

South Korean Civic Revolution: Another Mega-Protest Putting Impeachment on Track

Monday 5 December 2016, by [WON Youngsu](#) (Date first published: 4 December 2016).

An update of the article published the day before: [Nationwide candlelights mobilisation: South Korea shaken by new civic revolution](#) from the same author.

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On December 3rd, another largest mega-protest hit hard Park Geunhye's regime again. More than 2.32 million angry South Koreans joined massively the 6th national candle protest, breaking the record of mobilisation beyond concerns for a low turn out. Millions of South Koreans demanded the immediate, unconditional resignation of president Park.

Park's another manœuvre

This enormous mobilisation was the direct response to president Park's speech on November 29th, in which she first mentioned her intention to resign, but according to the plan that the parliament would propose. Her manœuvre worked, and her ruling Sanuri party welcomed her proposal, as the non-Park faction MPs joined the pro-Park majority on the condition that she would designate the date of her resignation, that is, the end of April of 2017.

The opposition refused Park's proposal, criticizing Park's manœuvring as a way to evade parliamentary impeachment. However, they need the support from at least part of the ruling party MPs, as the impeachment requires two-thirds majority votes. With non-Park MPs stepping away from the agreed impeachment plan, the opposition parties had to step back, giving up its plan to vote impeachment on 2nd December.

After some argument over what to do, the opposition decided to keep on impeachment process under the pressure of popular indignation. However, while the non-Park group is waiting for an answer from president Park, the opposition has no other means but to persuade dissent MPs of the ruling party to join the impeachment.

The conservative media, which provoked popular anger by exposing a series of scandals, also stepped back and exhorted for an solution within the framework of law and order, pressuring the opposition for a political solution. Though evading a direct confrontation with candle light protests, the conservative media wanted to stop mobilisations and follow a path within legal framework, unless impeachment is realistically impossible without breakaway votes from the ruling party.

However, people in the streets would not listen to any message of compromise and exhortation.

More and more people were upset with indecision of the opposition parties, as well as the ruling party and the president. In addition to Park and her accomplices, the ruling Sanuri party itself became a target of ever-growing popular anger.

Candle lights hit back even harder

In the afternoon, tens of thousands gathered in front of the Sanuri party's headquarters, demanding: Disassemble Sanuri Party! Nationwide, scores of the ruling party offices were targeted by angry protesters. People shouted their wrath at MPs and Sanuri party as a whole.

At seven o'clock, a huge waves of candles converged into the Gwanghwamoon Square, the main rally site, from all directions. Tens of thousands already had the marches toward the frontline of the police blockades, just 100 metres away from the Blue House. After the main rally, people marched again toward the blockades, having rallies and free speeches, deep into the night.

The rally in Seoul was joined by more than 1.7 million, a new record-high, and 2.32 million nationwide. Outside of Seoul, 620,000 people joined in candle light rallies in hundreds of cities and towns nationwide. Major cities and provincial capital also witnessed the biggest protest in history: Busan 200,000, Gwangju 200,000, Daegu 50,000, and Daejeon 50,000.

People in the streets shouted more radical slogans: Step down immediately; Nor honourly resignation; Arrest Park Geunhye immediately; and Disassemble accomplice Sanuri Party! The protest is getting radicalised in demands and attitudes.

The enormous scale of mobilisation is extremely stunning, especially because the rallies were organised as nationwide simultaneous protests. Even organisers of the rally expected a smaller scale than the previous week's 1.9 million mobilisation. However, after the president's Tuesday speech, the protest easily broke the record, with hundreds of thousands of first comers joining the protest and march.

March toward impeachment and beyond

After the mega-protest, the situation was still unclear. The opposition is supposed to vote for impeachment on December 9th, with or without dissident MPs. If impeachment fails, there would be an even bigger protest. That is what all the pundits and conservative media fear most. In face of further escalation of candles, the solution within the framework of law and order seemed at risk.

On Sunday even, finally, the dissident MPs of the ruling party decided to give up the dialogue with the president and join the opposition in the impeachment procedure scheduled in December 9th. The huge pressure put them on the track of presidential impeachment.

However, in spite of efforts to prevent a regime crisis, the situation has its own dynamics. Park Geunhye is totally isolated, faced with a fate of eventual ouster. At the moment, though there is no further exposures except for some minor ones, parliament hearings, investigation by the special prosecution, and the trials of Choi Soonshil and her accomplices are scheduled.

What next? Nobody knows. The political situation fluctuates moment to moment, but beyond wishes of conservative media and institutional politics. The path to orderly retreat or honourly retreat is blocked for good. At this juncture, what is most certain is this: as long as Park refuses to resign, millions of candle lights won't die, and they are prevailing more and more. Thus, it's time to imagine

something bigger than mere impeachment.

WON Youngsu, December 4th March
