

Realistic Revelations Offered By Korea's Modernization To China's
Social Development

Ma Kefeng

Professor; Tutor Of PhD Candidates

History School, Renmin University of China

삭제됨:

Located in East Asia together, China and South Korea are friendly neighbors separated only by a mere strip of water. A century ago, the political systems, economic modes, social life and value systems of the two countries are amazingly similar in nature as well as content, and they even used the same writing system based on the Han characters. At that time, the two countries coexisted amicably and exchanges between their people had continued for generations. On the whole, Chinese culture had impacted on South Korea, being more advanced and developed; while Korea had drawn lessons and learnt from the fine elements of Chinese culture. As things changes with the passage of time from the 1970s to the present time, Korea has made great achievements in its economic development, level of industrialization, political transformation,

democratization progress, social order, spiritual cultivation, etc. Objectively speaking, it has advanced a long way ahead of China. The enormous success of Korea's modernization provides China's society with a lot of experience and reference for its comprehensive transformation.

1

Economic modernization is the core of modernization while industrialization is the chief indicator of the complete realization of economic modernization. Modernization in the East Asian mode is usually carried out on the basis of traditional societies, giving priorities to economy, efficiency and production in order to realize the comprehensive transformation of economic structures and to change from traditional agricultural economy to modern industrialized economy. Planning and guidance work in coordination with market adjustment, complementing and organically integrating with each other. One of the such vital elements is the appearance of a strong political leader. For instance, Korea's Park Chung Hee, Taiwan's Chiang Ching-Kuo and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew were typical figures who had advanced the industrialization of their countries or regions. The impact from a strong political leader on the initial period of a country's industrialization has been proved by reality to be positive and affirmative. The kind of political

structure which has such a strong political figure at its center stresses authority, team spirit, straight-forward organization, strict discipline, quick decision-making and forceful implementation, and displays relatively high efficiency.

In the 1960s, amidst chaotic political environment and social unrest in Korea, Park Chung Hee, a military official came on to the front stage of history. Park Chung Hee proceeded, after his arrival on the scene, establish the government's authorities in order to restore stability and order. He also followed the guiding concept of "Economy First" and adopted an economic development strategy of "export-oriented production", which started Korea's journey of modernization and created the "*Hangang Miracle*". In 2005, Korea's economy had already leapt to the world's eleventh place by GDP (Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, September 2004. [1]; European Union [2]). and become an economic entity of great importance in the global economy.

The main features of the enormous success in Korea's economic development within such a short time are:

(1) The establishment of a strong centralized government: The authoritative government and autocratic leader had been extremely influential in the processes of Korea's modernization while being widely

supported by the whole society in general. This was one of the major reasons for the speedy modernization of Korea's economy.

The Constitution Of The Republic Of Korea was promulgated on July 17, 1948, and The Republic of Korea was established on August 15 with Rhee Syngman as its first president. Korean history entered a new epoch, which should offer a very good opportunity for Korea's economic development. However, being in his seventies, Rhee appeared to be lacking in vitality and quickness of thinking and under the influence of post-war "cold-war" mode of thinking, and focused most energy on power struggle and ideological confrontation, stressing politics and neglecting people's daily living. As a result, Korea's underdeveloped economy did not improve while people's living worsened. On the other hand, corruption in politics and the breakdown of moral standards got worse by the day, which ultimately led to the "4•19 Revolution" which saw Rhee's regime overthrown and Korean society thrown into turmoil and the country in the face of a serious crisis.

Park Chung Hee was a political thinker as well as a career soldier. After coming into power, he used martial laws and military control measures to rein in Korea's social unrest and restore the country's order and stability. He also carried out anti-corruption measures to clean up Korea's administrative organs and did not refrain from using dismissal,

arrest or severe economic penalties to effectively stamp out corruption. Upon such a foundation, a new central government was formed with young military officials as its backbone. This central government was characterized by the advantages of youthfulness, motivation, incorruptibility and international outlook. The smooth progress of Korea's industrialization was undoubtedly related to the strong central government, demonstrated by the fact that construction works such as the Seoul-Pusan Highway and POSCO were all the products of government initiatives.

