

Change and Continuity in Police Organizations: Institution, Legitimacy, and Democratization*

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Abstract: This article analyzes how institutional pressures have allowed for continuities as well as brought about changes in modern police organizations in Korea. When facing a legitimacy crisis, the Korean law enforcement system has typically responded with organizational restructuring. Strong myth-building patterns compensate for the lack of moral legitimacy of the police, particularly under authoritarian-military regimes that suppress democratization movements in Korea. Even after seemingly radical organizational changes aimed at placing the police under democratic control, highly institutionalized core structures of the police remain in place. Performance reform after the economic crisis, which was preceded from reformers' shared belief in the market-driven solutions, diagnosed the Korean police as a big, inefficient, and self-serving bureaucracy, a diagnosis that eventually caused gradual deterioration in the taken-for-grantedness of policing activities. The internet and social media made the Korean police even more vulnerable to external challenges and a questioning of its legitimacy.

Keywords: institution, legitimacy, policing, democratization

INTRODUCTION

Police aim to control those behaviors by citizens that are dangerous to other citizens, although its level of perceived legitimacy varies in context (Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Developmental states try to induce societal changes, and therefore the legitimization of the police force is often the key to accomplishing development goals (Hinton & Newburn, 2008; Im et al., 2011; Marenin, 1996), especially as law enforcement

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institutions play a critical role in the democratic transformation of society (Bayley, 2006; Cheng, Haggard, & Kang, 1998). Further, through their visibility, police forces can influence the economic, social, and moral stability of a society (DiIulio, 1996), both indirectly and directly, which is likewise related to democratic development (Johnson, 1989; Johnston, 2008; Cho et al., 2013; Im et al., 2013).

Studies about the role of the Korean police in Korea's democratic development are often very normative and/or prescriptive (Kim, 2000)—not many studies have explored the changes the police has experienced in Korea and how these changes have affected democratic development. A more balanced approach is required to evaluate how and why police organizations in Korea have developed in the way they have and how the democratization movement has affected and been affected by these changes.

This article approaches the phenomena from an institutional perspective, focusing on the concept of organizational legitimacy. The reason this study focuses on the legitimacy concept is that it is central to understanding the nature of institutional continuities and changes in the modern Korean police. Institutional orientations contend that past outcomes are institutionalized in the organizational structure, and the fluctuating history of Korea since the liberation of the country has encouraged such institutionalization. Further, the institutional perspective argues that the organization incorporates certain forms not necessarily because they are efficient but because they are considered legitimate, which is relevant to explaining changes in police organizations during the democratic transformation of Korea.

THERETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Among variant theories of (neo)institutionalism, this study's perspective is closest to a sociological/organizational tradition in which organizations are viewed as being infused with expectations, values, and meanings from their external environment (Jay, 2013). This strand of institutionalism emphasizes legitimacy, routines, and schema (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Institutionalism, Persistence, and Change

Institutionalism provides an explanatory account of how organizations respond to institutional pressure (Seo & Creed, 2002). According to this view, organizational survival is dependent on whether the organization is able to meet institutional expectations, even if these expectations are not always technically related to what the organi-

zation does (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), because what is expected of organizations is regularized by values, ideas, and beliefs that originate in the institutional context (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983). This means that actors in the institutional context may unwillingly accept the prevailing template as the right way of doing things (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Olsen, 2009). Therefore, institutionalism emphasizes the stability of organizational arrangements (Farjoun, 2010) and even treats the unfolding of organizational change as one of constant reproduction of existing modes of thought (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

Institutional pressure is a powerful force against organizational change (Buckho, 1994; Ledford, Mohrman, Mohrman, & Lawler, 1989).¹ However, Oliver (1992) adopts the notion of “dissipation,” which refers to a gradual deterioration in the acceptance of a particular institutionalized practice. In this conceptual framework, environmental factors contribute to deinstitutionalization—changing values, conflicting internal interests, and increasing social fragmentation result in institutionalized practices being replaced by new ones, which in turn leads to organizational change.² DiMaggio and Powell (1991) suggest that in the shift from the old to the new institutionalism, power becomes less important. This argument about the processes of changing legitimated templates has drawn scholarly attention to the role of intra-organizational dynamics in organizations’ rejection of institutionalized practices.

On the other hand, a political model of organizational change suggests that power is paramount (Clegg, 1975). Fligstein (1991) argues that organizational change occurs when a new set of actors gains power or when those in power have an interest in altering the organization's goals. Greenwood and Hinings (1996) suggest that organizationally defined groups have differential power, meaning different abilities enable them to make organizational change. Social audiences listen more keenly to certain groups,

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1. March and Olsen (1983, 1996) have identified internal factors that produce resistance to organizational changes, while Meyer and Rowan (1991) have identified external factors that force organizations to embark on change. A two-stage dissemination model of change is suggested by Tolbert and Zucker (1983)—in this model, institutional pressures become more important in the later stage of the development of an organizational field, whereas technical performance requirements are more salient in the earlier stages of the development of the field. Institutionalists have subsequently proposed mechanisms of imitation, focusing on interlocking directorates (Davis & Powell, 1992; Palmer, Jennings, & Zhou, 1993).
 2. Greenwood and Hinings (1996) suggest that organizational change is instigated by dissatisfaction with the way that interests are accommodated within an organization, proposing that interest dissatisfaction leads to radical change only if it is associated with a competitive pattern of value commitments—this means that interest dissatisfaction otherwise precipitates convergent change.

and these groups have more power to enable or resist organizational changes—further, these powerful groups are able to constitute or recreate organizational structures according to their preferences (Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980). The differential power that groups have is useful to understanding the operation of interests. Organizational studies on political power claim that organizational change is accomplished by appeals to the normative visions of the social audiences of organizations (Collins & Porras, 1991).

