

## **CRISIS IN SOUTH KOREA: *From Social Theory To Practices***

Cahyo Pamungkas

*Research Center for Regional Resources  
Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Email: cahyopamungkas\_lipi@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

This article aims at describing the way the dimension of the social crisis is within the social sciences and humanities discourses, and the extent such a dimension is noticeable within the crisis reality in South Korea. Literature study of crisis for this study indicates that social crisis is, in theory, a general failure occurring in social life within a historical period, such a crisis produces collective distress generated by the incongruity between the ideas structure and the material structure. The crisis dimension consists of socio-political and socio-economic crises and natural disasters. Available data on the socio-political crisis reality in South Korea displays a fact that those theoretical dimensions are discernible within the Korean society's life since their colonial era until today.

**Keywords:** social crisis theory, crisis dimension, crisis reality.

### **Abstrak**

*Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan bagaimana dimensi krisis sosial dalam wacana ilmu sosial dan humaniora, dan sejauh mana dimensi tersebut terlihat dalam realitas krisis di Korea Selatan. Studi literatur krisis untuk studi ini menunjukkan bahwa krisis sosial secara teori merupakan kegagalan umum yang terjadi dalam kehidupan sosial dalam periode sejarah, krisis semacam itu menghasilkan tekanan kolektif yang dihasilkan oleh ketidaksesuaian antara struktur gagasan dan struktur material. Dimensi krisis terdiri dari krisis sosial-politik, krisis sosial-ekonomi, dan bencana alam. Data yang tersedia tentang realitas krisis sosial-politik di Korea Selatan menunjukkan fakta bahwa dimensi teoretis itu dapat dilihat dalam kehidupan masyarakat Korea sejak zaman kolonial mereka hingga saat ini.*

**Kata kunci:** teori krisis sosial, dimensi krisis, realitas krisis.

## INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the crisis in Korea, we prefer to elucidate first the referent of the term 'crisis' used in this study. The word itself has different meanings, following its scientific discipline and theoretical perspective that define it in their respective interests. In its etymology, the Merriam Webster dictionary (2013) defines 'crisis' as "*a paroxysmal attack of pain, distress, or disordered function.*" Another understanding of the term can be seen within its Greek root as expounded by Kosseleck and Richter (2006). They indicate that in Greek, the term crisis is used more frequently in law, medicine, and theology. Their suggestion implies something closely tied to the problem of right and wrong, salvation and destruction, life, and death.

At the beginning of the modern era, medical signifying over the term crisis was still dominant, within which 'crisis' has been seen as a phenomenon related to the degeneration and salvation over a living system. Since the 17th century, the term was used as a metaphor and had its development within the fields of political science, economy, history, and psychology. At the end of the 18th century, the term still contained religious and theological connotations, but it was much used in analyzing essential events within the French and American revolutions. Those days, the term was used as a flexible metaphor and became influential. From the status of a religious term, it turned secular and became a word of daily use. The term was firstly used in 1780 as the new world view index that points to the end of an epoch. A crisis was then conceptualized into a chronic signifying a longer or shorter stable historical period. As a result, a crisis might depict a repeated event as found in economy and politics, or it might become the critical analytical term as found in psychology and theology.

The term crisis used in this study is within the perspective of social sciences and humanities, i.e., referring to social crisis. About Anwar Shaikh (1978), a crisis is understood as a set of general failures affecting the economic and political relations of the capitalistic production system. Shaikh indicates that the term social

crisis assumes that the crisis is produced by the principles and mechanism of the system itself, or it is an internal crisis. Shaikh's conception of crisis is different from the definition above, for the first definition tends to be seen as neutral. He takes Marxist theory as the basis of his conception. Marx declares that the capitalistic production system is frail against disturbance and destruction coming from within or without. At times, such a disturbance produces a general crisis over the whole production system in its time of infirmity, and the disturbance may accelerate its ruining.

Shaikh (1978) makes clear that the society within the capitalistic production system is a complex and interrelated social web, and its reproduction necessitates an inter-complementary structure among many production activities. The production system can be seen as a class structure, where the reproduction of the capitalist class requires the reproduction of the labor class. The consequence is that the system resembles a cooperative community of humans, but it makes the capitalists confront the workers, capitalists fight each other, and workers crush those of their class. Such a system is capable of reproducing itself so that it can continuously function and does not collapse along with human history.

Such a fact can be explained within the history of economic thinking as following (Shaikh 1979). First, capitalism has its capacity for self-reproduction in automatic ways, and there is no definite life-limited of a capitalist system. Second, a capitalist system has its growth in order to develop and survive, and it needs demands from without, i.e., from non-capitalist systems external to it. Third, a capitalist system is capable of expanding itself, but the capital accumulation process indeed deepens its own internal contradictions progressively until the moment of its explosion into a social crisis.

The social crisis has not only its economically deterministic structural dimension but also has a dimension within the symbolic or signification realm. Bourdieu (1977) introduces the term 'legitimacy.' In Bourdieu's thought (1977), legitimacy is the social agents' loyalty

expressed in their receptivity to Doxa. Doxa is a proposition which has an unquestionable truth in the eyes of social agents; it is a form of recognition of the absolute validity of the social world. Subordinated social groups have their interest to get rid of Doxa and to wipe away the legitimacy of oppression, while dominant groups hold their interest to perpetuate it. A crisis occurs when subordinated groups have symbolic and material means to object to what is defined as reality by the social structure (Bourdieu 1977).

Another perspective on the social crisis can be seen implicitly in the work of Gills (2010), who compares 'crisis' and 'globalization.' Along with 'globalization,' the term 'crisis' has been in use for describing various phenomena and social contexts. Gills states that 'crisis' is frequently being utilized for making abstractions over economic and financial crises going then globally, such as the great depression in the 1930s. However, Gills expounds that a further look on the phenomena makes us notice that at least we have three dimensions of a global crisis: 1) crisis in capital accumulation, 2) systemic crisis that overwhelms the whole world including shifts of world economic centers and transition of world economic power hegemony, 3) civilization crisis. It is thus clear that a financial crisis is merely a dimension of a simultaneous global crisis. The three dimensions of global crisis can be observed within the social structure historically, including environment crisis and logical consequences of discordance between the ideas structure and material structure. Recently we can consider that a global crisis signals a shift of economic hegemony from the northern hemisphere countries to those of the southern. Those dimensions of a global crisis require radical social and political responses, not only meant to save world system stability but also to transform economic and political world order (Gills, 2010).

