President Park’s support ratings have sunk to 4% nationwide and 0% in the southwest, as well as 0% with those in their 20s and 30s. Public outrage has forced the mainstream opposition parties, as well as thirty two assembly persons from her own party, towards the ⅔ vote necessary to initiate impeachment. Amongst the public, the scandal has provoked protests with numbers in the hundreds of thousands every weekend. On Nov. 19, 1.2 million showed up in the heart of Seoul to call for Park’s impeachment, equal to the protests of 1987 that brought an end to the country’s dictatorship. Nov. 26 brought 1.6 million to Seoul and 2 million in total nationwide, making it the largest concentrated gathering in Korean history. Protesters ranged from toddlers with parents to middle school to college students, and included even the elderly. The spontaneous nature of this movement has even led to the coining of a new term for individuals attending a protest on their own: honchamro - the protest equivalent of the lone eater. New evidence keeps emerging about the complete corruption and abuse of power that Park committed. As her presidency crumbles under the weight of public pressure, what will the crisis mean for those seeking deeper social transformation?
Calls for President Park’s impeachment started soon after she took office in 2012 after it was revealed that the National Intelligence Service had meddled in the elections on her behalf, a crime equal in magnitude to that which sparked the Watergate scandal for US President Nixon.\(^1\) They grew in size and volume with the botched rescue of the Sewol ferry.\(^2\) Grief turned to anger and anger to fury as the president averted and blocked every attempt at uncovering the truth and punishing those responsible for the tragedy.\(^3\) The chorus of protestations grew with President Park’s privatization of the public sector and her weakening of labor conditions. It intensified further with the death of 70-year-old farmer Baek Nam Ki shot by police water cannon during protests over the price of Korean rice. There had always been a sector of society directly impacted by the president and who felt deeply discontented with (even betrayed) by her.

Yet it was the Choi Soon Sil scandal that turned Park from an unpopular president into an illegitimate one. If the first nick to her legitimacy began with suspicions that she’d helped a close friend collect funds from conglomerates for personal slush funds, then such nick spread into a deep crack when further investigations uncovered that the president had helped Choi’s daughter get preferential treatment at an elite Korean woman’s university. The deeper investigators probed, the clearer the all-encompassing the connection between Choi and President Park became. Nothing appeared free from Choi’s influence whether policies, top secrets, government posts, or favors for corporations and individuals. As the full extent of corruption and power abuse was revealed, the public, who had initially been irked by the whiff of corruption reported in the news, became first dumbfounded, then ashamed by the great depths of the scandal. That first weekend, 200,000 people came to Seoul to protest. Shame soon mixed with anger at President Park’s betrayal of Korea’s representative democracy: the president was supposed to represent the people, not Choi and her entourage. The president’s half-hearted apologies and lies only served to stoke the public’s anger and outrage. That weekend, 1.2 million came to protest in Seoul. The president’s unwillingness to be investigated despite her earlier promises of full compliance led to protests by another 950,000 nationwide. Driven by rumblings in their conscience, assured by the safety and festive nature of the protests, more and more people spill into the streets every weekend despite the cold and even snow. The protests have become a mash-up of agora,\(^4\) k-pop concert, and massive open-mic. Stuck with a clearly illegitimate president unwilling to step down and an opposition party too timid to impeach her, it has become the moral duty of the public to keep coming out and prod the opposition parties into action and dislodge the president from office. The latest manifestation on Nov. 26 involved an estimated 2 million people (4% of the population) coming out to the streets nationwide.

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\(^1\)The Watergate scandal involved wiretapping of the Democratic Party’s headquarters during the presidential election by President Richard Nixon. As impeachment of the president became imminent, President Nixon resigned.

\(^2\)304 people, overwhelmingly high school students, drowned died in the Sewol Ferry as the government failed to rescue the people trapped inside.

\(^3\)Over two years later, the ferry - a key component in recovering some of the still missing bodies and uncovering the truth - has not yet been recovered from the bottom of the ocean.

\(^4\)Agora refers to an open space where people assembled.
Can such a massive mobilization of Korean society lead to deep fundamental change? Undoubtedly, even if President Park steps down or is impeached, many questions will still have to be answered: What about companies like Samsung, who contributed funds to Choi’s foundations and got a massive social security tax write-off? Or even worse, was there any connection between these contributions and President Park’s announcement the next day of labor reforms favorable to corporations and destructive to workers? What of the seven hours when 306 people were drowning in the Sewol Ferry? Was President Park really getting beauty treatments with Choi Soon Sil? Will public discontent spill into other policies and structures that immiserate people’s lives?

At present, the public’s attention and pressure is focused like a laser on President Park and her resignation. Resignation or impeachment will be followed by calls for constitutional reforms to prevent repetition of such incident. Yet for those of us that organize, this fight is about more than simply Park’s impeachment - it’s about the making of a better Korean society. This political crisis offers space to engage with family, irregular workers, farmers, young part-time workers, students, women, artists, and run-of-the-mill strangers in the streets, and the opportunity to organize them. One thing is certain: the ousting of a president won by the power of the people will be akin to the moment people realized kings were but men - they can be brought down.
2. Anatomy of a Scandal

By Gavin Huang (Editor, World Current Report)

Ewha University students protesting Chung Yoo-ra’s special treatment
(Photo by Yonhap News)

In early October, students at one of the nation’s most prestigious universities caught wind that one of their peers, a 20-year-old student named Chung Yoo-ra, had been granted special admission to the school, even though she did not have the grades to meet the institution’s rigorous requirements.

