

The Structure of Local Government in South Korea: Participation and Performance*

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I. Historical and Legal Background

Korea has had a long history of highly centralized bureaucratic rule under the central government. Although political changes and administrative reorganizations had taken place many times during the monarchical era, the relationship of central to local authorities has remained intact. The tradition of a highly centralized patrimonial control of national government over the local populace remained unchanged until the Japanese control of Korea beginning in 1895. Prior to this, local officials were appointed by and compelled to be loyal to the monarch to whom they owed their position of power, high social status and economic privilege. The local citizenry had virtually no control over the power and authority of these officials.

Japanese colonial rule, which began formally in 1910, had brought little

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change to this tradition. What the Japanese did, however, was to replace Koreans with Japanese bureaucrats. Before Japanese rule, the central government used to respect traditional local boundaries, and provincial governments exercised a considerable degree of independent jurisdiction over purely local matters. It also encouraged a certain degree of local political tradition and practice to develop and allowed a considerable measure of self-determination. However, the Japanese colonial administration prevented these indigenous developments from becoming independent political forces, and in the beginning took even harsher measures of centralized bureaucratic rule. Later on and due largely to the growing resistance to foreign rule and protests for autonomy and independence by Koreans, the Japanese introduced a series of institutional reforms of the local government system which accepted a limited scope of citizen participation and self-governance (autonomy) of local communities.⁽¹⁾ The Japanese colonial system, however, remained far from a democracy and removed from the principle of self-determination for local communities. Rather, the reform was undertaken with an eye to diffusing the strength of the resistance movement and restructuring the colonial system into a more elaborate and efficient design of indirect rule.

The American military government in Korea after the Second World War brought no significant change to the local political system, in spite of its proclaimed aim to provide the Korean people with a democratic, representative machinery of government that would follow a decentralized pattern. Pressed by time and due also to the lack of preparation for the Korean occupation, the Americans adopted the Japanese machinery of governance as "a temporary measure" for tutelage and training. It also adopted the Japanese centralization model as a tool for governing occupied Korea. Thus by mid-1946, "centralization became the dominant operating philosophy of

(1) For example, Japanese reforms established an advisory council system and method of indirect representation in local administrative units. See, Kim and Kim (1973:166-177).

the entire American military government occupation in Korea" (Meade, 1951:76). The provinces were left with little power of discretion and independent authority in legislation. The provincial governments and their subordinate units were under the central control of USAMGIK. The American experiment regarding democracy and local politics in Korea is well summarized by Meade (1951:81-82):

Military Government concluded its first year of occupation by foisting upon the Koreans a governmental structure in which one of the most certain safeguards of democracy, local self determination, was completely lacking. The resolve to instruct Koreans in the American democratic way appears to have become strangely distorted. It was not abandoned. The Interim Legislative Assembly was established in October, 1946; universal suffrage was planned; and the popular election of provincial governors, mayors, and other local chief executives was introduced in November. The paradox was a strange one; for while the people could choose their officials, the latter were cogs in a machinery that made them responsible not to the electorate but to the authority of the USAMGIK.

An independent South Korean government was established on August 15, 1948. The nation's first act for local self-government was adopted in 1949. But due to the political turmoil during the initial period of nation-building and the subsequent break-out of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, the elections of local assemblies were withheld until 1952. The first popular elections for local legislative bodies—for the cities, towns, villages and provincial governments—were held in April-May, 1952. ⁽²⁾ These assemblies were in turn empowered to elect the chief executives of the cities, towns, and villages.

(2) The elections were withheld for Seoul and two provinces where the wartime martial law was effective and the government could not effectively exercise control. Elected were 378 city council members for 17 cities, 1,115 for 72 towns, and 16,051 members representing 1,308 villages. 306 members of the provincial assembly were also elected. (Kim & Kim, 1973:200-201).

The provisions of the 1949 local government laws were amended twice in 1956 (second amendment in February and third amendment in July). The chief executives of city, town and village were elected directly by popular vote as mandated by the amendment. The power of the no-confidence vote of the local assemblies against the chief executives was also abolished. The fourth amendment of the local government law followed in December, 1958. According to this amendment, the direct popular vote of the local chief executives was reverted to an appointment system. Provisions of self-government by the people were further restricted by this change. Such a change was widely considered an act of President Syngman Rhee and his ruling Liberal Party to tighten up control over local politicians and accentuate his dictatorship and desire for permanent power. According to the 1958 amendment, mayors were appointed by the president, and chiefs of towns and villages were appointed by the provincial governors, who in turn were appointed by the central government. Chiefs of neighborhood associations(*Dong* and *Ri*) were also appointed(Kim and Kim, 1973:207-210).