A broader critical theory approach can be found in Sociology, as explained by Quarantelli and Dynes (1977). Referring to Barton (1970: 83), they define 'crisis' as a situation where "*many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system.*" Such

a definition shows that a crisis is a distressing situation that is going collectively. A crisis is a status within which society members fail to provide themselves with expected living conditions. Such a perspective can be seen through two approaches for signifying 'crisis': consensus and dissensus. The dissensus approach indicates that the crisis is signaled by a conflictual situation where sharply different views contradict each other. The latter approach shows a consensus over the meaning of a disputed situation and over the values and norms deemed appropriate to be observed by society members. The consensus approach includes natural and non-natural disasters as critical situations. A crisis is still considered as a social crisis not only within socio-economical and socio-political dimensions but also including natural disasters as a factor capable of disrupting the continuity of a social system.

Based on the ensemble of concepts concerning 'crisis', as explained above (with Bourdieu, 1977; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977; Barton, 1997; Kosseleck and Richter, 2006; Shaikh, 2009; Gills, 2010), we infer that the term of 'crisis' in this study is closer to the concept of social crisis. A social crisis can conceptually be understood from a multidimensional perspective, which is a general failure occurring in a social system within a historical period causing a collective distressed situation; the situation is provoked by the incongruity between ideas structure and material structure or by a failure of a particular social system. Specific social crises are related to the economic and political world order or related to the world climatic order, but other crises are merely local. We will examine the extent this 'crisis' understanding can be used for describing and explaining the crisis of Korea. This article has shown if there are other dimensions of crisis distinct from those dimensions already mentioned above.

Based on findings within our literature study, referring to the definition of 'crisis' discussed above, we can say that the Korean crisis can be classified in general into three categories, i.e., political crisis, economic crisis, and disaster-induced crisis.

## POLITICAL CRISIS

Political crisis in Korea can be plotted into historical periods. Each period has its political events such as war and other political violence; those events disrupt social, national, and state lives. Certain political happenings that caused great scale social crises and made a great deal of death toll in Korea will be outlined below.

Referring to Lee (2003), the worst crisis along the history of Korea is the war between North Korea and South Korea from 1950 to 1954. This war was an impact of the cold war involving the USSR and the PRC block against the U.S. The war took lives of 257,000 South Korean soldiers and 860,000 of its civilians. More than 500,000 houses were destroyed or damaged by bombings, and four million people fled away in refuge to avoid the war (Lee, 2003: 4-6). Almost all academic experts noted that the war was triggered by the assault of the communist North Korean to the South Korean. Another perspective was given by an American reporter I.F. Stone in his work *Hidden Story of the Korean War* published in 1952. He indicates that the South Korean President Syngman Rhee deliberately provoked North Korea to attack so that the U.S. came to help him to defeat North Korean communists (Lee, 2003: 5).

In a further retrospect, hostility between South Korea (*Republic of Korea*, ROK) and North Korea (*Democratic People Republic of Korea*, DPRK) that provoked that immense humanity crisis sprang from the anterior crises within the history of Korea, i.e., imperialism and colonialism. Before the 19th century, Korea implemented isolationistic politics. It did not open any diplomatic and commercial relations with other countries. It was then well-known as a *hermit kingdom*. It was just in 1866 that a U.S. ship named after General Sherman sailed along the Taedong River from the Yellow Sea to Pyongyang. However, the ship was not welcome the way the Japanese received the opening of trade and political relations with the U.S. in 1852. Instead, Korean noblemen and people did not welcome the ship, so that a conflict occurred, Koreans destroyed and massacred all its sailors who were English, Chinese, and

Americans. The incident incited the American Marine Corps to launch an assault over the west coast of Kanghwa Island of Korea. The island was a guard post for Korea to secure maritime lines to Seoul. In that war, 650 Koreans were killed. The war made the American effort to open trade, and political relations fail, although Americans succeeded in destroying a large part of the Korean army. The American troops left the island in 1871.

Five years later, in 1876, a Japanese ship sailed for Korea and demanded Korea to open the port for commercial business. The counselor of King Kojong (of the Chosun dynasty 1392-1910) suggested the king open the port for the Japanese. The king was very young, 12 years old, and very dependent on Queen Min for managing royal issues. Queen Min was one year older than the king, but she was more dominant in making royal decisions, including opening the port for Japanese in 1876. Those days Korea was still under the political influence of the Chinese Emperor so that the Japanese were cautious in Korea to avoid war against the Chinese Empire. However, progressively, the Japanese strengthened their navy capacity in Korea so that they could interfere in the domestic issues of Korea. In 1894, Queen Min asked for help from China to send its troops to Korea. Nevertheless, in the Sino-Japanese War in the same year, the Chinese army was defeated by Japanese troops.

Their defeat against the Japanese made Queen Min invite Russians to send their troops to Korea. Vladivostok port of Russia could not be used in winter, so that Korea offers one of its ports for the interests of Russia. Such a political act trigger the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and Japan was victorious. In the same year, Japanese troops in Korea did an assassination to Queen Min, and such a deed roused a deep anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans. In 1905, the Japanese General Governor in Korea force Koreans to make a protectorate treaty with Japan.

Furthermore, the treaty made Koreans more hateful to Japanese. In 1910, Japan forced Koreans to sign the Japanese annexation over



Korea. The pact of the annexation was signed by PM Lee Wan-Yong and the Japanese General Resident Terauchi Masatake, but King Sunjong of Korea did not sign it. The signing of the annexation commenced the Japanese colonialism over Korea.

The treaty was deemed invalid by Koreans for their king did not accept and sign it. During the Japanese occupation, Korea experienced political, and identity crises for the Japanese implemented an assimilationist cultural policy. Exploitation over Korean people and natural resources for industrial needs increased and make Koreans suffer more. The result was that rebel movements sprang all over Korea, mobilized mainly by labor and religious activists. After World War I in March 1919, Kim Ku, a Korean nationalist, declared the independence of Korea from Japan, referring to the right of self-determination mentioned by President Woodrow Wilson in the Peace Conference for preparing the draft for the Versailles Treaty. At the same time, the leader of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Lenin, demanded the whole world to support the independence movement of all oppressed nations in the world. Almost two million a crowd consisting of students, ordinary people, and Christians joined a march in March. The Japanese colonial authority responded to the march by bursting bullets over a crowd of Koreans who were singing the Korean hymn and crucified Christians. The Japanese official reports indicate that 500 Koreans were killed, 1400 wounded, and the police arrested 13000. However, some Korean note indicates that approximatively 7500 Koreans were killed, 15000 injured, and 45000 arrested (Lee 1992: 12).