At the time, students at Ewha Womans University were already engaged in protests pressing the university’s president to step down over accusations that she unilaterally decided to establish an extension school at the university without consulting students. The protests gained extra fire when they discovered that Chung had not only gained special admission to the school as an equestrian athlete — especially infuriating in a country where college admissions are notoriously competitive — but that she had also been given passing grades in eight of her courses at Ewha even though she did not attend a single class.

The university’s president eventually stepped down, but this was only the beginning of a nationwide corruption scandal that would ultimately reach the highest office of South Korea.

At around the same time the students were engaged in their protest, JTBC, a Korean cable news network, was busy sifting through files on a tablet PC left behind by Chung’s mother, Choi Soon-sil, who had fled the country as allegations of her involvement in government-level
corruption began to surface. The computer revealed details about Choi’s wide-ranging influence in South Korea’s state affairs, from editing speeches of Korean President Park Geun-hye to vetting top ministerial posts. Later investigations found she had even strong-armed education officials to get her daughter into Ewha and pressured professors into giving her passing grades.

Reports of Choi’s underhanded dealings were alarming, not least because she was a private citizen with no political experience or security clearance. Yet despite this, Choi, a longtime friend of President Park, was given unfettered access to a broad range of top-secret documents, including drafts of speeches before they were delivered, daily policy briefs from the presidential office and résumés of candidates for top government posts, including the minister of culture and the director of the National Intelligence Service, the Korean equivalent of the C.I.A.

While South Korea’s citizens have seen their share of corruption scandals dating back to the era of military dictatorship, this most recent case of influence peddling is unprecedented. While past scandals involved a president’s family member receiving favorable government contracts or the president making off with public funds after leaving office, Choi’s influence in Park’s administration was unusually extensive. President Park appeared to have tailored many aspects of government to fit Choi’s needs, a relationship that Korean newspaper editorials have likened to that of a puppet and puppeteer.

Choi is suspected of using her influence over the president to extort more than $70 million from South Korea’s largest conglomerates by having them donate to foundations that acted as her personal slush funds. In return, the Park government ensured the conglomerates received favorable deals and contracts, from granting duty-free shop licenses to approving mergers.

Subsequent investigations have found that Choi may have also been involved in pressuring the South Korean government to purchase F-16 fighter jets for its military and that she may have played a role in the government’s controversial decision to deploy the U.S.-led Thaad antimissile system on the Korean Peninsula due to connections with lobbyists and officials at defense contractor Lockheed Martin.

Choi also allegedly pressured Park to place her own associates in top government positions to benefit her friends and family. In fact, it was Choi’s associates in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism that helped her daughter receive a “special waiver” as an equestrian athlete to enter Ewha Womans University. Choi also ensured that many government projects went to her own friends.

President Park, in turn, is said to have relied on Choi extensively for governance advice, even though Choi had no government experience. Within the presidential compound, Park developed notoriety for being aloof and difficult to reach, even by her own aides and ministers, and many now speculate she was attempting to hide the fact that she was consulting Choi on high-level matters. Rumors abound that the infamous seven-hour delay in government response after the deadly Sewol ferry sinking in 2014 was Park deliberating with Choi on what to do.
Choi Soon-sil's connection to Park Geun-hye began 40 years ago, when Park's father, Park Chung-hee, was still in power as South Korea's dictator. In 1975, Park Geun-hye, then just 22 years old, was still recovering from the shock of witnessing her mother's assassination at the hands of a North Korean spy. Choi's father, Choi Tae-min, was a cult leader who claimed to have the ability to heal people, and he saw an opportunity in an emotionally vulnerable Park Geun-hye to curry the favor of South Korea's ruling family.

Choi Tae-min sent letters to Park Geun-hye claiming the soul of her mother had visited him and that Park could communicate with her mother through him. She invited Choi to the presidential residence, where he gained Park's trust and developed a relationship that would help him amass a fortune with the help of her influence.

Park Geun-hye considered Choi Tae-min a mentor, and when he passed away in 1994, her trust moved to Choi's daughter, Choi Soon-sil. The relationship remained intact throughout Park's rise to power, from her first foray into politics as an assemblywoman in 1998 to her election as president in 2012. So powerful was Choi Soon-sil's friendship with Park that even after revelations surfaced of the corruption, Park's first apology included not a dismissal or renunciation of Choi, but rather an admission that she had relied on Choi as a friend for help in her speeches.

In early November, about a month after Ewha students first discovered irregularities at their school, Choi was arrested by prosecutors and charged with embezzlement, tax evasion and acquiring classified government information. Two of President Park's closest aides were later arrested on charges of conspiring with Choi, and on Nov. 20, prosecutors listed Park herself as a suspect in their investigation.

Meanwhile, opposition parties in the National Assembly have begun the process of drafting a motion to impeach the president, while some angry members in the president's own party are also creating splinter groups to push for impeachment. In order for an impeachment motion to pass the 300-member legislature, at least 200 votes are needed. The country's three opposition parties and liberal independents currently occupy 171 seats, and the ruling party has reportedly secured more than 40 of their own lawmakers' support, enough for the majority vote needed. A vote could come as early as Dec. 3.

If the legislature passes the motion, Park's presidential authority will immediately be suspended, with the prime minister serving as acting president while the country's Constitutional Court deliberates on the legality of the impeachment. The court will have up to 180 days to make a ruling, and afterward, the country will have 60 days to hold a special election.

Of course, there is also the possibility that Park could voluntarily resign.

