

# The Korean Bureaucracy; Authority and Policy Formulation Process

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## Mixed Social Backgrounds

There are three layers of higher civil servants in the Korean government bureaucracy. There are former Japanese colonial government civil servants of the rank and file level with the legal training background and quickly ascended to higher positions because of the Japanese withdrawal and the Korean War. Most of these men finished their colleges during the Japanese rule.

There are also those who are somewhat younger and finished grade schools under the Japanese and colleges after the liberation either in Korea or in Anglo-American countries. A survey shows that 11.7% of the higher civil servants are educated in Anglo-American countries and there is tendency for the percentage to increase as ranks move upward.<sup>(1)</sup>

Those belonging to the last category are ex-military men who entered the higher civil service after the military coup. 14.08% of the higher civil servants had been in the military immediately before joining the civil service and this number increases as the ranks move upward and 56.12% of the age group of 36 to 40 are ex-military men. 50.4% of all the higher civil servants were born in rural areas and 42.1% had their fathers, occupation in agriculture. Those who had fathers in the professions such as civil service, medical practice, teaching, law, and business management occupy 35.0% of the higher civil servants. Of the 30% who claim to possess religions, around 15% belong to Christianity and the rest is divided between

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(1) Yu Hoon, "Hankuk Kokup Kongmuwonui Sahoejok Bae Kyong, (the Social Background of Korean Higher Civil Servants)," *Korean Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. IV. No.2, p.256. Unless otherwise mentioned the figures hereunder came from this survey.

Confucianism and Buddhism.

Thus the higher civil servants had had sharply different socialization processes before joining the civil service. As elsewhere religion and fathers' occupation exercise significant influences on the value formation of a person. More significant, however, is the fact that around half of them were raised in rural areas where the change in traditional values is bound to be slow. Also significant is the fact that their formal educational periods show sharp contrasts. Some were educated through high schools and colleges by the pre-World War II Japanese. Some received part of their education under the Japanese and the other part under the Korean after the liberation, while still others received the Japanese and Anglo-American education. Some received military training and education. Those in younger category of ages 30 to 35 received all of their education after the World War II.

One thing this heterogeneity of backgrounds means is that they are likely to possess sharply different values. While it is not certain how and to what extent the experience they get in the civil bureaucracy change their previous value orientation, it is safe to conclude, however, that the Korean bureaucracy is characterized by high degree of value heterogeneity. In this sense it is the mixed bureaucracy in which getting along among the bureaucrats themselves is an uneasy experience.

### **Authority in Korean Bureaucracy**

In spite of the heterogeneity of values which are frequently in conflict, there are common threads which bind the men in the bureaucracy together. Because of these threads they can stand the uneasiness and the bureaucracy could survive the two revolutions and ensuing changes in the regimes. Among these threads we take up the authority patterns characteristic to the Korean bureaucracy.

### **Hierarchical Human Relations**

In Korea, one of the dominant values governing the bureaucratic behavior is that of regarding human relations as characterized by hierarchical order. The Confucianism was the most influential in forming such values in the traditional culture. The Japanese colonial government reinforced this value as to the relationship between the government and the people. Egalitarian norms introduced after the liberation have not formed a strong value as to be able

to influence significantly the actual behavior of bureaucrats. 84% of the higher civil servants as of June 1, 1966 were above 36 years old,<sup>(2)</sup> which means most of them had undergone primary school education under the pre-war Japanese government. Their formative years of personality were spent in the families which were unfamiliar with egalitarian norms. The new norms introduced after the liberation through high schools, colleges and/or foreign travels remain peripheral to the main value orientation.

Consequently, the most important criterion governing the human relations in the bureaucracy remains to be the hierarchical role. A superior is expected to govern the behavior of the subordinates not only in the area of legal jurisdiction and task performance but also the latter's personal affairs. Subordinates are likely to obey the superior even when their judgement of the task requirement does not agree with that of the superior's.

The emphasis on hierarchy is expressed in the formal structures of the Korean bureaucracy, at the apex of which the president dominates the whole bureaucracy through gradual scaling of the responsibilities down to the field workers. There are no agencies which are structurally independent and enjoy autonomous status vis-a-vis the president. The lack of horizontal coordination at the middle and low levels of hierarchy is also largely due to this value. Responsibility for coordination is likely to reside with one man whose accountability to superior is supposed to be explicit and without conditions. Committees and conferences without hierarchical superior participating in them will easily fall into chaos and result in no decisions. Those in which superior presides meetings will be dominated by him, because subordinates will not dare to raise different opinions. The consequence is eventual dissolution of the committees.