Contradictory points of view had been there among nationalist movements since the Japanese colonial era. At one side, guerilla warfare against the Japanese continued until the days of the World War II, with a force of 30000 personnel under the leads of Kim Ku and Kim Il Sung, who became then the leader of communist guerrillas. However, right before the world war, the Japanese had succeeded in dismantling that military movement. On the other side, nationalist leaders such as Dr.

Syngman Rhee commanded their movement from Honolulu, U.S., and did not consent the use of guerrilla warfare, for they preferred diplomatic strategy.

After the defeat of Japan in World War II, Soviet Union troops came in and occupied the northern part of Korea. Meanwhile, American soldiers reined over the southern part of the country. The 38th parallel separated Korea for the two world war victorious countries. Most Koreans hoped that at the end of the war, they could have their country freed from colonial rules and foreign troops automatically. But the reality went; otherwise, Soviet troops moved to the south from Sariwon and stopped at the 38th parallel, and the American army stood right at the south of the line.

Most Koreans do not know where the 38th parallel borderline came. The decision to divide Korea into two was signed on August 10, 1945, five days before Japan officially surrendered to the Allied Forces. The United States asked the Soviet Union to go for war in Manchuria and Korea with certain concessions. President Roosevelt and other Allied leaders did not realize that the decision might cause prolonged political and humanitarian crises. Today, most Koreans consider the decision as heartless, ignoring Koreans, and describing a desire to sacrifice small nations for saving American troops (Lee, 1992: 23-24).

Korean War caused a continuous crisis for Koreans. The story of the war is well narrated by Fearly (1950). Well-armed and trained North Korean forces fought victoriously and gained their advantage over South Korean. The American army was then in their base in Okinawa, and they gave supports for the South Koreans who were fighting against their northern enemies who came in a number larger than them. They were expecting reinforcement troops from America who arrived on July 31, 1950. On August 1, South Korean troops had been pushed back southward and forced to survive at the brim of the peninsula while defending the area around Pusan port and waiting for the South Korean forces to be reenforced and to assault back, a process that needed months to complete.

The North Korean forces were supported by labor activists who organized themselves for endorsing them. Most of those people were poor peasants. Pyongyang Radio announced that the land reform already implemented in the North would soon be applied in the South. The policy had been enacted in areas occupied by the North Korean forces. Responding to the Soviet Union and North Korea's aggression to invade South Korea by practicing the communist system, President Truman spoke before the Congress asking for consent for military intervention in order to stop communists from seizing power over the peninsula. For responding to the communist penetration in Asia, the U.S. backed politically and militarily some governments dominated by nationalists such as Chiang Kai Sek (China), Syngman Rhee (South Korea), and Bao Diao (South Vietnam).

### **Crisis in Defining Political Identity of Koreans**

Schmid (2001: 7-11) indicates that the period of 1895-1910 was a changing era, a transitional and critical time. Korean mass media expounded in detail that those days, the Korean Peninsula began to be integrated into the global system. At a regional level, Korea was annexed by the Japanese Empire, and at its national level, there occurred shifts of political power balance with the emergence of a reformist agenda by nationalist movements. Knowledge of nationalism produced at that time indicates some repositioning of power at regional, national, and global levels. The center of discourse on the nation can be identified in different fields, and primarily, it can be easily found in time and space terms. Discourse on a nation has to be referred to like the narration of modern world history. As a part of an area known as *Timut (Tongyang)*, the Korean nation is in a close tie with Japanese and Chinese, for both nations share the same space in history.

At the national level, Korean mass media introduced a history of Korean nation formation as an autonomous entity. After the Sino-Japanese war, the perspective viewing Koreans as a nation seemed solid. The perspective was meant to put Korea away from common

knowledge that East Asia was centered in China. Tensions among different levels began to show after the Japanese colonial government took control over Korea and introduced modern capitalism organized for a different aim. That is that the Japanese power did some manipulations over the world and regional histories for weakening the Korean claim over autonomy and taking away Korean sovereignty. The Japanese ruler created a discourse claiming that Koreans were separated from the Chinese, but they were part of the Japanese Empire. In this context, Korean nationalists struggled through mass media to make a nationalist discourse that Koreans were autonomous, and equally, they fought against the Japanese. The struggle took various forms in discourses, such as the form for indicating the spiritual character of the nation and rediscovering the ethnical definition of the nation. Problems of representation, narrative, and definition within the writings of Korean nationalists had their impacts on the individual writers, mass media, and the whole nation.

Based on the fact that Korea was situated between the two Empires (the declining China and rising Japan), Korean nationalists began to take a look not only to the West but also to its neighbor countries. We see, for example, that historical events of the area such as the Sino-Japanese war 1897, the Boxer Rebellion in China, the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, and the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, all those events caused historical changes in the power formation in the area. The changes had essential consequences on how Koreans not only consider its two neighbor countries but also on their way of understanding their nation. After the defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese war 1864, the defeat became their main reason for rearticulating their ideas of civilization and their relation with the new Korean vision. Rethinking Korea could be understood as an act of reevaluating the meaning of China. After signing the treaty of Shimonoseki in 1890, Emperor Qing of China recognized the independence of Korea and dismantled all ritual ceremonies representing the subject status of Korea before the Central Kingdom (China). Although the treaty was among foreign countries, it resolved

the ambiguity of the Korean Peninsula before China, for there were cultural legacies in the form of knowledge and cultural practices that came from China, obtained through exchanges for centuries.

Changes in the function of China were introduced as an integral part of the Korean nation re-formation process-oriented by new knowledge and ideas of civilization introduced and adopted by Korean nationalist writers. The Middle Kingdom was no more considered having a central position but situated at the periphery at global and regional levels. The reorientation could be seen within the problems of practices, texts, and traditions for Koreans who had been participating within the transnational Confucianism for centuries. The beliefs were taken for granted universally, but now it was seen as a part of Chinese national identity, and thus were deemed foreign for Koreans. In the time of the complete control of the Chinese Empire over the whole East Asia, in politics and cultural areas, Korean writers spent most of their energy in discussing China. Nationalist writers commenced a movement of returning their indigenous tradition. They discussed the practices and beliefs that came from the development of Chinese culture. The movement was called *decentering the middle kingdom*. The movement aimed at reobtaining an authentic national culture as a result of hybrid cultural development. This cultural movement was not only shown to Chinese but also the Western colonial rules. The hybridizing process did not occur solely with the arrival of the imperialists but had been going for centuries in Asia. For Korean nationalists, their task to recover their culture consisted of identifying the hybrid culture, which was appropriate to be seen as a national component.