Analysts at Eurasia Group, a consulting firm that focuses on political risk, have put the chances of Park leaving office before her term ends at 70 percent.
Korea has been experiencing the biggest political scandal since it first became independent from Japan. Even though this Korean domestic political scandal has not been perceived as having a big influence on international politics or economics, it has had wide foreign media coverage. The ISC monitored English, French, and Japanese news to examine their coverage. We monitored the following major news websites: The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Guardian for English language coverage; Le Monde for French language coverage; Asahi Shimbun, Yahoo and Sankei News for Japanese language coverage.

First of all, the number of reports that covered the scandal increased since October 24 when the first report about the Choi Soon-sil case was aired by JTBC, a cable TV network and broadcasting company whose largest shareholder is JoongAng Newspaper. After that, the foreign media has been reporting the moves of the prosecutor, the government and citizens. In early November, most of the news was about the government’s announcement that the president would answer the prosecutor’s’ questions and the arrest of Choi Soon-sil on charges of fraud, coercion and abuse of power.

As the nationwide rallies have grown bigger and bigger, the news coverage has started to address them in articles, photos, and on the ground interviews. Other aspects of the story have also been published. For example, one story examines how President Park Geun-hye’s thinking
is still stuck in the 1970s when she learned her father’s governance style of coalition between business and politics. There was also an article concerned about the scandal’s negative impact on the status of women in Korea, and another about the involvement of conglomerates (such as Samsung and Hyundai) in the scandal and another about how foreign officials in Korea were paying attention to the scandal.

Even though the news coverage increased and expanded into related issues, it is hard to find articles that analyze the current scandal in a socio-politico-historical context. In other words, there is no explanation for how the citizens’ anger has been accumulated from the start of Park’s administration; how the rallies are dynamic as the people’s consciousness has developed; how active organizing is happening in different sectors such as students, workers, and women; or of efforts to combat gender discrimination in the rallies.

That is why the International Strategy Center thought it important to explore the aforementioned aspects of the current political scandal. The ISC joined all the major rallies in November, interviewed participants and organizers, and analyzed the significance of the current issue. I hope the ISC’s coverage can fill in the missing pieces in the foreign media coverage.
4. Reflection on Nov. 12 Protest

By Lillian Hexter (Editor, World Current Report)

On Nov. 12, the ISC attended a protest in Gwanghwamun Square calling for President Park Geun-hye’s resignation. The Seoul Metro System estimated that around 1.2 million people attended the event, which spanned from 4 pm through the night. In the U.S., there is a pervasive perception that Asians are not political or politicized. This protest was a clear indication of the inaccuracy of this perception. Although I didn’t hold this view, I was still surprised and impressed by the outpouring of people. It demonstrated how seriously Koreans viewed this issue, and how ready they were to create change in their society.

My first indication of the scale of the protest was how packed the train was. I spent most of the ride from Nambu Terminal to Gyeongbokgung Palace crammed among dozens of other people. While most people got off closer to City Hall, we decided to take the train to the palace. As soon as we left the train, it was clear that people were starting to gather. Everyone who walked by had a 박근혜 퇴진 (Park Geun-hye, Step Down!) sign. They ranged from families to young children to students to groups of older people.
Walking to meet up with others, the crowd was, at times, claustrophobic. Standing at just five feet tall, I couldn’t see ahead and was dragged along by the motion of the crowd. It was difficult to find the rest of the group, but once we did, four of us broke away to interview attendees of the protest.

After scanning the area for someone who didn’t look too busy, we approached a young man calmly sitting on a crate outside a cafe holding a bright red sign. His name was Guk Seung-hyun. Guk had traveled to Seoul with his friends and said this was his first demonstration. When we asked why he had come to the protest, he answered that he had followed the National Assembly hearings and noticed the bad attitudes of high level officials. He concluded by saying that this protest showed the accumulated anger of the Korean people and that it’s time for government officials to wake up.

Next, we approached a father in his forties, Jo Ik-han, who was sipping coffee with his wife and two young children. He cradled the paper cup to keep his hands warm while we asked him what brought him to the protest. In a soft-spoken manner, he simply responded, “My children.” Jo explained to us that he wanted them to know there was a better future. When we asked to take their photo, they proudly held up their 박근혜 퇴진 posters.

Our last interview was with a high school girl, aged 14 named Kim Yu Jin, who was juggling two candles, a poster and a Korean flag. She had heard about the event from her father, who came to the protest with her. He had told her that this will be a historical moment for Korean society. Kim said she was disappointed with the President’s actions and even if she herself didn’t understand politics, she knew enough to understand that this was wrong. During the interview, her father, who had wandered away, quietly made his way back, hovering nearby. Throughout our brief interview, Kim talked with us in a confident manner, never deferring to her father — rather, she eagerly shared her own thoughts and opinions.

Notably, most of the people we spoke with had never been to a protest before that night. Park Geun-hye’s corruption, however, was too much for them. Evidently, the severity of the scandal drove many people to the streets, eager to add their voice and presence to the growing movement. It was uplifting to see the diversity of those who attended the protest because it demonstrated the way in which this movement is uniting people from all backgrounds, all over the country. It was surprising how willingly people shared their thoughts. Almost everyone we
approached was kind and eager to talk with us. None of them identified as activists but they felt an obligation to protest and to fight injustice in their country as ordinary citizens.