Contrary to the administration in the United States where the equality norm is strong, the subordinates in the Korean bureaucracy are not likely to experience much frustrations when faced with authoritarian style of supervision by superiors. In Korean administration, delegation of authority is not yet conceived as an attempt to increase the welfare of subordinates and to conduct democratic management.

The attitude of administrators toward the clientele is also governed by this value of hierarchy. Administrators are supposed to rule and at best teach the people. Government's action is regarded as favors rather than obligations to the people. Consequently, the clientele show the attitude of begging for special favors rather than requesting government's abidance with legal provisions. Favors are handed out at best because of sympathy toward the people or because

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(2) Ibid, p. 245.

of payback to what the clients did for the particular administrator.

Frequently, those with superior roles exercise coercion with the threat to deprive the incentives involving subordinates' careers. Though not always regarded legitimate, the coercion exercised for the achievement of legitimate task does not invite criticism within the bureaucracy.

### **Speciality**

Though Korean bureaucracy is fastly being filled with college graduates,<sup>(3)</sup> this cannot be interpreted as a consequence of the value which regard specialist role very important. It is the mere reflections of the population structure which shows enormous increase in the number of college graduates in recent year and of the administrators' attainment motivation. Except for the positions which require the knowledge of natural sciences, it is safe to assume there does not exist correlation between one's major in college and the current position an administrator is occupying.

Staff positions dealing with the personnel, finance, accounting, purchasing, organization and methods, planning and programming system are likely to be filled with those who are not specialists in these fields. Yet only those staff units which are placed high in hierarchical ladder directly under the head of an agency and strongly supported by the latter are more likely to be effective than those placed at lower echelon and filled with persons of much higher degree of specialized knowledge. Most of the administrators do not belong to professional associations because they usually do not show concern to them even if such associations are available in the society.

However, they are specialized in the sense that they are placed under the vertical and horizontal division of work which is universal necessity for the operation of any large scale venture. Those in the subordinate positions are given duties in the manner horizontal cooperation among peers is least needed. They are to contact only hierarchical superiors and subordinates. Responsibility for coordination is always placed at the top management level. Those in the supervisory positions in-between the top management and the rank and file are usually relaying the documents up and down the hierarchy. Through this arrangement an administrator gradually accumulates sporadic informations and knowledge until he gets transferred to entirely different position, where he will start this process all over again. In the Korean

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(3) The above survey shows that 46.4% of higher civil servants are college graduates. cf. Ibid. p. 253.

bureaucracy when an administrator is absent from his duties, his subordinates, superior and clients have to wait until he appears again in order to resume the processing of the documents, because it is he who knows the matter and is accountable for the specific step involved. Subordinate's power based on speciality derives from this source. However, when hierarchical role and specialist role in this sense are in conflict, this is usually resolved in favor of the former.

### Personalism

In the Korean public administration, there is widespread value which asserts that interaction among human beings should be based on mutual confidence in the persons involved. Such confidence is built up only after long period of experiences through particularistic treatment of human relations.

Ideal supervisors are those who show paternalistic affectivity toward his subordinates. Thus superior-subordinate relationship which is position-to-position relationship is actually indiscriminable from person-to-person relationship.

In the recruitment process, there are relatively few in number who entered the higher civil service solely through universalistic criteria. Most of them are rather recruited through the channel of so called special appointment which is more lenient in its criteria. Promotions are also most likely to be processed through similar channel.<sup>(4)</sup> This means that they had patrons, sponsors and go-betweens either at the moment of joining the civil service or on the occasion of promotions. These particularistic human ties serve as the bases on which various informal groups are subsequently formed.

The functions of these informal groups are diffuse in that these groups provide the members with banking function, hobby opportunities, traditional rituals for festivity and condolence, and protect and advance the members' interests within the bureaucracy. The structure of informal group is characterized by their extension beyond the boundaries of formal organizational units.<sup>(5)</sup> Consequently, formal organizational head is not likely to be able to control these cohesive informal groups unless his formal authority is supplemented by his provision of similar functions to the subordinates or by his capacity to mobilize another more powerful informal group.

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(4) cf. Bark Dong—Suh, *Hankuk Kwanryo Jedoui Yoksaik Jongae*, (A Historical Development of the Bureaucracy in Korea), the Korean Research Center, Seoul, Korea, 1961, p. 197.

(5) For the Similar Point, cf. Sidney Verba, *Small Groups and Political Behavior*, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J., 1961, pp. 4p. 45-9.