The Kimonoseki Treaty signified the end of the formal relations and ties between Korea and China, but the Korean cultural movement was meant to wipe away Chinese culture and to introduce Korea as a free nation. But in fact, practices and symbols that had been used together by both nations could not easily be separated into two distinct national categories. Besides presenting news of the movement of

decentering Chinese culture, the newspaper *The Hwangso ng sinmun* (Capital Gazette) kept constructing a shared history for writing ideas that the East was the adversary of the West. The newspaper had its commitment to reform Confucianism and to offer a means for not only expressing a vision of the area as a cultural entity unified by Confucianism but also for indicating how the past could integrate into a new understanding of civilization and enlightenment.

Nationalist was dangerous because they criticized old fashioned cultural practices. For their criticism, it coincided with the criticism against the colonial rules. In the era of Japanese colonialism, the criticism developed into an autonomous thinking area of the nationalists, some moments before Korea turned into a Japanese protectorate. The criticism was not only used to defend their nation but also to fight against the colonial ideology. The option of getting involved within the cooperation with colonial power was rejected by Korean nationalists, for they were in their efforts to transform colonial concepts into their aims. However, with the coming of the annexation in 1910, they did not have much time to develop their strategy. Both the colonial power and Korean nationalists had significant attention to the problem the way Korea and its culture had to be represented. Both for Japanese and Koreans, nationalism did not require much time to develop a postcolonial theory to understand that cultural representation was tightly tied to power.

A collision between nationalists and colonialists in Korea extended to the field of representation and terminological definition. In the eyes of nationalists, the strategy of fleeing from a dilemma characterized by the essential nature of civilization. For instance, civilization was dualistic in distinguishing a field where the definition of a nation was not incorporated profoundly within the concept of progress, such as one that might be found in the enlightenment project. After the Japanese ruler seized control over central state institutions, their reformist struggle did not seem very useful for most people, for they had to

cooperate directly or indirectly with the colonial power. Korean nationalist writers began then to abandon definitions of nations centered on the state for creating alternative locations, some of them set to discuss national spirit (*kukhon*) or national essence (*kuksu*), similar to the concept of a nation which was understood and developed in East Asia.

Nevertheless, in Korea, the new definition of the nation was important, and the protectorate politics corroborated its usefulness. A nation defined in spiritual terms offered a new form of struggle rooted not only within the civilization reform but also in the incorporation of language, religion, and history. Partha Chatterjee indicates how Indian nationalists developed similar ideas of spiritualism under British colonial rule. However, not so much like the Indian situation, the spiritualism attracted much attention for it presented a masculine nation (Schmid, 2002: 11).

Adopting a social Darwinistic vision that left no much room for the enlightenment model history, Sin had a system of ethnically national kinship as his subject matter, and extinction threat became a dynamic narrative. By situating ethnical nation at the center of history, Sin kept a distance with the narrative of Confucianism that centered the world to the royal castle. Through that procedure, he created an autonomous nation subject that had no other external reference except the nation subject's act itself. Sin's movement made China irrelevant to *Minjok* Korean history, and it constituted the last phase for decentering the Middle Kingdom. The Korean history offered equally an objective definition of their nation, i.e., a nation that existed through historical times without the necessity of realizing its existence or not, but within in a situation and condition of an oppressed nation. When his country was stolen, but its existence continued in the form of an ethnic nation who were dependent on its time consciousness, Sin's historiography had a prospect of creating and preserving Korean collective memory. The maneuver of Sin historiography could serve many purposes then, but the most important matter was that it created autonomy for the nation than being

oppressed by two grand empires, and simultaneously it decentered Korea away from China of the past and provided a version of a nation who could give a particular measure against Japan. The maneuver was perceived by other historians who wanted to provide an alternative for defining their nation.

### Political Crisis of the 1970s

In the aftermath of the Korean War, a political crisis came up in 1972 when President Park Chung Hee enacted martial law and dismiss the national council, closed down universities, and did tight control over mass media. The policy was known as *Shiwal Yushin* or October Revitalizing Reforms, aiming at strengthening the executive power in dealing with the issue of Korean reunification and at enhancing the economic development (Buso, 2007: 123-128). Following the referendum result of 21 November 1972, that consented radical changes over the constitution to give the authority to the president to control the legislature by holding the right to choose one-third of the number of the national council members. The era was also called the fourth republic and *Yushin Era*. The changes in the constitution reflected the consideration of President Kim over the domestic and international situational changes.

That authoritarian policy was run in the context of the high level of society industrialization, which was increasingly complex and hard to control, and also for reducing uncertainty when dealing with international problems. Under the President, the Korea Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) became a balancing body for the bureaucracy and central power, which were of great importance in domestic politics. The purpose of the system was holding tight control over the state and overcoming the infirmity of the government in dealing with popular political pressure. Nevertheless, the detrimental excess was that KCIA became an overpowered body and the most corrupt one, for it was given to much authority in solving security issues, and it was involved routinely in pressuring and oppressing political adversaries of the régime.



The policy caused a political crisis in August 1973 when KCIA kidnapped a fugitive political figure of South Korea who was in his exile in Japan, Kim Dae Jung. Such a political system was challenged by the parliamentary institutions, students and other civil movements. During 1974, the student movement of South Korea had a significant influence on protesting against human rights violations practiced by the régime of Park Chung Hee. However, the protest struggle did not bring about any political change but made the régime more and more repressive. The failure negotiation with North Korea, the discovery of a giant secret tunnel built by the North under the demilitarized zone, and the fall of the South Vietnam into the hand of Viet-cong in April 1975, all those facts provided a pressure for the coming of a political consensus for the necessity of powerful leadership and defense posture. During 1974-1979, President Kim promulgated a series of emergency decrees for reducing political protest and criticism against the authoritarian political system. Moreover, the policy was popular and supported by Koreans for President Park succeeded in maintaining high economic growth.

However, then, the political legitimacy of the president weakened when an economic crisis occurred in 1979. Opposition movements got their momentum and mobilized students and labor demonstrations in all South Korea, including riots in Pusan-Masan, which the government failed to control. Amidst the political situation which was full of uncertainty, President Park Chung Hee was shot and killed in a dinner party held by the director of the KCIA, Kim Chae-Gyu. The death of the president did not mean the collapse of the authoritarian political system, for the system, was continued by the military régime of General Chun Doo Kwan (1979-1987). It is proven by the sheer number of political prisoners in his administration era, as shown in Table I. Students who were imprisoned from 1974 to 1979 were 986 persons. The number decreased in the period 1980-1985 into 678. Nevertheless, the number of worker prisoners increased from 117 to 490 from the first to the second period.

