

# Collective Memory and Formation of the “Unconscious” Political Generation: Focusing on the Former Period Baby Boomers in Korea\*

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*This study aims to show how the collective memories of industrialization and dictatorship Korean baby boomers experienced in the formative period of political socialization have unconscious effect on Korea's political process. Research findings include: First, baby boomers have preferences for strong leaders-moderate civil society relationship. This is in line with the positive collective memory of President Park Chung Hee, who led industrialization and remarkable economic growth based on his authoritarian rule. Second, political choice of baby boomers in their lifetime voting since 1987 manifested a regional cleavage between Honam and non-Honam. This shows the unconscious effect of their sense of belonging to a political party and regional identity, formed according to the division into Honam and non-Honam regions. Third, baby boomers from non-Honam attacked progressive or critical political parties and social forces in a manner similar to the way President Park Chung Hee ruled using anticommunism to justify violence and oppression against political opposition forces. The above discussions reveal the need to consider not just political generation as a social movement force, but also the “unconscious” political generation that influences political process by their political values and faith.*

**Keywords:** baby boomers, political generation, generation politics, political orientation

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## Introduction

Korean baby boomers revealed their political presence through voting in the 18th presidential election of 2012. With a high voting rate of 80 percent or over, they played a critical role in the winning of the conservative party candidate. Various political comments ensued, such as the “betrayal of people in their 50s,” (*The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, Dec. 21, 2012<sup>1</sup>) or “the power of the 50s” (*TV Chosun*, Dec. 22, 2012<sup>2</sup>). The most predominant way to explain “50s’ becoming conservative” was to see it as the “manifestation of social and economic insecurity.” As a “sandwich generation” required to support both children and parents and unprepared for their own old age, their wish for security manifested as politically conservative orientation (*Munhwa Ilbo*, Nov. 8, 2013<sup>3</sup>). A similar and yet different explanation is to heed the effect of the biological age of the 50s, emphasizing that generally, the older the voters, the more conservative they become (*News1*, Dec. 23, 2012<sup>4</sup>). Though socio-economic situation or biological features can explain political orientation of an age cohort to some extent, these explanations overlook the effect of unique political faith or values shared by an age group.

In studies of generation politics, the political generation theory assumes that political attitude and behavior of a particular population cohort are formed through historical and social experiences in the formative period of political socialization, corresponding to late youth or early adulthood. The attitudes as formed have constant and unchanging impact on their later lives. Based on this assumption, this study aims to show how baby boomers’ experiences of historical and social events in their formative periods of political socialization have formed political faith and values unique to the generation and then influence their subsequent political attitude and behavior. The 1970s, their formative periods and the dynamic period of Korea’s modern and contemporary history, are represented economically by the success of heavy and chemical industries, special demands from the Middle East, and dispatch of workforce overseas. In addition, aggravated military dictatorship, democratic movement against dictatorship, and the establishment of national mobilization system through the New Village

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<sup>1</sup> [http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?artid=201212212230515&code=910110](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201212212230515&code=910110)

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.tvchosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/12/22/2012122200729.html](http://news.tvchosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/12/22/2012122200729.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=2013110801070523037002>

<sup>4</sup> <http://news1.kr/articles/?945188>

Movement also represent this decade politically. Kim (2013) analyzed the conservative orientation of the 50s in the 18th presidential election as a generation effect, not general age effect, contending that baby boomers' positive memory of former president Park Chung Hee with experiences of state-led economic growth resulted in support for conservative party candidates. However, this argument lacked empirical evidence about what memory this generation has of the president, what value and meaning are given to the memory, and how the memory affected their voting behavior.

Through in-depth interview of Korean baby boomers, this study aims to show how their memory of historical and social events in the 1970s subsequently affected politics in reality. More specifically, in line with the theories of formation of political generation and collective memory, it aims to show that the political orientation of the baby boomer generation was formed through the experiences of industrialization and dictatorship in the 1970s, and through the collective memory of this period, they became an "unconscious political generation" that impacts the current political ground. Based on the life course interviews with some baby boomers, this study also attempts to find answers to the following questions: How have industrialization and dictatorship been imprinted in the memory of the baby boomer generation? How have they influenced their voting choices after South Korea's democratization of 1987? How are their collective memories of industrialization and dictatorship represented in their expectations of the state and politics as they face old age in the current economic crisis of 2012?

This article is divided into six parts. Section II reviews theory and research trends on the political generation and collective memory, followed by an overview on research methodology in section III. Section IV analyzes the attributes of baby boomers' collective memories of the state-led industrialization, dictatorship, and democratic movement in the 1970s. Section V explores how collective memories of the 1970s are represented in the subsequent political choices through their lifetime voting behavior after 1987 and attitudes toward the relationship between the state and civil society. Section VI wraps up this study with comprehensive discussion and conclusions.

## Literature Review

### *Formation of the Political Generation and Collective Memory*

Generation politics has been used as a variable to explain changes in political attitude or behavior such as voting choice or support for a political party and furthermore to predict macro political changes (Hwang 2009, p. 127). Political generation theory assumes that political values, faith or attitudes are formed through historical and social events commonly experienced by a population group born in the similar period and is sustainable despite changes in age, life course, or political environment. Researchers who strictly use the generation concept of Mannheim distinguish the concept of cohort from political generation. According to Braungart and Braungart, “political generation” is not formed until members of a cohort share unique attitude and behavior clearly distinguishable from other age group and are mobilized into forces of political change, while “cohort” is “a group of persons born around the same time who share a particular set of social and historical experiences” (Braungart and Braungart 1986, p. 215). In other words, it can be said that political generation exists “when an age group rejects the existing order, joins together, and attempts to redirect the course of politics as its generational mission,” and solidarity and identity as a political force for social change become essential elements of political generation (Braungart and Braungart 1986, p. 217).

However, the concept of political generation is limited in that it generalizes the experience of the few who actively participated in social change to that of the whole members of generation. Park argued that Mannheim’s concept of generation with a “strong implication of social movement” has the problem of concentrating on the social movement force of the few without addressing the generational issue that common people, who do not actively participate in social movement, experienced in everyday life (Park 2003, p. 11). Thus, the concept of political generation overlooks the unintended and unconscious effect on political changes of political values or faith commonly shared by the group of a particular cohort through momentous historical and social events, even if they did not participate in political and social process.

Schuman and Scott (1989) and Schuman and Corning (2012) paid attention to the unconscious cohort effect (Schuman and Scott 1989, p. 360) by combining Mannheim’s generation theory with the concept of collective memory (Hur 2014, p. 264). Based on Mannheim’s view that formative period

of political socialization begins with about the age of 17 and ends with 25 years or so, they saw the formative period as a critical period and attempted to prove the impact of this period on the collective formation of generation memory. The "formative period" is a period of experiencing a "fresh contact" (Mannheim 1952, p. 293) when one leaves a familiar group of the past, including family or community, to enter a new group. It is also a period of "seriously questioning and reflecting on things" (Mannheim 1952, p. 300). Schuman and Scott saw this period as a "critical period" in the formation of collective memory, because the experience of "fresh contact" and "reflecting" has the effect that cannot be experienced again in one's life afterwards. As such, the memory formed during this period lasts so strongly as to have continuous impact (Schuman and Scott 1989, p. 361).

Schuman and Scott attempted to prove the hypothesis that the "formative period" becomes the "critical period" in connection with Halbwachs' concept of "collective memory." According to Halbwachs, memory is not a simple recall of past events but a selected and reconstructed past based on the present. Though the agent of memory is always an individual, the moment the individual chooses the material from the storage of memory, memory becomes something social, and an individual's memory of a particular event is influenced by the interaction with others in the group (Jedlowski 2001, p. 31). Individuals' memory of particular historical and social events can be particular, but maintenance or extinction of memory is fundamentally collective in that it depends on the "social frame of memory," that is, particular contexts for recalling the past, selecting some of them, and collecting and rearranging them (Kim 1999, pp. 576-90). The source of collective memory lies in direct and indirect experience of events. Halbwachs divided memories into autobiographical memory based on a person's direct experience and historical memory formed by hearsay from the previous generations or through recording or learning about the past, regarding the former as lasting with personally rich meanings than the latter (Schuman and Scott 1989, p. 361; Kim 1999, pp. 577-78).

Schuman and Corning confirmed the generation effect of memory through empirical data that autobiographical memory of events experienced during the "critical period" is far better remembered than historical memory. However, they saw it difficult to directly infer people's future political attitude or behavior from this. This is because autobiographical memories recalled by many people are personal and particular so that they have little clear political implications, even though they include political interpretation. Otherwise, there are completely different assessments of historical and social events,

positive and negative, depending on groups. Such contrasting assessments show the existence of Mannheim's "generational units" that respond differently to events depending on their social status, and it means that we cannot generalize the viewpoint of a particular group in a generation to that of the whole (Schuman and Scott 1989, p. 379).

Therefore, the implication of collective memory on the future political attitude lies in the subjective meanings that individuals and groups grant to particular events, rather than the content of what is recalled. Seeing memory as a sort of narrative practice, Jedlowski argued that memory should be analyzed by two aspects, that is, subjective meanings given by individuals and expression of a sense of belonging to a social group as each individual's frame of reference. The narrative of past memory is a socializing action in itself and a tool to confirm relationship with the reference group in which individuals have social unity and a sense of belonging. Some of the important functions of collective memory are to strengthen the cohesion of social groups and to consolidate their identities (Jedlowski 2001, pp. 32-4).

