If South Korea was one of several nation states to ride the “third wave of democracy,” it is arguably one of the smoothest and most successful cases of democratic transition. Beginning in the 1970s, democracy spread through southern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Huntington 1991). Roughly fifty percent of all democratic nations today made their transition to democracy between the early 1970s and late 1990s (Haynes 2001). The high count of democratic transitions during the third wave, however, does not obfuscate problems associated with the consolidation of democratic institutions. Accordingly, there has been a shift in scholarly focus towards assessing the challenges new democracies face in establishing the institutional structures that sustain democratic polities (Haynes 2001; Pridham 2007; Mainwaring et. al. 1992; Simutanyi 2002).

Democratic transition in 1987 marked the end of successive authoritarian regimes that ruled South Korea for nearly three decades and thus provides an exemplary opportunity for analyzing the evolution of social movements in drastically different political contexts. In South Korea, democratic consolidation is pushed forward by different sectors in political society. While institutional reforms have taken place within the central government (Diamond and Shin 1999), social movements continue to play an important part in political development (Armstrong 2002; Kim 2000). More specifically, this volume traces the ways in which South Korea’s democracy movement emerged and evolved, eventually culminating in democratic reforms in 1987, and the impact of democratic transition on contemporary social movements. Following democratic reforms, social movement activists found themselves in a qualitatively different political environment which, in turn, galvanized the rise of new civil society movements.
We draw upon social movement theory to develop a framework for understanding the evolution of Korean social movements before and after democratic transition. We propose that there are at least two important processes to consider when understanding the evolution of social movements. The first involves the institutionalization of South Korea’s democracy movement and the legitimation of democratic ideals and organizations. The second includes diffusion processes whereby new social movements have appropriated and adapted cultural and material resources from the democracy movement of the 1970s and 80s. The proposed conference seeks to address these two issues and selected papers will be edited and published as a book.

Institutionalization of Social Movements

While dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s had to rely on extra-institutional forms of political participation, because of the limited political opportunities afforded by the authoritarian states, activists in the 1990s had ready access to institutional and traditional forms of political participation. This conference explores the increasing institutionalization of Korean social movements in the following ways. First, we consider the legitimation of democratic ideals as manifest in the establishment of government-sanctioned movement organizations and the participation of these organizations in the political process. In the new democratic context, activists were able to establish important organizations that were not deemed illegal and repressed, as was the case prior to 1987. Indeed, at times, the new democratic governments funded these organizations in commemoration of the democracy movement and/or in recognition of the need for independent political institutions. Established organizations such as the Korea Democracy Foundation, National Human Rights Commission and the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, are representative of the larger legitimation of democratic ideals and organizations.

A second form of movement institutionalization involves the increasing participation of past activists in institutional politics and the deliberation of movement-related policies in the central government. Democratic reforms opened up the political
opportunity structure such that activists were able to participate directly in institutional politics. Significant numbers of activist-turned-politicians were successful in joining the ranks of government as National Assembly (South Korea’s legislative branch) members or other political posts. Thus, dissidents in the democracy movement, who for nearly three decades had no potent voice in government, found (or became) allies with significant political power. Furthermore, in the democratic period, many movement-related policies were introduced and debated in the central government and consequently, influencing the legislative process became a central concern for social movements.

In sum, then, we see institutionalization as taking diverse paths including the increasing legitimacy of the democracy movement’s ideals and organizations, as well as a shift towards traditional political institutions, such as the National Assembly, as a central locus for movement activity:

1. **What** we mean by the institutionalization of Korean social movements:

   a. *Legitimation and Social Acceptance of Democratic Principles*

      i. *Organizationally*

         1. Korea Democracy Foundation
         2. National Human Rights Commission
         3. People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy

      ii. *Culturally*

         1. Acceptance of universal “rights” ideology

   b. *National Assembly as a Locus for Movement Activity*

      i. Entry of past activists into institutional politics

      ii. Deliberation of movement-related legislation in central government

Having briefly described what we mean by the institutionalization of social movements in the Korean context, we turn our attention to what is arguably a more important issue; the consequences of movement institutionalization. Various studies of social movement institutionalization have yielded conflicting findings with some arguing for greater movement efficacy after institutionalization, and others arguing that institutionalization constrains and weakens social movements. The former argument
posits that movements have access to a greater number of cultural and material resources once they are institutionalized and that these additional resources, coupled with greater social acceptance, contributes to the long term sustainability of social movements. The latter argument, on the other hand, warns that movements that have become institutionalized are more likely to be coopted and thus lose their ability to exact change. Indeed, some have argued that extra-institutional political activities, such as disruptive protests, are the true weapons of social movements (Piven and Cloward 1979). The opposing arguments of whether movement institutionalization leads to greater efficacy or cooptation, are empirical questions that must be addressed on a case by case basis. For the South Korean case, we are interested in the following research questions:

2. What are the general consequences of institutionalization?

3. Has the institutionalization of democratic principles influenced the tactical strategies of democracy-related organizations?

