



Transformation Of Korean Politics and Administration

A 30 Year Retrospective

Tobin Im

Public Policy and Governance

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PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

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

By

TOBIN IM

Seoul National University, Korea



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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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.

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Tobin Im