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Introduction: Understanding Korean Politics

*Soong Hoom Kil
and
Chung-in Moon*

South Korea drew worldwide attention as it experienced two dramatic events in December 1997. One was the collapse of the Korean economy and the subsequent \$57 billion bailout arranged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the other was the nation's first peaceful transfer of political power from the ruling to opposition party through the election of Kim Dae Jung as the new president. South Korea, once touted as a model for third world economic development, had been able to convince the world of its successful path from periphery to core through admission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. Yet while cheers abounded for its economic performance, as always, Korea's politics were subject to disdain and ridicule due to chronic authoritarian rule and failed democratic reforms. A first-rate economy and fourth-rate politics were Korea's trademarks—a shared understanding among Koreans and international observers. However, the two events of December 1997 completely reversed this traditional view. Now, Korea may well be known for its first-rate politics and fourth-rate economy.

Understanding Korean Politics: Four Legacies

Traditional South Korean politics is deserving of such a negative portrait. Four decades of soft and hard authoritarianism, fre-

quent military interventions in civil politics, and the politics of personalism, factionalism, and regionalism have impaired any potential for political development and stable democracy. Despite the democratic opening of 1987, actual democratic reforms have been delayed, and former presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, as well as the second son of former President Kim Young Sam, were put in jail under charges of corruption. Past political practices have left four legacies from which South Korea still suffers.

The first legacy is the narrow ideological spectrum. Immediately following national independence in 1945, the Korean peninsula enjoyed a wide ideological spectrum ranging from ultraright to far left. However, national division and American military occupation paved the way for the triumph of right-wing conservative forces, and the progressive forces were purged from the political scene. The narrowing of the ideological spectrum was unavoidable, given the ideological confrontation between the now-divided two Koreas, which was initiated and reinforced by the logic of Cold War bipolarity. The outbreak of the Korean War and its aftermath further consolidated the power of conservative forces and stamped out all progressive movements. Anticommunism emerged in the South as a hegemonic ideology; no alternative ideological postures were allowed. Socialist discourse was legally forbidden, and even social democratic ideals were dealt with suspicion. The overwhelming continuity of such monolithic ideology narrowed the space for ideological plurality and flexibility in governance and policy, ultimately undermining any further democratic developments.

To some extent, the democratic opening of 1987 lifted the unidimensional ideological overlay from Korean politics, as evidenced by the sharp surge in liberal and progressive discourses and movements. However, this trend did not last long. The grand conservative ruling coalition formed in 1990 dealt a critical blow to the progressive camp, and the historical clock again reversed towards the conservative direction. For all its campaign pledges and earlier efforts at reform, the Kim Young Sam government, which was the first civilian government since 1960, was also swept by recurrent waves of the conservative ideology. It remains to be seen whether the new reformist leadership of Kim Dae Jung can successfully cope with the subtle tradeoff between democratic mandates in order to expand the ideological spectrum and economic imperatives required by IMF neoconservative conditions.

The second legacy is authoritarianism. South Korea has a long history of authoritarian rule. While traditional Confucian culture

forced conformity to authoritarian values, Japanese colonial rule carved out a critical base for authoritarian governance. With the exception of a brief political albetura in 1960, South Korea was never able to escape from the grip of autocracy and authoritarianism for four decades. Park Chung Hee's developmental dictatorship during the Third and Fourth Republics succeeded Syngman Rhee's autocratic rule of the First Republic. Park's tragic death in 1979 was not the end of authoritarianism in Korea; Chun Doo Hwan, seizing political power through a military coup in 1980, continued the politics of repression and intimidation. South Korea went from authoritarianism to authoritarianism where the garrison state became the prevailing image of governance. This protracted authoritarian tradition caused South Korean politics to be downgraded, despised, and ridiculed by its own people and the international community.