In their critical period hypothesis, Schuman and Scott combined Mannheim's discussion on the formative period of political socialization and Halbwachs' concept of collective memory. The hypothesis provided theoretical resources to explain unintended or unconscious impact of the political views and preferences manifested according to political beliefs and value that originated from collective memory as generational memory on political process, even if the generation did not consciously participate in the trends of political changes and lead the political changes. In this study, "the unconscious political generation" is defined as a "cohort that has impact on political process through non-reflective political attitudes and beliefs that are formed based on the common collective memory." This is a concept distinguishable from "conscious political generation" as the main actor who critically reflects on and challenges the existing social order from the perspective of social movement and creates a vision for a new alternative society.

### *Baby Boomers in Studies of Generation Politics in Korea*

In Korea, studies of generation politics began with the 16th presidential election in 2002, when the impact of regionalism relatively weakened and instead, generation and ideology emerged as a new political cleavage. Since democratization in 1987, regionalism had long prevailed Korea's election politics and the focus of the studies were on whether generation politics would replace regionalism and whether it lasted in the subsequent elections.

Studies (Kang 2002; Lee 2002; Chung 2002; Lee and Shin 2003; Ohn 2004; Kim 2004; Choi and Cho 2005; Lee and Yun, 2011) presented around the 16th presidential election noted the overlapping of generation and ideology, expressing optimism toward the possibility of generation politics replacing existing politics based on regionalism. Kang (2002) regarded the “support for candidate Roh Moo-hyun” led by the younger generation as a sign of political change that emerged together with the decline of regionalism. Choi and Cho (2005) contended that regional cleavage would no longer have powerful impact in the future than it did in the past. Lee (2002) forecast that though it was in transitional situation unable to overwhelm factors of regionalism, differences in political ideology by generation would bring fundamental changes in Korea’s political parties, elections, and political paradigm in the long term.

In the latter half of the 2000s, time series studies were conducted to track whether the generation effect that had manifested in the former half of the 2000s was a temporary one or still remained by then (Hwang 2009; Park 2009; Yoon 2009; Noh, Song and Kang 2013). They assumed that if there was a generation effect, certain political orientation would have persisted in spite of the period effect reflecting distinctive characteristics of political situation or the age effect resulting from the increase in the age of the generation who led political changes in the past. Under this assumption, they kept track of continuity and change of political orientation by generation.

Though generation politics had been a constant subject of research through the 2000s, baby boomers did not attract attention as a political generation of unique category. The classification of generation, one of major issues in studies of political generation, clearly shows this. Previous studies (Park 2009; Yoon 2009; Hwang 2009; Noh et al. 2013), albeit different in detail, tended to distinguish generations by birth year, such as population groups born before the 1950s, in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In this generation classification, baby boomers born between 1955 and 1963 span the latter period of the Yushin<sup>5</sup> generation and the former period of the “386 generation”.<sup>6</sup> The baby boomer generation comprises half the population born in the 1950s and over 40 percent of population born in the 1960s. Among the baby boomers, there may be a difference between the population

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<sup>5</sup> “Yushin,” used as a symbol of military dictatorship in Korea, refers to the amended Constitution in 1972 by Park Chung Hee for his long-term ruling, which restricted the people’s basic rights and reinforced the presidential power.

<sup>6</sup> The 386 Generation in Korea refers to the generation of South Koreans born in the 1960s who attended college in the 1980s and led a broad range of democratic movement at that time.

born before 1960s (former period) and the population born in the 1960s (latter period), but this classification fails to grasp the unique characteristics of former- or latter-period baby boomers.

This ambiguous position of the baby boomer generation in the classification of political generations resulted from assuming that the 386 generation and sequential generations are the agent of political changes and giving primary attention to them. On the one hand, this kind of research reflects particularity of Korean politics in which the distinctive generation called “386” took the initiative in generation politics. On the other hand, it is the general tendency of generation politics studies that did not relatively pay heed to political attitude or orientation of the middle aged, while seeing them located somewhere between the youth and the aged (Braungart and Braungart 1986, p. 210).

However, the 18<sup>th</sup> presidential election became an opportunity to reveal the limitation of generation politics studies exclusive to the 386 generation and latter generations. Studies of generation politics centered on the young 2030 generation<sup>7</sup> produced the common idea that a high voting rate would be favorable to the progressive party and a low voting rate to the conservative party, because it was assumed that the turnout of youth with progressive orientation compared to the aged tends to be lower than the aged due to their political indifference and cynicism.

However, the 18<sup>th</sup> presidential election was recorded as an election challenging this common idea, because the conservative party candidate won the election despite the high voting rate of 75.8%. This figure was higher than 70.8%, the voting rate of the 16<sup>th</sup> presidential election that contributed to the re-creation of the “progressive regime.” Kim argued that behind the winning of the conservative candidate were “people in their 50s who became conservative” with the highest voting rate of 82.0% among all age groups (Kim 2013, p. 129). This analysis shows the need to take notice of not only the younger generations, but also this middle-aged generation who has the potential to exercise influence on political topography by resisting the trends of change with unintended and yet united power.

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<sup>7</sup> The 2030 generation refers to a young generation in their 20s or 30s.



## Research Methodology

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

This study analyzes the in-depth interviews of 47 former period baby boomers born between 1955 and 1959. Han asserted that it was necessary to divide baby boomers into former and latter periods considering the wide age difference of 9 years among Korean baby boomers and Korea’s rapid social changes (Han 2010). According to this assertion, this study limits data collection to former period baby boomers born between 1955 and 1959 who had been long exposed to industrialization and dictatorship in the 1970s.

Interviewees were selected by quota sampling, which allots participants in proportion of population according to socio-demographic characteristics including gender, dwelling areas, and education and then recruits participants befitting the conditions. This study made effort to select the most representative samples possible through quota sampling, focusing on the variables that were expected to have impact on political consciousness.

The contents of interview encompassed not just major life courses, including birth, education, employment, marriage, child birth, and childrearing, but also subjective opinions about main areas of life, including family, sexuality, the state and political awareness, generation, and culture. Of these areas, this study largely analyzed their responses about the state and political awareness. Interviews were carried out for two months from early April 2013 to late May 2013, and each interview took two to four hours per person. With the consent of interviewees, the interview was recorded, then transcribed and documented. We carefully read the transcribed data, classified commonly repeated responses by type, and used Nvivo10, computer assisted qualitative data software (CAQDAS), to review consistency of the classification and examine whether there were differences according to socio- demographic characteristics including birthplaces, gender, primary lifetime occupations, and current occupations.

### *General Characteristics of Interviewees*

Characteristics of interviewees included in the analysis are as shown in <Table 1>. Of the 47 interviewees, 21 informants were born in 1955; 10 in 1958; 6 in 1957; 5 in 1956 and 1959 respectively; and 22 were male and 25

**TABLE 1**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES**

		N			N
Year of Birth	1955	21	Primary Lifetime Occupations	Large Enterprise/ Public Institution	14
	1956	5		Construction/Technical Job	4
	1957	6		Manufacturing Job at small business	4
	1958	10		Office Job at small business	5
	1959	5		Service/Sales Job	9
Sex	Male	22	Current Occupations	Management of small business	1
	Female	25		Self-employed	9
Birthplaces	Yeongnam region	14		Homemaker	1
	Gangwon-do	8		Self-employed	18
	Chungcheong-do	4		Large Enterprise/ Public Institutions	5
	Honam region	9		Worker for Small business	2
	Seoul/Gyeonggi-do	12		Temporary Worker	10
Educational Level (graduation)	Middle School	15		Homemaker	10
	High School	16		Unemployed	2
	Two-year College	4			
	University or above	12			

were female. Birthplaces<sup>8</sup> were classified based on the areas they had dwelled until elementary school, and there were 14 interviewees from the Yeongnam region,<sup>9</sup> the largest in number, followed by 12 from Seoul / Gyeonggi-do, 9 from the Honam region,<sup>10</sup> 8 from Gangwon-do, and 4 from Chungcheong-do. In terms of educational levels, 15 informants graduated from middle and high schools respectively, 12 from university, and 4 from two-year college. Primary lifetime occupations included 14 cases, the largest in number, who had stable jobs at large enterprises and public institutions, 9 persons with

<sup>8</sup> In the data collection stage, this study allotted the number of cases according to dwelling areas, but in the analysis stage, it assumed that birthplaces have greater impact on political orientation than dwelling areas (Lee and Shin 2003, p. 287; Cho 2000, p. 46; Kang 2002, p. 119). Therefore, the study paid more attention to differences in the tendency according to birthplaces than current dwelling areas.

<sup>9</sup> The Yeongnam region includes Gyeongsangnam-do, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Busan, and Daegu, which areas traditionally feature a high proportion of supporters for conservative parties.

<sup>10</sup> The Honam region includes Jeollanam-do, Jeollabuk-do, and Gwangju, which areas traditionally feature a high proportion of supporters for anti-conservative parties.

service / sales jobs and self-employed jobs respectively, and 13 cases who had construction / technical jobs, manufacturing and office jobs at small businesses. Current occupations consist of 18 self-employed, the largest in number, 10 temporary workers, and full-time housewives respectively, 5 large enterprises / public institution workers, 2 employed at small businesses, and unemployed respectively.