The 5th amendment of the local government act was occasioned by the April 19 student revolution and adoption of a bi-cameral system in 1960. The Democratic Party government which replaced President Syngman Rhee's Liberal Party after the student revolution drastically strengthened local self-government. It reestablished the practice of the direct popular election of local elites of all administrative units and introduced measures for more autonomy and decentralization. The system whereby the mayor of Seoul, the governors of the provinces, administrative chiefs of cities, towns and villages were appointed was reverted to that of the popular election. Chiefs of the neighborhood associations(*Dong* and *Ri*) also became elective positions. The 3rd election of local governments was held in December 1960, by which all the executive heads and assembly members of the local governments were elected.

The military coup on May 16, 1961 earmarked another frustrating event in the development of local politics in the country. Local assemblies were

ordered to dissolve on May 16. Governors of provinces, the mayors of Seoul and the other major cities were appointed by the Cabinet, while the other executive heads of local communities were appointed by the provincial governors. On September 1, 1961, the military government proclaimed a Provisional Law on Local Self-government which reduced the number of local governments eligible for self-governance. According to this law, only provinces, cities and counties became eligible for self-governance. Town and village governments were excluded from this legal status and downgraded as administrative units subordinate to higher levels of authority. It also transferred the power of local assembly bodies to the administrative heads; the functions of the provincial and Seoul assemblies were relegated to the office of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and city and town governments were placed under the auspices of the provincial governors, etc. The Third Republic and the so-called Reform Constitution of 1972 under President Park Chung-Hee virtually closed the door for popular participation in local government affairs. The supplementary clause of the Reform Constitution stipulated that no local assembly shall be constituted until the nation becomes reunified.

Thus, since 1961 politics in Korea and, especially, the levers of power were managed increasingly by the administrative elites of the central government. Consequently, there has also been a strong tendency to concentrate power at the central government and to neglect the possibilities for a more autonomous development of local communities and their governments. Too many duties delegated to the local governments and the central government's over-interference with local affairs delayed the development of local autonomy.

The problem of revitalizing local communities and particularly the issue of restoring local autonomy and self-government have recently been brought to the fore of political debate in South Korea. The sudden emergence of local self-governance as a political issue after an unduly long period of dormancy was occasioned by the adoption of the New Constitution that

launched the Fifth Republic under President Chun in 1981. Article 119 of the current constitution provides that legislative bodies of local governments shall be established in due course. The Constitution also stipulates that the election, organization, power and authority of the local assemblies, the selection of the chief executives and other matters related to the administration of local governments shall be determined by laws. A supplementary clause stipulates that local self-governance shall be restored as local governments become fiscally self-sufficient.

No concrete steps have yet been taken to fulfill the commitment of the Fifth Republic regarding local self-governance. Neither have any legislative measures to enact new laws been taken, nor has the political time-table for restoring local self-governance been set. Both the ruling and opposition parties accept in principle the need for adopting a system of local self-governance. Currently the political talks concerning local governments are mainly focused on the timing of establishing elected local assemblies and chief executives. However, differences are apparent between the ruling and opposition camps. The ruling Democratic Justice Party and the executive branch tend to advocate a cautious and incremental approach. This position seems to argue that local self-governance should be implemented gradually as the fiscal condition of the local communities improve. The opposition parties—the Democratic Korean Party and the Korean National Party—have been arguing that (1) the fiscal dependency of local governments on the central government is no excuse for delaying the implementation of self-governance, and (2) the institution of the local assembly should be restored no later than by the end of 1985.

The present stalemate notwithstanding and a new legislation for self-governance being still uncertain, the issue of revitalizing local politics is widely held as a critically important one for the political development of Korea. Many people believe that the nation should adopt and carry out a policy of self-government of the local communities, and that the establishment of local assemblies is the key to political development, for if a

democracy is to thrive, it is essential that it be firmly planted in the grassroots.

II. Organization and Governance

1. Hierarchical Structure

Local governments in Korea are created by the central authorities and are charged with the administration of the policies and programs initiated by the central government.⁽³⁾ The central government exercises a broad power of control over the functional operations of the local governments at various levels (see Fig. 1). Ever since the nation embarked on its journey of rapid modernization from the early 1960s, there has been an increasing tendency of the central government to restrict the autonomy of the local governments.

Seoul is administratively classified as a "special city" which legally belongs in the jurisdiction of the office of the Prime Minister. The Mayor of Seoul is equivalent in rank to a cabinet minister and regularly attends cabinet meetings. All other local governments are principally under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, one of the most powerful bureaucratic organizations in the central government, and second only to the Defence Ministry in the number of personnel it employs.

There are, of course, a number of legal provisions that allows each ministry in the central government to supervise and direct various operations of the local governments regarding matters that are in a ministry's proper functional area. For example, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry supervises local governments on matters related to the administration of industrial guidance and commercial activities.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries can direct programs of the local governments in its functional area. In spite of this, the power and

(3) A concise introduction to the local government system in Korea, though outdated, is found in Cho (1972).

