

## Book Review

Lee, J., Oh, C., & Kim, Y. (Eds.). (2021). *The Candlelight Movement, Democracy, and Communication in Korea*. Routledge.

Soo-Hye Han<sup>ID</sup>

Department of English,  
Tsuda University, Tokyo

Corresponding to  
Soo-Hye Han

Department of English,  
Tsuda University, Tokyo,  
2-1-1 Tsudamachi, Kodaira,  
Tokyo 187-0025, Japan  
Email: [han@tsuda.ac.jp](mailto:han@tsuda.ac.jp)

Received

19 April 2023

Revised

22 May 2023

Accepted

24 May 2023

This edited volume provides a critical examination of the 2016-2017 Candlelight Movement in South Korea (hereafter Korea), which led to the impeachment of then-president Park Geun-hye. Building on a conference panel at the 103rd National Communication Association Annual Convention in 2017, editors JongHwa Lee, Chuyun Oh, and Yong-Chan Kim assembled a wide array of authors from various scholarly traditions and put forward what can be considered the most comprehensive compendium on the subject in our discipline.

The 2016-2017 Candlelight Movement marked an extraordinary democratic moment in Korean history. For months, millions of people from all walks of life took to the streets holding candles and demanding justice. Unlike previous social movements in Korea, which often accompanied violence, the candlelight demonstrations were remarkably peaceful and festive. Protesters sang, danced, and connected kinetically, emotionally, and via social media. As the editors aptly state, the Candlelight Movement was not simply a political movement, but also “a communicative and discursive movement” (p. 1). Accordingly, chapters in this volume are richly grounded in the Communication discipline.

Reflecting the wide scope of our discipline, the strength of this volume lies in the diversity of its theoretical, methodological, and analytical approaches. While themes are seamlessly woven through the book, each chapter highlights a distinct aspect of the social movement (including investigative journalism, digital diaspora, networked public, networked fandom, emotion, performance, performative body, economic democracy, and visual critical rhetoric) with various methodological and analytical approaches (case study, ethnography, survey, feminist film criticism, critical discourse analysis, and rhetorical criticism). Each chapter offers a unique, sometimes conflicting, perspective on what happened (and did not happen) during the Candlelight Movement, and taken together, it creates a captivating mosaic.

The book is organized into three parts. Part I “Media and Media Space” investigates the role of news media (Chapter 1), digital diaspora (Chapter 2), and social media (Chapter 3) shedding light on how they contributed to the historic Candlelight Movement. Part II “Culture and Performance” highlights an intricate relationship between culture and social movements. Specifically, it demonstrates how popular culture (Chapter 4), emotion (Chapter 5), and performance (Chapter 6) are intertwined in political protests, foregrounding the power of culture and art to empower and unite people who fight for justice. Part III “Counterpublics and Representation” turns to the forgotten, ignored, and hidden voices in the Candlelight Movement. Taking a critical approach, chapters in this section complicate the celebratory discourse advanced by the previous chapters and dissect the subjects/bodies (Chapter 7), issues (Chapter 8), and symbols (Chapter 9) that are left on the margins of the Candlelight Movement.

Opening Part I “Media and Media Space” is Hun Shik Kim’s essay, “A crisis of press freedom: Investigative journalism and the downfall of the President” (Chapter 1). This chapter traces how Korean news media and journalists effectively played the watchdog function in exposing the so-called “Choi Soon-Sil scandal” which instigated the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. Kim presents a detailed account of how mainstream news media and journalists from across the spectrum put aside their partisanship and uncovered one of the biggest political scandals in modern Korean history. In addition, this chapter contains a useful overview of Korean news media that have been marred by decades-long political interference from the government and business conglomerates. Kim closes with a triumphant note on the success of investigative journalism and the progress of press freedom after the Candlelight Movement. This chapter lays a solid foundation for proceeding chapters, particularly Chapter 8, which contests the

euphoric discourse of investigative journalism.

In Chapter 2, “One small action for the larger movement,” Hojeong Lee looks beyond the national borders and explores how digital diaspora enabled the worldwide candlelight protests which spread across 70 cities in 26 countries. Employing participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of the Korean digital diaspora, Lee traces the evolution of the Korean digital diaspora and unpacks how Koreans abroad affected social change in their homeland using digital media. Lee asserts that their involvement in the *Seowol* ferry social movement in 2014 paved the way to the transnational 2016-2017 Candlelight Movement. She indicates that this global networked political action signals a new era of solidarity among the diasporic community and growing emotional ties to their homeland, which could promote more social and political engagement from abroad in the future.