(2) The policy of "Economy First": After the downfall of Rhee's regime, the succeeding Democrats' government had proposed the policy of "Economy First" but did not see it through due to the weakness of the central government. Upon his coming into power, Park Chung Hee continued with the policy and gave it details for implementation. Being alert and knowledgeable of the current situations and with plenty of zest for actions, Park insisted that "industrialized economy is the key to modernization", and that "particularly for an underdeveloped country like Korea, economic security is the most important among all the basic securities, one that is over and above those of the legal and the political". In his eyes, there was no room for political democracy or social pluralism without the modernization of the economy, "and the transformation or progress in other spheres would therefore never be realized." Therefore,

economic modernization must be treated as an undertaking of paramount importance and be carried out with the utmost effort and consistency.

With these ideas as guidance, Park formulated the plans for the paths, mode and features which Korea's economic development would assume.. The essential way of Korea's economic modernization was to adopt a policy of "maximum freedom and minimum planning". In other words, there was to be a one-third portion of economic planning and national control and two-third portion of market adjustment. "Economic planning or long-term development planning would be strictly restricted from inhibiting the innovative and independent nature of private enterprises". "Private enterprises were ultimately the chief actors in the liberalization of the economy." For the structural formation of Korea's industrial sector, Park chose a system of industrial economy comprising of large-scale enterprises as its backbone and medium to small enterprises as supplementary and complementary components. Throughout Korea's industrialization, large-scale enterprises like Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and SK had all benefited from the central government's favorable policy and funding, while accepting guidance and supervision from it. Smoothing out relationship with the U.S.A. and Japan, developing international relationship, actively seeking and utilizing foreign funds were also the realization of the policy of "Economy First". During the process, Park established the Ministry Of Enterprise Development (经济企化院),

carried out the “export-oriented” strategy for economic development, and adopted the “five year planning” format to reach the final success in the industrialization of Korea.

(3) The New Community Movement – A Coordinated Development of The Industrial and Agricultural Economies

Korea started The New Community Movement in a timely manner after implementing its industrialization policies for over ten years and at a time when urban economic development was undergoing major transformations. It was based on the foundation of the industrialization of urban areas in Korea and through which the industrial sector supported and repaid the rural areas by helping its agricultural modernization. Being an initiative of the government which provided it with a certain degree of economic support, it also successfully encouraged the participation of various social forces, as the ultimate purpose was to promote the initiative and creativity of farmers. From the 1970s until the end of the 1980s, Korea’s rural areas had gone through amazing change, resulting in improved transportation networks, clean and spacious housing, improved entertainment facilities for the public, economic development, social harmony, and the situation where farmers’ income and social status were not much different from those of urban dwellers. The success of Korea’s New Community Movement has drawn the attention of the world and

become a model and prototype for the resolution of rural and agricultural issues in Asian developing countries. China's government has decided to carry out The New Socialist Rural Community Movement and planned to send tens of thousands of party officials and farmers from rural areas to Korea to study its experiences within the next few years. Asiaweek commented that China is moving from the campaign of "Agriculture Learns From The Great Commune" to that of "Agriculture Learns From Korea". Korea's success has caught the serious attention of China's authorities and learning from Korea is on the way of being started in China's agriculture.

2

Korea's political democratization had gone through forty years of time which can be roughly divided into three stages: the foundation period (the times of Rhee Syngman); the growth period (authoritative and autocratic rule of military officials); the completion period (civil candidature and popular election for presidency).

The Constitution of The Republic Of Korea was promulgated on July 17, 1948, and the Republic was officially established on August 15. The Parliament was convened on May 31, 1948 and Rhee was elected on

189 votes to be its Speaker. On July 19, 1948, Rhee was elected on 180 votes to be the first president of the Republic. On August 3, Rhee nominated Lee Bum Suk to be the prime minister, which was carried by 110 to 84 votes, after which the first cabinet was formed.