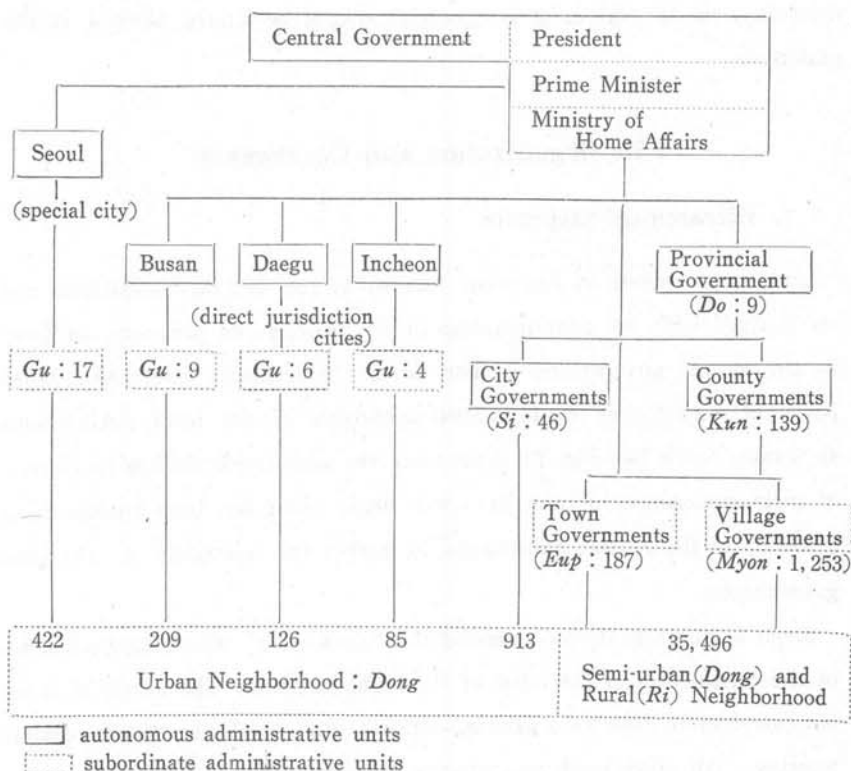


Fig. 1. Hierarchical Structure of Local Governments in Korea (as of 1983)

influence of the Home Ministry has been much more prominent in local communities in relation to other various organs of the central government. Indeed, the Ministry of Home Affairs has been "the central supervising organ" for the organization and function of the nation's local government machinery. Its various organs also play a predominant role as agents of the central government in each locality.

The Ministry of Home Affairs administers the activities of local governments through three bureaus which are under the supervision of the Assistant Minister for Local Administration: the Local Administration Bureau controls personnel, administrative guidance and the planning of local government affairs; the Local Finance Bureau manages the financial affairs, tax administration and public enterprise of the local communities; and the

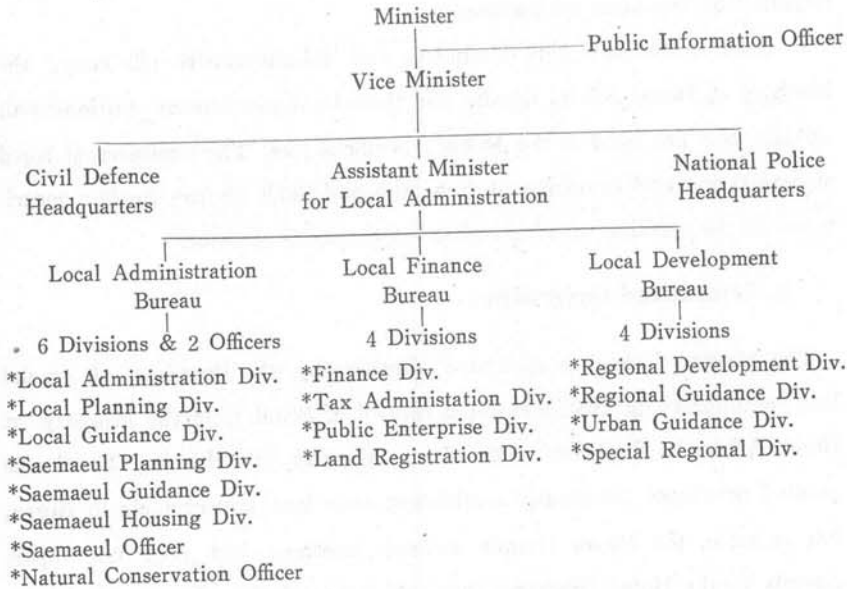


Fig. 2. Organization of the Ministry of Home Affairs

Local Development Bureau is in charge of the guidance and coordination of regional development programs (see Fig. 2). Furthermore, the power of appointment of the provincial governors, mayors, chiefs and many other important local officials belongs to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry also has the prerogative to overhaul the budget and oversee the accounting, auditing, tax collection and disbursement aspects of local administration, and, moreover, determine the specifics of local borrowing, central grants and subsidies.