Chapter 3 entitled “Social media use on protest sites during the 2016-2017 candlelight vigils in Seoul” written by Yong-Chan Kim analyzes protest participants’ social media use. Based on an online survey of protest participants (n = 225), Kim shows the prevalence of social media use during the protests (such as sharing check-in messages, texts, photos, and videos) and how it varied by people’s protest participation experiences (PPE). Kim found that those with high entertaining PPE, who participate in protests “as if they were in a concert or a cultural event, to have fun, or to enjoy the festive atmosphere” (p. 43), were more likely to use social media during the protests, while those with high distributive PPE, who consider that “individuals (rather than established organizations) should lead the protest” (p. 44) were less likely to share their experiences with others using social media. These findings suggest that protesters at the Candlelight Movement were not a unified group but individuals with differing purposes and patterns of social media use.

Turning to Part II “Culture and Performance,”

Jungwon Kim's essay "With the brightest light we have: K-pop fandom in candlelight movement and diversification of Korean protest culture" (Chapter 4) dives into how K-pop fans engaged in the candlelight protests and diversified the norms of protest culture both visually and sonically. Marching alongside a group of young K-pop fans and listening to their stories, Kim takes readers to the street-eye view of fan protesters with their glow sticks, singing and chanting. Kim notes that while these fans (mostly teenage girls) were not taken seriously by other protesters at first, their essential fan skills such as "lining up," "waiting," and "memorizing songs" (p. 59) made them unlikely leaders at protest sites. By bringing a new genre of music, K-pop, to the protest sonic environment (dominated by Korean modern folk songs, *minjung gayo*, and *pungmul*) and illuminating the streets with their most luminous light sticks (instead of candlelight), Kim argues, these young K-pop fans not only expressed their identities as cultural and political agents but also expanded the notion of what political protests look and sound like.

Next, "Channeling anger into hope" (Chapter 5) by Youllee Kim examines the mechanism behind what drove millions of Koreans to the streets to fight for justice. Kim suggests that for a massive collective action like the Candlelight Movement to occur, people should not only feel anger, but have hope for a better future. What makes people hopeful when faced with injustice? Drawing on appraisal theories of emotions, Kim identifies perceived collective coping potential as what channels anger into hope and leads to collective action. In the case of the candlelight protests, Kim ascertains two primary sources of collective coping potential that motivated people into collective action – collective memory of past social movements (memories of fighting for and achieving democracy) and active communication (the exchange of information and emotions through social media) which created strong social bonds. By explicating the critical link between

emotion (anger and hope) and collective action, this chapter provides a valuable theoretical framework to analyze other social movements.

Carrying the theme of hope, Chuyun Oh's essay, "Dancing for hope: The shamanic ritual and performative Koreanness at the candlelight protests" (Chapter 6), turns to the power of dancing in reaching for hope and (re)constructing nationhood. Informed by trauma studies, performance studies, and dance studies, this chapter asserts that traditional dance performances at the candlelight protest sites helped its citizens to work through trauma and to reclaim the indigenous nationhood of Koreanness. According to Oh, "when citizens feel hopeless because nothing seems feasible and their voices are not being heard, dancing could be a gateway to channel the anger and speak up, and thus share their trauma in a communal space" (p. 95). Using descriptive analysis and ethnography, Oh lucidly illustrates how community dance performances with Korean shamanic ritual and folk dance at the protest sites enabled unspoken trauma to be spoken and "turned into a danceable pleasure and communal joy" (p. 96). Oh contends that these performances helped destigmatize Korean shamanism and folk dance, "reclaiming Koreanness in the neocolonial landscape of South Korea" (p. 86).

Part III "Counterpublics and Representation" begins with an essay titled "Contested neoliberal vulnerability: Laboring, feminine, and queer subjects in the streets of the impeachment protest" (Chapter 7), which challenges the narrative of unified "candlelight citizens" achieving "political revolution." Following the critical tradition, Jiwoon Yulee sheds light on the experiences of laboring, feminine, and queer subjects who were left behind in the Candlelight Movement, unveiling their struggles and economic and sociopolitical oppressions that continue to plague contemporary Korean society. Specifically, Yulee analyzes storytelling techniques employed in the documentary film *Candle in the Wave* and by

the feminist and queer activists (namely, *visual inversion*, *radical commoning*, and *solidarity right now*) and uncovers exclusionary practices that remain unresolved post regime change. Yulee posits that the stories and struggles of marginalized bodies (elderly female janitor, feminist activists, and sexual minority) “continue to challenge the rhetoric of a political revolution that assumes a linear historical progress from the dark past to a brighter future” (p. 112). Despite the jubilant discourse surrounding the Candlelight Movement, this chapter reminds that the fight for economic and social justice is still ongoing.

