

Regionalism as a New Motif for Regional Planning in Korea

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I. Introduction

Regional development in Korea today is a political necessity. It is to secure continuing political supports for further national economic development on one hand and on the other, to meet the ever increasing demands for more equitable shares of the development pie. In a society like Korea where 76% of the population believe that they have now achieved "middle class" status, support for further growth and demand for equitable share are of two sides of a coin. The societal context of persuasion for development planning is being shifted from mere rationality —the most efficient means to unquestioned ends— to participatory opportunities. Under such circumstances, "support generally takes the form of agreement not to resist implementation if a plan recognizes or furthers the ends of the affected groups." (Richard Warren Smith, 1973, pp.277-278) And therefore, the scope and strength of political support and the equity of distribution are mutually reinforcing.

If indeed regional development is to be effective as a means to manage the distribution process in Korea, it must now be organized as a process of participatory planning. Politicizing development process is often resisted for a very tenable reason of maintaining

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economic and technical efficiency of development programs, especially so in an early stage when growth is deemed urgent. Sooner or later, however, time comes when the gap between the growing modern sector and the forgotten traditional sector of economy becomes starkly visible and it is no longer tolerated as mere "growing pain" but begins to settle in as structural pattern of the society. The conventional response to such a disparity has been merely to geographically decentralize "industrial locations" of the growing modern sectors over a wider surface of the nation. And yet, since the technology of modern sector industries is becoming more "footloose" and even "internationalizing," physical locations of new factories and plants do not necessarily guarantee "communalization" of distributive process. (Friedmann and Weaver, 1977, p. 358)

What Korea needs to do at this stage of development is indeed to "foot-bind" so many development projects. And in that sense regional development today is apropos to be defined as a political process of communalization of growth and distribution planning and management. The communalization process will also bring about diversity and pluralism not only in economy but also in political base of national development process. The goal of diversification of economic base and that of democratization of political institutions can not be separately pursued at this stage of development, as the two are in fact interrelated.

It is submitted here that regionalism is the most active medium of communalization of productive as well as distributive processes and thereby, to bring about diversification and pluralism in national economy and politics. If regionalism is to be characterized, borrowing Marshall Dimock's words, as "a clustering of environmental, economic, social and governmental factors to such an extent that a distinct consciousness of separate identity within the whole, a need for autonomous planning, a manifestation of cultural peculiarities, and a desire for administrative freedom are theoretically recognized and actually put into effect," (Marshall E. Dimock, 1937 p. 138) regionalism is the reality and substance of sub-national spatial units of "bottom-up" development process. The so-called "bottom-up" approach of planning, without based on such a territorial reality and substance, would only serve the central planners tokenism for local considerations.

Regionalism as both "the philosophy and technique of self-help, self-development, and initiative" (H.W. Odum, & H. E. Moore, 1938, p.10) is inherently a diversifying and pluralizing force. There is always a possibility that regionalism is put to work for sectionalism of secessionistic motivation, especially at an early-stage of "nation-building." Howe-

ver, in the Korea context of development today when national intergration is so well established, it will work as organic principle and equilibrating force "between nationalism and internationalism, between sectionalism and federalism, ...between agrarian and urban life, between agriculture and industry,... between quantity civilization of standardizing forces and a quality world..." (Odum & Moore, supra)

Whether regionalism exists in a country of particular form of manifestation and of degree of distinctiveness is an empirical question. The various forms of manifestation and the degrees of distinctiveness will help determine the colours and the structure of diversification and pluralism in the outcome of regional development process. And therefore, empirical investigations of the true nature of regionalism in a particular region must precede formulation of viable goals as well as effective strategies of regional development. And yet, such investigation and identification of regionalism ought to be a regional concern. The objective of the present paper, probably being only the first attempt ever of exploration in the possibility of regional planning via regionalism, is merely to establish a paradigm of regional planning based on regionalism in Korean context.

II. Nationalization of Regional Planning

1. Functional Integration of National Territory

The autonomy of local governments being suspended by law for the time being, regional development planning in Korea has been basically of the central government's function. Although official recognition of the needs of regional development had been pronounced as early as in 1972 in the form of "the 1st Comprehensive National Territorial Development Plan (1972 ~1981)", it achieved little but in selecting locations for major social overhead capital investments such as interprovincial expressways, industrial estates, multi-purpose dams, and port facilities. (The Korean Research Institute for Human Settlement, 1982, pp. 47-68) In fact, implementation of this part alone of the plan exceeded(124%) the originally planned target.

Most of these major social overhead capital investments during this period were primarily for modernization and territorial integration of national economy. On the other hand most of the residential programs such as housing, water supply, more traditional small and medium industries, schools and etc. received little inter-agency support from the central government and was practically left to the local governments discretion with little financial

capacity of their own.