As a Korean American adoptee who is living in Korea for the first time, I was grateful for this opportunity to see Koreans in protest. Part of my desire to move to Seoul this past year was to better understand and immerse myself in this country that was such an important part of who I am, yet which I knew so little about. Throughout this scandal, I've seen many Koreans from my high school and college posting on Facebook about how proud they felt to be Korean at this moment in history, and I realized that I felt the same. In many ways, because I do not speak Korean nor did I grow up in Korea or with a Korean family, I feel like I cannot fully participate in or understand this ongoing political struggle. Though I am interested in what is happening as a Korean adoptee and current resident of Korea, I still feel like an outsider—observing a society that I have never been a part of. Nevertheless, while I could not understand most of what was said at the protest without translation, I felt a deep sense of pride to have been born in a country that is fighting for its voice to be heard.
The preparatory committee of Together Labor is in charge of founding an organization that creates a community of workers from all sectors from subway workers to teachers to irregular workers and even the unemployed. Such worker’s community would strengthen union struggles by building a broader front based on solidarity from outside. It would provide political education and organize those without unions. In fact, most of its 200 members are part of workplaces without unions. While the fundamental aim of unions is to represent the needs and demands of its workers, the purpose of Together Labor would be to imagine and pursue larger more fundamental social transformation. To build such community and vision, members participate in monthly meetings to get to know each other, in hobby based as well as study groups that cover a variety of political and economic topics. Oh Sang Taek is the chair of the preparatory committee of Together Labor.

During this time of political chaos, how do your activities differ from those of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions5 (KCTU)?
We have been campaigning under the banner of Workers’ March for Park’s Resignation. It calls for common action once a week. The campaign organizes office workers to be more active in the struggle to oust President Park. Our street outreach is concentrated near subway stations. About 80 people registered so far.
We participate in the Thursday candlelight protests in Cheonggye Plaza. Many people still hesitate about coming out to the demonstrations or don't have anyone to come out with.

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5 The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions is the more independent and politically progressive confederation of trade unions.
Workers March provides a space where members can go out to the streets holding a friend’s hand and chant together for the president’s resignation. In addition to the Thursday protests, 20-30 of our members have been participating in the large manifestations every Saturday, as well as having a time afterwards to reflect and discuss the day’s events and plan for future actions.

What has been the reaction of workers to your campaign?
I thought that it would be much harder to get support from workers because our campaign asks them to act such as by participating in a protest. And in fact there was no reaction at the first and second day. We switched things up a little bit to become more approachable and as a result 20 people registered giving us their contact information and a donation. While the majority of people didn’t actively support our campaign, the more important thing was that many people listened to what we were saying. We are providing a space for collective action to workers that usually are simply focused on their immediate needs and interest. This campaign even provides an opportunity to reenergize Together Labor members who prepared and participate in the campaign.
Most people who registered joined during the big demonstration on Nov. 12th where more than 1 million participated. These 1 million citizens are also workers eager to change the society furious and discontent about the elite and the Park-Choi scandal.

What was the most memorable moment in the campaign?
One of our members worked at Seoul Metro. Last Thursday, he brought with him all the members who work with him. Among these members, there were a 28-year old and 29-year old indefinite contract workers who entered into the company in 2014, and a 39-year-old who recently became a regular worker from the outsourcing company. Being with them, I felt that this was a struggle of all the people against a corrupt government. One of them said, “I was very upset at the TV news, some of that fury was released a little bit after participating in the protest. I came here today because my coworker asked me to come, but in the future, I think I will come out here for myself.” I made a decision that we should make more space in which workers could join us more easily.

To recap, workers are ready for a space where they participate in daily life and where they can join in collective action.
Yes. Small protests of 500-1000 provide a space to share and hear people’s feelings on the spot. They are usually also more lively because because they are based on the free speech. Last Thursday, there was the nationwide College Scholastic Aptitude Test. About 200 students that finished the test participated. People can decide whether or not to come out to these small protests on their own. The KCTU stated that unions should participate daily in the candlelight protests. But it is unrealistic for a trade union to join every day. In that way, it is very meaningful for Workers’ March to open such a space.

Let’s shift topic. Workers have been fought against the labor policies of Park’s government and recently the public sector' went on strike against the performance based
salary and termination system. In that regard, a protest of more than 1 million people seems to be an explosion of the accumulated fury of workers and others towards the government including as regards the Choi Soon-sil political scandal. Of Park’s labor policies, what was the most crucial threat to the workers? 
Recently workers from the public sector went on strike. KORAIL workers are going on their 60 day of strike. The performance based salary termination system is one of the labor market flexibility policies, which pit workers against each other and making it easier to layoff people that a company can’t control. It is very threatening to workers. However, personally, I think the most crucial Park labor reform is replacing regular workers with irregular ones. They say that it’s for job flexibility, but in fact it is to expand irregular jobs. The context was the same as the performance based salary termination system. The government has been pushing to ratify these reforms since last year, but KCTU’s general strike and the ruling party failure in the last general election has given it a death sentence. At the second all people’s action on Nov. 12, 150,000 workers participated. It was one of the biggest manifestations in recent years. It reflects both organizing power and the workers’ fury to the labor reform law and the performance based salary and termination system.

In conclusion, we could say that Park’s labor policies are very neoliberal, and the recent worker’s struggle is also the struggle against neoliberalism. In this situation what do you want to tell workers in other countries?
I have heard that the militancy of Korea’s labor movement has gotten the attention from movements in other countries. In particular, the 1987 Workers’ Great Struggle and 1996-7 struggle against the labor reform law were historic since workers were standing up and fighting against neoliberalism. I think the workers’ struggle is also the same. Now the struggle started from the corrupt relationship between Park Geun-hye and Choi Soon-sil, but it is, fundamentally, a problem about the back-scratching alliance between government and business. Conglomerates who provided a few billions to Park and Choi earned trillions in profit. For example, Samsung donated 20.4 billion won to Choi’s Mire Foundation and K-Sports. However, the profits Samsung made last year was 26 trillion won, which is the highest amount in history. The top 30 companies have 700 trillion won in reserves. Park and Choi who were funded by conglomerates got labor reform that facilitates the oppression of workers with such toxic contents as the performance based salary and termination system.
Korean people’s movement have become much more conscious that we are fighting against neoliberalism and capitalism. Therefore, workers and other social sectors are working together in solidarity with others.
One of the sectors of society most active in these marches and rallies have been college students. The Red Card Student Marching Delegation organizes unaffiliated college students on campuses. Many unaffiliated students attend the rallies and marches on their own or not all. The Red Card Student Marching delegation creates a space for students to march together under a common banner and get to know one another in the process. On Nov. 18, Song Dae-Han and Gavin Huang interviewed one of its lead organizers, Kim Hyun-woo, a Korea University student of Sociology.

