Fighting in the Shadow of the Past: The Mobilizing Role of Vernacular Memories of the 1987 Pro-democracy Movement in the 2008 Candlelight Protests in Korea

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Abstract:

This paper examines how the vernacular memory of a political contestation in the past can be appropriated as a conceptual tool with which the present is interpreted. Through the case study of the 2008 candlelight protests in South Korea, this paper discusses how the 1987 pro-democracy movement gained visibility and became articulated on the internet. The article shows that the politics of memory—tensions and conflicts over the meaning of the past—was central to the meaning-making of the protests. The vernacular reconstruction of the past movement on the internet created an alternative discourse, characterized by concreteness, corporeality, and multiplicity, which allowed the protests to gain momentum. From the analysis of the postings on one of the most active internet forums in the country, Agora, this paper examines the complex interplay among vernacular memories, digital media, and the institutional discourse of the past and the present in times of political contestation.