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PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

**TRANSFORMATION OF
KOREAN POLITICS AND
ADMINISTRATION: A 30
YEAR RETROSPECTIVE**

By

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK
First published by 진인진 (Jininjin) as **한국행정 되돌아보기: 지나간 30년, 앞으로 30년**
(*Looking back on Korean administration: The past 30 years, the next 30 years*), 2020
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80382-116-0 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80382-115-3 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80382-117-7 (Epub)

ISSN: 2053-7697 (Series)



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PREFACE FOR TRANSLATED EDITION

This book is a translated version of two published Korean books *The Reflection on the Korean Public Administration: The Past 30 Years, the Next 30 Years* (ZININZIN, 2020) and *Korean Administrative Organization* (Bobmunsa, 2018). However, instead of a literal translation, various transformations have been made in the English edition. I have augmented detailed explanations within the paragraph and inserted text boxes to provide extra context for foreign readers. Additionally, each chapter contains the main takeaways from Korea's experiences.

It is said that a foolish person repeats the same mistake without learning anything from the past experience. A slightly more intelligent person will try to solve it with the help of others. A brilliant person will learn from the errors of others and redirect oneself to a better path. Though this is an individual-level typology, it can be applied to the national level.

Today, developing countries are often faced with more difficult situations due to the increase in global polarization, and their scholars and government officials are struggling to develop their country. Despite their efforts, the lack of information and knowledge makes it hard for them to learn from other countries. Countries having the potential to become "brilliant" often fail to bloom for this reason. South Korea has successfully achieved economic growth and political democratization, but the literature explaining these phenomena are insufficient. This book has been translated with the purpose to make up for the lack of literature related to South Korea's successful achievement of both economic growth and political democratization.

There may be criticism pointing out the exceptionality of the Korea's history and situation, and its inappropriateness to work as an example for the development of other countries. However, I believe that Korea's unique history compared to that of mainstream Western countries, adds a special value in sharing its experience.

This English edition is published as a part of the 10-10 Project proposed by the President of Seoul National University Se-Jung Oh. Seoul National University Graduate School of Public Administration (GSPA) is a renowned research and education institute of South Korea in public policy and administration. I hope this publication sets a milestone that generates more meaningful research in the field.

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PREFACE

This book looks back at the past 30 years of the Public Administration of the Republic of Korea. 30 years ago, I was a college student beginning to think about the society and set foot on the path of being a public administration scholar after my graduate studies. Thus, it can be said that the book is a narration from an observer or a participant. I did not completely realize at the time, but looking back as I write this book, it certainly was a turbulent period that I had lived through. Indeed, all of us who lived through that time would feel that way. This is a time when the Republic of Korea experienced turbulence, which we as individuals lived through in our daily lives.

Writing history provides the author an advantage of being able to see changes from a step behind as a big picture and in a long-term trend, which is something that an individual would not recognize in day-to-day life. The community of the Republic of Korea has a dynamic history. There were joyful days as well as hard and painful days, but as a result, we have made remarkable changes and developments rarely seen worldwide. At times I was annoyed owing to the slow pace of development, and at times held in my frustration and experienced discouragement. However, looking at the history from a long-term view, I experienced a remarkable development unparalleled in the world history. Although there was some waste and inefficiency, it seems that there was a divine providence that it would eventually become the present Republic of Korea.

Public administration also played a significant role in such unbelievable development. Besides the situation of the times and political issues, the administration had worked hard with a sense of mission for national development. Summarizing this history into one flow is an important task for the field of public administration and great luck on my part as an author. The history of a field of study contributes to academia as it offers researchers knowledge of the meaning and value of the research they are doing. Thus, it is necessary for researchers to know the history of their field of study.

In addition, an interest in history may be a natural instinct of a human being. As our current state is just an accumulation of past experiences, humans must constantly explore history, even to understand themselves. Furthermore, seeing the future through the past is also a lesson that history gives to humans. By reflecting on the past, humans sometimes discover patterns and trends and try to predict the future through these. Therefore, there is no development for those who ignore the history, and history is a solid framework that must be continuously explored and applied through generations.