## Collective Memories of Industrialization and Dictatorship

Based on the political generation theory, it can be assumed that political socialization of former period baby boomers born between 1955 and 1959 was achieved under the Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo-hwan regimes during 1972 to 1976 and during 1982 to 1986 respectively, when they were in the formative years of their late teens to mid-20s. This period features remarkable growth of macro and real economy through the state-led industrialization under the Park Chung Hee regime and subsequent high economic growth under the Chun Doo-hwan regime. Politically, it is a period in which military dictatorships kept a firm grip and democratic movements against the dictatorships were deployed in the fiercest way and widest range in Korean history. Though born in the ruins after the war and their childhood spent mostly in the rural areas in hunger and poverty, former period baby boomers had firsthand experience of high economic development thanks to the strong state-led industrialization of the military regime. Those who had completed their education early on went straight into the workforce, while those who had been raised in relatively wealthy families, entered college and participated in democratic movements or witnessed them. Their memories and assessments of historical and social events in the formative period can be diverse depending on the social positions that individuals were situated in and whether their experiences were firsthand or secondhand. This chapter aims to seek a clue for characteristics of political orientation that emerged in the subsequent political situation through interpretation of collective memories that remain strong until now and of the meanings subjectively given to them.

*Thatch-roofed Cottages Were Turned into Tile-roofed Houses: President Park Chung Hee Is Still the Most Memorable to Our Generation*

Among the past presidents, President Park Chung Hee remains most

vivid in the memory of most baby boomers because he enabled them to escape from poverty, more than anything else. He “raised our poor country to the one like now” (Soon-Hee), “revived the economy in tough times” (Jang-Ik), “made us people become better off, above all” (Kinam). Because he made our country “this rich among Southeastern countries” (Ki-Jun), he remains in our memory. Because he laid “the ground for economy,” “I have a strong respect for him” (Nam-Jin).

The memory of President Park Chung Hee, who restored the economy, is highlighted along with their firsthand experience of poor childhood, changes brought to the village as the New Village Movement began, and getting “better off.” Interviewees recalled President Park Chung Hee amid the memories of the periods “so poor as to have nothing to eat” (Jin-Sook), “so tough as skipping meals” (Yoo-Mi), seeing “a friend starve to death” (Sam-Sook), and getting chocolate from American soldiers” (Young-IL). President Park Chung Hee was deeply imprinted on their memory as a figure that changed such a poor country through the New Village Movement. Interviewees said they had joined a rat-catching campaign,<sup>11</sup> and heard “the New Village song most often whether in school or anywhere...” while growing up (Hyun-Mi); while participating in Ulryeok,<sup>12</sup> thatch-roofed cottages were turned into tile-roofed houses; village roads widened and villages became clean; furthermore, our lazy people’s way of thinking changed. They thought all of these changes were thanks to President Park Chung Hee.

President Park Chung Hee is the most memorable. (Why is that?) Our country was so poor (back then). I lived in a thatch-roofed cottage before. But new roads were paved. Back then, I really liked that. Because thatch-roofed cottages were gone and turned into tile-roofed houses... (Hyung-Ju, Gangwon-do)

The success of the state-led industrialization left a strong impression with President Park Chung Hee’s leadership and drive. Rather than the negative aspect that he oppressed the opposing parties and forces through the Yushin constitution, they remembered him as a president who was “confident” with “power to move forward” and “pull things off” (Jong-Youl), being “energetic and disciplined” (Yoon-Hwan) with “charisma to lead the people”

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<sup>11</sup> A government-led project to catch rats nationwide, involving homes, schools, workplaces, and the army, to prevent the rats from gnawing grains

<sup>12</sup> Cooperative labor to help households with lacking hands in farming villages.

(Jin-Sook).

When I think of presidents, I think of President Park Chung Hee, and though we were young back then, he seemed somewhat confident, and presidents nowadays aren't like that, though we'll have to wait and see, but otherwise... he had the power to move forward. The militaristic side, too, but I liked that he could pull things off by himself. He did well all along, throughout the past period. He was a military dictator, but somehow confident (Jong-Youl, Busan).

*Despite His Dictatorship, He Achieved the Economic Miracle Anyway*

It is true that there are sharply divided assessments about the merits and demerits of President Park Chung Hee, who succeeded in industrialization through dictatorship. This may come, in part, from the differences in value judgment, which puts more weight on one of the two aspects of national development, namely, economic development and political development, i.e. democratization. In advanced capitalist countries that achieved industrialization throughout a long period, economic growth and political democracy were developed in a mutually complementary manner. However, as Korea accomplished compressed industrialization and economic growth at the sacrifice of political democracy, the assessments of sequential generations cannot help but be controversial. In the memory of Korean baby boomers who experienced this period firsthand, in what manner are the past events of economic growth and dictatorship arranged?

Except for one interviewee among those who recalled President Park Chung Hee as the most memorable president, assessments of his dictatorship were generous in general. In their responses to assessments, comparative speech between dictatorship and economic growth was in common such as "though he was a dictator, he still ..." (Kinam), "gained more than we lost" (Jung-Soon), "for good, there should be something bad" (Hyung-Joo), and "though he had some problems, anyway" (Il-Sook). Though they summoned memories of the past periods not only of economic growth, but also of dictatorship at the same time in their comparative speech, positive memory of economic growth is arranged in a manner of overwhelming the negative memory of dictatorship. Though dictatorship was thought to be wrong, "it's undeniable that that's how Korea got so rich" (Jung-Soon) and "he achieved the economic miracle anyway" so his achievements should be highly assessed.

I think we gained more than we lost. There was a lot (that President Park Chung Hee did wrong, like Yushin) but it's undeniable that that's how Korea got so rich (Jung-Soon, Daejeon).

Another way of arranging memories of economic growth and dictatorship is the causal relationship between them. In other words, it was argued that dictatorship was an unavoidable choice in that situation for economic growth. "Because our country was so troubled, dictatorship was unavoidable" (Il-Sook), "through dictatorship, he laid framework for national development" (Min-Hee), and "because of dictatorship, we are well off now" (Sam-Sook, Min-Hee). Because President Park Chung Hee's governing style was a precondition for us to become well off, it was not to be criticized, and because we may not still have overcome poverty but for him, his dictatorship no longer has negative meanings. Yoon-Hwan said that though the younger generation criticizes President Park Chung Hee for his long-term ruling as a dictatorship, dictatorship should not be badly assessed, because "without such a person in that period, Korea could not have come this far."

Because he made Korea well off, starting from the New Village Movement. Of course, the younger generation may think that because being in power for such a long time seems like a dictatorship. The young ones may. But without such a person at that time I don't think Korea could have come this far (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do).

Il-Sook, born in Gimcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do and who graduated from a university in Daegu<sup>13</sup>, went so much as to praise dictatorship, thinking he should have been in power longer. She thought if President Park had lived longer, Korea might have caught up with Japan, but the country's national development ended with his passing away. She thought dictatorship was inevitable for bringing Korea's poor economy to life, and because his dictatorship greatly contributed to economic development, "even if some others had it," that is, even if they fell victim to his coercive ruling, it had to be so.

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<sup>13</sup> Daegu and Gyeongsangbuk-do are traditionally areas with the highest support rate of conservative parties.

*Democratic movement***Life as Petty Citizens: Working Hard and Thinking of the Future Only**

The memory of the democratic movement from the late 1970s to mid-1980s remains with a few who went to college at that time. It remains either with visual/auditory images of rally sites such as “campus lawns filled with tear-gas smells” and “roaring shouts heard from lecture rooms,” or as passive participants who “joined rallies once or twice in college” (Nam-Jin), or “followed rallies like an extra,” or as a on-looker who watched “opposition students” participating in rallies “to bleeding” (Il-Sook). Respondents who were undergraduates at that time did not actively participate in rallies due to realistic reasons, including study and preparation for employment, though democratic movement was something like a duty as college students. Nam-Jin, who entered Dong-A University in Busan in 1977, began military service in 1978, and returned to school in 1981, said it was natural for college students to join the democratic movement back then, but he just participated in the rallies once or twice, and could not actively join them due to his part-time job and preparation for employment.

It’s only natural for college students to do so, but I needed to work part-time and after the military service, job hunt, so I couldn’t participate. I needed to job hunt for my future, so I couldn’t spend all my time there (Nam-Jin, Busan).

Baby boomers who completed education early and stepped into society through employment or got married and had to make a living for their family could not afford to take interest in political issues or to actively participate in democratic movement. Min-Hee, from Gangwon-do who passed a civil service exam in the third year at a night college in Seoul in 1977 and worked and studied at the same time, couldn’t join rallies because she had to study and work. Na-Joo, from Buan, Jeollabuk-do who went up to Seoul at age 17 in 1973 and graduated from a night high school while working during the day, had great interest in the democratic movement, but had never joined the movement because he had to “work hard in mid-20s ... think about the future only.”