Rhee held the office of the presidency for more than ten years, and despite the later involvement in election corruption which led to the “4.19 Revolution” and the upshot of being driven from power by students and other members of the public, it is fair to say that during his presidency Rhee had made certain contribution to building the framework for Korea’s democratization. Firstly, he participated in the formulation of the constitution and gave it approval by signing it in his capacity as the Parliament’s speaker. It was a move that started the transformation of Korean society from one that was ruled by individual human being to one that was ruled by law. The promulgation of The Constitution laid the foundation for Korea’s democratization. The choice of the presidential system in favor of the bicameral system was beneficial to the stability of Korea’s political conditions. The presidential system has continued into the present times, proving its suitability for Korea’s politics. Secondly, the system of the presidential election was gradually changed from indirect election through the parliament to direct election by the whole population. Referendum and direct presidential election represents the mainstream of democracy around the world today. Thirdly, the

multi-party political system was firmly established, allowing legal existence of various political parties and the competition between them, which constituted the framework for Korea's democratic political system.

The period in which military officials held the presidential office, represented by Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, was a time of growth for democracy in Korea's political system. With the background of being in military service, these politicians had an autocratic style and brought about centralized powers and strong central governments. However, they did not interrupt the progress of democracy, not did they reverse the trends in Korea's parliamentary politics and party politics. Despite Park's autocratic and authoritative style and his use of martial laws, he had proceeded lawfully and in accordance with the constitution in divesting himself of his military uniforms and then forming the Democratic Republican Party and taking part in the presidential elections.

(1) The spirit of the constitution was still present. During Park's times, Korea continues to have parliamentary politics and presidential elections while political parties carried out their activities under the protection of the law, had their own political platform and independent actions, put forward their own candidates for presidential elections. When a party lost in an election, it became the party in opposition and exercised the powers of counter-balancing and supervision of the party in office.

Kim Young Sam was active in the political scene in Korea for many years as a leader of the party in opposition. In 1967, Kim Dae Jung and Park Chung Hee ran for the presidency. Party politics in a lawful manner signified that the democratic political system had basically taken form. An article has pointed out that, during Park's rule, "the government actions was not only subjected to supervision in the form of the voices of the public and the media but also to the supervision of the opposition party. Despite certain restrictions on political activities prior to 1972, but multi-party competition was truly alive. In the election campaigns of 1963 and 1967, the economic and diplomatic policies and especially the corrupted conducts of Park's camp were severely attacked by the opposition party and exposed through the media by the opposition and liberal camps."

At the same time, such fundamental elements of a democratic society as freedom of the press was going through the difficult process of growth and progress. The supervision of the government by the opposition party via its news and opinion voicing in the press was in effect the rehearsal and practice of democracy in Korea's politics.

(2) Establishing and improving various modern administrative systems, stamping out corruption, rectifying undesirable social customs and bad habits of the people, etc., removed the obstacles to democracy in

Korea's politics.

Shortly after the military coup, Korea implemented a strict supervision system. The Ministry Of Supervision was established in the central government and there were offices of supervision locally and within departments, each responsible for their own jurisdiction. During the "Renewal of Civil Administration" campaign of 1975, Park introduced the system of "vertical collective responsibility" whereby supervisors at the first and second levels above would be penalized together with the offenders, highlighting the same liability to penalties of supervisors as that of offenders. At the same time, "The Incentive Journal For The Renewal Of Civil Administration" was introduced which started recording once a month from January 1977. It aims to prevent dismissed officials from being re-employed in another public office by penalizing any public enterprises or administrative organs found to have employed dismissed public officials. Where dismissed public officials were found to be employed by the private companies that were involved in the matters leading to the dismissal, both parties to the employment would be subjected to further penalties.