Even from today's vantage point, the first 10 years trend of the national territorial development process may very well be evaluated as inevitable to a larger extent. It was during the time when per capita GNP was still within the range between \$304(1972) and \$1,500(1980); and especially in a country like Korea where "population pressure... is usually high and natural resources endowment poor" so that "the potential for growth of land-based exports is small," a sort of "economic nationalism" may have been inevitable for accelerated economic growth. (Fuchen Lo & Kamal Salih, 1978, p.3)

In such a context, regional planning is inevitably an integral part of "nation-building" process. (Friedmann & Weaver, p.8) In the process of "nation-building," functional integration of national economy takes precedence over sub-national territorial identity. Such a functional integration usually takes the form of a hierarchical system, from the top of large scale propulsive modern sector industries down to the bottom of small and medium scale industries dependent upon the top-down linkage effects. Since this kind of functional integration of national economy is carried out through a rational technocratic central planning of resource allocation and of the hierarchical network of social overhead capital investments over the entire territory, industrial locations as well as settlement structures also tend to be rationalized in a hierarchical structure.

Even during this period of national structural changes in Korea, there were some exceptional cases of regional development efforts based primarily on the regions unique ecological and/or resources endowments. One was the tourism development plan for the Island of Cheju and the other was for the Province of Kangwon. Both plans were called "Special Region Development Plan" as provided by the Comprehensive National Territorial Development Law. Both regions are indeed "special" as compared to the other regions of Korea: the Province and Island of Cheju is ecologically and historically so unique that it almost has the appearance of a South Pacific island (Tai-joon Kwon, 1983), while the Province of Kangwon is, unlike the rest of the country, so rich with mineral resources and yet still very much inaccessible by modern means of transportation.

Although the stated objectives of both "Special Plans" are to make use of regionally endowed resources and ecology for the welfare and prosperity of the regions while conserving the regional ecological balance, the actual implementation efforts have so far been mostly in the area of improving access to the regions from outside. And thus, the outcome today in both places is widened opportunities and easier accesses for outsiders to exploit

the resources and ecology. (cf. Tai-joon Kwon, *supra*)

More significant "communalization" attempt during this period may have been the case of "Saemaul Movement" since 1971. This is basically a rural community development process, the primary objective of which is to encourage self-help and self reliance of each of the rural natural village communities. If one is to point out the uniqueness of the Korean efforts as compared to so many similar programs of other developing nations, a very strong national political and administrative leadership and the nation-wide scale of the movement comprehending every single rural village of the country must be noted.

In regard to communalization of planning and development processes, it could be cited as an example of regional development based on regionalism in a broader sense of the word. However, the spatial unit of this kind of community development, i.e. a single natural village the average size of which in Korea is between the range of 50 to 200 households, is too small to be defined as a "composite societal region" (Odum & Moore, p.30). It is more of a neighborhood community for a relatively simple task-oriented community organization. If regional development is to have its own place apart from such a small scale community action programs, it has to be based on the concept of region to comprehend "relatively large degree of homogeneity measured by a relatively large number of indices available for a relatively large number of purposes." (Odum & Moore, *supra*) Especially in the context of urban-based industrialization process as carried out in Korea, the region has to be large enough to include industrial nodal areas as "they are the physical precipitates of functional linkages" of the national economy. (Friedmann & Weaver, p.362)

In fact as it became more and more obvious that urban and rural linkages were not developing through the Saemaul Movement and rural-urban migrations have not been significantly decreasing, an attempt has been made to induce small and/or cottage industries into the villages, primarily in order to absorb the idle labour forces in rural communities. Yet the outcome was a disappointment to both the farmers and the business in most of the areas. (A similar attempt has been made more recently in larger scale, that is, to cover a larger spatial unit in the name of "agro-industrial estate" and for better results so far, whereas the former was called "Saemaul factory" project. The "agro-industrial estate" will be discussed further in a later section.)

At any rate, the point here is that the kind of "development from below" as the Saemaul Movement based on relatively small spatial unit, basically traditional "field of associa-

tion" of people (J.R. Mellor, 1983, p. 70), is too weak to rise to the level high enough to be functionally integrated into the fastly changing national economic structure. Unlike many other developing countries, the Korean community development programs have been quite successful in meeting at least some of the "basic needs" of the rural community such as housing conditions, sanitation, education, electrification, communication, farming techniques and etc.. It simply could not move "up from below" to be integrated into the modernizing national economy; and the weakness of upward force is partly due to the smallness of the spatial unit beside the top-down institutional constraints. And thus, structural dualism of economy is still persistent between rural and urban sectors, despite such a salutary trend as narrowing average income disparity between urban and rural communities. (Hwang Myung-Chan, 1984, pp. 279-281)

