-aged married housewives who marched in the protests with their children in their strollers (Chae and Kim).

<sup>8</sup> The Candlelight Girls (*chotbul sonyeo*) consisted of middle and high school girls. First

not founded until well after the street protests had begun (Chae and Kim 81; Yun and Chang 147). The protests, therefore, lacked a single, centralized directing authority; this was an aspect that most perplexed authorities in the Lee Myung-bak government that sought, in vain, to target the “masterminds” and the “powerful backers” of organizations such as the Baby Stroller Brigade (Chae Song-mu; Kim, Park, and Shin). Indeed, as Hardt and Negri rightly surmised, such a headless “monster” composed of “living flesh” must seem grotesque and “terrifying” to governments targeted by the multitude (2004, 192). Lacking a central command, the multitude involved in the 2008 candlelight protests coordinated its various constituent organizations through communication networks, the swarm intelligence. This swarm intelligence, an extension of the biopolitical production, made use of mobile communication devices, nearly ubiquitous high-speed internet access, and online networks for collaborative, and later collective, action. Initially, this collective action took the form of online protest, but later coalesced into the massive offline street protests.

In discussing online political activism, Lim and Kann concluded that the practices of online movements tend to mirror traditional offline activism; paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan, they referred to this practice as “backing into the future” (92). Following this pattern, online political action in the case of the 2008 candlelight protests began with a petition posted on Agora calling for the impeachment of President Lee Myung-bak (Chang 2012, 14). Two days after the announcement of the resumption of US beef imports, the petition had received 20,000 signatures, swiftly climbing to 200,000 following the airing of *PD Notebook*, and reaching over 1 million signatures about a week after the first street protests. Cyber-activism also took less conventional forms at this point, including an attack launched by angry netizens on the same night the *PD Notebook* program aired against the Blue House’s homepage, flooding the server and crashing it (Kim and Park 166). Other similar attacks were later directed at police authority websites (Yun and Chang 145).

Another more traditional protest action collaboratively organized over the internet was a media campaign mainly directed against the three major conservative newspapers – *Joseon Ilbo*, *Dong-ah Ilbo*, and *Jungang Ilbo*,<sup>9</sup> (Chang 2010, 44). The participants of the

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participating in the protests on May 17, the Candle Girls were often an important part of speeches and public statements during the protests (Yun and Chang).

<sup>9</sup> These three newspapers are often derisively referred to collectively as *jojungdong* to emphasize

candlelight protests widely criticized these three newspapers because of their perceived bias against the protests. This campaign consisted of both “positive” and “negative” campaigns (Chang 2010, 44). The positive campaign consisted of drives to increase the subscriptions of progressive newspapers such as *the Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, campaigns to increase advertisement revenues for the same progressive newspapers, and a massive fundraising campaign for the online amateur-journalism website OhMyNews – one of the major sources of information for participants in the candlelight protests – which raised 145 million won (44). The negative campaign focused mainly on an advertisement boycott launched against the three conservative newspapers, a major center of which was the Daum café titled the Citizens’ Campaign for Media Consumer Sovereignty (*eollon sobija jugwon gukmin kaempein*) (Chang 2010, 45). A comparison of the number of advertisements in all three conservative newspapers during the height of the 2008 protests and the number of advertisements during the same period the previous year suggests the campaign was fairly successful; advertisements in all three newspapers fell by over half compared to the year before (Chang 2010, 46).

These two forms of activism – a petition campaign and a boycott campaign – are not new forms of activism; indeed, they have been used by activist organizations in South Korea for decades. The difference in the case of the 2008 protests is that advancements in communication technology and the development of online networks reduced the costs of organizing such campaigns to near zero (Shirky 2008, 47-48). Furthermore, this type of cyber-activism allows for “part-time activism”; activism without the need to commit substantial time or effort (Lim and Kann 101). Individuals, visiting a café on Daum could participate in the protest movement by merely adding their names to a list. On its own, this action is insignificant; taken in coordination with the rest of the multitude, the individual becomes part of the “swarm”. This was a type of activism where people “who cared a little could participate a little, while being effective in aggregate”, the essence of swarm intelligence (Shirky 2008, 181).