4. Has the transition to democratic governance influenced the issues raised by democracy-related organizations?

5. Have funding sources and other forms of resource garnering changed in the democratic period? If so, how has this changed the agenda of democracy-related organizations?

6. Has democratic transition altered the ability of democracy-related organizations to impact larger society? If so, in what new ways are democracy-related organizations able to impact society?

**Diffusion and Spin-Off Movements**

The institutionalization of social movements in South Korea, and its consequences, is only one way by which the democracy movement was transformed into civil society movements. A second important development in social movements following democratic transition was the rapid diversification of the types of movements found in South Korea. While individual movements did exist in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the free speech movement or labor movement, these movements were subsumed under the master narratives of democracy and human rights (Koo 2001; Lee 2007).
Indeed, activists participating in specific movements in the authoritarian years were convinced that their unique movement goals addressed different parts of a larger problem that originated in dictatorship. Thus, democracy and human rights were the banners under which all other individual movements rallied.

In contrast, in the democratic period, a common enemy no longer existed and movement actors were free to pursue their unique interests. Accordingly, in the 1990s, South Korea witnessed the rise of what movement scholars might call “new” social movements: environmentalist movement, women’s movement, gay and lesbian movements, peace movement, etc. Theoretically framed as “spin-off” movements, as many activists in these social movements had significant experiences in the democracy movement, this volume will provide historical case studies of some of the more important social movements active in the democratic period.

Scholars have noted that social movements are not distinct nor self contained (Meyer and Whittier 1994; McAdam 1995; Strang and Soule 1998; Issac and Christiansen 2002; Staggenborg 1998). Rather, movements grow from preexisting movements and/or give birth to other movements. This general diffusion process is well documented in studies of America’s Civil Rights Movements. While the Civil Rights Movement’s main goal was to acquire basic liberties and rights for the African-American population in the U.S., those who participated in that movement went on to become key players in various other movements such as the Women’s Rights movement, Peace Movement, and Labor Movement (McAdam 1995; Issac Christiansen 2002; Staggenborg 1998).

In the case of South Korea, as mentioned above, the various sub-movements within the larger democracy movement went their own way after democratic transition in 1987. That is, the particular agendas of politicized social groups became more salient and mobilization occurred along these localized lines of contention. In addition, after 1987, there arose various social issues that were marginalized during the democracy movement (i.e. women’s issues, environmentalist issues, etc). While some have identified the end of authoritarianism with the “death of the Minjung Movement,” it can also be readily interpreted as the differentiation of social movements, post 1987. While it is true that the larger goal of anti-dictatorship is no longer salient, social movements have
not disappeared from Korea’s political landscape but rather, have taken their own paths advocating for particular social agendas. In regards to these new social movements, we are interested in their linkages to the democracy movement and hope to answer the following research questions:

1. **What** are the “products” of the democracy movement that have been diffused and appropriated by civil society movements?

   a. Do new social movements active in the democratic period utilize a qualitatively different set of **tactics** compared to the democracy movement?

   b. In raising new issues, do new social movements appropriate any elements of the discursive **frame** of the democracy movement?

   c. What are the personal histories of the **leaders** of new social movements? Do leaders of new social movements have experience in the democracy movement? If so, how has this past activist experience influenced how they lead and organize new social movements?

2. **How** are these social movement “products” diffused? What are the **mechanisms** by which diffusion occurs?

   a. Are there **network ties** between activists in new social movements and activists in the democracy movement? If so, is the diffusion of movement characteristics facilitated by these network ties?

   b. Are there **organizational linkages** between new social movement organizations and democracy-related organizations? If so, do these organizational ties facilitate the appropriation of democracy movement “products” by new social movements?

   c. If, as it is commonly assumed, democratic transition afforded a qualitatively different **political opportunity structure** for new social movements, how has this change influenced how new social movements mobilize?

**Conference Plan and Call for Papers**

The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University with a generous grant from the Academy of Korean Studies will host a conference on “From Democracy to Civil Society: The Evolution of Korean Social Movements” on October
23-24, 2008. This conference seeks to examine two paths through which Korean democratic movements have evolved: institutionalization and diffusion. We are looking for papers that deal with these issues as detailed above. We encourage paper submission from interdisciplinary approaches and junior scholars including graduate students. The deadline for submitting proposals or papers (preferred) is May 15, 2008. We will pay all expenses for travel and accommodation and offer an honorarium for those who will present their papers at the conference. We will only accept electronic submissions and they should be sent to Dr. Gi-Wook Shin at gwshin@stanford.edu (and copied to Paul Y. Chang at pychang@stanford.edu).