The history described in this book cannot be regarded as the established theory that is completely objective or the one that has been most thoroughly verified. It is rather a history that I have observed and interpreted. Therefore, it would be

best to regard it as the history seen through my own lens and, my prediction of the prospects for the future.

There is one more thing I would like to discuss regarding the prospects. Predicting the future is difficult because the environment surrounding us has been rapidly changing in recent years. Therefore, it might seem reckless in some ways. However, just as our motivation for exploring history is to see a shed of light on the future, I have boldly painted a big picture in this book. Nevertheless, unless one is a fortuneteller, predicting the right direction is a difficult task as the surroundings around us are rapidly changing. Therefore, I had no choice but to look into the future with both extremes of optimism and pessimism. I ask for the readers' understanding of this.

Continued efforts are necessary to make the world a better place in the future. The Republic of Korea has also been developed in the midst of constant efforts, and these efforts are attributable in their entirety to the people of the Republic of Korea. These people, who were worried and agonized in the past, faithful to the present, and leaping forward for tomorrow, are the owners of the Republic of Korea. The history of the future also lies in its people. Being a part of the Korean society, and playing a key role in exploring the discipline of administration, the academic field of public administration should also be contemplating on its role that aligns with the direction of the future. This is what it would mean for public administration to progress. The moment has come once more for us to put our efforts together. I hope that this book will also be there at that moment as a useful reference for the history.

This book is a revised and translated version of *The Reflection on the Korean Public Administration: The Past 30 Years, the Next 30 Years* (ZININZIN, 2020), published in Korean. Chapters 7 and 8 are a translation of the revision of a part of *Korean Administrative Organization* (Bobmunsa, 2018) co-authored with Professor Cho Suk-Joon. Finally, I would like to thank the Institute of Information, Knowledge, and Policy at Seoul National University Graduate School of Public Administration for providing financial support to the writing of this book, as well as the assistants at the Center for Government Competitiveness who worked hard on the data collection and organization processes.

Spring 2020.
Tobin Im

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A CONSTANTLY GROWING ECONOMY

The Han River's miraculous economic development that had occurred since the 1960's Park Chung-hee regime surprised the world. After the Korean War, Korea changed its economic structure from light industry to the one based on a heavy chemical industry and achieved an export-led growth, going from one of the world's poorest countries to freeing itself from poverty. At the time, the now-disappeared self-deprecating expression "people of an underdeveloped country" was widespread in Korea.

However, since the 1980s, after the end of Park Chung-hee's regime, the national per capita income has been steadily increasing, except during the period of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Specifically, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which was less than \$100 in 1960, has continued to increase to the present day (Fig. 1). The GDP per capita surpassed \$30,000 in 2017, implying that it has grown more than 300 times in about 60 years. Notably, the Korean economy raised its capital in a unique way as it did not have a developed capital market in the 60s and had nearly no businesses that were appealing to foreign investments. Rather than the foreign direct investment method, capital was raised through the foreign indirect investment method whereby foreign investment was received by way of the country's guarantee; thereafter, domestic companies loaned it back to domestic companies. The government would vouch for the financial institutions lending money from foreign countries, and domestic entrepreneurs would lend this money from domestic banks to run their factories. Through this method, raw materials were imported and goods were manufactured and exported, creating an export-dependent economic system. Under a foreign direct investment system, companies are responsible for individual foreign investments made. However, as the Korean economy was based on foreign indirect investment, the government had leverage on domestic companies. Due to this historical context,

**Transformation of Korean Politics and Administration: A 30 Year Retrospective
Public Policy and Governance, Volume 35, 1-5
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ISSN: 2053-7697/doi:10.1108/S2053-76972022000035023**