Isomorphic organizational change is another key institutionalist concept. Isomorphism incorporates elements that are externally legitimated, and organizations' dependence on externally fixed institutional practices stabilizes the environment within which they are operating (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Isomorphic changes are classified as coercive, mimetic, and normative (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). Coercive isomorphism results from the legitimacy problem and political influence; mimetic isomorphism stems from standard responses to uncertainty; and normative isomorphism is caused by professionalization. We should note that mimetic, normative, and coercive mechanisms are parts of the institutional context and that the strength of these kinds of pressure is not equivalent.

Legitimacy: Social Audience, Value, and Myth Building

This study particularly focuses on the institutional legitimacy.³ Legitimacy explains what an organization is doing and why (Jepperson, 1991). Legitimacy enhances organizational survival, stability, and continuity and protects organizations from institutional pressure (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995).⁴ Legitimate organizations are able to choose their organizational structure and enjoy substantial freedom to pursue their affairs in the way they want (Deephouse, Bundy, Tost, & Suchman, 2016; Knoke, 1988; Brown, 1998).

Institutionalist researchers tend to conceptualize legitimacy as a set of institutionalized beliefs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Zucker, 1987).⁵ Meyer and Scott (1983) take the view that organizational

3. Suchman (1995) states that institutionalization and legitimacy are almost synonymous.

4. There are three different sources of legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan (1977)—rational effectiveness, legal mandate, and collectively valued purpose—dimensions that have been renamed in more recent literature as pragmatic legitimacy, regulatory/sociopolitical legitimacy, and normative/moral legitimacy, respectively.

5. Early institutionalist literature embraced Weber's analysis of legitimacy and regarded legitimacy as the congruence of an organization with social norms and values (Parsons, 1960; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975).

legitimacy refers to the degree of “cultural support” for an organization. This conceptualization highlights cognitive aspect of legitimacy, treating it as the array of established cultural accounts explaining an organization’s existence—the emphasis on cultural conformity rather than on overt self-justification of an organization’s right to exist is a noteworthy contribution of this conceptualization. According to this view, no question is raised about a completely legitimate organization—the absence of questioning is central to this concept.⁶

Suchman (1995) highlights that legitimacy is a generalized perception within a socially constructed system of norms, acknowledging the role of social audience in legitimization dynamics. Social audiences perceive legitimate organizations as more meaningful, not just as more worthy of existing. Social audiences of organizations supply resources to them, allowing them to persist (Parsons, 1960). External audiences can determine how the organization is built, how it is run, and how it is understood. Meyer and Rowan (1991) suggest that organizations build myths using institutionalized programs, and diffuse them via a relational network. Institutionalized activities of legitimate organizations are supported by the mobilization of myths embedded in the system (Suchman, 1995; Zucker, 1988).

Legitimacy is defined in the scholarly literature as having three dimensions: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive (Suchman, 1995). Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interested calculations of social audiences whose well-being is affected by organizations’ activities. Moral legitimacy, by contrast, is based on normative evaluations (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Palthe, 2014)—this is why the institutionalist tends to refer to moral legitimacy as normative legitimacy (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Moral legitimacy is not judged by the expected benefits of an organization’s activity but by whether the activity is the right thing to do—therefore, social audiences’ socially constructed value system is reflected in this judgment. Although the ascription of moral legitimacy is not completely interest-free, social audiences’ prosocial evaluation is different from purely self-interested consideration. Cognitive legitimacy is based on taken-for-granted-ness. This taken-for-granted-ness is the most powerful source of legitimacy, because it has the effect of making alternatives unthinkable and challenges nearly impossible (Zucker, 1983).

6. Hirsch and Andrew (1986) identify two different ways organizations that are not perceived as wholly legitimate are questioned, namely by probing how well agreed-on goals are met (performance challenge) and by inquiring about an organization’s mission (value challenge).

Institutionalism and Legitimacy in Police Studies

Police departments and law enforcement units are highly institutionalized organizations and therefore are well suited to being approached from an institutionalist perspective (Carter, 2016; Crank & Langworthy, 1992). Crank and Langworthy (1992) argue that an institutional orientation emerged in police studies as a reaction to the limitation of a normative focus on the traditional theory of police organization—that is, disappointment with the results of normative theories of reforms in police organizations in the United States led scholars to pay attention to the institutional environment. Police research in the normative mode links particular types of organizational structure to desired goals, but Langworthy (1986) suggests that the search for the best structure for police organizations in this traditional normative research fails to explain the role of institutional contexts that mediate between structure and effectiveness.