With such prevalence of informal groups including factions and cliques within the bureaucracy, every administrator is likely to seek others with similar particularistic backgrounds and orientations and to strengthen the existing personal ties among the group members in order to protect and advance his interests.

It is through these informal personal ties that the rigid value of hierarchy expounded above gets modified. Only a subordinate who commands the personal confidence of the higher echelon through this process can really exercise discretion even to the extent of disregarding the legal provisions and exercising coercive power over his subordinates. Those who do not enjoy such confidence will faithfully abide by legal provisions even to the extent of formalistic interpretation of law in order to free himself from later punishment.

### **Bureaucracy and Policy Formulation Process**

The president or prime minister is likely to rely on the bureaucracy as the major policy formulating and implementing apparatus in the country. The bureaucracy has served as a major channel through which political appointees such as ministers and vice-ministers were provided.<sup>(6)</sup> The resulting feeling of identification by higher civil servants with these political appointees accelerates the hierarchical orientations of the former.

Though most of the higher civil servants are recruited to the bureaucracy through the lenient channel of special appointment as mentioned above, it does not necessarily mean all of them are the beneficiaries of party patronage. Yet the bureaucracy is frequently deeply involved in exercising its influence for the benefit of the government party. This function is especially conspicuous at the time of general elections for the nation's president and representatives for the National Assembly. The national police, the local governments which actually serve as the field offices of the central government, the national broadcast system, government publications, and some of government-created interest groups such as agricultural and fishery cooperatives are the examples which involve themselves more actively in favor of the government party.<sup>(7)</sup> The agencies which have large business clientele are most likely to serve

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(6) A recent survey shows that one-third of bureau chiefs and one-fourth of vice ministers have been promoted to the positions of vice ministers and ministers respectively. cf. Bark Dong Suh, *Hankak Haeng Jonbuui Kogup Kwanryoui Jakok Josa*, (A Study of Qualifications of the Korean Administrative Executive), *Korean Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VI, No.2, p.85.

(7) cf. Cho Suk—Choon, "Miguojong Mit Jeilgonhwakukui Jungang Buchokikui. Byonchone Kwanhanyonku, (A Study on the Changes of Central Government Structures under the American Military Government and the First Republic of Korea), *Korean Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. V. No.1, pp.134-152.

as major channels for providing funds for the government party through their power of rendering and withholding government favors.<sup>(8)</sup> The only agencies which do not involve themselves in such behavior are those central management agencies whose clients are other government agencies and those whose civilian clients are small in size and/or unorganized.

Since the bureaucracy's loyalty is dominated by hierarchical orientations and its norm for democratic political system is not strong, the bureaucracy is likely to regard the legislature and the parties insignificant in the policy formulation process. A strong motive of the members of the National Assembly is to get appointment in the higher positions of the executive branch. However, their likelihood of becoming ministers and vice-ministers is not large. Therefore, it is unlikely that the higher civil servants will show a thread of loyalty in expectation of the legislators' becoming their superiors eventually. Loyaltywise, the only exceptional period in the post-war Korea was in the late fifties when former ex-bureaucrat ministers formed an oligarchical governing group in the legislature and the government party under Syngman Rhee. The relatively higher degree of loyalties shown by senior civil servants to these men in the legislature was due to the latter's personal relations which had been formed in the bureaucracy, their knowledge of bureaucracy and the confidence given to them by the president<sup>(9)</sup>

The higher civil servants show loyalty neither to democracy, nor to the legislature but to the individual member of the assembly. The degree of loyalty is governed by the bureaucrat's personal relation with the individual legislators, the latter's ability to mobilize power and specialized knowledge. In the hierarchical culture, the legislator's power is largely determined by the degree of confidence given by the president of the nation. Thus those in the core of the power structure of the government party vis-a-vis those in the lesser positions in the same party and those in the opposition party are likely to get relatively more attention of the senior civil servants in the policy formulation process.

With regard to speciality, those ex-bureaucrat legislators are likely to enjoy more respect in addition to the possible development of *we-feeling*. However, the division of work and specialization in the bureaucracy have been increasing in their degree at rapid rate. Especially since the military government was initiated in 1961, the advanced techniques of military manage-

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(8) cf. Kunsu Hoykmyong Jaepansa, (History of the Military Revolutionary Government Court), Seoul

(9) For the orientations and behavior of this oligarchical group, cf. Hahn Been Lee, *Korea: Time, Change, and Administration*, East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1968, pp.92-96.

ment which had been imported from the American Army have been extensively adopted in the civil bureaucracy. However, the legislature has been very slow in catching up with this trend of specialization. Legislators' unfamiliarity with the details of the programs being conducted by the bureaucracy has been increasing. As a result, new managerial techniques introduced in the bureaucracy for the sake of efficiency is incapacitating the legislature's ability to control the bureaucracy. Because of the crippling of the legislature, the bureaucrats' attitude of regarding the National Assembly as insignificant in the policy formulation process is reinforced.