The central government's power to recruit and staff the higher-level civil service officials in local governments is an additional lever which facilitates its dominance in and control of the political arena of the local communities. For example, as of 1981 almost all the political and appointive positions, and 57% of the local government officials equal to or above the grade 4 rank, were members of the national civil service assigned to local service by the central authorities, while most of the functionaries and temporary employees were designated as local civil service personnel and usually

recruited by the local authorities.⁽⁴⁾

In order to maintain this dominance and "administrative efficiency," the Ministry of Home Affairs usually fills these local government positions with officials who are loyal to the Ministry's official line. The requisites of rapid modernization and development from the mid-1960s on has further contributed to the creation of a centralized government structure.

2. Centralized Governance

The Mayor of Seoul is appointed directly by the President. A special law promulgated in 1962 transferred control of Seoul from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Office of the Prime Minister. By this law Seoul was granted privileges not usually available to other local governments in Korea. For example, the Mayor attends cabinet meetings and does not report directly to the Home Ministry; the legal status of the city stands above the provincial level; and the rank of the important positions in the city government is elevated.

Below the Ministry of Home Affairs there are three Direct Control Cities and nine provincial governments. These administrative units have basically the same legal status as primary governing agencies of the local communities. However, these units are considerably different in size, population, degree of urbanization and financial capability, etc. Direct Control Cities are metropolitan communities with a dense population and higher degrees of financial self-sufficiency. The provincial governments exercise control over both the city (urban) and county (primarily non-urban) communities. County governments in turn are in charge of the administration of the town (semi-urban) and village (rural) communities. The city and county governments are the lowest units of the local community that are legally designated as "self-governing units."

The district (*Gu*), town and village governments are merely administrative

(4) Based on data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and quoted in Park (1983:384).

units designed to ease the workload of the higher-level governments.⁽⁵⁾ Thus, the heads of the district, town and village governments act only as the superior governments authorize.

The governors and lieutenant-governors of the provincial governments and the mayors and deputy mayors of the Direct Control Cities are nominated from among the career officers in the Ministry of Home Affairs or the provincial governments. Bureau directors and section chiefs in these provincial and city governments are usually members of the national civil service rather than the local civil service.

The governance of the Direct Control Cities lies not under the jurisdiction of the provinces, but under that of the Home Ministry. According to this arrangement, the mayors of the Direct Control Cities are equal in rank to the provincial governors. By eliminating provincial control over the metropolitan governments of Busan, Daegu, and Incheon, the central government has obtained more effective powers of management over the growing urban administration. Instead of having to rely on the provincial governments as intermediaries, the central government deals directly with the Direct Control City municipal governments. Busan obtained the legal status as a direct control city in 1962. Daegu and Incheon became direct control cities in 1981.

In administering Seoul, Busan, Daegu and Incheon, each city is divided into geographic units called *Gu* (district). The districts themselves are not self-governing units; with a branch office of the municipal government located in each of these districts, they serve as an extension of the administrative arm of the central municipal authorities. The districts themselves are divided into *dong*, whose offices again facilitate the execution of the administrative responsibilities of the higher authorities.

The provincial governments function as the liaison between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the governments of the counties and the other cities

(5) The Extraordinary Measures Law on Local Government of 1961 abolished the local self-governance status of the towns and villages.

which are not considered metropolitan communities. Counties and cities enjoy equal legal status in that both are under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, and are, in theory, designated as local "self-governing units." A city is usually given its legal and administrative status when its population is over 50,000 and its appearance becomes urban in character. When this happens, the city ceases to belong to the county and its government then begins to deal directly with the provincial government. There are currently 46 cities in Korea whose populations range from 50,000 to almost one million. The governing practice and internal operations of the city governments are slightly different from one another depending on their population size as well as their administrative importance.

The county (*Kun*) government primarily served as an electoral district and jurisdictional branch office of the provincial government before the military revolution. It was given legal status as a self-governing unit equal to the city by the Extraordinary Measures Law on Local Government in 1961. Since then, it has become a significant unit in the hierarchy of local government. Several scattered local branch offices of the central government were integrated into the county government following the 1961 law.

Towns (*Eup*) and villages (*Myon*) are under the jurisdiction of county governments. They are the grass roots units of local government in Korea. A town is usually semi-urban in character with a population of over 20,000, while the village is basically rural with less population than the town. Prior to 1961, the leaders of these localities were elected by popular vote. Since 1961, however, they have been appointed and function only as the administrative extension of the higher authorities. Below the town and village are numerous *Dong* or *Ri* which are quasi-administrative units extending to the neighborhood associations. *Dong* usually stands for urban neighborhood, and *Ri* the rural association.