Yet authoritarian rule in South Korea was not to last forever. Popular uprisings in June 1987 opened the way for democratic transition. Two factors account for the opening and transition. One was the people's continuing belief in liberal democracy. Ideals of liberal democracy, first transmitted to Korea through American missionary workers and later through academic circles, are not foreign to Koreans. These ideals have had a profound impact on traditional political culture as well as on political institutions and practices, laying the ground for democratic opening. The other factor was economic development. Rapid economic development accompanied both structural and cultural changes. Economic growth realigned the structural foundation of Korean politics by expanding the middle and working classes; a higher educational level, spread of mass media and communication, and urbanization, all closely associated with economic growth, entailed concurrent cultural shifts toward political liberalism and pluralism. The confluence of structural and cultural changes offered a critical catalyst for democratic opening and consolidation in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

The third legacy is the bureaucratic state. Modern democratic politics is characterized by a system of checks and balances among the three branches of the government. In South Korea, this hallmark of democracy does not exist. The executive branch has always prevailed over the legislative and judiciary branches—the National Assembly is effectively nothing but a rubber stamp, the judiciary remains politically ineffectual. Beyond this one-branch dominance, the Korean state subjugated political and civil society to its corporatist control. Such executive dominance was possible due to the

institutional arrangement framed around a presidential system as well as the traditional political culture and authoritarian mode of governance. This severely damaged democratic political processes by excluding the citizens, and it deformed the institutional balance among the three branches. Administration from the top eliminated real politics from below.

Still, it is precisely this bureaucratic state that often has been singled out as a key determinant of South Korea's impressive economic performance. Executive dominance, bureaucratic unity and competence, monopoly of policy instruments and resources, strategic intervention in the economy, and insulation of policy-making machinery from contending social and political pressures, which are all essential features of the bureaucratic state, are believed to have ensured efficient, coherent, and consistent formulation of economic policy and its effective implementation. Indeed, the bureaucratic state made significant contributions to steering and enhancing economic performance. But the recent economic downturn points to the fundamental limits of the "visible hands" of the bureaucratic state. In a brave new world of democratic opening and economic liberalization, there seems to be no place for the bureaucratic state.

Finally, Korean politics has been obsessed with the legacy of the myth of "revolution from above." The study of Korean politics has focused solely on the study of political leadership. In the political space of South Korea, only political leaders exist. Yet preoccupation with leadership has neglected other important ingredients of contemporary democratic politics, namely, people, interest groups, political processes, and coalition dynamics. For transitional democracies such as South Korea, political leadership occupies the pre-eminent position, but it needs to be balanced with other political actors.

It is through these four legacies, among others, that South Korean politics has been portrayed as a dismal enterprise. But recent political changes, manifested through the election of Kim Dae Jung as the fifteenth president, portend a new era for democratic politics in South Korea.

Structure of the Book

The present volume is designed to offer readers a comprehensive overview of Korean politics over the past five decades by

recasting the four legacies discussed above as well as forecasting the future of Korean democracy in light of recent changes.

The book is composed of nine chapters. In chapter 2, Woon-Tai Kim presents a comprehensive overview of the ecology of Korean politics. Kim examines the historical context, geopolitical setting, economic development, social changes, and political culture of Korea, and traces how these environmental settings have influenced the evolutionary dynamics of Korean politics. Kim argues that although the ecological variables surrounding Korean politics have not always been favorable, they have served as major catalysts for enhancing democratic change and national survival. Chapter 3 by Soong Hoom Kil provides a rich overview of the development of Korea for the past five decades with a specific focus on democracy and economic development. Kil argues that the sole achievement of Korean politics is the basic introduction of liberal democracy in Korea. He also points to the fact that democratic opening and consolidation since 1987 was a paradoxical outcome of economic development which past authoritarian regimes engineered in order to enhance their political legitimacy. He concludes that despite sporadic setbacks and transitional uncertainties, South Korea will soon reach the desired stage of a mature liberal democracy. He offers a detailed analysis of democratic reforms under the Kim Young Sam government.