The policy staffs of both the legislature and the party<sup>(10)</sup> are likely to be those inferior in specialized knowledge compared to their counterparts in the government bareaucracy. Whether they are ex-bureaucrat who are few in number or non-exbureaucrats, their motivation is also likely to be the joining of career civil service at various levels. This means they enjoy far lesser amount of prestige vis-a-vis the career civil servants of the government.

It is because of the above factors that the legislature and the parties are unable to influence significantly the policy formulation process of the government. Sense of failure on their part makes them switch their attention to other directions. The members of the assembly are likely either to ask for favors from the bureaucracy for the promotion of particularistic interests acting as go-betweens or raising extremistic and agitative demands which are ikely to be responded by government specialists as nonsense. Begging for favors on the part of the legislators put them to lower status vis-a-vis the bureaucracy. Thus the bureaucrats perception of rgrading themselves superior and the only influential policy formulators is reinforced.

Bureaucracy is the main focal area where interest groups conduct their activities compared to the legislature and the parties. Most of the interest groups are concentrated in urban areas and it is rare case that there are competing groups in one functional area. Therefore, the possibility the opposing group will disclose and criticise the government's action is minimized. The bureaucrat's interpretation of public interest thus is likely to be unidimensional. With the exception of some strong interest groups based on middle class professions, the techniques interest groups use are characterized by secret dealings with the civil servants based on particularistic ties rather than open negotiations.

A single most important pressure group for most of the higher civil servants is the press.

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(10) For the first time in history, the Democratic Republican party which is the government Party under the President Park adopted the institution of professional policy staff in the party bureaucracy.



This is mainly due to the control function the press exercises over the bureaucrats. As a watchdog of administration and because of its relative independence, the press is likely to criticize various government actions. In the bureaucracy in which upward communication is restricted and the only upward communication available are mostly for the defense of the subordinate status, the newspapers which have easy access to and are read by superiors including the nation's president serve as alternate upward communication media for the bureaucracy. Thus the control exercised over the bureaucracy by the press is based on its upward communication function and on hierarchical orientation of the bureaucrats.<sup>(11)</sup>

The arena for policy formulation in the Korean government is largely limited to the bureaucracy restricted only by the limited functions performed by outside groups and institutions as mentioned above.

( A characteristic of policy formulation process within the bureaucracy is that it is governed by secrecy. Secrecy is valued not only because of the need for national security but more because of the need for avoiding the criticisms by the press and the opposition parties. Secrecy is also valued because of the intra-bureaucracy politics. Whenever a policy issue is likely to induce oppositions from other agencies in the bureaucracy, the originating agency is likely to approach the common hierarchical superior in secrecy before the others do the same in order to get the prior commitment of the hierarchical superior. Once approval is given this way, there is less likelihood that the matter will be either negated or significantly changed.<sup>(12)</sup>

Thus the policy formulation process is not governed by wide participation and consensus-building even within the bureaucracy. Relevant agencies and persons who are placed in horizontal relations are neglected in the process. Consensus-building pattern is dominantly vertical following the hierarchical lines.

Since the bargaining and conciliation do not govern the policy formulation process, the content of the policy formed looks as if rational in the sense the speciality of the sponsoring agency is well reflected. Such an overt rationality seems to have governed policy formulation processes more dominantly when the presidents of the nation were more technocratically oriented as in the latter part of the fifties under Syngman Rhee, when he relied on

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(11) For how the police responded to the press with regard to the latter's criticism of corruption in the former, ref. to Jo Kyu Sang, *Kyongchal Kongmuwon Kikang Hwakripe Gwanhan Yongu*, (The Discipline of the Police Personnel), Tongguk University, MAPA Thesis, 1968.

(12) For a typical case, cf. Huh Bom, *Gyol Chong Jaksonge Kwanhan Yongu*, (A Case Study on the Decision Making Process), Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University, MPA thesis, 1967.

technocrat ministers, and since the military government under the leadership of president Park.

The policies arrived at this way is not rational even in the sense of the technocratic viewpoint. The search for information by the civil servants is not extensive and what information they gather are far removed from facts very frequently. The storage of information in the official files for later reference is neglected.