Eun-Sun, who graduated from middle school in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do and gave up on further schooling due to difficult economic conditions, came to Seoul in 1972 when she was 18 to work as a clerk at a theater, got

married in 1977 at 23, and began to run a jewelry shop with her husband. She heard about what happened, now and then, from newspapers or from the word of mouth, but she had been indifferent to the labor movement or democratic movement because she was too busy making meals for shop workers and keeping shop when her husband was out.

What would I have known back then? Back then, living, and in my case, looking after the shop and making meals were the daily routine, so I had no room for looking elsewhere and doing other things. If things are on the news, sure, and stuff on Jeon Tae-il<sup>14</sup> too, and I heard people working in Pyeonghwa Market talk about what happened as they passed by, but I never went to see it or experienced it myself, so I don't know very deeply (Eun-Sun, Gyeonggi-do)

Among female interviewees, many did not take interest in political events including dictatorship and the democratic movement. Sung-Eun, who was born in Seoul in 1959, graduated from middle school, then worked as a hand in a sewing factory, and got married at 29, lived without much interest in politics or things outside of her life. Yoon-Hwan, born in mountainous farming village in Milyang, Gyeongsangnam-do, could not go to high school due to family conditions and helped her mother with farming and supporting her brothers until she married in 1982 at 26. Yoon-Hwan lived “without knowing about it (military dictatorship)” nor participated in, had not much reason to hear about such thing,” because she lived in a countryside. Soon-Hee graduated from elementary and middle schools in Sokcho, Gangwon-do then entered high school in Chuncheon, Gangwon-do though not well off, thanks to her parents who had strong enthusiasm for education, and got a job at a bank in 1977 upon graduation. She said she “had never thought of” issues like democratic movement. She thought people who participated in democratic movement might be negative or well off and working hard only was to do for society, country, and family.

### **The Gwangju Uprising: Heart-aching History, Different Memories**

The Gwangju Uprising<sup>15</sup> is the historic event baby boomers recalled

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<sup>14</sup> A symbolic figure of Korea's labor movement who committed suicide by burning himself to death in 1970 as a sewing factory worker in protest of poor working conditions.

<sup>15</sup> A democratic movement led by citizens of Gwangju and Jeollanam-do against the new military regime and dictatorship of the chief of the army security command, Chun Doo-hwan, in 1980, who mobilized the army to suppress the opposition at the sacrifice of countless innocent civilians.



most when they heard the words “democratic movement.” The sacrifices of Gwangju citizens are remembered as a negative incident, such as heart-aching history, history that should not have occurred, or unforgettable tragedy. However, there are differences in the contents of memory and the meaning given to them between those from the Honam area who experienced the incident firsthand or secondhand back then and those from the non-Honam areas who subsequently heard of it through historical process.

For baby boomers from the Honam area, their memories of the Gwangju Uprising were composed their direct experiences and experiences of their close acquaintances. Memory of hiding in blankets to flee from flying bullets; memory of being scared while listening to gun shots; and stories of people who barely fled, treading on corpses and people who saw fallen people bleeding are all vividly stored in their memories. Yoo-Mi witnessed Chonam National University Hospital fell the next day her father was out of hospital, with a memory of having been on pins and needles, wondering, “what would become of this?” Soon-Hong, who lived in Bangim-dong, Gwangju, in 1980, had a frightened memory of bullets reaching the front yard and soldiers coming along the alleys, so he could not go out during the day and slept at night with the bedding set up.

I could not leave the house, and it was very very scary. At night, noise came from every direction, and bullets reached our front yard. I lived alone, and bullets came flaming toward us. So I set my bedding up against the door, because they say bullets cannot go through the bedding, so I slept with the bedding set up like that. Because the bullets hit the front yard, I could never go out during the day. I just stayed home, and soldiers went back and forth along the alleys of Bangim-dong (Soon-Hong, Gwangju).

Eun-Ja, who was in Boseong, Jeollanam-do at the time of the Gwangju Uprising, did not witness it in person, but vividly remembered the stories of “venders who fled for life, “treading on corpses” and “people falling here and there, bleeding” heard from her friend’s cousin, who was dispatched to Gwangju as counter-insurgency force. Though he was in Seoul during the the Gwangju Uprising, Na-Joo, who is from Buan, Jeollabuk-do, recalled the pain and heartache of his friends who were assistant instructors at the Samcheong Re-education camp<sup>16</sup> and other friends who were involved in the

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<sup>16</sup> A human rights abuse incident committed by the military junta in 1980 which indiscriminately arrested political suspects and civilians in the name of elimination of social evils, imposed harsh

camp.

Especially, a lot of people around me were there at the Gwangju Uprising, and something called Samcheong Re-education camp was built, and a lot of people were involved. A lot of my friends were assistant instructors at the camp. Some are my very close friends.... They try not to talk about it. Only when they're drinking, but not normally. Because, you can guess, how much pain they went through. They did it because the higher-ups ordered them to, but they don't talk about it... think of such pain... (Na-Joo, Jeollabuk-do)

For those from non-Honam areas, the Gwangju Uprising was a historical event that they did not know well back then but came to know afterwards. In their memory, there is no such detailed story as those from Honam recall. They signified the Gwangju Uprising as an event when the state "tragically slaughtered" citizens (Hyun-Deok), an event when "Gwangju citizens were unfairly treated" (Ki-Jun), "a heart-aching event" (Min-Ok, Jum-Soon) with "sacrifices of many people" (So-Noe), and "deplorable event" (Jung-Ae). They simply had emotional pity and sympathy with Gwangju citizens. Il-Sook said she "didn't know it was such a serious matter." Back then, she thought "Gwangju citizens were wrong," and "Kim Dae-jung was a spy," but later when she came to know "people had died or something" she felt guilty about "thinking it wrong." This manner of signification strikes a considerable contrast to those with the grim and negative emotions of panic, anxiety, fear, pain, and heartache in the autobiographic memory of baby boomers from Honam formed through direct or indirect experiences of bullets, blood, corpses, and soldiers.

### Divided Assessments

Compared to wide-ranging, homogenous, and positive assessments of economic revival and President Park's achievements, there are divided assessments of the democratic movement.

The most general assessment of democratic movement is an abstract and normative one. Assessments falling under this category include that the democratic movement was "necessary during that period" (Sung-Nyun), those who conducted the movement in spite of oppression were "great," (Jung-Seok), "thanks to the democratic movement, at least our life became democratic" (Joo-Haeng), "because of the movement, our society developed

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disciplines on them, and resulted in numerous victims.

this much” (Jang-Ik). Though seen as positive assessments, memories based on direct and indirect experiences from participating in the resistance to dictatorship and democratic movement are left out in these assessments. That is, the assessments relied on “historical memory” formed in the subsequent historical process.

The other stance is a neutral one, which views the democratic movement as just a political process that can hardly be called either right or wrong. Because in politics, there are “people who agree and those who disagree to whatsoever” (Kinam); all politicians “have strong and short points” (Jin-Sook); and “there are always opponents and those who oppress them” (Min-Hee). Baby boomers in this category did not think it necessary to give special value to the democratic movement. Recalling the violent confrontation symbolized by teargas and firebombs, Ji-Hwan thought “both police and protesters the same” in that they did harm to each other, leading to violence.

The third position is to assert that the democratic movement itself was wrong. Hyang-Sook thought Korea came to be developed this much because politicians did politics well, and whoever did politics we should support them and it was wrong to oppose or resist violently. Hyun-Gyu said that democracy would be in place “as time passed even without rallies,” and fighting for democracy in a short term was not a normal course. He suspected if the democratic movement was an “activity to conquer the nation by communists in the name of democratization.”

Lastly, the position of the few came from Honam respondents who experienced the Gwangju Uprising firsthand and college graduates from Seoul who had clear awareness of criticism against the military dictatorships in the 1970s and the 1980s. Yoo-Mi, who had heard many stories from acquaintances at the time of the Gwangju Uprising, squarely refuted the criticism of the people who said the Gwangju Uprising and democratic movements were done by the “commies.” She said, “not everyone thinks the same way,” resenting that they “shoot people with different ideas or eliminate them just because they have different ideas.” She was shocked from the experience of the Gwangju Uprising and came to have fear and distrust against the regime and power.

I don't think movements like that happen just because of the commies. It's because people think differently. Not everyone think the same way. I don't think we ought to shoot people with different ideas or eliminate them. Wouldn't it have been like that back then? Just because their ideas are different, go shoot them dead... Even now, people in politics think they'll

get better if a woman newly enters politics and changes things, don't they? I absolutely don't believe in such things. I don't think they will do well (Eun-Ja, Jeollabuk-do).

Se-Joo, born in a wealthy family, went to college in Seoul and never participated in the movement in college. But in the 1980s when he had a job near Myeongdong, he participated in rallies to “scrap the wrong constitution” as a member of office workers wearing called “necktie troop”<sup>17</sup> and supported protestors at the Myeongdong Cathedral.<sup>18</sup> He assessed then-democratic movement as a “just voice from society” and “what represented public sentiment.” Like him, Ki-Hong was also raised in a wealthy family by elite parents and went to college in Seoul, and entered a bank in 1979 and had since worked there until the interview in 2012. He also belonged to the “necktie troop” and assessed that the “democratic movement was a matter of course that we should have done” and “a process to correct the wrong and restore the people's rights.”