Online activism has its distinct advantages, but “face-to-face gatherings” has proved “necessary to sustain, organize, and focus” political efforts (Lim and Kann 101). The multitude organized in response to the opening of US beef imports displayed an impressive ability to act collectively on the internet; however, had the movement remained only on the internet, it is unlikely it would have had the political impact that it

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their similar content and shared conservative tenor.

did. As it were, in early May the movement became a “hybrid” of on- and offline elements. Like all other actions of the 2008 protests against US beef, the decision to move from online to the streets was not undertaken by a centralized authority or single activist organization, but rather was the product of communications across networks. The number of messages suggesting a candlelight protest posted on Naver and Daum blogs and community websites increased sharply in the days between April 27 and May 2, the date of the first street protest (Kim and Park 167). On the evening of May 2, an estimated 10,000 people gathered for a peaceful candlelight protest in Cheonggye Plaza in downtown Seoul (Heo). Billed as a “Candlelight Festival”, it featured live music performances in addition to political speeches. The next day’s protest brought out approximately 20,000 protesters, most of which were teenagers.

The protest on the evening of May 3 was organized on the website called “Mad Cow” (*michincow.net*), however the participants were not members of any civil society organization, but rather netizens who had taken the individual choice to come to the protest (Kim Mi Young). This is a pattern of participation that would be typical, particularly among teenagers, throughout the 2008 candlelight protests. According to a poll conducted of teenage participants of the candlelight protests, a majority learned of the protest on the internet (51 percent), rather than from friends (17 percent) or TV (17 percent) (Yun and Chang 153). Furthermore, 71.3 percent responded that their decision to participate was an individual “voluntary” decision, rather than through the invitation of a friend (18 percent) or parents (5.6 percent) (Yun and Chang 155).

The candlelight protests, throughout the following weeks and months, gradually increased in size, scope, and level of organization. The weekly – at times, almost daily – protests continued to gain more and more participants, reaching a peak of roughly 500,000 across the country on the night of June 6, 2008 (“Busan-do Gwangju-do”). The increase in the amount of people brought in various different demographics, and many groups sought to distinguish their own identities among the multitude; in addition to the Candlelight Girls and the Baby Stroller Brigade mentioned above, other groups included the “necktie brigade” and the “high heel shoes band”. As the number of groups participating in the protests continued to grow, the range of grievances multiplied to include not only the issues of US beef and education policy, but also the proposed privatization of the national health insurance plan, President Lee Myung-bak’s proposed Grand Canal, and the independence of public broadcasting channels (Yun and Chang 150).

Essential to the success of the multitude in the 2008 candlelight protests was the effective deployment of "swarm intelligence", and essential to this swarm intelligence was the effective use of mobile communication devices and communication networks. It is therefore no surprise that technology played such a pivotal role in the coordination of strategies throughout the protests. Mobile phones were an essential tool, and many of the streets protests were organized and coordinated by text message (Lim and Lee 252). A very innovative example of this use of technology employed by the protesters was the use of Google Earth to mark the location of police barricades and water cannons in Gwanghwamun Square (Min Kyung Bae 95). This was possible thanks to advanced mobile technology and constant high-speed internet access.

Protesters also used mobile technology to conduct street journalism by posting live streaming-video of the protests on websites such as Afreeca, thus avoiding a reliance on the mainstream media to get the protesters' message out to the public (Chang 2010, 41-43). This amateur journalism also served to expose instances of violence and brutality against the protesters on the part of the riot police – such as the incident on the night of June 1, when a 22 year-old female college student was repeatedly kicked in the head by booted riot police (Amnesty International). Thus, technology, as the conduit of the multitude's 'swarm intelligence', allowed for unique forms of resistance.

### **Awakening: The Future of Democratic Participation in South Korea**

Hardt and Negri contend that at the center of the formation of the multitude is a "profound desire for democracy – a real democracy of the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom" (2004, 67). Indeed, the participants in the 2008 candlelight protests often defined their struggle as one for democracy.<sup>10</sup> More than any feelings of "anti-Americanism" or "pro-North Korea" – as some on the political right have suggested – and more than any ideas of "anti-neoliberalism" – as claimed by those on the left – the protesters were mostly animated by the "anti-democratic" policies of the Lee Myung-bak government (Cho 140). This is why the scope of the issues covered by

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<sup>10</sup> Based on the author's observances, this often took the form of appropriating the symbols of the democratization movement of the 1980s by the use of certain well-known protest songs, such as "A March for My Beloved" (*Im-eul wihan haengjin gok*), or the staging of a massive protest on June 10. A more unique form was a performance in which Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea - the Republic of Korea is a democratic republic in which the power is derived from the people - was sung with an accompanying dance routine.

the candlelight protests was able to expand without breaking the cohesion of the multitude; all the issues – the agreement on the import of US beef, the Grand Canal, the privatization of health insurance – stemmed from a perceived lack of democratic communication between the government and the people. These various grievances arose as the newly inaugurated Lee Myung-bak government was increasingly seen as being solely focused on its role of guaranteeing the “rights of capital”, rather than its duty to protect the welfare of its citizens (Hardt and Negri 2004, 171). The protesters could simultaneously demand action on all of these issues because they all had a commonality that placed them all within the realm of what Hardt and Negri termed “biopolitical grievances”; that commonality was a demand for democracy (2004, 282).