Crack and Langworthy (1992) emphasize the role of institutional environments and myth building in attaining police legitimacy—according to this view, survival of a police agency and its ability to secure resources to support its fundamental well-being are dependent on whether sovereigns accept the legitimacy of the police organization. Symbolic attributes such as police uniforms, ranks, insignia, and traditional titles are important sources of legitimacy (Crank & Langworthy, 1992).

The institutionalist perspective has been mainly used to explain community policing movements in the United States. In 1960s, a drastic increase in crime and media-depicted police brutality against civil rights protesters significantly delegitimized existing myths about the police's professionalism and autonomy in the fight against crime. A relegitimation strategy was the community policing movement grounded in the myth of community (Crank, 1994). Community policing was originally a means of overcoming the limitations of the professionally based policing model, but after a certain point, community policing itself came to be taken for granted as the right way to police. Zhao et al (2001) explain why organizational priorities in American policing have remained unchanged even after the proliferation of community policing programs in the United States. They argue that the community-policing paradigm has been used somewhat strategically by police organizations to buffer the undesired impact of challenges to the professional model of policing.

Police studies with an institutionalist orientation tend to emphasize the idea that organizational change is affected by external pressure—legitimation by sovereigns is a key concept. High visibility and the investigative nature of policing require relatively higher levels of acceptance of legitimacy from sovereigns compared to the other government activities. On the other hand, it should be noted that core features of police organizations have been found to persist over time and that change is in fact

more peripheral.

This study analyzes the modern history of Korean police organizations using the institutional perspective. We draw on institutionalist concepts such as sovereign, legitimacy, myth building, isomorphism and ceremonial/ritual activities to explain how the Korean police has adopted certain practices and what features have persisted.

CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN THE KOREAN POLICE

In Korea, the police has traditionally been a national/federal organization—all provincial and city police are under the jurisdiction of the national police. The Korean police has maintained strong paramilitary characteristics, and its activities tend to be highly investigative. The national police system of Korea has been developed via institutional interaction with diverse actors such as domestic political leaders, civil society, the military, and other countries. Since its establishment in 1894, the modern Korean police has experienced dramatic events such as colonialization of the country, civil war, military coup and subsequent political instability. Over the course of this turbulent history, the legitimacy of the Korean police has been challenged and reestablished, a process that has been closely connected with the country's democratization process.

Colonial Police (1910-1945): Modernization of Brutality

Many authors agree that the traditional focus of the Korean police was law enforcement activities, and that this focus dates back to the history of Japanese occupation of Korea (Lee, 2007). The Japanese colonial regime annexed Korea in 1910 and controlled Korea for almost half a century. The Japanese deployed the colonial police to monitor Korean citizens while they pursued their exploitative goals and eventually to oversee law enforcement on the peninsula as a part of Japan's imperialist regime (Kim, 2012). Japanese officers were dispatched at all levels of the colonial police organization and supervised Korean law enforcement personnel from patrolmen to top-rank managers (Cho, 2015). Because of this close supervision at every level, colonial police organizations were a carbon copy of the Japanese police (Esselstrom, 2009; Hoffman, 1991), although the colonial police in Korea were much more brutal than the native police (Choi, 2008). Korean people came to have a deep-seated hatred of the police force during this period, which is evidenced in the series of events after the independence of the nation such as the killing of former colonial officers and the burning of their houses (Kim, 2012).

From the fourteenth century until the late nineteenth century, Korea's police unit was a part of the army (Lim, 2010). Crime control was a responsibility of this semi-military organization, and communities collaborated with it (Lee, 2007). In 1894, the Korean police was separated from the military when Japan intervened in Korea's internal affairs as part of its initial imperialistic move (Kim, 2012). The Japanese imported their centralized modern police organization into Korea as a means of controlling of the colonized (Esselstrom, 2009), and Japanese police officers were stationed in almost all major cities, where they took control of police organizations and investigated anti-Japanese movements (Pyo, 2001; Heo, 2005). In 1907, the Japanese intention to colonize Korea became more apparent, and police administration was restructured to allow Japanese police personnel to occupy every important position in the law enforcement system in Korea (Cho, 2015)—this granted the Japanese police authority to closely monitor publication, immigration, and residential registration in the colony.

By 1908, the number of Japanese police personnel in Korea had increased to more than 50 percent of the entire Korean police force (Kim, 2012; Myong, 1959). Japanese police were at the frontline of the colonization attempt (Steinberg, 1968), with the number of police being one for every 400 Korean citizens (Esselstrom, 2009; Hoffman, 1991).

In 1910, just after it secured full control over the Korean police force, the Japanese colonial regime formally annexed Korea as a part of its territory (Cho, 2015). Colonial police in Korea were under the direct supervision of the Japanese governor general, and brutal repression of the colonized people was the most prominent feature of policing in this period (Kim, 2012; Myong, 1959). Military-like colonial police stations were established in rural areas in Korea, and more than 12,000 colonial police officers were dispatched to these stations to control Korean citizens (Heo, 2005). The Japanese colonial regime dramatically increased the number of colonial police stations from 480 to 730 within the three years after the formal annexation of Korea, and Japanese police personnel in Korea held high-ranking positions (Hoffman, 1982; Myong, 1959).