## Political Choices and Values: The “Unconscious” Generation Effect of Collective Memories

In the previous sections, we addressed the strong memory of overcoming poverty through state-led industrialization, the positive memory of economic growth overwhelming the negative memory of dictatorship, indifference to the democratic movement buried in the life of petty citizens, the autobiographical and historical memories of the Gwangju Uprising, and emotional signification contained in this, regional cleavage, and divided assessments of the past democratic movement. In what way are these represented in Korea's subsequent political process to show the presence of the generation? In this section, we discuss the “unconscious” generation effect of their collective memories on Korea's political process, focusing on their political choices as manifested in their voting behavior in the presidential elections since 1987 and their political values as shown in their opinion on the state-civil society relationship.

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<sup>17</sup> White collar office workers who participated in the students-led massive democratic movement against the military regime in June 1987.

<sup>18</sup> The main Catholic church in Korea, which is recognized as a sacred place of democratic movement, because democratic protesters or wanted people involved in democratic movement in the 1980s fled to this place from the oppression of the military regime.

*Political Choices: Regional Cleavage in Lifetime Voting***Indifference to Politics, but Active Participation in Voting**

One of the intriguing political orientations of baby boomers is that they actively participate in voting while thinking they are indifferent to politics. A considerable number of the 47 interviewees responded that they did not know about politics nor were interested in it, but most of them said they had participated in every voting since the restoration of the direct presidential election in 1987 as long as there were no special circumstances (overseas stay, illness or injury). The reasons for their indifference to politics were mostly that they took interest only in issues directly related to their lives, including occupation or family, for such reasons as being “too busy” (Young-Hak) and “family-centered” (Eun-Seon). Not only that, they were cynical or afraid of politics. Jung-Wook said he did not want to have interest in politics because “politicians don’t do politics well.” Jong-Yeol said he did not want to take interest because politicians would not change a lot. Sam-Sook did not want to talk about politics because she was “afraid” as if recalling the period when the freedom of political expression was extremely restrained. Eun-Sun decided “never to be involved in politics” as she came to be afraid of power after having heard from her husband’s nephew about the Gwangju Uprising, how the military forces were dispatched to suppress Gwangju citizens. On the other hand, though one of the few, Il-Sook said she came to take great interest in politics because “there are so many strange pro-North Koreans.”

Though with a different reason, indifference to politics implies a possible lack of knowledge, one sufficient enough to critically judge and reflect political issues, policies, and activities of political parties. What were, then, the reasons for their participating in every election and their criteria for selecting candidates in the election? In the following section, we analyze more specifically the criteria for choosing candidates with active participation in voting despite political indifference.

*Regional Cleavage in Lifetime Voting Choices: Same Memories, Different Meanings*

Based on the responses to candidates baby boomers voted in the 13th through 18th presidential elections, we classified the types of their lifetime voting choices. As a result, the types were divided into five: ‘Constantly conservative,’ ‘Constantly anti-conservative,’<sup>19</sup> ‘Conservative seeking

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<sup>19</sup> In this paper, ‘anti-conservative’ refers to a group who does not support conservative parties or

alternatives,' 'Anti-conservative seeking alternatives,' and 'No party.'<sup>20</sup>

TABLE 2  
LIFETIME VOTING CHOICES OF INTERVIEWEES BY BIRTHPLACE (UNIT: PERSONS)<sup>21</sup>

		Youngnam Area	Gangwon- do	Chungcheong- do	Honam Area	Seoul / Gyeonggi- do	Total
Conser- vative party candidate	Constantly conservative	13	5	2	0	7	27
	Conservative seeking alternatives	0	1	1	0	1	3
Anti- conser- vative party candidate	Constantly anti- conservative	0	0	0	7	0	7
	Anti- conservative seeking alternatives	0	0	0	2	2	4
No Party		0	0	0	0	1	1
Unclassifiable		1	2	1	0	1	5
Total		14	8	4	9	12	47

candidates. Generally, Saenuri (New Frontier) Party and its predecessors are referred to as 'conservative,' and Democratic Party and its predecessors as 'progressive.' Strictly speaking, however, the term 'progressive' in Korea has no diverse meaning, so no self-identity is firmly established in terms of the direction and ideology of the society in contrast to 'conservative.' In this study, none of the interviewees who did not support 'conservative' parties or candidates called themselves 'progressive.'

<sup>20</sup> As respondents who belonged to 'Constantly conservative,' or 'Constantly anti-conservative' type include those who answered 'Always conservative,' or 'Always opposition party' without directly mentioning the candidate's name, it is likely that the information of candidates they voted for may not be accurate. But the distinction itself between 'conservative' and 'anti-conservative' as voting tendencies of respondents is accurate.

<sup>21</sup> 'Constantly conservative' refers to a type of respondents who voted for 'Roh Tae-woo (Kim Young-sam) - Kim Young-sam - Lee Hoi-chang - Lee Myung-bak' in the 13th through 18th presidential elections or who answered 'Constantly conservative candidate' to the question about voting choices. 'Constantly anti-conservative' refers to a type of respondents who voted for 'Kim Dae-jung - Kim Dae-jung - Kim Dae-jung - Roh Moo-hyun - Chung Dong-young - Moon Jae-in' or who responded 'Always opposition candidate.' 'Conservative seeking alternatives' or 'Anti-conservative seeking alternatives' refer to a type of respondents who had basically voting tendencies of being constantly conservative or anti-conservative, but voted for candidates with different political orientation once or twice, or gave up voting. 'No party' refers to a type who voted various candidates regardless of political parties, and 'Unclassifiable' is a type without information of voted candidates.

Of the 47 interviewees, the voting choice types were known of 42 persons, and of this, 34 persons voted consistently for candidates from conservative or anti-conservative parties. Though it is difficult to generalize cases of the few to the entire baby boomer generation, we could learn that there was no change in voting choice of the absolute majority. Cross comparison of respondents' birthplaces and lifetime voting types clearly showed a regional cleavage between Honam and non-Honam areas as in <Table 2>. Of the 42 respondents, those from all the regions (27 persons from Yeongnam, Gangwon-do, Chungcheong-do, Seoul / Gyeonggi-do) other than Honam had consistently voted for conservative party candidates. Of them, only a few (3 persons) have changed their support for conservative candidates. In contrast to the conservative political orientation of non-Honam, many of the respondents from Honam (7 persons) had 'constantly voted for anti-conservative' party candidates, while two persons voted for candidates from other parties than “anti-conservative” party. If baby boomers' voting behavior was “conservative,” then it may have been caused by overwhelmingly “conservative political orientation of non-Honam people, who accounted for a high proportion of all voters.

Regional cleavage in baby boomers' lifetime voting was manifested symbolically in their memory of the most impressive elections, which makes us pay heed to the different meanings given to the same memories. The most memorable elections to both respondents who voted for conservative party candidates and who voted for anti-conservative party candidates were the 15th and 16th elections when Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun were elected respectively.

However, the reasons for voting were extremely different. Supporters of conservative party called into mind candidate Kim Dae-jung, because they had a “personal wish not to give up the presidency to the candidate from Jeolla Province” (Hyung-Joo, Gangwon-do). In the case of Candidate Roh Moo-hyun, it was because “a person never imagined to be elected” (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do) was “unexpectedly” (Jung-Ae, Gyeongsangnam-do) elected president when they believed candidate Lee Hoi-chang from the conservative party would win. On the other hand, Honam people recalled President Kim Dae-jung because he was elected after many difficulties (Hye-Ja, Jeollabuk-do) and expected “Honam would change somehow” (Deok-Joo, Gwangju) when he won the election. Like non-Honam people, candidate Roh Moo-hyun remained in Honam people's memory because “nobody had thought he would win” (Sung-Geun, Jeollanam-do), but the reason for remembering him was completely different. They strongly remembered the

election because of the joy of the unexpected reversal.

### **We Always Vote for the Ruling Party: We Want Security Because We're Conservative**

Respondents who had invariably voted for conservative candidates assessed their political orientation as “conservative,” saying, “we always vote for the ruling party” (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do), and “mostly vote the ruling party” (Nam-Jin, Gyeongsangnam-do). Their continued preferences for the conservative party can be explained by two interrelated reasons: one is to pursue security rather than change, the other is to consider a regional basis of the party the candidate belongs to.

They support the ruling party “because we are conservative, we want security” (Joon-Soo, Gyeongsangnam-do), “going for safety” (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do), and “once I support a person, I continue to believe the person” (Jang-Ik, Gangwon-do). Here, “conservative,” “security” and “safety” imply the meaning of “insecurity” about the opposition party. Because there would be more social unrest due to this, they thought it would be “better to go for the ruling party than regime change” (Min-Hee, Gangwon-do).

We got conservative and always vote for the ruling party. Because we want to be safe; for example, if another party comes up, everything will change and because of that isn't there more social unrest? ... we are going for safety so we do what we always do (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do).

Joon-Soo, from Haman, Gyeongsangnam-do, supported candidate Lee Hoi-chang in the 16th presidential election in 2001 when he competed with candidate Roh Moo-hyun from the Democratic Party. He said candidate Roh Moo-hyun became president at the mercy of public opinion, which proved Korean society was still “insecure and at a low level.” The sense of insecurity about the opposition party was caused by anti-North Korean and anticommunist ideologies. Il-Sook, from Gimcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do, always “leaned toward” conservative parties, because the opposition party “opposed for the sake of opposition.” She was not at ease with them because they “seem pro-North Koreans on the pretext of supporting progressive ideas.” She was very nervous when the South “hailed stuff up” to the North under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. She is not nervous at all now that President Park Geun-hye is in power.