**Table 1.** Number of Political prisoners by Occupation

Occupations	1974-1979	1980-1985
Students and youths	986	678
Workers and peasants	117	490
Priests	78	6
Members of religious groups	49	23
Reporters and writers	74	35
Teachers	59	53
Politicians	50	46
Businessmen and researchers	29	16
Soldiers and Public servants	5	31
Employers and self-employed	31	27
Unemployed	37	6
Poor people	0	17
Members of movement groups	0	23
Others	776	57

Source: The National Churches in Korea (1986).

President Park has a legacy that is still memorable to Koreans today, i.e., his success in accelerating economic growth and slowing down political growth. He was an authoritarian leader, but still, he was a humble person. His portraits were hung obligatorily only on the walls of government offices. There is no monument or statue for commemorating his achievements; no praise songs are created for him; there is no ideology named after him. He was known as a person firmly holding the conventional Confucianism: filial piety (*Hyo*), loyalty to one's betters (*Ch'ung*), and proper social etiquette (*ye*). Among his positive sides, he has the vision to build a prosperous country and a powerful military posture, and he shared his prosperity with Koreans broadly. He was not only popular among military persons but also among ordinary people, for he wanted to have firm business and agricultural sectors.

## ECONOMICAL CRISIS

An economic crisis is one of the social crisis dimensions in Korea, for the scale of its impact is immense for causing poverty and related to the economy and politics of the world. At the end of 1997, Korea experienced a sudden

economic fall that raised the unemployment rate, decrease of income, and increasing social frustration, the bankruptcy of many companies (C hung, 1998; Kim & Lee, 1998; Kwak, Song, & Kim, 1999; Lee, Koh, & Kwon, 2000; Park, 1998 cf. Kwong et al., 2003)

This part focuses on the financial crisis of 1997 that had its impacts as well to other southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Thailand. The systemic impact of this crisis made it appropriate to be classified as a social crisis and also a political one.

Bridges (2001: 13) describes the Korean financial crisis in six phases as follows. First, from July to October 1997, the crisis had its impact only on a number of Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Second, from October to December 1997, it spread to the south part of East Asia, especially South Korea. Third, from January to Mei 1998, it extended geographically and reached economically developed countries such as Singapore and Hongkong, those countries had their economic growth negative. Fourth, from June to December 1998, most economies attempted to prevent themselves from falling into recession and restructured their economic system. Fifth, from January to December 1999, economic recovery from the crisis could be seen, especially in South Korea and Singapore, and the same trend could be found among affected countries, their economy began to grow positively. Sixth, from the end of 1999 to 2001, the economic growth of Asian countries began to be high, and the economic crisis ended.

In mid-1997, President Kim Dae Jung indicated that the fundament of the Korean economy was much better than Southeast Asian countries, and assumed that South Korea would never be hit by any economic crisis. However, on 19 November 1997, he fired his key economic thinktank members, for they were deemed blameable for the Korean economic mismanagement. Two days later, he asked for help from the IMF for stopping the economic collapse of his country (Bridges, 2001: 14). The Korean economic crisis was caused by external factors in which the economies of Thailand

and Indonesia began to grow negative sharply. Nevertheless, institutional factors contributed too in weakening the administration of Presiden Kim to respond to economic environment changes that went rapidly. The economic crisis in Southeast Asia was caused dominantly by capital flight, which made the economy of a country fragile. The direct impacts of the economic crisis in Southeast Asia on the Korean economy might be limited, but its indirect impacts were more significant to the psychological aspect of society. ASEAN countries were essential markets for South Korean products since the mid of the 1980s, and Korean banks were interested in providing investment loans to enterprises in the area up to USD 15 million. Korean dependence on the area made this country not confident enough to deal with the crisis.

Since October 20th, 1997, the financial crisis in Korea became evident when it hit not only South East Asian countries but also Hongkong. The analysis of OECD indicated that the tumbledown of won before the U.S. dollar was caused by the economic panic in Hongkong. Foreign investors fly their capital away from South Korea, for they sold their financial assets in Korea. Several big companies in South Korea were bankrupt of the crisis, e.g., Hanbo and KIA, at the mid of the crisis year. The situation made international commercial banks worry about the possibility of failure among Korean banks. At the end of Oktober 1997, 30 commercial banks in Korea had their total asset USD 3.6 billion, which were in the status of non-performing loans outstanding, three times higher than their assets at the end of 1996. Foreign creditors become reluctant to give loans to domestic financial institutions; they tended to withdraw their funds from Korea. The roll-over ratio of the biggest Korean banks for asking for loans from abroad declined from 87% in October 1997 to 32% in December 1997. The government ironically announced that it would provide assurance to all foreign loans, which means that the central bank of Korea was trying to be the last creditor of USD. To foreign economists, such a reality indicated something

wrong among Korean conglomerates and the financial system.

At the same time, the exchange rate of won to USD fell significantly, and the Korean central bank began to intervene in the foreign exchange market to stop the collapse of won. However, the policy required a great expense of its foreign exchange reserves. The Korean government claimed that its reserves amounted to USD 33.2 billion in mid-1997. Nevertheless, reality seemed worse. Bloomberg indicated that Korean foreign exchange reserves were less than USD 15 billion. Won's exchange rate fell from 840 won per USD in December 1996 to 929 won per USD in October 1997 and continued to weaken to 1,390 won per USD at the end of the year when the South Korean government asked for financial aid to the IMF.

The South Korean prime minister deputy once said that the government would never ask for loans to the IMF. But in his visit to Seoul on 16 November, the director of the IMF Camdesus warned the Korean government about their financial condition. Two days later, when one USD equaled 1,000 won, the Korean central bank suggested the government to ask for aid to the IMF. On that day, the National Council of South Korea ended its regular session without enacting the Financial Reform Act for strengthening surveillance over the financial sector. The act was blocked by the opposition party, i.e., the National Congress for New Politics and the United Liberal Democrat, which had their interests in the next presidential election. President Kim dismissed his Vice Prime Minister Kang and his Economic Senior Minister Kim In Ho for his was deemed fail to enact the Financial Reform Act, and the president appointed Minister of Industry and Trade Lim Chang Yuel to be the Vice Prime Minister the for the later was close to the IMF. However, Lim declined as well the idea of asking for help to the IMF, and he decided to contact the Japanese and American governments for supplicating for bilateral aid. Nevertheless, both countries agreed to help only within the IMF framework.