Colonial police officers were granted very extensive authority over the populace, including the power to censor publications. The colonial police extended its control beyond what was legal; it frequently arrested Korean people without warrant and then kept them imprisoned for long periods without holding trials, denying them bail (Lee, 2015). There was no habeas corpus; indeed, those arrested were tortured instead (Chung, 1921). The criminal court of this period served the colonial government, and almost all judges were Japanese, which meant there was no right to appeal a conviction (Lee, 2015). Colonial police also executed Korean citizens who supported exiled Koreans whose activities were directly or indirectly related to the independence move-

ment (Esselstrom, 2009; Lee, 2007).

In the early 1920s, after massive nonviolent independence demonstrations in Korea, the Japanese colonial police began to turn over crime control and peace-keeping duties to civilian colonial officers (Kim, 2012; Myong, 1959). However, the real aim of this change was to use the civilian officers to monitor the daily activities of Korean citizens to prevent any anticolonial activity and to disseminate colonial ideology to the population in an attempt to secure support for the imperialist regime. The colonial civilian police force could still exercise almost unbounded discretion to treat the Korean populace violently.

Through coercive processes, the Japanese colonial regime produced a carbon copy of its centralized policing system in the Korean context. The brutality of policing in the colonial period instilled a hostility toward police that was passed on for decades between generations (Kim, 2012; Lee, 2007). A lack of moral legitimacy among police has been found to be a negative legacy of this period.

Postcolonial Police and Civil War (1945-1953): Response to Uncertainty

When Korea was liberated after the Second World War, the United States occupied the south of the peninsula while the Soviet Union occupied the north for a temporary peacekeeping purpose. The American occupation force, also called the U.S. military government of Korea, reorganized the police in postcolonial Korea to fill the administrative vacuum that remained after the Japanese retreated (Kim, 2008). In 1945, the U.S. military government established a police bureau as the national policing unit, putting the national defense director in charge of supervising it. In 1946, the national police department was designated to oversee the police, replacing the national defense director. This structural reform was based on U.S. advisors' recommendations. It was hoped that this reform would help the police force recruit more Koreans as police officers and procure advanced equipment and lead to the establishment of a modernized police school, the elimination of summary punishment, the creation of a national police board, and the enactment of civil right laws (Kim, 2006).

Unfortunately, despite some meaningful attempts to modernize the law enforcement system, the postcolonial regime governed by the U.S. military government did not succeed in shifting the orientation of police activity in Korea from a service-to-government one to a service-to-citizen one (Kim, 2009; Moon & Morash, 2004; Meade, 1951). This is at least partly because the reorganization of police in this period was heavily based on the Japanese model (Kim, 2008). For example, the U.S. military government decided to utilize former colonial police officers, who served the interests of the Japanese colonial regime, to deal with the shortage of police-trained manpower

and to manage postcolonial social instability (Meade, 1951).⁷ Out of 25,000 police officials in 1946, more than a half of the officers were former colonial officers. Due to the organizational and behavioral similarities between the colonial and postcolonial police, the populace's deep-seated hatred toward colonial police remained intact.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, just two years after Korea was established as an independent modern nation, the police had to take on military-like responsibilities such as counter guerrilla activities, military traffic control, intelligence operations, and refugee control (Bark, 1966). During the war, more than 10,000 Korean police officers were killed in action, and many more were severely injured. The military-like operations during the Korean war were an extension of the types of activities carried out by the centralized and highly investigative police force before the war, and police involvement in full-scale war further institutionalized the military-style investigative tradition of Korean police.

After liberation, the political vacuum in postcolonial Korea generated much uncertainty, which led the new government to rely on pre-existed organizational forms and to even hire former colonial officers. Deep-seated hatred toward the former colonial policing system was the evident source of the legitimacy challenges that this colonial, bureaucracy-based police force faced. However, at the same time, the public's acceptance of the need for military-like operations and the urgency of the manpower shortage aided the isomorphic absorption of the colonial police force and its centralized paramilitary organizational templates.

The Postwar Police under Syngman Rhee (1953-1961): A Political Force

The Korean War ended in 1953, but the threat from North Korea persisted, which occasionally even attempted territorial incursions.⁸ In order to manage the North Korean military threat and its intelligence activity, the political leadership in the Republic of Korea wanted to maintain a paramilitary police force (Seo, 1996). This highly centralized police organization did not just serve national defense purposes, however—it also served the political goals of President Syngman Rhee and his ruling political party (Heo, 2005; Kim, 2009). An excessive use of police force was unacceptable to the Korean people, who had experienced the brutality of the Japanese colonial police (Bark, 1966).

That a highly centralized and repressive law enforcement organization remained in

7. Given the absence of proper background checks and a failure to establish criteria for hiring, many unqualified personnel, some even with criminal records, were recruited.