Yes, I've always leaned toward them (conservative candidates), because the



opposition party, the Democratic Party seems to oppose for the sake of opposition, and for that, they seem a bit pro-North Korean, so I'm not at ease with them. I was anxious when the Opposition came to power. (In terms of national security?) Yes. I was very nervous when we hauled stuff up to the North under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. (Aren't you nervous nowadays?) I'm not nervous nowadays... I'm not nervous at all (Il-Sook, Gyeongsangbuk-do).

Such overt regionalism, as expressed in their responses "because I am from Gyeongsang-do" (Jun-Soo, Jin-Sook), and "men are blind in their own causes" (Jong-Yeol, Busan), has been an easy criterion for selecting candidates, which did not require them of knowledge or judgment of the policies or political stances of candidates. Jin-Sook, from Geochang, Gyeongsangnam-do, who always voted for the conservative parties, voted for the New Frontier Party "just constantly ... though I didn't feel this or that was good." Because her husband, in-laws, and her parents were also from "Gyeongsang Province," they had voted for conservative parties. Eun-Sun, from Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do, whose husband was from Chungcheong Province, supported Lee Hoi-chang in the 15th presidential election because she "could not ignore the regional thing." Gi-Dong, from Yeongdong, Chungcheongbuk-do, could not explain why he had constantly voted for conservative candidates. However, it seemed he "had done so just automatically."

Similar to the "explainable reasons of the contrast between security and insecurity, the easily unexplainable reasons of non-Honam people's long-time voting based on regional ties are related to their negative emotions toward anti-conservative parties. They reduced anti-conservative parties to personal or regional party such as "Kim Dae-jung Party" or "Jeolla Province Party" rather than seeing it as a political system of a multi-party democratic nation, with a negative sense of distance. Kinam, from Gangwon Province, voted for Candidate Roh Tae-woo in the 13th presidential election when Candidates Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, and Kim Dae-jung competed because he "hated the Kims," and voted for Kim Young-sam and Lee Hoi-chang respectively in the 14th and 15th presidential elections because he "strangely disliked Kim Dae-jung because he belonged to the other region" though he "did not have regional sentiment against Jeolla Province." Kinam supported Lee Hoi-chang in the 16th election and Lee Myung-bak in the 17th election "without particular reasons" for voting for conservative candidates, but because he thought the Democratic Party was "somehow Kim Dae-jung Party." Jum-Soon, from Seoul, constantly voted for conservative candidates

based on some feelings, though she “did not know politicians well.” She said, “because I was not from Jeolla, but a Seoulite, I had to go that way for no reason.” That is, she had voted for conservative parties because of the “feeling” that only Jeolla people should support anti-conservative parties.

Even if supporters had constantly voted for conservative party candidates, it does not mean that they eagerly supported the policies and visions of the conservative party. Jung-Ae, from Hadong, Gyeongsangnam-do, thought “politics should change” because the conservative party she supported “committed lots of wrongdoings.” However, she knew she “could not come out of the conservative party that committed wrongdoings.” They could not choose anti-conservative parties while they did not actively support conservative parties because of their discontent at the opposition parties which did not have alternatives nor met their expectation of changes. Ki-Jun, from Ulsan, supported conservative parties because people around him were for the Grand National Party,<sup>22</sup> but when candidates Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun were elected president, he “wished there would be a change” because “Honam folks had been so much at disadvantage.” Jum-Soon, who did not like Kim Dae-jung much because she’s from Seoul, expected that when he was elected president “something would change but there was not much difference.”

### **I Voted Unconditionally for the Opposition Party**

Voting choices of baby boomers from Honam were defensive response to the non-Honam conservative party supporters’ negative sentiment against “Jeolla Province Party.” Baby boomers from Honam eagerly supported Candidate Kim Dae-jung from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> presidential elections. Female respondents supported him because of his non-authoritarian aspects such as “reading books a lot and speaking well” and “communicating with various people” (Young-Sim, Jeollanam-do), or because of emotional sympathy with his personal life with “a lot of difficulties” (Hye-Ja, Jeollabuk-do), “hardships” (Yoo-Mi, Jeollanam-do), and “sufferings” (Eun-Ja, Jeollabuk-do). Eun-Ja believed that because he “went through hardships, he would protect the people and lead them hand in hand with North Korea.” On the contrary, male respondents supported him because they expected regional development. When Kim Dae-jung was elected president, Deok-Joo, from Gwangju, expected “fantastic period, and fantastic Republic of Korea.” Joo-Haeng expected “Gwangju too would become something.” However, their

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<sup>22</sup> Former Saenuri (New Frontier) Party.

expectations of President Kim Dae-jung turned into disappointment since he took power. Eun-Ja, who had supported “Kim Dae-jung until he became president,” thought he fell short of her faith even if she chose him. Also, “Deok-Joo, who had thought, “now we’d have a great time,” was disappointed that Kim could not meet his expectation.

Even though they were disappointed with Kim Dae-jung whom they had passionately supported, Honam people still supported “unconditionally opposition parties” (Sung-Geun, Jeollabuk-do) “without special reasons, but because there was no party to vote for.” They had constantly voted for anti-conservative parties “because of being Honam people” (Deok-Joo, Gwangju) and “due to regional tendencies” (Yoo-Mi, Jeollanam-do). Yoo-Mi, who had participated in voting with the most passion when Kim Dae-jung ran, wasn’t going to vote in the 16<sup>th</sup> election when Roh Moo-hyun ran, but she did at the last minute, because she “thought it would be a bit better if Roh Moo-hyun does it.” In the election when Lee Myung-bak won, she voted against him at the last minute because she thought Lee Myung-bak shouldn’t win.

I wasn’t planning to vote, not for Roh Moo-hyun either, but I voted at the last minute... when Kim Dae-jung was running, I participated with the most passion. It was because of him and his region, but he was passionate about taking on the tough challenge for his cause, and in Roh Moo-hyun’s case, I thought it would be a bit better if Roh Moo-hyun does it, and in Lee Myung-bak’s case, I voted against him because I thought Lee Myung-bak can’t do this. I wasn’t going to vote, but I did at the last minute. Because I thought Lee Myung-bak shouldn’t win (Yoo-Mi, Jeollanam-do).

Non-Honam respondents had constantly, albeit reluctantly, voted for conservative parties, because they did not see anti-conservative parties as a political alternative. Likewise, Honam respondents had constantly, albeit not eagerly, voted for anti-conservative parties because there was no choice after Kim Dae-jung. The safest way to choose in a situation without any political alternatives was not to choose a political party with a tradition that had excluded and guarded against Honam.

### **Divided Collective Memories and Regional Cleavage in the Absence of Alternative Forces**

Jang (2013) explained that regionalism had been dominant in Korean election politics since 1987 and political forces had selected it as an easy political strategy under the structure in which political forces based on social

groups, by ideology, and by class, and politics based on political parties were not invigorated yet. However, it is hard to see region-based voting choices as voters' passive response to the strategy of political forces. Based on the interview results, the reasons can be interpreted as the following:

First, alternative political forces or politicians could not impact voting choices beyond the regional composition. Those who had constantly voted for conservative or anti-conservative parties did not eagerly support the candidates of the parties they chose. Even if they did support these party candidates, they had in common negative emotions such as distrust and disappointment with politicians regardless of regions. Second, there has been the "unconscious effect of divided collective memories" between Honam and non-Honam. Voters from non-Honam regions have actively selected conservative candidates based on negative prejudices against anti-conservative parties, keeping watch against political forces that have grown based on Honam. The voting choices of non-Honam baby boomers who supported conservative parties because they wanted "security" and "were blind in their own causes" imply "insecurity" about the ruling of the anti-conservative parties based on Honam. This voting behavior is closely related to anticommunist ideology at times and is hardly explainable resistance to "Jeolla Province Party." This appears not just in the Yeongnam region, but also among people from most regions, including Gangwon-do, Chungcheong-do, Seoul / Gyeonggi-do, except for Honam, eventually leading to the "isolation of Honam." Inherent in non-Honam's "insecurity about and resistance to anti-conservative parties is the political ideology of regional cleavage that the Park Chung Hee regime used as a means of suppressing the opposition parties and opponents that were threats to his long-term ruling.

Kim (1995) sought the origin of non-Honam vs Honam cleavage and the structure of isolation of Honam in Korea's election politics from the 7<sup>th</sup> presidential election in 1971. In that election, candidate Kim Dae-jung of the opposition party emerged as a formidable challenger to the Park Chung Hee regime. The ruling force formed a negative sentiment in non-Honam voters against Honam voters to make him powerless, and succeeded in turning the confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties into regional confrontation. The opposition party, which was the challenging force against the long-term ruling party, was marginalized as a political force of the Honam region, and criticism against and opposition to the ruling force were reduced to regional competition and confrontation (Kim 1995, pp. 222-29). Kim Dae-jung, positioned as "Honam leader" by President Park Chung Hee, was suppressed by the Chun Doo-hwan new military regime with charges of

conspiracy of insurgence. The region-based anticommunism, which was used as a means of governing by Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and the conservative ruling forces, became the source of origin for regional identity and the split sense of belonging among non-Honam and Honam parties. This manifested in voting selections of non-Honam voters as “unexplainable” resistance to anti-conservative parties and in Honam voters as defensive selection of candidates with Honam ties.