The Vice Prime Minister decided then to form a committee of economic counselors

for president, and ran a set of exigent policies including the attempt to widen allowed space for daily won fluctuation, setting earlier the stock market schedule and activating new financing to expunge non performing loans as an instrument for encouraging foreign investment and trust of foreigner investors. But those policies did not help, won collapsed against the USD on 21 November, so that the Vice Prime Minister Lim asked for help to the IMF to avoid loan moratorium. South Korea received a loan of USD 20 billion. The problem that emerged was the perspective difference between the IMF and the South Korean government. Lim stated that Korea only needed fresh fund injection and not policy intervention, for he learned from the mistakes done by Indonesia and Thailand, which had to run a tight money policy. South Korean government once again asked for economic aid to Japan and APEC countries, chiefly the U.S., Canada, and China, but all those countries could not help. In the end, South Korea had no other choice but accepting requirements posed by the IMF. South Korea and the IMF signed the loan agreement on December 3, 1997, with a commitment to run the following economic policies:

- The financial deficit had to be managed to be lower than 1% of the GDP in 1998 and 1999, with a 5% inflation rate in 1998.
- The real GDP growth was not allowed to be higher than 3% in 1998.
- Tight fiscal policy would be maintained for reducing financial burden in order to increase the independence of the central bank and to improve supervision over financial institutions.
- Specific actions would be done to restructure and capitalize on troubled financial institutions, including the shutdown of their operation.
- A new schedule would be established for the trade liberalization program and capital flow.
- State management would be improved through greater transparency and better managerial practices.

- Labor market practices would be made more flexible.

As compensation, the IMF agreed to provide a loan package of USD 20.9 billion to South Korea, and the sum could amount to USD 58 billion, were USD 35 billion came from international monetary institutions, and USD 23.35 billion was provided by individual countries. South Korea received the first emergency funds of USD 5.5 billion, but the agreement did not solve the crisis rapidly. A positive effect of the loan agreement to the value of won and the stock market was relatively insignificant and short-termed. The financial situation of Korea remained bad for new data and was available only on daily crisis reality so that the market gave more attention to gaps within the financial sector. The situation was maintained by the perception that the administration of President Kim was trying to get alternative funds and attempted to renegotiate with the IMF.

The 1997 economic crisis had an impact on the life of Korean society. Kendal (2009: 144) writes about the crisis' impacts on Koreans comprehensively within his article on the effects of the IMF loans to the spiritual world of Korea. In the time of the 1997 economic crisis, debtors began to withdraw their money out of Korea so that Korean banks were forced to get loans. This phenomenon increased the debt of chaebols, i.e., tycoons who dominated the Korean economy, for money had been loaned, and the loans had been guaranteed by a complex system no one outside the structure knows precisely the amount of the loan (D. Park and Rhee 1998; Root et al. 1999).

Although programs for financial reform had been run by the government before the crisis, the government did not completely understand the problems. The collapse of Hanbo Iron and Steel Company at the beginning of 1997 and several other big companies indicated that government-controlled banks, which were the sources of the loans for the chaebols, had expanded loans to Hanboo above the legal limit (Pollack 1997). The capital flight out of Korea pushed the Korean central bank to release several billions of its foreign exchange

reserves to maintain the stability of the won exchange rate. Among the impacts of the IMF financial aid, certain policies were unpopular (S. Suh, 1998), including tight measures over credit provision. Tight credit regulation limited the access of business people to get cash loans and contributed to worsening mistakes within the unsafe credit chains. South Korea became dependent on importing for fuel oil and wheat for food and cattle food, while iron ore and coal were imported commodities. High cost for sugar became the burden of every household, except for poor households, for they spent most of their income on food and fuel, for reducing the devaluation impact (Y. Y Lee: 145; Lee 2000).

The IMF imposed firmly the labor market flexibility that caused brad labor discharge in South Korea. Combined with business failure caused by tight access to loans, the flexibility increased unemployment. The government had encouraged labor market rationalization and greater accountability within market transactions; most Koreans considered the government obedience to the IMF was humiliating to them as a nation since, for years, they were taught to see South Korean prosperity as their joint victory in blissful time. Among intellectuals, there were discussions on the fact that South Korea had become a protectorate of the IMF and even had been annexed by it (Cho Hae-joang, 1998: 1) under its regulation (H. Park, 1997). It was a hard language referring to the colonialism that fell on them in the past. The idea that Koreans had no power was expressed through little dolls sold in rest areas along highway roads in Korea. The doll had a little blackface, indicating that foreign people were tightly controlled, and there was an emblem of IMF on its chest. The spring of 1998 was known in South Korea as the IMF era, for there were promoted the IMF burgers, cheap foods as the alternative for instant noodles. Those foods were part of the attempt of people in business to encourage economic and simple consumption. Rumors developed in South Korea that employment discharges might happen in the future; everybody was waiting for his/her lot of being fired from his/her job. Like old haunting ghosts, images of jobless people, sleeping in the park at night, abandoning their



children, and committing suicide for having no resources for supporting their family life, haunted the media and appeared in every conversation. Although there was no sudden disaster, everyone seemed to be easily affected by insignificant things. A waiter or a restaurant owner was struggling to overcome the difficult time by holding on their optimism about a better time to come — taxi drivers sitting lazily in their cabs for hours in the row of empty vehicles waiting for passengers. Civil servants were insecure if they would still have their jobs after some of them had been discharged. Economic reform had been introduced by the IMF and considered as the main principle in the era of transparency and accountability in the banking sector, business, and state management (E. H. Kim, 1998), but most people on the street saw the uncertain future to figure out.

The situation worsened, the unemployment rate arrived at its peak, i.e., 8.4% in the first quart of 1999. The rate increased three fourth times compared to the rate the time prior to the crisis and significantly higher than the unemployment rate in the years before the 1980s before the Korean economy was recognized as miraculous (J. Lee and Rhee, 2000). The number of people without housing increased to 2,550 in the autumn of 1998. Coming into the year 1999, the business world of Korea continued to fail three times before the crisis-era (Kendal, 2009: 145). Many companies owned by tycoons collapsed, but most collapses happened to small and medium businesses so that the crisis impacts affected more heavily to those at the middle and low levels of the economy. Regional governments reduced 12% of their employees (Y. Y. Lee and Lee, 2000). In 2000, the economic crisis ended, and the Korean GDP raised to the level of the time before the crisis. Manufacture and construction sectors resurrected, with the rationalization over jobs within the private and public sectors, college graduates who expected professional or managerial carriers had to compete to gain those positions which were reserved only to the master graduates. Most economically marginalized people who consisted of women, non-educated, and unskilled workers were still

unemployed. Economic restructuring generally meant the spectacular dream of economic and social achievement. The dreams characterized the life of South Koreans before the time of crisis (Kendal 2009: 146).