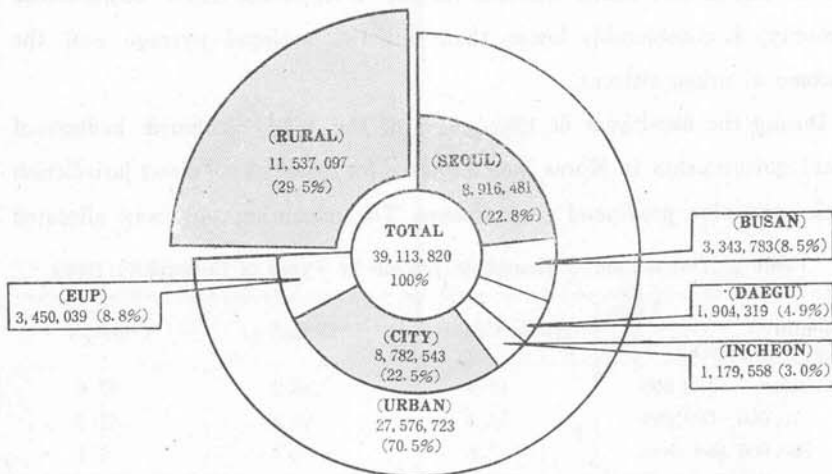
III. Ecological Characteristics and Resources

1. Population Composition and Income Level

Table 1 shows the population composition of Korea divided into various types of communities. As of 1982, 70.5% of the population lived in urban communities. The proportion of the urban population almost doubled during the last twenty years; it was 39% in 1960, 50% in 1970, and reached 69% in 1980. Almost 23% of the national population is concentrated in Seoul,⁽⁶⁾ a city that occupies only 0.63% of the total area in South Korea. The population of Seoul is bigger than that of all 46 cities of medium and small size combined. The population of the four metropolitan cities—Seoul, Busan, Daegu and Incheon—combined make up nearly 40% of the national population; 55% of the urban population is concentrated in these four cities.

The population of the county-level community is declining in relative

Table 1. Population Composition by Types of Communities (1982)



Source: The Ministry of Home Affairs, *Municipal Yearbook of Korea*, 1983.

(6) The growth of Seoul has been phenomenal; the composition ratios of Seoul to the national population has grown from 17.6% in 1970, 19.8% in 1975, 22.3% in 1980, and 22.8% in 1982.

terms compared to the city population. For example, the population of the rural areas declined from 32.1% in 1979 to 29.5% in 1982; that of the town (*Eup*) also declined from 12.2% to 8.8% during the same period (The Ministry of Home Affairs, 1980;1983a).

These simple statistics show that community life in Korea is undergoing a rapid structural change. Urban congestion in the most serious problem that has been caused by such change. Urban areas currently comprise 13.5 % of the total land area in South Korea. However, this area must accommodate more than 70% of the nation's population.

Distribution of economic resources is heavily skewed in favor of the urban communities. As table 2 shows, people living in the more urbanized communities earn a higher income than those who live in the counties. Most of the high income group (i.e., above 700,000 won monthly) live in cities. Figure 3 compares the yearly income of the people living in different types of communities. Among the urban residents, big city residents earn considerably more income than those who live in cities of medium and small size. It also shows that the income level of the rural communities (county) is considerably lower than both the national average and the income of urban citizens.

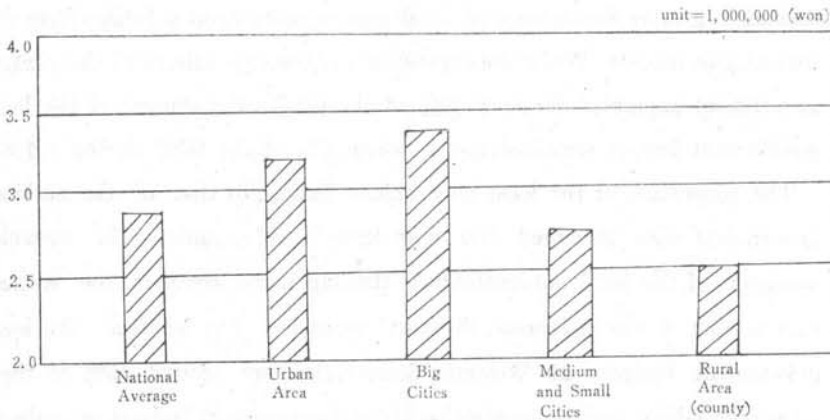
During the fiscal year of 1982, 61% of the total combined budgets of local governments in Korea was allocated for Seoul, three direct jurisdiction cities and nine provincial governments. The remaining 39% was allocated

Table 2. Distribution of Household Income by Types of Community (1980)

Monthly Income(won) \ Type	Whole Country	Cities*	Counties
below 170,000	42.9	38.9	47.6
170,000~699,999	54.3	57.2	51.3
700,000 and over	2.8	4.2	1.1
Total	100%	100%	100%

* Cities include Special City (Seoul), Direct Jurisdiction Cities (Busan, Daegu, Incheon) and other cities.