8. Officially, it was a ceasefire that was secured via a truce agreement.

place even after the Korean War had ended and the threat from North Korean incursion diminished can be attributed to fact that the police template from the colonial era was deeply institutionalized (Ha, 2002; Kim, 2008). Once this form of modernized and centralized policing was institutionalized, the populace accepted it as a taken-for-granted form of law enforcement.

After the anti-dictatorship movement got under way in Korea in 1950s, the Korean police was used by the authoritarian government to coerce the population to fall in line with the interests of top political leaders (Heo, 2005; Kim, 2000). For example, the Korean police was deeply involved in manipulating elections, most prominently the presidential elections of the 1960s, and it arrested and interrogated political rivals of ruling parties (Jung & Kim, 2014). There were various clashes between anti-authoritarianism movement leaders and the police due to the human rights violations committed by the Korean police. Resentment over the police's involvement in manipulating elections challenged the legitimacy of policing activities, although propaganda idolizing the cause of national defense was an effective strategy that buffered questioning against oppressive and punitive law enforcement.

In spite of the inertia preventing non-superficial reform in policing, there were certainly attempts to effect change. The political dissent against President Syngman Rhee gradually assumed a strength that led to his eviction from office in early 1960 (Hong, 1995). When it was revealed that the police was involved in manipulating the results of the presidential election in 1961, anger over the corrupt system, which was maintained by repressive law enforcement organizations, led a massive group of college students to demonstrate in the streets (Jung & Kim, 2014). Korean police confronted these protesters with a violent show of force that caused hundreds of deaths, which in turn resulted in uncontrollable outrage from the public (Kim, 2001).

Prime Minister Myun Jang tried to stabilize the political situation after the resignation of the president, and the newly established government under the Prime Minister attempted to restructure the police force and the law enforcement system (Ha, 2014). The public safety commissioners were given the authority to create police policy, and these commissioners had to be approved by the legislature. There was an initial attempt to ensure police neutrality and to reorient the organization toward more citizen-serving purposes. However, this attempt to reorient the police failed to be institutionalized because of the military coup in 1961.

Policing under Military Dictatorship (1961-1987): Myth Building

Attempts to para-militarize Korean policing patterns returned after the coup in 1961 mounted by the military officer Chung-hee Park (Kim, 2004), who reorganized

the national police force in his authoritarian military government. At this stage, however, even a dictator could not fully overlook the public's democratic aspirations (Yi, 2006). In response to the democratic movement growing in the country, Park adopted so called "managed democracy" (Wolin, 2010), responding to external pressure with superficial and peripheral changes in governing. This "fake" democracy, as a closely contested electoral race makes clear, was managed by propaganda issued by the police and the intelligence agency (Kim, 2004; Heo, 2005). The assertion of a national security crisis, whether substantial or exaggerated, was a powerful legitimization strategy (Kim, 2004).

Intelligence activity formerly carried out by the police was the responsibility of a newly established counterintelligence agency (Kim, 2004). This intelligence organization was empowered with authority to monitor and control Korean citizens as a means of counteracting the communist revolution in the south (Vreeland, 1975, p. 324; Suh, 1976), and policing was under the supervision of this agency as well. Ex-military officers were employed to fill high-ranking police positions, and they collected information about political dissent, labor activists, and antigovernment student movements (Holtman, 1982; Heo, 2005).

A national police affairs office was established in 1974. The director general of police was given very extensive policing power, and the political influence from the military government continued to increase (Heo, 2005). Military-like activities were still common even decades after the Korean War ended. The Korean counterintelligence agency likewise carried out such activities, arresting, investigating, interrogating, and detaining protestors against the dictatorship and political revolutionaries, who were subsequently punished by the court under the guise of eliminating the security threat from communist North Korea (Vreeland, 1975; Jun & Yoon, 1996). The democratic movement was suppressed even more after President Park declared martial law, recasting the constitution into a highly authoritarian document (Chung, 2006).

It was an irony that President Park was assassinated by the chief officer of his own intelligence agency in 1979 after having survived several previous assassination attempts by the North Korean government. President Park's assassination brought another military regime into power, headed up by Chun Doo-hwan, who dissolved the Korean national assembly and maintained an authoritarian military government in Korea until 1987. In the process of his military coup, Chun ordered special units to hunt down democratization activists in Gwang-ju city, which massacred more than 2,000 civilians, including many innocent citizens (Kim, 2014). After Chun became a president with a rubber-stamp election in 1980, the authoritarian regime continued to suppress the democratization movement and the police was again at the frontline (Im, 2004).

During this period, Korean citizens were reluctant to actively ask for any changes in policing because to do so would be regarded as part and parcel of a communism-driven revolutionary plot (Jung & Kim, 2014). Further, foundation of civil society in Korea was very vulnerable partly due to the colonial legacy and in part owing to the public's resentment on betrayal of the business class in Korea, which was supposed to support the anti-government movement but which subserviently collaborated with the Japanese colonial regime and supported President Rhee's corrupt government (Bark, 1996; Cho, 2015; Heo, 2005).