## NATURAL DISASTER CRISIS

As a country situated at the coastal area of the Pacific Ocean, South Korea is frequently hit by natural disasters, such as storms, typhoon, flood, drought, extreme snowfalls, extreme temperature, landslide, forest burning, yellow dust, tsunami, earthquake and so on (Park, 2005; Kim et al., 2007). Wook Joon-Kim (1994: 2) indicates that the statistical data of the government notes that the frequency of disaster hits in the period of 1904-1990 shows: flood 28% (390 events); storm 27% (380); typhoon 19% (265); extreme snowfall 11% (153); other disasters 14% (199); from the total 1,393 disaster hits. Flood, storm, and typhoon are seen by the Koreans as *p'oongsuhae* (storm-flood disaster) that happen in summer every year. A flood happens very often geographically, and the Korean Peninsula is located between the Asian continent and the Pacific ocean. Meteorologically, a storm happens very frequently for Korea is within the area where a low air pressure coming from the Yangtze valley in East China meets the high-pressure air coming from the west and north parts of the Pacific ocean. In addition, the flood is also caused by human mistakes, especially mismanagement of economic development

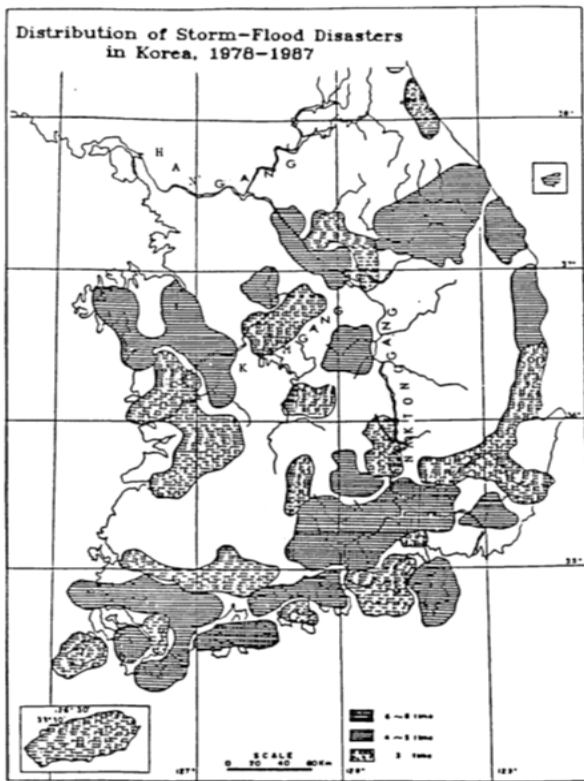


Figure 1  
Distribution of Storm-Flood Disasters in Korea, 1978-1987  
Source: Redrawn from MOC, 1988, p. 308

and industrial development and urbanization pressures in large cities (Joon-Kim, *ibid.*).

Figure 1 shows areas along the coastal line of South Korea and low lands situated around great rivers in Korea, i.e., Han'gang, Naktoggang, and Kumgang rivers. Coastal areas are most affected by storms and tsunami. Flood hits areas of riversides, related to the increase of density and regional industrial development of the 1984-1994 decade. While, figure 2 indicates an increase of loss from year to year, except for the damage in 1987 when two typhoons and one storm happened in two months during the summer. Total loss of the flood and storm during the period of 1981-1990 includes 2,828 lives, and property loss amounts to USD 4,267 (Jong Kim, 1994: 3). Figure 3 lets us notice sectors within the society that are affected by natural disasters in South Korea. During the 1981-1990 decade, damages happen dominantly to public facilities (45%). Reconstruction of public facilities requires massive financing: roads, slop enhancements, school, and many other public buildings. Recovery over the damage of public

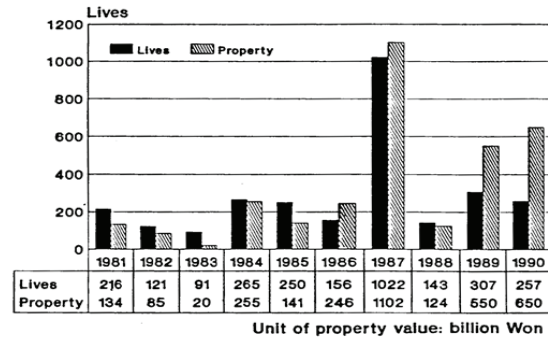


Figure 2  
Loss of Life and Property Due to Storm-Flood Disasters in Korea, 1981-1990  
Source: Derived from NDPCH, 1991, p. 447

facilities needs government intervention, but in reality, some damages cannot be recovered by the government.

Some natural disasters especially typhoon, flood, drought, landslide, snowstorm, tsunami, and earthquake, come almost every year in Korea and cause an annual loss amounting to USD 700 million as it has been calculated by a statistical study done by the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Industry. All those disasters affect annually agricultural areas of 160,600 acres destroyed by the flood. The most frequently coming disasters are storm and typhoon. In summer, the monsoon wind carries the 383-millimeter rainfalls in 24 inches, causing floods and landslides for the Korean landscape is mountainous. In July and August,

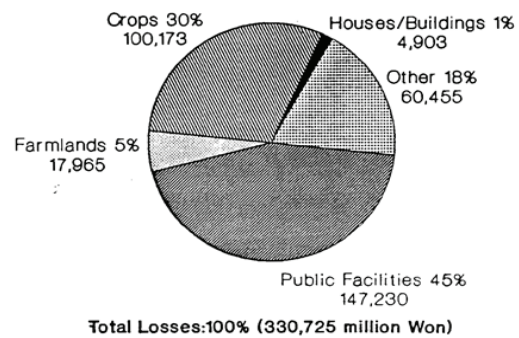


Figure 3  
Storm-Flood Damage Loss by Sector, 1981-1990  
Source: Derived from NDPCH 1991, p. 447

typhoon comes from the East of the Philippines to the peninsula. Storms that happen in June and August bring floods.

The Korean government today is within its process of improving its meteorological

surveillance system. The system enables the authority to warn people of the disaster risks and to do necessary evacuations. South Korea is also prone to earthquakes, although it is located on the inside part of the Eurasian continent and not on any tectonic line. Korean humanity history also notes the occurrence of earthquakes and tsunamis. For example, in 779 AD, an earthquake in Gyeongju destroyed houses and took 100 death toll. On October 17, 1978, Hongseong tremor of 5.0 magnitude did not cause human casualty but ruined 1,120 houses. The west part of the Korean peninsula is less affected by the earthquake. The center-west part of the peninsula has stronger earthquakes than the eastern part.