Unlike those from Honam, interviewees from Yeongnam tended to unconsciously use the term “we” frequently.

We got conservative and always vote for the ruling party. Because we want to be safe ... we are going for safety, so we do what we always do (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do)

Just because we must stick to this one path unconditionally.... Our thoughts... our Grand National Party is... (Jung-Ae, Gyeongsangnam-do)

We also voted a lot for the New Frontier Party, so... because we are from Gyeongsang Province... (Jin-Sook, Gyeongsangnam-do)

Overall, we are leaning toward the ruling party (Il-Sook, Gyeongsangbuk-do).

In the above quoted interview, “we” is a language that reveals their regional identity by disclosing a sense of belonging to a group based on a region as internal group members and simultaneously marking the boundary with an external group. Non-Yeongnam respondents did not actively reveal their sense of belonging to a group through the term “we” but expressed their regional identity by distancing themselves from Honam, stating it is “because I am not from Jeolla Province” (Jum-Soon) or by otherizing Honam, saying “Kim Dae-jung belonged to the other region” (Kinam). In contrast to this, people from Honam reveal their identity not by “we” or by distancing from others, but based on region such as “Honam people” or “Jeolla Province people,” distinguishing themselves from non-Honam people.

Region, which is the source of an unconscious sense of belonging to a political party and identity, works as a boundary that shares historical events of the past and makes other collective memory through interaction among the group members. Il-Sook, from Gyeongsangbuk-do, who voted for Candidate Park Geun-hye in the 18<sup>th</sup> presidential election, said “even just as

the daughter of Park Chung Hee, ‘we’ have no qualms about her.” It was not just her, but also her friends, parents and her mom’s friends. She even thought President Park Geun-hye should have become president right after President Park Chung Hee passed away, which was not her thought alone either.

Even just as the daughter of Park Chung Hee, we have no qualms about President Park Geun-hye. It’s not just me, but my friends do too... our parents and mom’s friends, also, and it’s not because President Park Geun-hye is a woman, but gender aside, this was how it was supposed to be, like how it was, Kim Il-sung, then Kim Jong-il, then Kim Jong-un, it should have been this way after President Park Chung Hee passed away. A lot of people think that (Il-Sook, Gyeongsangbuk-do).

From the aspect of evaluating President Park Chung Hee’s economic achievements, Honam respondents had generally positive memories similar to that of non-Honam respondents. However, the Honam people’s emotional sympathy with Kim Dae-jung as a “suffered” leader, sharing of expectations that he would develop the underdeveloped region, and the trauma of the Gwangju Uprising shared through region-based private ties, including friends and relatives, become the source of the Honam people’s identity and unity with “anti-conservative” political party. Furthermore, their experience of overt discrimination in other regions was an opportunity for others to give them an identity and for Honam people to set a boundary through negative emotions about non-Honam regions. Na-Joo, from Buan, Jeollabuk-do, said he formed regional sentiment because he was considered a “commie” when he was in Wonju on business.

When I did business in Wonju, during the Asian Games in ’84 or ’86 and the Olympics, even then, people in Wonju thought that we Jeolla-folks were commies... Wonju, Gangwon Province is pro-ruling party. Because I’m from Jeolla and there are many military areas in Gangwon, it’s worse and they speak so badly of us that we’re considered commies. So that leads Jeolla people to regionalism (Na-Joo, Jeollabuk-do).

### *Opinion on the State-Civil Society Relationship*

#### **The Nostalgia for Strong Leaders**

Baby boomers who witnessed rapid economic growth under the dictatorship thought too much freedom was a problem these days, but felt it

was difficult to return to the past. Yoon-Hwan said there is “no need for much freedom” in our country and wished that a “confident person would come forward to do politics with discipline.” The strong leadership, one of the positive memories of President Park Chung Hee, became a critical criterion for evaluating presidents after him. Those who positively evaluated the strong leadership had very negative impressions toward Presidents Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam. Kinam thought Presidents Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam contributed to democratization but “social order” loosened afterwards. Jung-Wook complained that when the civilian regime came to power, he had high hopes, but life became harder than it had been during the period of military control and suffered great economic difficulties. Presidents who were evaluated as having no achievements are remembered as “powerless” (Hyun-Gyu), or did politics “vaguely” or “weakly” (Eun-Sun) in contrast to the “strong” image of President Park Chung Hee.

We had high hopes, but when the civilian regime came to power, our life became harder than it'd been during the period of military control. Business, shops did worse than before, they lifted the regulations, but the economy went downhill without regulation, so we entered a period in which business did even worse, so isn't that how the financial crisis ended up coming? We had to endure even greater hardships in life (Jung-Wook, Gyeongsangnam-do).

In the similar vein, the period of Chun Doo-hwan, an authoritarian ruler of the Park Chung Hee style, was reminisced as “good to live in.” Yoon-Hwan said she was not scared because there was public order during the Chun Doo-hwan period and in retrospect, life had been better back then. Though there is not much freedom in an oppressive social atmosphere, freedom does not matter a lot in the life of commoners, so it had been better to live back then.

I think, rather, the Chun Doo-hwan period was better. There was public order. It would have been great if he hadn't had the slush fund. We weren't too afraid, back then. There weren't a lot of things like sexual violence. Nowadays, it's scary to raise a daughter.... Maybe it was a bit oppressive, and we weren't as free. But there's no need for much freedom for us commoners and ordinary citizens to live (Yoon-Hwan, Gyeongsangnam-do).

Young-Hak recalled the period of Chun Doo-hwan when “the army guys

got the corporations and beat them up” with “guns and knives” as “the best time” and “good for the commoners.” He believed through dictatorships, “the economy would run fine.”

I understand (the necessity of democratization movement) because of past dictatorship, under the Yushin regime, and how the ridiculous Chun Doo-hwan regime marched in. But just because the ridiculous guns and knives took its place, the economy developed. Wasn't that the best time? People say it was the best then. Then, the army guys got the corporations and beat them up if they didn't listen and killed them if they didn't listen, so life was good for the commoners. For the commoners to fare well, dictatorship is the way. Through dictatorships and such, people can't act up without listening, and the economy will run fine (Young-Hak, Chungcheongnam-do).

The nostalgia for leaders with strong ruling power does not represent the wishes of non-Honam people alone. Na-Joo, from Buan, Jeollabuk-do who recalled President Roh Moo-hyun as a “humane” and “commoner” president, and said that “a person like Chun Doo-hwan was necessary, once again” because the “social discipline” is way out of order with social problems, including the Internet issues.

(The leader needed in our politics) is a powerful person, like Chun Doo-hwan. (Because) the social discipline is way out of order, so in many aspects, I think a person like that is necessary. Once again, such leader should bring discipline to social order, particularly on the Internet or online, there are lots of problems, which is too much (Na-Joo, Buan).

Sung-Geun, from Gochang, Jeollabuk-do, said he liked Lee Hoi-chang, because it seemed that he pushed hard things he should have pushed although he did not vote for him.” Though she is not from Honam area, Mi-Ja from Seoul, who consistently voted for anti-conservative party except once for President Lee Myung-bak, also recalled that “a little bit of dictatorship” in the Park Chung Hee period was good and wishes for “a little bit of dictatorship” even now. Her reason is that “liberty is good, but some degree of dictatorship is necessary for the country to do well.”

The nostalgia for powerful leaders seems to have contributed decisively toward overwhelming support for President Park Geun-hye in the Yeongnam region in the 2012 presidential election. People from the Yeongnam region voted for President Park Geun-hye because “we became well off thanks to



President Park Chung Hee" (Yoon-Hwan), and "she would lead charismatically like her father" (Jun-Soo). Some thought "she would advance things well... like her father, who laid the ground for economy" (Nam-Jin), and others expected that "she would continue after President Park Chung Hee, who brought Korea to life" (So-Noe). Min-Hee actively supported candidate Park Geun-hye to the extent she "told her son to vote for [Candidate Park]."

### Priority of Economic Growth over Democratization

Baby boomers thought the democratic movement was necessary at a normative level, but unlike their positive assessments of rapid economic growth, they said it became a problem when democracy came "too quickly." Young-Hak thought democratization was needed, but "only to a certain extent" and because Korea "democratized too quickly," it affected economic development negatively afterward. Il-Sook also thought the movement for democracy was necessary, but "even without clamoring about it," "democratization would have happened naturally, though it would have taken some time." Koreans like "hurry, hurry," but it's a minus when it comes to unity, so she thought it was not good to do "democratization movement so overtly." Hyun-Gyu also thought it should "change gradually with time," and democratizing in 40 to 50 years, compared to the hundreds of years it took for the West to democratize, is not a "normal process of democratization," because he thinks it may be "the work of communists up North to conquer the nation in the name of democratization."