During the authoritarian period, external pressure for democratic control of the police by the citizenry gradually intensified (Kim, 2000; Jung & Kim, 2014). Although the change was gradual, the police became more oriented toward peacekeeping and crime control. Some scholars argue that it was effective in crime control (Kim, 2005)—compared to other developing countries, Korea has maintained relatively higher level of safety in its streets, neighborhoods, and cities (Im & Park, 2010).

On the other hand, the national police did engage in public relations efforts in an attempt to retain a level of police legitimacy, promoting a citizen-friendly image (Korean National Police, 1981). The myth-building efforts under the guise of the North Korean communist threat served their purpose, as the peace lasted for decades without full-scale war. The British-American model of law enforcement and its citizen-oriented policing were first introduced in Korea in the late 1970s as methods of re-legitimizing the Korean police. For example, government publication materials emphasized citizen-friendly policing activities while only briefly mentioning the law enforcement function (Kim, 2006)—blending of professionalism and elitism with police image was another message sent via these police publications.

This was a certainly a change, as the printed police materials before this period had emphasized only the urgent need to strike at and sweep away the so-called communist remnants from the south. However, the citizen-serving model was not truly adopted as an institutionalized organizational template of the police organization because no substantial restructuring took place. Changes were superficial, merely declared in printed materials and not carried out. The claim to have restructured can be understood as a myth-building strategy to defuse external pressure for democratic control over the police.

Democratic Control over the Police (1987-1998): Accomplishments and Limitations

During the late 1980s, the later phase of the military dictatorship, the police was deployed to break up democratization movements. Violent clashes between police and

demonstrators resulted in serious injuries and deaths, and the legitimacy of police activities under the authoritarian regime gradually deteriorated (Kim, 2004; Jung & Kim, 2014; Moon & Morash, 2009). The external pressure brought to bear for democracy was no longer negligible—it became too difficult for the political regime to insulate oppressive police activities by claiming they were necessary owing to the threat from North Korea.

To address the Korean police's political neutrality problem, several reforms were introduced in the early 1990s. Under the Police Act enacted in 1991, a national police agency was established, and in order to ensure its political autonomy and democratic control, it was not subject to the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior (Heo, 2005). This reform was focused on changing the structure of the interorganizational relationship that had long made the police subservient to the undemocratic political leadership (Kim, 2004; Moon & Morash, 2009).

Civilianizing the police was one of the major efforts undertaken to change the police bureaucracy, and for this purpose, the government appointed nonmilitary and nonpolice civilians as head of the police and created civilian boards and committees in public safety policy decision making. For example, a national police board was created to increase democratic control over police administration (Kim, 2006). This civilian board took part in budgetary/financial management, personnel administration, and investigation of police's human rights abuses. The national police agency had to adopt, at least in appearance, very extensive operational reforms, such as restrictions in the use of tear gas in dealing with public protests. The image of brutality and lack of democratic control were major sources of the delegitimization of the police in this period, and therefore, it needed to seriously consider the shared value of democracy in the institutional environment.

President Kim Young-sam's regime (1993-1998) was considered a truly civilian government after decades of military dictatorship, and it implemented numerous administrative reforms, including breaking up the central police force into localized street-level police stations so that it would be able to react more effectively to crime in the communities (Moon & Morash, 2009). In Korea, decentralization was considered one of the pillars of democratization (Im & Cho, 2008; Kang et al., 2012) and so this change can be understood as part and parcel of the democratization effort. This organizational change also reflected the growing need for crime protection (Heo, 2005).

However, many authors have pointed out that the police act had serious limitations in bringing substantive organizational change to the Korean police (Moon & Morash, 2009; Yoon, 2001). The institutionalized core of the bureaucracy remained intact, and the police force continued to serve the interests of ruling government, violently dealing with many student protests (Jung & Kim, 2014). The civilian board did not (or could

not) exercise any constraining influence on police behavior. The political autonomy of the police was not fully ensured by this structural change because the primary supervising office was still under the Ministry of the Interior, and furthermore there were numerous indirect ways to influence on police (Kim, 2006). The commissioner general and all high-rank police managers tended to be appointees of a patronage system, which served a strong control mechanism over the police.

Again, the change was superficial despite its “looking” very different. The democratization measures in the early 1990s restrained police activities only in part. In fact, these measures were utilized as a relegitimization strategy to address external pressure to allow democratic control of the police by the civilian populace and to deflect attention away from the fact that changes in the core structure were minimal.

Performance Reform in Policing (1998-Present): Financial Pressure in the Digital Era

Starting in the late 1990s, Korean society faced drastic social changes generated by economic crisis and the growth of the internet. In 1997, a fall in foreign currency reserves, caused by a profound moral-hazard problem embedded in the economic structure, forced the country to seek a rescue loan from the International Monetary Fund. The International Monetary Fund required Korea to completely restructure its economy and government administration (Campbell & Cho, 2014; Kim & Cho, 2012). Major companies were bankrupted, and many workers lost their jobs. The financial burden for the Korean government was significant, and the public sector was one of the primary targets of the reform (Kim & Cho, 2014; Im et al, 2014). Newly elected president Dae-jung Kim declared that the economic crisis was the greatest national challenge the country had faced since the Korean war.