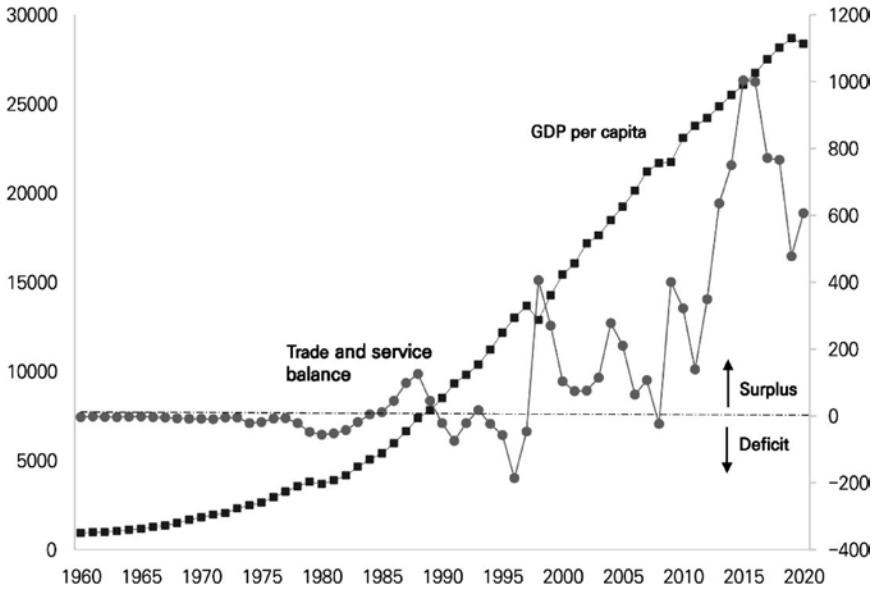


Fig. 1. Korea's GDP Per Capita (\$1 in 2010 Price) and Trade-Service Balance (\$100 Million in 2010 Price). Source: World Bank Open Data (<http://data.worldbank.org>), searched on July 23, 2021, reorganized by the author.

crony capitalism and the excessive market intervention of the government are still prevalent in the Korean economy and are under harsh reprimand.

Due to its small domestic market size, the export-dependent Korean economy was bound to be significantly affected by the international economic environment. The oil shock in the 70s raised the raw material prices, affecting the domestic economy. A bigger threat was when the foreign capital tried to collect the debt lent to domestic banks. During the period of analysis in this book, there were two instances of financial crisis in which the loan could not be repaid, as foreign investors denied loan extension of domestic companies due to the lack of foreign exchange reserves. In 1997, after excessive investment by domestic companies, the foreign capital temporarily decided not to extend the repayment period, and a bailout was requested to the IMF. In return, the IMF called for a strong restructuring, which took a toll on our country's businesses and households. The prescription of the IMF, which was focused on restructuring public sector and increasing labor force mobility, caused companies unable to repay their debt to go bankrupt. These companies were sold to agent overseas at a cheap price, and the overall unemployment rate increased. Compared to the rapid growth period, when the country showed a two-digit growth rate, this was the first time Koreans witnessed a negative growth rate. This experience became a psychological trauma for many Koreans and suicide rates increased accordingly. The second crisis was the credit crisis from the US subprime crisis in 2007, which the Lee Myung-bak government was able to overcome relatively well by

remembering the valuable lesson learned from the first crisis. The Lee administration prepared for the crisis by making a currency swap agreement with Japan and increasing government expenditure and financial aid. The government had learned a lesson from the past experience.

Korea's economy has continued to grow in and out of the top 10 in most indicators today, with increased GDP, higher national income, and increased export volumes. Notably, through exporting the goods manufactured with foreign capital, Korea moved from the stage of trade deficit to having a surplus in 1985 (Fig. 1). At this time, reform measures were taken considering the need for an open economy. However, in the early to mid-90s, trade services recorded deficits. This means that the labor-focused industry lost its international competitiveness as real wages increased as reforms were made to meet international standards. While the income and expenditure for trade service recorded a surplus since the 2000s, it can be seen that its amplitude has enlarged.