The generous assessment of President Park Chung Hee that his dictatorship was inevitable for economic and national development was represented in the assessment of presidents after him. Admitting that the Yushin constitution and his long-term rule were wrong, Young-Il definitely said "there was no alternative than that person (President Park Chung Hee)." He regarded Chun Doo-hwan negatively because he "killed a lot of people for his ambitions" but thought that thanks to the "scary knife," economic activity could recover stability.

About Chun Doo-hwan, there's only one thing I regard negatively. It is that he killed a lot of people for his ambitions. I can evaluate this positively – people from Honam wouldn't like this, but – he was like a very scary knife. Because of the scary knife, economic activity could recover stability. If he wasn't like that, I think the inflation would have been even worse than it is now (Young-Il, Seoul).

### Resistance or Indifference to “Progressiveness” and “Criticism”

Because most interviewees were “busy making a living” including study, marriage, and employment in the period of anti-dictatorship democratic movements in the 1970s and the 1980s, they could barely take part or interest in democratic movements. This tendency has continued even until today. They did not have much knowledge or interest in progressive civic organizations which are critical of the government policies or political and social issues, so most of them said they did not know of any civic groups, “there should have been a lot, but don’t know any” (Soon-Hee), “have no interest in them at all” (Soon-Hong), and “heard of them but did not have much interest (Min-Hee). Only a few recalled just off and on organization names such as the United Progressive Party, Democratic Labor Party, Federation of Democratic Labor Unions, People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, and Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice, but they did not say specifically what these organizations were doing.

Nevertheless, they had resistance or negative positions toward “progressive” or “critical,” the terms included in the interviewers’ questions. Ki-Jun, who “knew the ‘Democratic Labor Party and the Federation of Democratic Labor Unions’ as ‘progressive,’ thought the Democratic Labor Party as “not a good group that does not even sing our national anthem.” Hyun-Deok thought, “Because the United Progressive Party protect and defend North Korea,” its “ideology is strange.” Ji-Hwan and Jun-Soo saw it a problem that democratic movement groups “went too extreme leftist,” “became too left wing,” “praising North Korea,” and “trying to conquer the state.”

The negative attitudes toward past democratic movements are in line with resistance or indifference to today’s critical civic movements. Interviewees said critical civic movements as problematic because they seem “somehow single-minded” (Sung-Eun) and “opposition for the sake of opposition” (Hyun-Gyu). Joo-Haeng thought it’s good for civic groups to “help citizens in need” but they should give in when necessary rather than “excessively self-assertive.” Young-Il thought civic groups’ movement uncomfortable because they “went too extreme,” and talked about the inconveniences he went through because of the rallies in his neighborhood. He said he was “negative” about progressive civic groups, because they went too extreme and pushed things their way for their gain so his neighborhood markets were ruined.

I'm negative (about progressive civic groups). It's because I used to live in Nusang-dong before.... And there, there was an environment group and a participation group, and what they stood for was too, what should I say? ... I'm saying, if they're too extreme about something, it is uncomfortable, rather. It's good to express their opinions for a good cause, but pushing things their way for their gain, playing with the press, I don't think that's good. After President Lee Myung-bak came to power, the rallies were so bad that neighborhood and markets were ruined because they rallied so much. So we sued them. Because of them, I couldn't even enter my own house (Young-II, Seoul).

## Discussion and Conclusions

Based on theories of political generation and collective memory, this study analyzed the collective memories of industrialization and dictatorship in the 1970s shared by the baby boomer generation, and discussed the unconscious effect of the memories on Korea's political process through their subsequent political choices and values, focusing on their lifetime voting behavior and opinion on the relationship between the state and civil society.

Research findings included the following three: First, from the aspect of political values, baby boomers have preferences for strong leaders-moderate civil society relationship. This is in line with the positive collective memory of President Park Chung Hee, who led industrialization and remarkable economic growth based on his authoritarian rule. The positive memory of Park Chung Hee as a president with economic achievements not only overpowered the negative memory of his dictatorship, but also had interviewees think that dictatorship was inevitable for economic growth. In such assessment, the memory of political oppression of criticizing forces or oppressive ruling was forgotten or evaluated as an unavoidable thing. What strongly remained in their memory was “mighty governing power” which successfully brought economic growth. This worked as a criterion for evaluating the achievements and abilities of the presidents after him, or it had the interviewees interpret economic crisis, sexual crimes, or social problems from the perspective of “social discipline.” Some interviewees assessed that though it was an oppressive period, it was better off back then during the Chun Doo-hwan period because freedom was not so important to the commoners, that economic crisis was due to democratization that was achieved too quickly, and that crimes resulted from the loosened social discipline without a strong

leader. Others said that though they did not take much interest in progressive social forces or critical social movements, the Progressive Party was “extreme leftist” or “pro-North Korean”. They also had negative images of critical civic groups that excessively oppose and assert themselves.

Second, this study shows the unconscious effect of the sense of belonging to a political party and regional identity on the lifetime voting behavior of baby boomers. In the presidential elections from the 13<sup>th</sup> of 1987 to the 18<sup>th</sup> of 2012, the criteria for political choices of most baby boomers had invariably been the region. This voting behavior may have directly come from the political parties and forces that have used regionalism as an easy voting strategy, but the analysis of interview data shows it is hard to see baby boomers’ voting behavior as passive response to the strategy only. This voting behavior of regionalism has lasted as the unconscious effect of their sense of belonging to a political party and regional identity which was formed by being split between non-Honam and Honam in the political vacuum of alternative political forces. Non-Honam people have formed sense of belonging to a political party and regional identity through emotional resistance to Honam or distancing from the region. Non-Honam voters’ tendency of pursuing “security” is another expression of “insecurity” of the ruling of anti-conservative parties. Also, their ‘region’-based choices are still another expression of resistance to a non-conservative political party that is a mere personal party of a leader with Honam ties or regional party. Non-Honam voters’ resistance to Honam, which is inherent in the reasons for supporting conservative parties, has been reinforced through the internal interaction between group members during the election period. On the other hand, the Honam people’s unity with anti-conservative parties and regional identity have been defensively formed by emotional sympathy with a leader who became a politician in a relatively underdeveloped region under political suppression, by autobiographical memories from direct and indirect experiences of the Gwangju Uprising, or by collectively sharing discriminatory experiences from non-Honam people.

Third, we need to pay attention to the origin and effect of extreme anti-communist ideology found in the remarks of non-Honam baby boomers. Non-Honam people reveal their anticommunism when they negatively assess the democratic movement, overtly resist progressive parties, and extremely express antagonism against anti-conservative parties. Their support and sense of belonging to a conservative party are rooted considerably in the anticommunist ideology, which can be used as an effective means to attack the primary opposition party when it is the most threatening primary

political challenge to critical social forces, political parties, and conservative parties. This resembles the way President Park Chung Hee ruled using anticommunism as the first national policy to justify violence and oppression against political opposition forces. As a generation ingrained with the anticommunist ideology from learning by heart the Charter of National Education<sup>23</sup> in school and making anticommunist posters and writings, no baby boomer would be free from such internalized anticommunist ideology. However, due to the history of anticommunism that conservative parties and forces have used as a means to suppress political criticisms and resisting forces, anticommunism has become an exclusive tool of conservative forces as well as an obstacle to the development of democracy through critical and rational political debates. “Pro-North accusations” and “ideological disputes” that recently appeared in major elections are political strategies of conservative forces using the anticommunist ideology, but these strategies are effective because they have supporters based on the region.

The above discussions demonstrate the need to pay attention not only to the political generation as a social movement force that affects political changes through active participation in historical and social processes, but also to the “unconscious” political generation that influences political changes by their political values and faith as formed through their common experience of specific and momentous events in the historical process of a society. Korea’s baby boomers who were in the “formative period” of political socialization in the 1970s when the state-led industrialization and oppressive rule of the authoritarian regime coexisted, lived a life of petty citizens with expectations of an economically better life. Most of them worked hard while looking towards the future. Petty citizens who were “too busy making a living” directly experienced the effect of economic growth in a broad range, but could not take much interest in the authoritarian rule and resistance movements against it. Memories and assessments of the democratic movement were not so clear as the positive memory of the economic revival led by President Park Chung Hee and differed according to their birthplaces and social positions.

The collective memories of industrialization and dictatorship shared by baby boomers are represented as nostalgia for strong leaders, values that put priority on economic growth over political freedom and democratization, resistance to critical civic groups, and the anticommunist ideology. These

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<sup>23</sup> The educational charter made by President Park Chung Hee in 1968 to instill nationalism and anti-communism in the people

political attitudes and values exercise “unintended” or “unconscious” influence on political process, giving the conservative party political legitimacy.

Finally, we conclude this study by presenting limitations of this research and suggestions for future research. In generation studies based on quantitative data, generation is generally proven by presenting the continuity of unique political orientation unchanging with the passage of time and the uniqueness that can be distinguished from other contemporary generations. In this study, we attempt to show the existence of generation from the former aspect, that is, by presenting the continuity of voting tendency of regionalism since the democratic movement of 1987. In particular, we focus on the qualitative analysis of voting behavior grounded on regional cleavage.

However, our study could not identify unique characteristics through the comparison between the cohort under analysis (born in 1955-1959) and other cohorts with different historical and social experiences (born prior to 1954 or post-1960). The limitation of analyzing qualitative data is conducting diachronic and synchronic comparisons at the same time. We need to make comparative studies with other generations as part of our future research agenda.

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