The most important premise for policy formulation is what is ordered by hierarchical superior. This premise cannot be revised significantly. Consequently, the facts gathered and the analysis undertaken are governed by the need for the rationalization of the premise.

There is also a high degree of inconsistency in the policies formulated. In the Korean bureaucracy a new head of an agency is expected to undertake new policies. It is therefore most likely that the changes in the ministers and other agency heads will result in abdication of the previous policies and proclamation of sharply contrasting new policies. In the bureaucracy in which a policy is highly personalized, the shorter the terms of offices of the positions, the greater is the tendency for the policies adopted over time will result in inconsistencies. Between August 1948 to March 1963, the average term of office of ministers was 11 months.<sup>(13)</sup> This figure has been increased somewhat longer since then. Such inconsistency is also due to the particularistic influences exercised in policy formulation process through personal ties in and out of the bureaucracy. The frequent changes in goals and policies are also due to rapid environmental changes surrounding the bureaucracy, which do not permit long-term forecast and quickly deteriorate the value of previous policies.

### **Bureaucracy and Innovation**

In the Korean bureaucracy the process of innovation is also characterized by hierarchical orientations. Those at the apex of the bureaucratic structure usually serve as idea originators, advocates and legitimators and sometimes initial adopters of the new idea. Such diffusion of innovative functions at the apex of the hierarchy makes the civil servants at various levels perform routine supervisory and clerical works. The sources of idea for these top management personnel are their prior experiences before taking the assignment, which are bound to be dried soon. Those rare persons who show continuous flow of new ideas over some extended period rely on sporadic sources which can not be easily identified.

Many of these ideas get half-hearted commitment of the subordinate civil servants because

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(13) Park Mun--Ok, *Hankuk Jonou Ron*, (the Korean Government), Bak Yong Sa, Seoul, 1963, p.435.

of their frequent lack of feasibility, soundness and comprehensiveness judged from the view point of specialists. Thus the adoption of innovation is likely to remain formalistic.

Innovations which can acquire better support of higher civil servants and can be adopted with subsequent concrete results can occur only in the following situation which can be characterized as follows. First, there should be an enclave of specialists regardless of formal organizational boundaries. This enclave should have professional orientations showing strong loyalty to its profession. Such enclave may preexist before the take-over of assignment by particular political elite or the latter may bring in new people to form such a group under him. Second, the political elite himself should be task oriented and recognize that he has to depend upon such an enclave for task achievement because of the speciality of the latter, which he himself may not possess.

For the formulation of economic development plans of the Korean government, such a situation was obtained from about the latter part of the fifties, when in the Ministry of Reconstruction there was established Economic Development Council (EDC) with its members of foreign educated young intellectuals. Since then the EDC together with the Research Department of the Bank of Korea and some similar oriented intellectuals in a few ministries of the government served as enclaves in the subsequent efforts to formulate long range economic development plans. It was under the military government that the top management of the government who were strongly motivated for task achievements seriously relied upon these people. The first economic development plan which was successfully executed was the outcome of such a situation obtained both in the bureaucracy and in the political elite,<sup>(14)</sup>

Another case for innovation was the various reform in management techniques introduced since the inception of the military government. Young majors and colonels who had been trained through American military assistance programs in the development of managerial techniques in the Korean Army were brought in 1961 and 1962 in the Ministry of Government Administration especially in and around its Administrative Management Bureau newly established by the military government itself. This enclave with the strong support given by the political elite served idea originating and executing functions limiting the role of the political elite

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(14) For the more detailed analysis of the formulation process of the first five year economic development plan, cf. Cho Suk—Choon, "Comparative Analysis of Two Reforms under the Military Regime in Korea," prepared for the Development Administration Group/EROPA Seminar on Administrative Reform and Innovation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, June 20-27, 1968, in *Administrative Reform in Asia* (forthcoming), edited by Hahn Been Lee and Abelardo Samonte

to only legitimating function.

In the administration in which hierarchical authority is more valued than in the United States, the changes in the political regime which necessarily bring with them new presidents, ministers and vice ministers have been most important leverage points for the various innovations in the bureaucracy especially when these political elites had strong task achievement motivation and high regard of specialities administrators possessed.

Higher civil servants with similar motivation and possibly with awareness of what are going on in more developed countries will seek colleagues of similar backgrounds and orientations, and from a group in order to survive in the administration in which many informal groups compete against each other. When this enclave is found and given confidence by the above political elite, it will be able to exercise greater authority and contribute to a greater extent to the innovative formulation and execution of policies. Political elite should implant, nourish and protect these men in the bureaucracy.