Park's attacks on corruption were comprehensive. Dismissal was dealt to all those involved with giving or accepting bribery, nepotism, collusion between officials and businessmen, extravagance in public life,

coffee drinking, dancing, listening to Japanese music, hiring private tutors, playing golf, owning luxurious apartments, owning substantial funds from unidentified sources, etc. All those found to be lacking in work enthusiasm, lazy or unpunctual, giving the public unnecessary difficulties, making backdoor deals in the promotion or transfers of positions, having extra-marital affairs, incompetence, etc., were all to be discharged from office.

The systematic attacks by Park's government on corruption employed severe penalties and joint responsibility to reign in government officials, resulting in the improvement in corruption-free administration and administrative efficiency, which in turn had a positive impact on the general character of the society.

(3) Education was given a high level of emphasis, resulting in the improvement in the educational and moral standards of the public in general, which laid the foundation for the comprehensive construction of democratic politics for Korea.

During this period when military personnel were in office, education was highly emphasized. In 1961, the educational funds of South Korea occupied 15.2% of the government budget and reached 20.3% in 1985. Among developing countries except Israel, Korea had the highest investment in education. In addition, equal importance was attached to

education for modern knowledge as well as traditional morals, enabling Korea's education to climb up another level and turn Korea into one of the most developed countries in its educational systems. In 1978, the school enrollment rate in middle schools and universities in Korea was the same as that of Japan. In 1995, Korean GNP was ranked eleventh in the world and the national income per capita was thirty-first, whereas its educational indicator was ranked tenth in the world. Its university enrollment rate was 45% in the same year, ranked seventh in the world. "Only first-class citizens can build a first-class country", a quote from Kim Young Sam had been put to practice.

Kim Young Sam was the first popularly elected president (1993 – 1997) after the ending of the government by military personnel. Thereupon began the "Civil-Popular Age", which included the times of Kim Dae Jung (1998 – 2003) and that of Roh Moo Hyun (2003). On the whole, Korea completed its political democratization with relatively less difficulties and the "New Korea" envisaged by Kim Young Sam was basically realized. The main features were:

Firstly, the black-money, backroom politics and millionocracy under the power politics had ended. Open politics and transparent decision-making had become the mainstream of Korean politics. The trends in democratic politics were irreversible. Local, parliamentary and

presidential elections were conducted in alternate years, with everything following orderly procedures. Voters became rational and calm; university students changed the radical and hostile postures of the past and went back to their studies; university campus became peaceful and ceased to be the active force in the progress towards democracy in Korea's politics of the past. Local self-government was realized. Farmers received guidance from Korean Farmers Association, their autonomy organization, and Korea's rural communities were modernized.

Secondly, military personnel and political strongmen retreated completely from the political stage. The country was now run by specialists, civil officials and learned persons returning from overseas. Priorities were given to knowledge, innovation and the law. Governing by the rule of law had become the aspirations of the people and the main trend.

Thirdly, corruption had been contained and a clean government was being established. After becoming president in 1993, Kim Young Sam launched the campaign of "Elimination Of Corruption" to cleanse public offices. The wealth of public officials were disclosed, while their bank deposits and properties were required to be registered under their real names. Over a thousand officials were investigated and dismissed, including three ministers within the cabinet. With the most far-reaching

impacts, two former presidents were sent to court for charges of corruption in 1995, causing much attention across the whole community and much alarm among the officials. Once incidence that serves as a good example was when Lee Hai chan, Korean prime minister, was forced to resign because of the “Golf Incident” in March 2006.

Fourthly, the operational mechanism for party politics was becoming more and more mature and rational, with competition and cooperation between political parties happening at the same time. The days of deadly confrontation had passed and win-win for all had become the common understanding. The mechanism and channels for counter-balancing and cooperation had basically been straightened out.

3.

While completing the processes of industrialization and democratization, Korean society has restored and preserved its excellent cultural traditions and national spirit. Everywhere across the whole community could be seen the co-existence of, and the interactive and mutually beneficial impacts between prosperity and harmony, progress and order, material and spiritual civilization. Korea’s social civilization has come a long way and the Korea spirit has been established.