Source: adapted from Economic Planning Board, *Social Indicators in Korea, 1983*, pp. 73.



Source: *Social Indicators in Korea*, 1983. pp. 67.

Fig. 3. Yearly Income by Types of Community (1980)

for all the city and county governments: 46 city governments spent 15.1% and 139 county governments spent 24% of the total combined local government budgets. The relative portion of the investments made for county governments are, in fact, declining. The proportion of the county government budgets of the nation's total amount of local government expenditure was 28.5% in 1975. It declined to 25.9% in 1980 and again to 24.0% in 1982.⁽⁷⁾ The cities comprise 22.5% of the national population and the counties accommodate 38.3% of the total population.

Thus, in general, the metropolitan governments receive a larger proportionate share of the budget than the city and county governments. The urban(city) governments are given a better share of local finance than the rural(county) governments. It is therefore concluded that poorer local communities are given a smaller portion of financial resources.

2. Finance of Local Governments

Local governments in Korea have limited financial capabilities to perform their function for community development without heavy interference from higher authorities in national government. This financial weakness is also

(7) Statistics are drawn from the Ministry of Home Affairs (1983b:618-619).

causing a greater dependence of local governments upon subsidies from the central government. While the expenditure of the central government accounted for over 30% of the GNP, the amount of the local government budget remained merely about 5% of the GNP during 1970s.

The proportion of the local government budget to that of the national government also remained less than 30% until recently. The financial weakness of the local governments is striking if we compare the Korean case to that of the advanced Western countries. For instance, the local government budgets in Western democracies are around 15% of their respective GNPs, and the proportion of local government budgets to national budgets in the various countries is as follows (as of 1979): USA, 42%; West Germany, 32%; Sweden, 71%; Canada, 49%; Switzerland, 48%.⁽⁸⁾

Local governments heavily depend on the central government and subsidies in order to offset their financial shortages. Table 3 shows the extent of financial dependence of various local governments upon outside sources of revenue. Nationwide, 42% of the total revenues for local governments comes from outside sources in the form of subsidies or local share taxes, both of which are provided by the central government. Metropolitan communities rely less on outside revenue sources, while the provincial and county governments rely on outside sources for more than half of their revenues.

A financial self-sufficiency ratio is often used as a measure of dependence

Table 3. Revenue Sources by Types of Local Government (1982) (unit=%)

type of community revenue source	National Total	Seoul	Direct Jurisdiction Cities	provinces	cities	counties
Local Revenues	57.7	96.0	88.8	44.7	58.0	33.1
Outside Subsidies	42.3	4.0	11.2	55.3	40.0	66.9

Notes: (1) based on settled budgets.

(2) local revenues include local tax and non-tax revenues, and outside subsidies consist of local share taxes and subsidies.

Source: adapted from *Financial Yearbook of Local Government*, 1983, pp. 613-616.

(8) These comparative statistics are drawn from *Financial Yearbook of Local Government*, 1983, pp. 1234-1236.

Table 4. Self-Reliance of Local Government Budgets

year \ type	nationwide	Seoul	Direct* Jurisdiction Cities	provinces	cities	counties
1978	58.2	96.2	91.1	42.9	64.7	33.2
1979	55.1	94.7	86.7	42.5	64.4	31.2
1980	54.3	93.9	85.4	42.3	67.4	32.8
1981	55.5	95.2	92.3	42.2	62.4	30.8
1982	57.8	96.0	88.8	42.8	59.1	33.1

* Self-reliance is measured by the proportion of the revenues raised in the locality of the total yearly expenditure.

* Busan was the only direct jurisdiction city during 1978~80, while Daegu and Incheon were added to this category in 1981.

Source: taken from *Financial Yearbook of Local Government*, 1983, pp.1226-1233.

on outside sources of influence, and Table 4 shows data for recent years. The table also indicates that (1) the local governments of Korea are financially weak in general, (2) metropolitan governments are the least dependent, and (3) the provincial and county governments are relying most heavily on external finance. Thus, the degree of financial dependence varies from one to another type of local government, and moreover, the tendency of "city bias and rural neglect" is evident in the allocation of financial resources among different types of local communities in South Korea.