Chapter 8 entitled “The conservative news media outlets: Blowing out candles for economic democracy” by Huikyong Pang investigates how conservative media outlets fared (and failed) in promoting “economic democratization,” one of the major concerns of the candlelight protesters. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, Pang traces how major conservative news media outlets (*Chosun Daily*, *Dong A Daily*, and *Joong Ang Daily*) covered issues surrounding Samsung’s involvement in the Park and Choi scandal. Combing through 96 editorials with three stages of discourse analysis (analyzing storylines, discursive styles, and ideologies/ implied values), Pang reveals that, instead of reporting on Samsung’s role in the Park and Choi scandal, conservative news outlets maintained a pro-conglomerate narrative, casting Samsung as a victim (of the scandal) and a hero who promotes the nation’s economic growth and development. Reverting to the discourse that has continued to hamper Korea’s economic democratization, Pang decries, “conservative media outlets, which lit up candles for political democracy, blew out the candles for economic democracy” (p. 129).

The final chapter “From flags to candles: Visual hailing and articulation of nation” (Chapter 9) by JongHwa Lee takes a critical rhetorical approach and scrutinizes dialectical and rhetorical tensions between two prominent symbols of the protest, candles and flags. Drawing on theories of critical rhetoric and visual rhetoric, Lee closely

examines the uses and the implications of two visual ideographs (candles and flags) during the candlelight demonstrations in 2002 and 2016-2017. Through his analyses, Lee demonstrates that “the choices of protest media ... are neither innocent nor trivial, but reflect political and rhetorical struggles of the time.” As the purpose (*telos*) of a “nation” was at the core of the Candlelight Movement, Lee argues, protesters used their visual markers (candles and flags) to “invoke, challenge, and justify their discursive, cultural, and political centrality and legitimacy in/ for the nation” (p. 133).

As seen, each chapter spotlights a distinct aspect of the Candlelight Movement, offering unique insights into the historic democratic moment in Korea. Given that the implications of this volume can be applied to social movements in other contexts, this collection will be an indispensable read for anyone who is interested in the study of social movements and social justice. Additionally, because each chapter includes a succinct, yet meaningful historical overview of its topic in relation to social movements in Korea, this volume can serve as an excellent introductory book for students and scholars in Korean Studies as well as those in Communication Studies, Journalism and Media Studies, Performance Studies, Sociology, and Political Science who may be less familiar with Korean history and culture.

Reading this collection was as much an emotional experience as an intellectual one. Clearly, the Candlelight Movement was a historic event filled with a range of emotions, and correspondingly, chapters in this volume reflect those emotions (anger, hope, trauma, sense of belonging, empowerment, disappointment, etc.). More significantly, however, the pages of this volume are filled with emotions. Through their writing, authors conveyed their sense of hope, pride, and admiration as well as their indignation, frustration, and plea for a more just society. Regardless of their perspective on what did and did not happen during the Candlelight

Movement, what is evident is the contributors' passion and genuine concern for social justice and the future of democracy in Korea and beyond.

While this book is relatively short, its chapters are impeccably arranged, building a sense of culmination as the pages progress. What could be added to this volume is a concluding chapter. Perhaps, it may have been intentional to keep the conclusion open as the fight for social justice is ongoing and many more stories remain to be written. Even so, a synthesis that brings various perspectives together and a discussion of future questions to consider would enhance this already excellent volume.

Overall, this collection offers one-of-a-kind insight and background into the historic social movement in Korea. Readers will appreciate diverse and critical perspectives of scholars who care deeply about social justice, democracy, and communication. This volume reminds us of the complexity of social movements and the centrality of communication in the ongoing fight for social justice, all the while leaving us with much-needed hope for the future.

## REFERENCES

Lee, J., Oh, C., & Kim, Y. (Eds.). (2021). *The candlelight movement, democracy, and communication in Korea*. Routledge.