Natural disasters that had occurred in South Korea in 2005 were the following (Dugkeun Park, 2005). First, a heavy snowing in March 2005 on the eastern part of Korea, causing damages over agricultural and fishery facilities with the loss amounting to USD 21 million. Second, torrential rains in August 2005 of 15-71 mm precipitation levels occurred in the central and east part of Korea. The disaster caused 15 casualties and property damages estimated by USD 456.8 million. Most of those who were dead in the disaster were victims of landslides that damaged 2,815 houses of 7,340 inhabitants. Third, the prophet typhoon in September 2005. An accumulative rain of 622.5 millimeters caused six deaths and a USD 115.4 million property loss.

For overcoming disaster impacts and preventing humanity crisis from expanding, certain policies are implemented by the South Korean government. National parks in affected areas are closed the highway temporarily to the areas are also shut, and the subway operation is extended 30 minutes. The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures is the body that decides the budget for the mitigations, the regional governments and related institutions that will cooperate after receiving the budget funds. Related to the torrential rains, mass media such a the Korean News Bureau participates actively in disseminating information on disasters. The verbal warning system can be activated automatically. Moreover, for dealing

with the prophet typhoon, people who live in coastal areas are to be evacuated primarily. Disaster mitigation is the same.

Tsunami attracted the serious attention of Korea, which is in geographical proximity with Japan, where earthquakes are frequent and because Korea is on a peninsula surrounded by the sea. The east coast of Korea was hit by two tsunamis in 1983 and 1993. The national natural disaster mitigation management and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), which is under the Government Administration and Home Affairs (MOGHA), is the institution that is tasked for natural disaster mitigation management. NEMA consists of four bureaus: Planning and Management Bureau, Mitigation and Planning Bureau, Response and Management Bureau, and Recovery a Support Bureau. In regular times, NEMA does practical tasks. In the time of the disaster, the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters (CDSH) is assigned to prevent and control natural disaster status and to equally make recovery planning and do necessary actions related to natural disasters. At the end of 1990, the South Korean government began to improve its disaster management to deal with the problem of responding to natural and human-made disasters, and the problem of creating programs related to improving the natural disaster information system and flood protection program. Those programs are handled by the National Disaster Prevention and Countermeasures Headquarters (NDPCH), which is under the MOGHA responsible for maintaining and operating the Central Civil Defense Council and the Disaster Countermeasure Committee. Twenty-one governmental institutions and 16 regional institutions are involved in disaster management and prevention efforts. The central and regional governments have made and been using techniques for improving their disaster mitigation practices. The goal is for making a national disaster preparation planning and establishing procedures of disaster recovery for citizens and infrastructures.

The South Korean government is working on developing the national flood insurance program, for the property loss caused by flood



increased. Korean disaster management and the prevention program are implemented by each ministry and regional government, and by government corporations such as Korea Water Resources Corporation (KOWACO), Korea Highway Corporation, Korea Environmental Management Corporation, and Korea Electric Power Corporation. KOWACO is under the authority of the Ministry of Construction and Transportation. It focuses on the effective use of water resources facilities, constructing new dams, expanding water provision facilities, and works of maintaining and repairing water channels for preventing flood in accordance with the long term water resources planning (2001-2020) and the long term dam constructions planning (2001-2020).

The three goals of the South Korean government in its five-year disaster management and prevention planning are following. First, establishing a comprehensive response system against disasters focusing on preventive measures. Second, building a disaster information system, implementing policies and strategies for disaster prevention based on science. Third, improving international cooperation and preparing for the Korean reunification.

The South Korean government has its planning for facing disasters in long terms, and the following projects are the most potential in disaster mitigation and prevention sectors in Korea. First, the National Safety Management Information System: this system includes a communication network connecting the central government to 25 organizations affiliated to it and sixteen regional government. Since 1996, MOGAHA has been implementing the National Safety Management Information System, which is part of the disaster mitigation and prevention project. The project aims at integrating all safety management operations run by all state ministries and sixteen regional governments to form a systematic and scientific natural disaster management system.

This system is to be communicated through wireless and satellite networks using the GPS (Global Positioning System), GIS (Geospatial Information System), GMS (Geostationary

Meteorological Satellite), GEOS (Geostationary Operational Environment Satellite) and other complex systems. Second, the protection program from the flood: this program produces flood protection maps and flood mitigation management. The program allows the government to provide protection for all citizens from the flood throughout Korea. The government is in its way of developing a community rating system for encouraging regional entities to adopt the management standard created by the national flood protection program. Third, natural disaster mitigation: specific methods are applied to estimate damages, techniques are used to assess trends of mitigation failures, there is also a system of rain reduction and disaster mitigation concept on land use and development planning.

South Korean government provides citizens who flee from the disaster funds for reconstructing their houses and recovery of their agricultural lands. The government has identified 537 areas as disaster-prone areas. Those structures were invested in the period of 1998-2004 for recovery. At the central government level, earthquake management is handled by the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB) and the Disaster Management Bureau of the Domestic Affairs Ministry. In Mei 1999, DPPB was merged with the Civil Defence and Disaster Management Bureau into the Civil Defence and Disaster Prevention Bureau (CDDMB). In the CDDMB, only 38 members staff are tasked to take care of natural disasters; they are compartmented into three divisions: the Disaster Planning Division, the Disaster Preparedness Division, and the Rehabilitation Division.

In May 1995, the MOGAHA commenced the project of the National Disaster Management System (NDMS) under the project of the Cyber Korea 21st Century and the National Administration Reform. The NDMS included the safety management operation interconnection distributed among management bodies, 24 government corporations, and local authorities to get interconnected to the safety management system. The project is to protect the lives and properties of citizens and for improving



their life quality by preventing disasters that menace the national and societal security. The policy can be completed with quick response and recovery over natural disaster-affected areas, and by implementing a systematic and scientific national disaster management information system.

## CONCLUSION

Reviewing the discussion above on social crises in South Korea since its colonial eras until today, we may infer that social crisis dimensions there are not different from those within social theories. As indicated earlier, departing from a set of literature in social crisis studies conducted by Bourdieu (1977), Quarantelli & Dynes (1977), Kosseleck (2006), Shaikh (2009), Gills (2010), a crisis is a failure of a social system. It causes collective distress, for there is a gap between the ideas structure and the material structure. In the context of South Korean society, we notice that political, economic, and natural caused crises are significant in provoking a social crisis, i.e., political and economic systems failures, and collective distress. We view that political legitimacy crisis causing regime change had also taken place.

There went a crisis in South Korea, but it had been not identified as a social crisis dimension, i.e., a crisis through which Korean people define their national identity or the meaning of 'nation' for them. Such a crisis is known as a signification crisis, for it goes in a symbolic realm that is intersubjective, although it may be caused by political or material crises. Defining the social crisis in South Korea does not only include the crisis in the infrastructure field, but it has to be considered too in signification terms.

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