The aforementioned claims will be comprehensively reviewed, focusing on the analysis period of this book. Leaving the 1960s aside, seeing that the annual economic growth has been approximately 10% during the late 1980s and 2000, South Korea's economic growth is incomparable to any other country's economic growth in the world in terms of "continuous" growth. Afterwards, the speed of growth did slow down to one digit, but this is not a pessimistic situation considering the size of the Korean economy. Trade service recording a surplus means that Korean goods are being sold at a reasonable price in which the revenue can be generated. The spectrum of goods has widened, the quality has increased, and the structure of industry has been reformed.

Japan has also gone through a period of rapid economic growth which was but soon followed by a negative growth. However, Korea has not experienced economic stagnation for the past 30 years. Although different from the UN's definition of the term today, it is an example of sustainable development. Now, in the era of \$30,000 national income per capita that was once dreamed of, South Korea has indeed joined the ranks of developed countries.

As indicated in Table 1, there have been some fluctuations microscopically. Since 2001, the economic growth rate has declined to less than 5%, indicating that it has entered a stage of slow economic growth. This likely indicates that although Korea's economic scale has grown and become more complex, the costs have increased due to the development of the labor welfare system, making it difficult to meet the growth rate of the past. In terms of administration and policies, there exists a need for more experts in each field rather than officials who are only good at increasing the economic growth rate. Nevertheless, some numbers have been steadily increasing over the past 30 years. As indicated in the table, the ratio of exports to GDP has been increasing by more than 100% in some years. This is because there are parts that cannot be caught in the denominator of the GDP as factories are established overseas. Another reason is that international trade is taking up more parts of the Korean economy. Increase in wages and the cost of shipment have also motivated factory owners to move their business abroad. What is produced outside of the country is included in the Gross National Product (GNP) but not in GDP. More specifically, there have been changes in the trade

Table 1. Economic Growth of Korea.

Year	GDP (Billion Won)	National Income Per Capita (Ten Thousand Won)	Economic Growth Rate (%)	Imports and Exports to GDP Ratio (%)	Life Expectancy
1985	88,130	211	7.8	58.6	68.9
1986	102,986	345	11.2	65.3	69.5
1987	121,698	289	12.7	67	70.1
1988	145,995	345	12	61.3	70.7
1989	165,802	389	7.1	55.3	71.2
1990	200,556	467	9.9	53	71.7
1991	242,481	560	10.8	51.8	72.2
1992	277,541	634	6.2	50.4	72.6
1993	315,181	712	6.9	48.4	73.1
1994	372,493	832	9.3	50	73.5
1995	436,989	966	9.6	54.1	73.8
1996	490,851	1,074	7.9	54.3	74.2
1997	542,002	1,173	6.2	59.5	74.7
1998	537,215	1,146	-5.1	71.9	75.1
1999	591,453	1,255	11.5	62.7	75.5
2000	651,634	1,377	9.1	69.3	76
2001	707,021	1,482	4.9	65.6	76.5
2002	784,741	1,641	7.7	61.1	76.8
2003	837,365	1,742	3.1	63.9	77.3
2004	908,439	1,886	5.2	73	77.8
2005	957,448	1,973	4.3	71.8	78.2
2006	1,005,602	2,070	5.3	74.2	78.8
2007	1,089,660	2,233	5.8	77.9	79.2
2008	1,154,217	2,354	3	99.9	79.6
2009	1,205,348	2,441	0.8	89.9	80
2010	1,322,611	2,673	6.8	95.5	80.2
2011	1,388,937	2,799	3.7	109.6	80.6
2012	1,440,111	2,899	2.4	109.4	80.9
2013	1,500,819	2,995	3.2	101.8	81.4
2014	1,562,929	3,095	3.2	94.2	81.8
2015	1,658,020	3,260	2.8	82.2	82.1
2016	1,740,780	3,411	2.9	76.9	82.4
2017	1,835,698	3,589	3.2	80.5	82.7
2018	1,898,193	3,679	2.9	82.9	82.7
2019	1,919,040	3,736	2	81.5	No data

Source: Bank of Korea *National Account*, Bank of Korea *National Income*, Statistics Office *Life Table*. GDP and economic growth: Based on nominal GDP, economic growth rate is the real GDP growth rate.

