

South Korea's Land Reform and Democracy

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This article aims to examine what sort of impact the South Korean land reform in 1950 had on democracy. I will mainly analyze (1) the international background, (2) legislation and execution, and (3) the change in relation between farmers and the state. In the context of the Cold War, this reform aimed to prevent socialist revolution by accommodating the demands of peasant revolution from the top. The land reform's social democratic character was minimized in its legislative process. The reform played a critical role in establishing the socioeconomic base for the liberal democratic and capitalist system. The National Assembly's management of the legislative process also provided a valuable experience for a procedural democracy. And as a result of the reform, the rural communities became more equal. The fact that farmers were liberated from the landlord system was also important in creating a pillar for rural democratization in the long run. Despite these positive points, the South Korean land reform also had its shortcomings and displayed democratic limitations. With the path to the development of farmers' autonomous organizations blocked, the real power in the rural communities at the *myeon*-level rested with the local administrators and elders. The South Korean land reform limited South Korean democracy to the framework of anticommunism and liberal democracy in the context of a global Cold War, while providing an experience in procedural democracy and the structural conditions for rural democratization.

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