What have your organizing efforts to call for President Park’s resignation looked like?
It started in September after a big report about corruption surrounding President Park through JTBC\(^6\) and other media. Many people were going on demonstration and marches demanding her resignation. Frankly speaking, college students today aren’t like the college students of the 1980s or 90s.\(^7\) Many students these days don’t know what to do in these protests. We thought we needed to organize and help them protest and get their voices heard. That’s why we started

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\(^6\) JTBC refers to Joongang Television Broadcasting Channel. It’s news show has been at the center of exposing the Choi Soon-sil scandal.

\(^7\) The 1980s and 90s marked the heyday of Korea’s student movement. Students led the protests and struggle to end the dictatorship and achieve direct presidential elections.
You have been organizing students to the Nov. 12 mobilization. How many students showed up? Did you consider it a success?
Almost 50 college students showed up. Many of them came through our offline campus outreach as well as by signing up online. It was fascinating to see students from so many different colleges in one space. Yet, we still need to organize many more students. While the student councils are actively participating on this issue, many students feel detached from them. Students view these student councils as too into the movement or as being too political. They don’t see them as “pure.” Yet, for us it’s not about politics or about being pure, it’s about defending the basic elements of democracy. We are organizing students for two reasons: to get them to participate in the protests and demonstrations but also to organize them into a broader progressive movement. In both regards, I wasn’t completely satisfied.

What has been the reaction of college students to your campaign?
It differs by college. At Dongguk University, they were very curious and interested about us. At Korea University, there are lots of student movements and campaigning. Since they are used to it, they weren’t that interested in us. In the case of Kyunghee University, I liked doing it there, because many students were interested and signed up even though its campus also has a lot of student organizations.

There are many in the 386 generation⁸ that are critical of the student movement today. What is your response?
The student movement is in its current state because of them. So, I blame them. But pointing a finger at them is not so important in organizing. We should look back at that time, and not repeat their shortcomings. However, just blaming us for the current state of the student movement is unreasonable. I want to also hold them responsible for compromising their values and not being progressive.

How can students change things now?
There are thirty year periods in the struggle for regime change. There was April 19 in 1960⁹; there was another big movement in 1980 and 1987,¹⁰ and now 30 years later, we are at the start of another period. I think we are at a very important time. It’s surrealistic. We can organize and restart the student movement again.

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⁸ The 386 generation was coined in the 90s for people that at that time were in their 30s represented by the 3, had gone to college in the tumultuous 80s represented by the 8, and were born in the 60s represented by the 6.
⁹ In April 19 of 1960, large protests led by students against electoral fraud by the Syngman Rhee government led to its resignation.
¹⁰ 1980 was the Gwangju Uprising against the reinstatement of dictatorship after a brief democratic spring following the assassination of Dictator-president Park Chung Hee. The protests were sparked by students. 1987 marked the large scale mobilizations led by college students that brought about direct presidential elections.
What would happen after President Park steps down?
Her resignation would be a big chance to achieve everything people desire. The interim cabinet cannot but follow people’s demands. I think people will get back their voices and fight for it. For college students, one very important issue is 1/2 price tuition. I think there would be a high chance of achieving that. Everyone agrees that tuition should be lowered. The Park administration simply pretended like they were implementing half price tuition by providing some funding and scholarships.

In Korea, college education is basically mandatory. It’s not a choice. 80% of High School students go to college, so there is no reason why students should pay so much. If a college degree offered a bright future then it might be worth paying for it, but it doesn’t mean much now. The more socialist view is that all the education should be paid by the government and public capital.

Just to draw a connection with your previous question about why the student movement is not doing so well these days…The college students in the 1980s and 1990s were considered part of the elite. They felt a sense of social responsibility. While they were later exploited as workers, they were nonetheless considered part of the elite. The college students of today are simply exploited. They are no longer part of the elite. They have simply accepted the ideology of neoliberalism and competition pervasive in Korean society.

Did you have any memorable moments during your campaign?
During the Nov. 12 mobilization, we joined the protests at 2 PM, and I got home at 6 AM. I was in the streets for 16 hours! The other participants that were coming out for the first time simply followed us. I could sense from them desire and passion. That was really impressive. Also, I had a debate with someone about violence versus nonviolence. Nonviolence is a type of ideology to which we are brainwashed. Many Korean people were all about non-violence about following the rules. I was talking with one of the students about violence versus nonviolence in protests as we were sitting in front of the police line. He finally changed his mind after a middle aged man climbed on top of the police bus. The people reacted by telling him to get down and chanting “nonviolence.” Witnessing that changed his mind.

You are not necessarily speaking about getting violent per se, but more about pushing back against the riot police and not simply staying within the bounds they designate, right?
Yes.