However, more than simply forming a temporary alliance, the protesters shared information and educated each other, forming a sort of offline “public sphere” to complement the one that had been formed online (Kim Young Ok). In this way, many of those who participated in the 2008 candlelight protests likened their experience to a kind of political awakening in which the participant’s “eyes were opened” (Chae and Kim 91, Kim Young Ok 49, Yun and Chang 150). They suddenly became aware of how politics worked and how things like government policies, free-trade agreements, and economic trends directly affect their daily lives.

In particular, middle-aged women who participated in the protests became aware of many different social issues through discussions at the protests, and they developed a new political consciousness which continued even after the end of the candlelight protests (Kim Young Ok 61). Many have become involved in consumer issues, such as food safety - prompting a number of them to subsequently join consumer cooperatives (Chae and Kim 95).

Another group that was profoundly changed by the candlelight protests was the teenage students who participated. One year after the protests, many of those students who participated in the protests expressed pride at having been a part of a movement they identified with “protect[ing] citizens’ rights” and “defend[ing] democracy (Kim and Lee 27-28). Furthermore, they claimed to have developed a strong identity as a part of the “candlelight generation,” having a strong sense of solidarity that, if continued, could lead to a wave of youth participation in politics (Kim and Lee 30).

Moreover, the 2008 candlelight protests saw a change in the definition of the term “participant”. As mentioned above, many netizens took part in the online activism (i.e.

signing a petition on agora or donating money to OhMyNews) but did not participate in the street protests. In addition to the “part-time activists”, there were also the “virtual activists”: those who did not attend the street protests but viewed them live via streaming video posted on websites like Afreeca (Lim and Lee 253). The number of “virtual” participants was quite significant; videos of the candlelight protests posted on Afreeca between May 25 and June 10 reached 17,196, with a total of 7.71 million views. Between June 1 and June 5, as many as 256,000 viewers were watching videos of the candlelight protests at the same time (Chang 2010, 43). In addition to viewing the protests, these virtual participants would also blog about what they saw, further contributing to the effectiveness of the protests (Lim and Lee 253).

Some have criticized the 2008 candlelight protests as representing a collapse in authority (Hong Sung-gi 123). They view the vigorous exchange of ideas and opinions online as a cacophony that drowns out the voice of public authorities, and they long for a more structured and restricted public sphere (125). However, the open structure of the multitude, in which individuals and groups could express their own identities and opinions, created a space where groups previously under-represented in politics – such as women and students – were able to make their voices heard.

## **Conclusion**

The ability to form such a large, coordinated, agile, and successful multitude has been greatly enhanced in South Korea by the advances in communication technology and internet networks. It is important to note, however, that technology did not create the 2008 candlelight protests. There was already a trend toward greater citizen activism and involvement in civil society preceding the events of 2008 (Sunhyuk Kim 67). Furthermore, this activism had already been trending towards so-called “post-materialist” values (Kim Ji-young), a definition which many would use to describe the 2008 candlelight protests (Han 5). What the enhanced technology did was reduce the barriers to communication between groups and individuals, allowing for not only collaboration and collective action but also new forms of individual action, such as part-time activism. More importantly, the communication networks established with the new communication technology provided the channels through which biopolitical production was made possible. Later, these same networks would provide the means to develop “swarm intelligence” among the protesters – the rapid sharing of information – that allowed for coordinated tactics and new forms of resistance. Without these – biopolitical production and swarm intelligence – the forming of a resistance of the multitude would have been impossible.

As Clay Shirky has noted, "Revolution doesn't happen when society adopts new technology, it happens when society adopts new behaviors" (2008, 160). In this sense, South Korea may have already witnessed a "revolution" in the form of the 2008 candlelight protests. Patterns of political participation have changed, and mobilization on the internet has become standard political strategy. This suggests that the potential exists for future multitudes to form and shape politics in South Korea. All that is needed is the spark.

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