This economic crisis led to external pressure for the police to reorganize itself into more efficient and citizen-oriented institution (Yoon, 2001), and so in 1998, the Korean police created a task force to initiate and implement performance reform. The Korean government pushed the national police agency to develop a more market-, performance-, and customer-oriented structure (Yun & Cheong, 2010), which led reformers to look to the New Public Management (NPM) (Cho, 2013). Among the reformers, who emerged as important actors in the institutional environment of police, there was a strong shared belief that NPM measures could completely resolve the problems of the Korean police bureaucracy (Lee & Lee, 2009) and more the magic of NPM could create a “small, efficient, and better-serving” government. Besides the controversy regarding whether the NPM could actually turn the Korean police into a born-again organization, another notable aspect of this performance reform is that it depicted the

Korean government as a big, inefficient, and self-serving bureaucracy, which seriously eroded its pragmatic legitimacy as well as that of the national police agency. It is interesting that reformers drew on this NPM-driven Western-style performance management not only as a way to question the legitimacy of the police but also a re-legitimation strategy insofar as the accomplishments of the market-oriented solutions adopted by police organizations were held up for praise.

Studies have found that these results-oriented performance reforms did not much improve the efficiency of the police (Lee & Lee, 2009). Many of the changes were not well-institutionalized, especially in the street-level bureaucracy (Cho, 2013). Some studies even show that the performance reform measures have gradually been deinstitutionalized over the last several years (Lee & Lim, 2012). High-ranking members of the Korean police resisted many elements of the performance-driven restructuring (Cho, 2013).

Even if one acknowledges that the organizational structure changed quite extensively at least formally, such as in the creation of subunits and the merging of related departments in this period, the police remained in essence a highly institutionalized service-to-government entity, especially in the behavioral patterns of police officers (Lee & Lee, 2009). Police officers in the authoritarian era were socialized in an organization where investigative ways of policing were highly institutionalized, and so it is not surprising that the organizational culture lacks a citizen-serving spirit even after a series of customer-oriented reforms. Many police officers try to maintain the traditional police model, but they face very serious citizen resistance. Cho (2013) has shown that many Korean citizens do not accept even legitimate police discretion such as stop-and-frisk.

Another characteristic of the institutional environment in this period was the growth of the internet (Im et al, 2014; Porumbescu, 2016), which posed great challenges to the legitimacy of Korean law-enforcement organizations. Instances of discretionary use of power on the part of the police can be depicted as misconduct and easily exposed and spread via the internet through blogs, internet journals, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter (cf. Porumbescu, 2015). In this environment, citizens began to question the legitimacy of the police and revealed their deep-seated hatred toward the police. The discretionary authority of police officers is now often ignored, and one consequences of this is that the Korean police d feels unauthorized to perform even its peace-keeping duties (Cho, 2013).

This lack of legitimacy is combined with historically-rooted antagonism toward the Korean police. There have been cases in which citizens have attacked police stations and beat police officers, and street-level police officers are often punched, kicked, and struck by citizens. Thus, some Korean police officers have recently refused to actively

become involved in crime control and remain as by-standers even when a crime is being committed in their presence (cf. Cho, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2009).

Most recently, the Korean police has emphasized community policing (Kim, 2002) as both a citizen-serving tool and a possible source of re-legitimation. This echoes to an extent how community policing in the United States operated. However, the myth of community and/or the mythology of the watchman does not figure in the Korean context, and therefore, it is questionable how well community policing can be institutionalized as a legitimization strategy.

Discussion: Institution, Legitimacy, and Democratization

The results of the institutional analysis of this study are summarized in the table 1. We found that throughout all periods institutional pressures have encouraged both continuity and change in the Korean police. A typical response to legitimacy crises faced by the police has been to restructure the Korean law enforcement system. Myth-building strategies have been formulated to compensate for the questioning of the legitimacy of the police by social audiences. But even in the wake of seemingly radical organizational changes, highly institutionalized core structures of the police remain intact.

Repressive policing was institutionalized in Korea during the Japanese colonial period, and this institutionalized style of policing has persisted, although it has been modified. The government's decision to absorb the colonial police force into the newly established independent Republic of Korea deprived the new police force of moral legitimacy. This in turn led to a series of myth-building efforts by the authoritarian regime. A lack of moral legitimacy constitutes an important institutional "previous-ness" for the Korean police force and remains one of the key characteristics of Korean law enforcement institutions even today. This has served as a driver, pushing the police to constantly seek ways to compensate with other types of legitimacy, such as pragmatic legitimacy, and with myth-building centered around symbols and ceremonies.

The Korean War and the security threat from North Korea created an institutional environment that led Korean citizens to be more accepting of the pragmatic legitimacy of repressive policing (Kutnjak, Ivkovic & Kang, 2012). However, during the democratization of Korea, decision makers had to deal with the strong desire of the public to wield democratic control over the police force. As a result, in 1991, the Korean police was drastically reorganized and were now expected to be politically neutral. Even with these dramatic changes, however, a number of core policing functions have persisted, because in this different institutional environment, the police sought legitimization by changing lower and less fundamental layers of their organization.