Firstly, the people of Korea generally have a high standard of personal qualities. During one year of academic stay in Korea, wherever I was, the same had been observed. In public places, people spoke with low voices, followed queues in an orderly manner, never shouted while using mobile phones, consciously helped to keep public sanity, never spit onto road surfaces, and held on to garbage instead of throwing them onto roadsides. Inside a university sports stadium, I personally witnessed the acts of the participants of a sports event in making a lap of garbage cleaning when the event was over. The stark contrast when compared with the acts of China's students in randomly disposing of garbage had given me much to ponder about. On two occasions of climbing the Bukhan Mountains, I had observed how clean the roads were kept despite the huge amount of tourists visiting, which showed the fine temperament and habits of the Korean people in loving and caring for nature. It was something that had moved and inspired us. When we asked for directions on the streets, almost everybody would carefully gave us directions in details, while the majority would personally led us to our destination after finding out where we were headed.

Secondly, there are very strong forces of social cohesion.

In his *Tentative Exposition Of Korean People's Character*, Professor Shen YiLin pointed out that, "The social cohesion forces of the Korean

people manifests themselves as the feelings of common fate and the indomitable fighting spirit when placed in the particular environment of intense national confrontations; whereas, in a peaceful environment it was the team spirit and the mutual help between neighbors, and between the rich and the poor.” It is a truthful remark. Such cohesive forces have served as a very important element in the development of the Korean society. In 1988, student-campaigns were in full swing which always brought students into confrontation with police and armies, but once the time for holding the Olympics arrived, the students reached the agreement with the government to refrain from protesting on the streets and from other disturbances to help make the Olympics a successful event. Witness also the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. Be it in the stadiums, public viewing in a municipal hall or a hotel, or viewing in the family home, Koreans could be seen in the same attire (all in the red color) and shouting the same cheers (Republic Of Korea), moving sights to people from another country like us. I was particularly touched when I saw, after the Korean team lost to Switzerland and therefore the opportunity to play in round of the last sixteen, the understanding of the Korean supporters and the newspaper advertisement which said, “No matter what, you are the Champions in our hearts!”. I was profoundly touched – they are a great people, the Korean People!

Thirdly, there is generally a high regard for frugality and the respect

and dutifulness toward the old.

In 2005, Korea was one of the relatively wealthy countries of the world, with its per capita income was 15000 US dollars. Even though the country is now modernized and its people have become wealthy, the whole nation and everyone in the community have retained the quality of diligence and frugality, still holding simplicity in high regard while rejecting extravagance and waste. For instance, Kim Young Sam, upon taking the office of presidency, prescribed that only noodles were to be offered at the cabinet ministers' luncheon held at the Cheong Wa Dae Office of the president. By the same token, only noodles were offered during the receptions for internal guests at the president's residence, with exceptions only allowed for diplomatic occasions. Kim publicly declared that he would give up his hobby in golf playing and locked up his own golf clubs during his presidential term. By their own actions, leaders in the government had led by good examples with very good results.

During one year of stay in Korea, I had plenty of experiences to reflect upon in this regard. The free supply of drinking water at various locations of public utilities undoubtedly reflected the wealth of the nation, but on the other hand, it also witnessed the nation's notion of frugality when one observed the fact that paper bags were always provided on top of free drinking water machines.

In the process of modernizing the country, Korea has discarded the notions of political and social hierarchy, emphasizing equality among people and valuing individuality and creativity. Also highly regarded are political democracy, freedom of the press, economic freedom and education. At the same time, Korea have preserved the notions of “respect” and “dutifulness” towards the old, which were components of the Confucian traditions. Elderly people in Korea, regardless of their background, or their social or material status, enjoy high regard from the family as well as from the society in general. Their opinions and actions carry natural authority and are regarded as ethical and moral standards.