IV. Functions of Local Governments

The functions of local governments can be divided into two types. One is the "local function," that is, the regulation of purely local affairs for the interests and welfare of the local constituency. The other type includes the functions and activities of local government which are assigned or delegated by superior authorities in the central government or its administrative organs. This may be called the "state function." Studies reveal that more than 50% of the administrative activities performed by various local governments belong in the category of "state function."

According to a study done in 1965, 68% of the functions performed by provincial governments, 62% by the city governments, and 70% by the county governments were state functions assigned to the local governments. Activities pertaining purely to local matters (or local self-government) accounted for only 32% for the provincial governments, 36% for the city governments and 30% for the county governments.⁽⁹⁾

Table 5 is the result of a similar study which was undertaken more than fifteen years later in two of the nine provinces. It shows that the relative weight of local functions has increased somewhat over the years. However, local government still functions largely as the administrator of assignments handed down by higher authorities; except for the city governments, more than 50% of the functions are classified as "delegated" by the state. The county government, which is designated as the most immediate self-governing unit, is the most heavily burdened by a myriad of jobs assigned

Table 5. Functional Classification of Local Government Activities

Gyeongnam Province	Percent of Local Function		Jeonbuk Province
provincial government of Gyeongnam (898)	47.7%	50.4%	provincial government of Jeonbuk (828)
city government of Ulsan (388)	55.2%	54.1%	city government of Jeonju (368)
county government of Ulzoo (754)	29.3%	46.4%	county government of Wanju (252)
village government of Ungchon (147)	29.3%	16.9%	village government of Rochon (65)

(): number of total jobs performed.

Source: Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University, *A Study of the Development of Local Administration* (in Korean) (February, 1982), pp. 45.

(9) The total number of functions reported was 1255 for provincial governments, 1057 for city governments, and 935 for county governments. Based on the report as appears in Kim & Kim (1973:389). Full documentation of this data is in, Korean Institute of Administrative Studies (1965:206-217). A different study of three sample communities undertaken by the government reports that the proportions of local functions are 32.1% for the provincial government (Gyeonggi Province), 43.7% for the city government (Daegu), and 32% for the county government (Pyeongtaek). The Ministry of Home Affairs (1968:165-166).

by higher-level governments. Thus, we find that (1) the functional autonomy of local governments is severely limited, and concomitantly, (2) the central government remains extremely slow in bringing about and/or reluctant to effect a decentralization of administrative power and the associated functions thereof.

Another way of examining the functions of local governments is to divide local government activities into different functional categories. Broadly speaking, the functions of the local governments in Korea can be divided into the following categories:

General Administration:

- organizational and personnel management
- financial administration
- culture and information
- other administrative matters

Public Works:

- construction
- maintenance (roads, bridges, etc.)
- water service
- city planning
- land development

Health and Welfare:

- health service
- social service

Economic Development:

- agriculture and forestry
- livestock
- rural development
- commerce and industrial improvements
- transportation

Table 6 reveals the percentages of local matters performed by each type

Table 6. Proportions of Local Functions by Different Types of Activities(1965)

functions	type of government	province	city	county
General Administration		60.6 (500)	55.2 (417)	51.4 (384)
Public Works		62.1 (103)	69.1 (152)	57.5 (80)
Health and Welfare		13.5 (193)	11.9 (353)	8.5 (357)
Economic Development		3.1 (459)	9.6 (135)	8.7 (117)
% of local functions out of total number of jobs		32.4	36.4	30.3
total number of jobs performed		1255	1057	935

(): number of functions belonging to each category.

Source: adapted from *Local Administration: Data Book*, pp.206-217.

of local government which are divided into different functional categories. For example, 60.6% of the general administration and 62.1% of the public works activities of the provincial governments belong in the category of purely local matters. The table shows that functions pertaining to economic development and the health and social welfare of the local inhabitants are largely dictated by the central government. Matters related to the economic and industrial development of localities are overwhelmingly controlled by the national authorities, which reflects the nation's determined campaign for rapid industrialization and economic growth.

In order to analyze the expenditure side, the budgetary data are similarly divided into functional categories in Table 7.

All the local governments tend to assign first budgetary priority to public

Table 7. Proportions of Expenditure by Types of Functions(1982)

type of government	nationwide	Seoul	Direct Jurisdiction Cities	provinces	cities	counties
categories						
General Administration	31.2	21.1	30.6	17.1	44.5	46.1
Public Works	28.8	29.4	34.5	31.8	28.2	23.7
Health and Welfare	13.8	20.8	17.7	11.7	15.1	9.8
Economic Development	13.3	3.1	3.5	21.8	3.4	18.5
others*	14.9	25.6	13.7	17.6	8.8	1.9

* Others include civil defence, collection grants, transfers, local borrowings, etc.