What has been the role of the internet?
The Internet was simply a tool for organizing people to the protest. What made them come out and protest was the issue itself.
[Interview] Waging a Two-front War: Against the President and Gender Discrimination

By Shim Taeun [Chief Editor, World Current Report (Korean edition)]

Parkhayeohaeng was created by feminists and social movement female activists to call for President Park Geun Hye’s resignation while also fighting the misogyny and gender discrimination that has emerged in the protests against President Park. At the heart of the organization are a dozen activists and over a hundred members. Park Ji-ah is an activist and one of its organizers. On Nov. 23, Shim Taeun interviewed her at the Sister’s Little Library, a project of the Seoul Woman’s Association.

What have your organizing efforts calling for President Park’s resignation looked like? What are the objectives? Any visible achievements?

We post articles and images online and participate in weekly protests to call for President Park’s resignation. In our fight against gender discrimination, we also write and post articles on the internet breaking down sexist or discriminatory comments and behavior. That is to say, we aim to give other women (and feminists) who find such comments uncomfortable a "language" to engage others with. Another important aspect of our activities is shaping the genuine democracy after President Park’s resignation. Exclusion and discrimination against women and sexual minorities and the disabled is not a democracy we want to be a part of.

As regards achievements, we think it is important to let people know that we will monitor discriminatory comments at the protests. When you announce you will call out misogynistic comments, it makes people more conscious about their comments. Afterwards, we share the results from our monitoring and urge the protest organizers to make corrections. For instance, one of the MCs for the Nov. 5 protest made a derogatory remark against women on stage. We immediately called it out online and delivered it to the protest organizer. Minutes later, the MC
apologized for his remark. Many women who had found such comments uncomfortable welcomed our efforts and joined our group.

**What has been people’s reaction?**
During our activities, we realized that many people are critical of discriminatory remarks. Many people have signed up to become members and have liked our Facebook page. Now we have both men and women who say they will actively participate in our activities. Also, we see more and more people realizing the need to educate themselves and to actively resolve the problem of gender discrimination in the protests.

However, there is always opposition to our movement. For example, a Facebook page called Kimchinyeo 211 posted photos of women participating in the protests with comments such as “those bitches have previously been in favor of President Park, but they came to the protest out of opportunism,” or “they previously worshiped Park.” They posted so many discriminatory and derogatory remarks on the page, so we reported it to Facebook Korea. At first, Facebook Korea turned down our request because the page did not breach any rules set by the company, but in the end, the page was deleted.

Some ask us why we are bringing up misogyny right now. But as we see it, this has been deeply rooted in Korean society and social movement for a long time. It is simply rising to the surface at the moment. Lodging official complaints against the misogyny facilitates more discussions on future democracy. This can be an important step forward for all of us.

**Did you have any memorable events during your campaign?**
During our street outreach campaigns, we saw how much people wanted President Park’s resignation and to be a part of the movement. While flyering, people actively approached us for flyers. Many were willing to sign our petition and donate money.

In one instance, there was this high school student. She listened to our explanation and agreed to our objectives. However, when it came to joining, she wavered. As it turned out, she had skipped her cram school that day and was not sure if she could participate in the protest the following week. Though she didn’t sign up, we were deeply moved by her showing up to protest despite the great pressure and competition to achieve good grades in high school.

Also, we really appreciate all those that share with us, “this kind of activity is really necessary,” or “I was never aware of this issue before Parkhayeohaeng.”

**There were many testimonies related to sexual assaults at the Nov. 12 protest. How has Parkhayeohaeng reacted to the issue?**
We first focused on spreading the news. One testimony from a female participant on the Nov. 12 protest was particularly heartbreakingly: “Although I was sexually assaulted on Nov. 12, I will still be part of the protest next week. However, I will not go there alone anymore.” We discussed this with other feminist groups and agreed that female participants should have a safe place. So, a “femi-zone” was created at the Nov. 19 protest.

**Even before the Choi Soon-sil scandal, there were people against President Park’s**

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11 Kimchinyeo is a derogatory term for Korean woman.
government. Of course now the rallies and marches are specifically calling for her resignation; were women against President Park’s government before? If so, why?

President Park has been immersed in a lot of controversy in terms of how she presented herself as a woman ever since she was a presidential candidate. Among the many intersecting identities a woman can have (e.g. a mother, a worker, a daughter, a teacher, a wife, a single mother) she has emphasized her identity as an unmarried daughter. This “unmarried daughter and political heir of Park Chung-hee” appealed to conservative Koreans. A married male political heir does not appeal to people as much as an unmarried woman because man can create his own family and establish his own regime. However, an unmarried woman can fully commit herself to follow her father’s will. Also recently, Park's lawyer used gender to shield President Park from prosecution/or indictment regarding her whereabouts during the 7 hours following the Sewol ferry tragedy. Without any explanation, her lawyer simply stated, “She is a woman before being the president, and as a woman, her privacy should be protected” This clearly shows that she is using her gender to cover up her crimes and avoid prosecution. And her position implies that women should be protected by men. That is not what we want to achieve. We want gender equality.

The Park administration’s labor policy towards women is one other reason we opposed her. Under the pretext of work-life balance for “women,” her administration introduced part-time jobs geared towards women. However, at the end of the day, they were low-wage jobs, and on top of that, the policy was devised to address the low birthrate. In other words, the government is trying to control women’s reproductive rights while portraying full time mothers as “mothers undedicated to their families.” Parkhayeohaeng is writing an article on why feminists call for President Park’s resignation.

Anything you would like to comment on or share with feminists or female activists in other countries?

On Nov. 25, there will be an announcement of women’s strike globally. We are going to participate as well. Globally, there is a new wave of feminism and we are thinking about how to be a part of it. I want to ask feminists and female activists in other countries to understand the unique situation Korean women are in.