Table 1. Continuity and Change in Police Organizations in Korea

Period	Institutional Environment	Challenges to Legitimacy	Myth- Building Strategies	Organizational Changes/Shifts	Continuity/Inertia
Colonial Police [1910-1945]	colonization (exploitation of the colonized)/ anti-imperialist movement	lack of moral support for colonial regime	emphasis on modernization of police force/ transplantation of colonial identity	coercive semi-militarization/ co-optation of colonial officers/ institutionalization of unbounded discretion	centralized bureaucracy/ paramilitary structure
Postcolonial and Wartime Police [1945-1953]	social uncertainty/ administrative incompetency/ full-scale warfare	deep-seated hatred toward former (colonial) policing system/ resistance to foreign (external) influence	emphasis on need for military-like missions/ emphasizing urgency of manpower shortage	isomorphic absorption of colonial police force/ establishment of a police bureau	focus on investigative policing activities/ centralized control over police bureaucracy
Postwar Police [1953-1961]	political chaos/ continuing security threat/ territorial incursions	resentment over police's involvement in manipulation of elections/ antagonistic confrontation with civil society	propaganda management (idolizing the cause of national defense)/ highlighting of postwar stabilization	efforts to institutionalize legislative approval requirement for public safety commissioners (failed owing to coup)	service-to-government orientation/ oppressive and punitive law enforcement/ control orientation
Military Dictatorship [1961-1987]	nation-wide democratization movement / rising crime caused by drastic urbanization	intensifying protests against dictatorship/ citizen's questioning of police neutrality/ growing hostility toward police as a result of its abuse of power	accentuation of urgent need to counteract communist revolution/ blending of police professionalism and elitism/ introducing citizen-friendly policing	publications promoting citizen-friendly and professional image (published in greater numbers)/ empowerment of counterintelligence function of police	reliance on investigative tradition/ authoritarian control by police forces/ military-like organizational culture
Democratic Control [1987-1998]	establishment of civilian (nonmilitary) regime/ intensification of populace's desire for democracy/ lower security threat	citizens' dissent against continued oppressiveness of policing activities/ strong social demands for anticorruption measures	civilianizing of police (e.g. appointment of nonmilitary and nonpolice civilian as the head of police)/ creation of civilian boards and committees (e.g. the national police board) for public safety policy making	establishment of a national police agency (1991 police act)/ assurance of de jure independence of police from Ministry of Interior/ breakup of central police force into local street-level stations (decentralization)	de facto control by Ministry of Interior (indirect and informal)/ inability of civilian board to exercise substantial influence on decision making
Performance Reform in Policing [1998-present]	national economic crisis/ external monitoring and advising on admin reforms/ diffusion of Internet and social media (high visibility)	reformers' prescription for a small, efficient and better-serving police force (external pressure)/ citizens' disapproval of police's discretionary authority/ viral social media reports on police misconduct	adoption of NPM-driven measures (idolization of market-oriented solutions)/ marketing of customer-oriented policing policies/ introduction of community-policing paradigm	creation of a police reform task force/ implementation of Western-style performance management/ use of citizen satisfaction as performance indicator	professionalism-based model of policing/ lack of citizen-serving organizational culture

The Korean police and its legitimacy have been greatly challenged in years between the economic crisis and the present. The economic crisis of Korea required the government to adopt reforms that would introduce efficient and cost-saving operations. In this performance-reform process, the pragmatic legitimacy of the police bureaucracy seriously deteriorated, while the lack of moral legitimacy and deep-seated hatred remained. This deterioration led Korean citizens to resist police actions that until then had been largely taken for granted as acceptable. The growth of the internet, which had made it possible to report the misconduct of police officers on a real-time basis via social media, reinforced this deterioration, leaving the legitimacy of the police vulnerable to citizens' questioning, for example. That is, the development of the internet and information technology has put rise new and very different pressures on the police.

CONCLUSION

This article shows how the Korean police organization has both changed over time and retained certain characteristics of its highly institutionalized core structure. When it faced a legitimacy crisis, it attempted an organizational restructuring. However, there was continuity even in the wake of this seemingly radical organizational change, and the behavior of Korean police officers has been affected by these stable elements. The analysis in this study has demonstrated that the Korean police has resisted changes that conflict with the values shared by the public and has only undertaken changes that conform with those values.

As we have shown in this article, contemporary policing issues and problems in Korea are best understood in the broader institutional context. This institutional understanding of Korean police organizations is necessary in order to change them so that they end up meeting the needs of citizens they serve. Further investigation into the cultural dimensions of the institutional context is required to formulate practical strategies for solving public safety issues in Korea. The findings of this research should also contribute to the growing literature on governance legitimacy (Christensen et al., 2016; Yang, 2016). Regarding the contemporary challenges of public cynicism that the Korean police faces, better communication with citizens and online engagement that keeps them better informed about what is going on in public safety issues might be helpful (see. Ho & Cho, 2017).

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