In chapter 4, David C. Kang provides a framework of analyzing continuity and change in Korean politics by examining its institutional foundations. By utilizing theories of principal-agency and transaction costs, which are the two main analytical trends of new institutional economics, Kang offers a persuasive explanation for continuing corruption and political crises in South Korea. He ascribes the current institutional deformity to the concentration of executive power, weak legislature, and unstable party system. In order to overcome the stalemate, Kang suggests that there must be an end to the patrimonial politics of the "three Kims" as well as the strengthening of the National Assembly as a decision-making institution.

With the revelations of corrupt and illicit acceptance of political funds in unthinkable amounts by past leaders, especially Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, chapter 5 by Ki-shik S. J. Hahn on political leadership is relevant. Hahn reviews the past leaders and examines their achievements in national building, economic growth, and national security with a focus on personality, behavior, and political philosophy. Hahn also presents an interesting survey

of administrators and legislators who served from the First to Sixth Republics (1948–1992). Despite the risk of being a conservative interpretation, Hahn's chapter provides a rich account of leadership profiles in contemporary Korean politics.

In chapter 6, Jung Bock Lee offers an excellent analysis of political processes in South Korea, focusing on electoral institutions, political parties, interest groups and other leading social forces, such as students, the military, and mass media. Due to the prevalence of authoritarian rule, political processes could not draw scholarly attention, especially nongovernmental processes focusing on political and civil society. However, Lee's chapter fills the gap by presenting thorough empirical accounts of the historical evolution of nongovernmental processes. His analysis is balanced and informative. In chapter 7, Dong Suh Bark provides a concise analysis of the history of the administrative process in South Korea, beginning from the patrimonial bureaucracy of the Chosun dynasty, moving on to the bureaucratic administration of the authoritarian Third to Fifth Republics, and ending with the promises of reform and change in the Kim Young Sam government. Bark concludes that while the administrative process in Korea has faced some major obstacles, there are promising signals for the future settlement of democratic governance and administration. Chung-in Moon and Sunghack Lim, in chapter 8, present a political and institutional account of the rise and decline of the Korean economy. They attribute impressive economic performance during the 1961–1987 to favorable international environments, market-conforming economic policies and institutions, effective functioning of the developmental state, and social and policy networks. However, they argue that the very determinants of economic success turned out to be the primary causes of the recent economic downturn and crisis. The structure of vulnerability resulting from a deep integration into the world economy, dismal corporate performance, deformed developmental state, and network failures are regarded as factors precipitating economic crisis in South Korea.

In chapter 9, Byung Chul Koh offers a penetrating analysis of the foreign and unification policies of the Republic of Korea. He identifies the quest for legitimacy, security, and development as the major themes of South Korea's foreign and unification policies, and traces how such themes have dictated the nature and direction of South Korea's policies. The dynamics of South Korean politics cannot be appreciated without reference to North Korean politics, since both have interacted in mirror images. Sung Chul Yang's chapter

10 is devoted to the analysis of the North Korean political framework. He casts the North Korean political system in comparative socialist studies perspectives and delineates common and idiosyncratic elements of the North Korean political system. His analysis sheds an important insight into understanding the foundations of North Korean politics.

The present volume was originally intended as a textbook on Korean politics. We believe our intention is well served, although some chapters go beyond an introductory level. We hope our readers will find this book, a part of the State University of New York's monograph series on Korean studies, useful in understanding contemporary Korean politics. We would like to express our cordial thanks to Professors Sung Bae Park and Sung-taek Cho for encouraging us to undertake the project and being patient with the delayed submission of the manuscript. Robert Siegel, managing editor of the monograph series, also deserves our gratitude for his generosity and patience. Several colleagues and research assistants helped us in translating some chapters into Korean and making editorial improvements. We thank Professor Jongryn Mo, Dr. Ki-soek Kim, Judy Eun-ju Chung, Yoonkyung Lee, Eun-sun Hwang, Eunsook Kim, Minuk Kim, Hyun-sook Heo, Song-hyun Chon, and Angie Kim for their comments and assistance. We are also grateful to the Institute of Korean Political Studies at Seoul National University and the Center for International Studies at Yonsei University for their institutional and logistic support.