Import and Export Ratio to GDP = $\{(\text{Total Exports} + \text{Total Imports} + \text{Factor income from abroad} + \text{Factor income paid abroad}) \div \text{nominal GDP}\} \times 100$.

Life expectancy: The average survival years that a 0-year-old is expected to survive in the future.

market of the world economy. For example, China sustained its economic growth of 10% for more than 30 years since the economic reform policy in 1979, creating economic ties with Korea. Korea also underwent changes such as transferring factories to Southeast Asian countries due to reduced product competitiveness caused by increased wages.

One trend that has remained unchanged during this process is that the Korean economy has grown more and more into an export-dependent country. This indicates that the role of the Korean government should have expanded internationally rather than being restricted to the country itself. This is because various other factors are needed to increase exports, rather than only through the comparative advantage of producing good products. This suggests that there were changes in foreign relations from various perspectives such as information about other countries, trade disputes, and resolution of cultural disparity that placed government ministries and individual public officials in a position where they were forced to globalize.

Returning to the issue of the slowing economic growth after 2000, this should not be viewed only in terms of slowing economic growth. When economic growth is achieved to a certain extent, it cannot be viewed only as a change in the economic growth rate. In the past, the policy goal was to mobilize all administrative power to increase the economic growth rate; however, now, other policy goals are pursued simultaneously. This means that the tasks of the government have become larger and more complex which requires us in-depth understanding in approaching regarding issues.

It is necessary to consider what changes the Korean government has brought to the people through such an economic growth. As only having more money does not mean all is good, there is a need for a multidimensional analysis. In other words, throughout the process of achieving this level of growth in response to changes in economic conditions, the outcome shows how competitive our government is compared with those of other countries. The outcome or impact refers to the changes that have occurred in the lives of the people, which are the final and fundamental target of a government policy.

However, it is difficult to display the actual results of how the government's policy enforcement affected people's lives. This is because there are various assumptions required, and there are many variables that cannot be considered when inferring causal relationships. However, it would be better than nothing to see through rough indicators that have such meaning. For example, it can be measured with an index of life expectancy.

As the level of diet, medical care, welfare, and culture changes in the process of economic growth, the human lifespan changes as well. Notably, as can be seen in the table, the life expectancy of Koreans has steadily increased. Approximately 14 years have been extended from about 69 years in 1985 to about 83 years in 2018. These figures mean that Korea has become a long-living country with no significant difference in the figures compared with those of Western developed countries. This is somewhat persuasive as there have been numerous truly surprising changes that can be observed in our society, families, and personal lives over the past 30 years. It can be said that today's Korean society has marked a sea change compared with what it was 30 years ago.

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PART I

CHANGES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ENVIRONMENT

South Korea achieved a remarkable economic growth over the past 30 years, transitioning from an authoritarian country to a mature democratic country. In the process of development, social demands and needs constantly increased. The government has effectively responded to these changes and has led the changes. In this part, I will describe the changes in the administrative environment in Korea over the past 30 years, focusing on three themes: population, technology, and occupation. The government should make policy decisions based on the citizens' demographic characteristics to meet the preferences and needs of society and respond appropriately. Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss the influence of technological advancement of our society. Today, South Korea has grown into a global leader in terms of information technology (IT), being sensitive to technological changes. Therefore, I would like to examine the development process of the IT industry and the resulting changes in personal life, such as changes in the occupational world, as well as the changes in government policy and public administration.

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