Neo-liberalism worsens the plight of women in many underdeveloped and developing countries given the greater interconnection between the world. In particular, the US has great influence on South Korea. While US foreign policies may bother its citizens, its impact might be greater to those abroad such as Koreans, especially Korean women.

To overcome this situation, women should carry out two types of movements: against neoliberalism and against gender discrimination. Even now, we call for the resignation of President Park, and raise our voice against gender discrimination in the anti-Park movement. So, we need solidarity among all women in the world. Solidarity that acknowledges similarities and differences of feminist movements in other countries.

I hope feminists around the world would understand that Korean women have never stopped fighting against government oppression, anti-female policies, and the crisis of democracy caused by the daughter of a dictator becoming president. I also hope our struggle might energize and empower others.
[Interview] Building people power at the community level

By Shim Taeun [Chief Editor, World Current Report (Korean edition)]

East Seoul Citizens Action Group was created by citizens and activists in eastern Seoul organizing for President Park’s resignation. On November 24, Shim Taeun interviewed one of its organizers, Jeong Jiyoon, about its organizing efforts. Jeong Jiyoon is also an organizer at Together Gwangjin, one of the founding organizations. She organizes events for its members: lectures on the current political situation, movie nights, street campaigns, and other small group activities. Every Friday, they hold candlelight vigils on Konkuk University Station.

What have your organizing efforts calling for President Park’s resignation looked like? What are the objectives?
At first we mainly ran street outreach campaigns to organize members to the action group and educate people on the severity of the situation. Many residents agreed with our movement. In our first street outreach campaign, more than a hundred people signed up for our group, exceeding our expectations. With increased members, we are running street campaigns from Monday to Thursday and holding candlelight vigils every Friday for those who want to participate in this movement but can’t come to the Saturday protests. The Friday protests take place near Konkuk University station because that’s where the most number of people signed up for the action group. This week, we plan to have college students, workers, and middle and high school students.

Our objective is to suggest a direction to people so that they can urge the government and the prosecutor to investigate the truth. More specifically we call for the arrest of Choi Soon-sil, the
resignation of President Park, and holding the ruling Saenuri Party\textsuperscript{12} responsible because it's nonsense that her party was not aware of the current situation. On a fundamental level, we aim to restore direct democracy. So it is important for us to take action and discuss politics with the group members and community residents.

**What has people’s reactions been like?**
During this period, we discovered that many people took to the streets for the first time in their lives. As the street campaign was held near Konkuk University station, many college students and workers near the station joined the group. At Guui or Achasan station, many residents signed up.

One noticeable thing was that people’s response was quite different by location and generation. For example, when we held street outreach on a busy street, we mostly met young people – students and workers – favorable to our cause. Sometimes people would even bring us food. However, when we went to places where older people usually gathered (e.g. local markets), we faced harsh criticism and disapproving looks. Even though the president’s approval ratings are at less than five percent, there are still some in their sixties and seventies defending her.

**Do people who became members of the action group also go out on the street outreach campaigns?**
Well, during the street outreach, you need to appeal to passers-by to join our group. It might be intimidating for new members to approach strangers. So instead, they come to the Friday local protests or the Saturday Gwanghwamun protests. Last week, three high school seniors came to the protest after their college entrance examinations and were there with us for six hours. We didn’t have a chance to talk with them since they had to leave early due to their curfews. So, we are planning a meeting with teenagers this week during the daytime.

**Did you have any memorable events during your campaign?**
Yes, most of them involved the people we met. There was one new member who joined the group on the first day of the campaign. He came to the November 5 protest for the first time and then again the following week. Now, he is like a veteran protester taking care of those coming out for the first time. It’s so fascinating seeing how fast he got used to the culture of protest. It made me realize that maybe he simply needed a space in which to take action and share his thoughts. I was really happy to hear that he was glad to meet our group.

Another interesting thing is that the past few weeks have served as an opportunity for people to restore old connections. For instance, this person joined the action group at the beginning of the campaign just before his wedding. We were invited to his wedding and even did a congratulatory performance. He came to one of our post-rally gatherings and met his cousin there. Actually, his cousin had also participated in the same protest that day. They had no idea both had joined the action group because they had signed up separately a week or two apart. In another example, one of the community activists saw a new member that looked strangely familiar. And the new member felt the same. They both thought hard and at last realized that the new member was the owner of a clothing shop the activist frequented. I guess President Park’s misdeeds are doing one good thing: connecting people. How ironic.

\textsuperscript{12} The Saenuri Party is the conservative party which President Park belongs to.
Even before the Choi Soon-sil scandal, there were people against President Park’s government. Of course now the rallies and marches are calling specifically for her resignation. Were people at the community level also against President Park’s government previously? If so, why? Unlike other movements – the feminist or labor movement – the community movement focused more on cultural programming with residents and on larger societal issues. That made me think about which issue was the most pertinent to residents that might move them to action. Schools came to mind. Schools, students, and parents… they led to two issues that have facilitated robust participation: the government’s national history textbook revision and the Sewol ferry disaster. The attempt of the government to create state-compiled history textbooks angered many parents and students. Parents participated in the petition saying that they did not want their children to receive such ridiculous education. Another significant issue was the Sewol ferry disaster. When the disaster occurred, many residents were shocked, and joined in the movement. To a lot of people, these two cases revealed the worst of the government.

Do you have some comments you’d like to share with activists in other countries? As far as I know, President Park’s scandal is making headlines in other countries as well. And I hear Koreans in other nations hold candlelight vigils. I feel their solidarity. I also think I need to learn about other countries that had been in similar situations because the next big challenge once President Park resigns will be what to do to stabilize our country. So, I’d like to tell your readers to please share any ideas or experience with us Korean activists.