Filial piety manifests itself chiefly in the following aspects: Firstly, the family is responsible for maintaining the old. Generally, the eldest son of Korean family is responsible for providing for the elderly, which is an established custom, and rarely would siblings pass the responsibility back and forth or take turns in fulfilling the duty. Usually, the eldest son and his wife look after the elderly and they live together in harmony. Filial piety towards the husband’s parents by the wife is recognized as one of the virtuous qualities for a woman. If parents live with their daughter or the second eldest son for a long time, the eldest son will start to feel the unease from the pressures of the opinions of neighbors and the wider public. Apparently, the issue of the keeping of the elderly, which has troubled China’s sociologists for some time, has been resolved quite

successfully in Korea. Secondly, ancestor worshipping is practiced during festivals. The New Year's Day of The Lunar Calendar and August 15 are the most important festivals for the Korean people. The Mid-Autumn Festival is particularly important because its chief content is the ancestor worshipping. During the three day holidays of the festival, the major cities of Korea, such as Seoul and Pusan, would witness an exodus of their citizens on their way, either by trains or own transport, to return to their hometowns to pay respect to their ancestors' burial grounds. In the eyes of the Korean people, failing to carry out ancestor worshipping during the Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most disrespectful and shameful conducts by a person. Thirdly, the care for the old is evident in the community in general. During my stay in Korea lasting a year, I was deeply impressed by the fact that not only special seats were reserved for the elderly in every compartment in subway trains, but also that they would never be occupied by young people no matter how congested the compartment was. Specially reserved seats and places for activities are provided for the elderly also on buses, shopping centers, hospitals, and parks, etc. Respect and dutifulness towards the elderly have been part of the traditional virtues in China's culture, and have been adopted by the Koreans who had for a long time in the past shared elements of China's traditions. They have not only preserved this virtue of filial piety, but have also developed and lifted its status. This is something that deserves

to be reflected on by the Chinese people.

4.

In conclusion, Korean modernization has offered the following points for developing insights regarding modern Chinese society:

Firstly, it is imperative to seize the opportunities to be diligently accomplish the modernization of the economy and realize the aspirations towards wealth for the nation and for the people. Modernization of the economy is the precondition for the modernization of all other aspects and is the foundation for political democratization and progress in civilization in general.

Secondly, democracy must be gradually introduced into politics. Governing by law, openness, fairness, and social justice must be realized through the gradual advancing from inner-party democracy towards popular democracy. The advancement and realization of democracy alone will guarantee social harmony, strength of the country, long-term stability, the stamping out of corruption, the cleansing of the old habits of the administration and the public, and the long-term resolutions of the

deep-rooted social and interests conflicts. If it has worked for Korea and Japan, which share the same Confucian roots in their civilization with China, is there any reason why the same could not be applied to China?

Thirdly, such excellent elements of the Confucian traditions as respect for nature, the elderly and frugality must be restored and advanced. Korea and China have a lot in common in the purpose and content of their intrinsic culture and traditions. Korea has inherited and preserved the cream of traditional culture and discarded the undesirable and outdated parts. Traditional civilization and modern civilization, spiritual wealth and material wealth have been integrated organically to establish the modern culture, contributing to the taking-off of the modernization process. There are plenty of lessons to be drawn from these experiences for us.

Ridding the pretentious airs and arrogant prejudices, and learning humbly from the Korean experience in order to obtain nourishment and lessons ought to be the choice for both the authorities and the people of China.

Bibliography:

Oliver, Robert: Biography of Syngman Rhee, Taipei: Zhanwang Publishing House, 1955

Yin Baoyun: Political Elements for Economic Success in South Korea, and Collection of Essays on Study of South Korea, the second volume, Beijing University Press, 1994

Yin Baoyun: Why South Korea Succeeds -- Park Chung Hee Regime and Modernization, Taipei: Wenjin Publishing House, 1993

Educational Targets of South Korea KEDI, 1993

Kim Young-sam: Founding New South Korea in the Twenty-first Century, P93, Beijing: Dongfang Publishing House, 1993

Shen Yilin: Trial Analysis of Korean Disposition, and Collection of Essays on Study of South Korea, the first volume, Beijing: Social Science Documentary Publishing House, 1992