Source: drawn from, *Financial Yearbook of Local Government*, 1983. pp.613-616.

works. The municipal governments give expenditure for economic development the lowest priority, ranking it below that for health and welfare. On the other hand, the provincial and county governments assign higher proportions of their budget (21.8% and 18.5% respectively) for improving local economic conditions than they do for health and welfare. Economic development occupies the second highest category of expenditures made by the provincial governments. Thus, urban governments spend more on public works and social welfare; the rural governments (provinces and counties), on the other hand, assign greater priority to economic development. Education in local communities are administered by branch offices of the Ministry of Education, which are independent from the administrative machinery.

The expenditure data of Table 7, by and large, conform to a pattern similar to the one depicted by Table 6. Public works and administrative expenditures are given the highest budgetary priority. Health and welfare, and economic development receive a much lesser share of the local governments' budgetary allocation, implying that matters falling in these categories are either to be handled by the central government or are not considered as higher priority functions of the local governments.

The successful development of local communities is closely associated not only with vigorous, locally accountable political and administrative institutions, but also with their ability to raise or obtain adequate financial resources. The data shown above and interpretations drawn thereof indicate, however, that the level of adequacy regarding the fulfillment of these conditions is still low in Korea.

We now turn our attention to assessing the implications drawn from the preceding discussion for the central issues at hand, namely, (1) the performance of local government in meeting the needs of the community, and (2) the extent and/or enhancement of citizen participation in running local public affairs in Korea.

V. Concluding Remarks

More careful and detailed analyses are required before the political implication of the facts and figures that we have discussed above can be further clarified. This study is only a beginning for such understanding. In the meantime, we are inclined to conclude that the structure and governance of the local governments in Korea are not likely to move smoothly toward decentralization and enhanced popular participation. Strong traditions of central control and legacies of colonial history are still very much alive in the operational code of the political and administrative machinery. Due to the economic hardships caused by war, political instability and the failure of leadership, the experiment of local self-government during the 1950s did not bear fruit concerning increasing the ability of government to institutionalize decentralization programs and policies of local self-government. The military government since the 1960s, with its drive toward rapid economic development and industrialization, also failed to create the political, administrative, and organizational conditions that would revitalize local communities and provide sufficient resources at the local level to carry out decentralized functions.

There is, thus, yet insufficient political commitment and support from the central government to transfer authority and resources to lower levels of the governing units. The result is the emergence of a hierarchical structure of organization within which (1) bureaucratic rule and administrative, rather than the legislative, control dominate machinery for community decision-making and allocation of resources; (2) the planning and execution of community development projects have been largely dictated by the criteria and principles of nationwide uniformity rather than by the needs of the community; (3) each level of government oversees the tasks, personnel, budgetary processes and appropriations of the ones below it so that local authorities have been subservient to the central government and, without

adequate sources of local revenue, become much too dependent on grants and subsidies; (4) the local institutions become less accountable to the local populace, and the encouragement of more active involvement and participation of the local constituent is being neglected.

The process of change in central-local relations has indeed, been, characterized by the "nationalization of local politics and government." "Politics" at the local level has given in to the levers of national "administration." Assemblies at the local level which provide a primary channel for citizen participation has been suspended since 1961. The present leadership has reaffirmed the principle of local self-government. In spite of this, the details of and plans for it have made little progress on the political and legislative fronts. No concrete steps have yet been taken toward the implementation of local self-government.

Yet, development at the local level is a primary goal of most schemes and programs of national planning and development agencies. Local communities provide the most immediate political framework within which people can be encouraged to make appropriate decisions and undertake various participatory tasks. Local communities also provide the most appropriate social and institutional framework for mobilizing people to achieve the objective of increased economic development and improved social welfare.

In order to achieve these goals, it is vital to create mechanisms of local governance that are most appropriate to motivate the people. This should be done above all through facilitating the emergence of the local leadership which can ensure effective communication and activate popular participation rather than through the manipulation of bureaucratic control. Strengthening the capacity of local governments and community leadership of course requires political, administrative and financial support by the central government. But the role of central government should be to "facilitate" and "assist" rather than to "control" and "dictate."¹⁰

Many arguments have been offered regarding the administrative measures

(10) For a useful reference on this, see, Cheema and Rondinelli (1983).

necessary to increase the local capacity for development in developing countries. Little is known, however, about the political processes of central-local relations. In order to give the local government its proper place in the national political process, political power should first be decentralized. Local government is the best possible instrument that would distribute power widely along democratic lines and satisfy community needs. To meet the needs of its constituents, local government requires local power. Establishing a sound and healthy system of local self-government is essential to democracy and, thus, will be one of the most imminent challenges for political development in South Korea for years to come. The purpose of this paper has been to raise the issue for political debates and call for serious scholarly efforts to fill the gaps in knowledge of and action in this crucial aspect of "center-periphery relations."

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