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13 The Park government has been attempting to pass a nationally mandated history textbook. The textbook has been criticized for whitewashing her father’s – President Park Chung Hee – dictatorship.
In the “street satirical cartoon” two actors play roles Choi Soon-sil and the prosecution to criticize their actions. (Photo by Majjang)

Majjang was started to use art to communicate the current situation with citizens through free artistic expression. The group deals not simply with the scandal around Choi Soon-sil but also with President Park’s blacklisting of artists. The group is made up of fifty members. On Nov. 21, Hwang Jeongeun interviewed Goo Yeonghoe, a choreographer and a founder of Artist Action Group “Majjang,” to hear about their work.

Different groups are doing various activities to demand President Park’s resignation. What kind of activities is the Action Group “Majjang” doing and what is its direction?

We participate in the rallies and also discuss with artists what actions to do. Also each artist creates art in different fields and shares and spreads them. We plan what we can do with people and discuss how to create art. Since our work is done not on stage or enclosed spaces but on the streets and in the candlelight rallies, mobility and direct communication with citizens is very important. One of the things we came up with was “street satirical cartoon”. Actors act out a scene to criticize the current state of affairs. In addition to that, artists in different fields work together to create and share art.
Who are the artists involved in the campaigns and what has been people’s reaction to the campaign?
Our members are from every field of art: art planners, art producer, play director, play and movie actor and actress, video maker, dancer, painter, singer, musician, etc. We did street satirical cartoon and busking in the last four mass candlelight rallies. The painters drew pictures and shared them online and we also posted a dance video that we created called “Haya(resignation) movement.” The reactions have been different case by case. People like street satirical cartoon and Haya movement because they were on the media so they recognize them. People see our street performances and donate to support our actions. In particular, many people are drawn to our Choi Soon-sil look alike. A lot of people are shocked by the resemblance between the actress and Choi, but in reality the resemblance is created through acting and and makeup.

These days, people from all levels of society are expressing just how much they want president Park’s resignation and their desire for direct, and not institution, democracy. That is why artists’ work can be helpful to the citizens. The strength of art is to express and visualize a subject more clearly and evoke emotions from people. Therefore, we think about our subject and how we are going to express it, then we refine it so that it has appropriate and has mass appeal.

Can you share the most impressive or memorable episodes during your campaign? What are your plans for the coming days?
We were performing the street satirical cartoon. Among the audience, there was a 70-year-old man and we asked him what inspired him to come out. He replied, “I do not think this kind of chance will come again in my lifetime. I think this is the last thing that I can do for my grandchildren.” Then, he took a picture with us. People can also write their messages in bubbles. Many people liked expressing their opinions, and parents actively encouraged their children to also do so. To them, this was a great education on democracy. There was one funny episode where we had to remind some angry people that our Choi look-alike was simply an actress..

In the coming rally on November 26th, we are planning to perform a flashmob with a thousand artists and citizens demanding the president’s resignation. Moreover, we are planning a mobile artist team with college students moving from place to place. There will be lots of people at the rally, and sometimes some people that are far from the main stage can’t see or hear. We are going to seek out those places to share our songs, dance, and movements. We are trying to create artwork to give citizens strength on the spot and during the march.

On October, there was shocking news that 9,743 artists were blacklisted by the government. In response, many artists pointed out that a lot of corruption related to Choi-gate took place in the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism so they are demanding both the president’s resignation and punishment for those responsible. How has the situation for artists changed under the Park administration and how should it be changed?
There were no stages for artists to perform on in 2014 after the Sewol Ferry sank. The whole country was in grief and it was hard to be on the stage without talking about the sorrow. So, a lot
of performance artists had financial difficulty. The Park administration has always talked about reviving the economy through the creative economy, but after President Park the economy actually got worse and in particular it affected artists the most. Especially hit hard were artists that are not parts of institutions such as universities and national or city art organizations. The average annual income for artists is two million won (about 2,000 dollars).

Worse, there was great censorship on the content of art under Park administration. In other words, artists couldn’t receive financial support if they pointed out the government’s problems. It had gotten worse than before. For example, CJ Entertainment, a large company, invested in the film “The Lawyer” (about President Roh Moo-hyun’s story fighting the government’s oppression of people during the dictatorship). As a result, CJ Entertainment was suppressed, and artists working for the company were dealt a heavy blow. Another example is “Spirits’ Homecoming” which is about the girls who were taken by Japanese soldiers as sexual slaves. No production or distribution company was willing to invest in the film, so it took 11 years and crowdfunding by ordinary people in order to produce the film. Furthermore, there have been cases where performances won competitions but could not be performed because it directly satirized the government’s wrongdoings. The government pressured the artist to stop the performance. These cases have been revealed and some artists are preparing legal action against the government.

We are pursuing alternative art, not the current art policies. In Korea, only people who have money or are born into rich families can learn and do art. Alternative art is about everyone being able to learn, create, and enjoy art. We also pursue art that resides among the people and not in museums. We reject art that is removed from people. Art is means to communicate with people.

Is there anything you would like to request to artists abroad as regards the current situation in Korea?
I have heard that there is a new way of education toward local culture and cultural education in Venezuela. Currently, the Korean wave\textsuperscript{14} is on the rise but this type of cultural exchange is simply for commercial purpose. I would like a different type of exchange with artists around the world about how art is valued and developed in their countries.

\textsuperscript{14} Korean wave refers to the rising popularity of Korean music, film, and TV shows around the world.
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