2. Demise of "Growth Pole" Approach

Come 1980's, more direct approach to the problem of urban-rural and inter-regional linkages has been attempted in the central government planning. "Regional planning" as such has become more conspicuous and even a legitimate part of the Five Year Economic Development Plan beginning with the 5th Plan (1981~1986). Inter-regional balance of growth is the primary objective as stated both in the 2nd 10 Year Comprehensive National Territorial Development Plan(1982~1991) and the 5th through 6th Economic Development Plans. Since the two sets of Plans were prepared by two different central government agencies, the former by the Ministry of Construction and the latter by the Economic Planning Board, various means of development are not very well coordinated. Yet both agencies at first proposed "growth pole" development as the main strategy of regional development. Undoubtedly, the "amazing yet understandable universal appeal of growth pole approach" had caught the eyes of Korean planners as well. Under the constraints of urban-based industrialization process for the past 20 years and also, of "the limiting conditions of capital and planning resources scarcity," the growth pole approach must have appealed as the most rational way "to reconcile the goals of equity and efficiency." (Lo & Salih, 1978, p. 17) The Ministry of Construction's 10 Year Plan had officially designated 15 cities all over the nation as either "primary" or "secondary growth centers" and had even contemplated to promulgate a law to support and to coordinate various governmental programs for the growth pole cities. These 15 cities were selected on the basis of assumptions for their growth potentials and spread effects.

It was also against the background of prevailing perception among the elites in Seoul

of "over-concentration" of population and industries in the capital region. Under the circumstances, the growth poles for their assumed growth potentials and spread effects must have appeared to be the most attractive options in order to solve the problems of urban primacy, interregional inequity, as well as urban-rural linkages in one stroke.

Within four years since its inception, however, the growth pole approach was abandoned. The abandonment was made official by the 1986 Revised Plan of the 2nd Comprehensive National Territorial Development. In its place came in the "central place". According to this new plan, all of the medium and small cities are to be developed as "nuclei of local development" and as "centers of industrial employment and also of services such as medical care and education." (The Revised Plan of the 2nd Comprehensive National Territorial Development, 1986, p. 32) While the two metropolitan regions, i.e. those of Seoul and Pusan, are to be subjected to various means of growth control and management.

No official explanation has been pronounced for such a policy shift. But two reasons seem to be most plausible. One is the recent democratization of planning process and the other is the increasing suspicion and criticism among planning professionals as well as academic community, domestic and abroad, of the assumptions of spread effects and urban-rural linkages via growth poles. As the present government in power, to be more responsive to the increasing demands for democratization of policy making process, held a series of public hearings on the 2nd 10 Year Plan, unexpectedly strong complaints and objections were lodged against the Plan especially from the citizens of those cities which had not been selected as the "growth centers." Equally strong demands for revision were raised by the members of the National Assembly representing those cities. Against such a political background and also diminishing support for the "growth pole" logic itself, the government planners must have thought the growth poles designation more a liability than feasible solution without any certain prospect of substantial investments for them.

With the nation-wide election of local legislatures expected to be held sooner or later, the shift to "central place" notion in the central government's regional development strategy can not be seen as a mere tactical change. The practical implications of the shift will not fully be known until the new structure of administrative and political relationship between central and local governments will have settled in. Yet it is certain that the paradigm as well as strategies of Korean regional development in general is now in transition.

Looking back, however, upon the past one and a half decade since the 1st 10 Year

National Territorial Development Plan was made public, the basic tenet of the central government's national development planning has been consistently that the high growth rate of national economy will eventually bring about convergence of interregional per capita incomes. Whatever may be the changing perspectives and perceptions of physical planners in the government have been, national economic planners expectation has been consistent in that basically sectoral balancing of national economy will be the most effective means of interregional income convergence: urban-rural convergence by means of agricultural price maintenance and large and small cities convergence by means of financial support of the small and medium industries. Such an international precedent as documented by Koichi Mera of the Japanese process during 60's and 70's (K. Mera, 1978, pp.193-216) could have served as their empirical references. Moreover, the performance of the Korean economy as a whole has also born out, to a degree, such an expectation since early 70's. (Hwang Myung-Chan, p. 281)

In such a context the role of spatial planners in governments at all levels has been mainly of auxiliary function to accelerate growth and/or to remove the physical bottlenecks of center-down hierarchical flow and diffusion process of national economic growth. Planning and implementation of the national network of social overhead capital investments such as highway system, multi-purpose dams, and industrial estates and growth pole strategies, though short-lived, are such functions.

Against such a background, the current shift to "central place" notion in national government's regional development planning should be interpreted as a political accommodation of the demands for distribution rather than regionalization of productive forces. Although the full ramifications of this recent shift are yet to be seen, it is clear that the emphasis is now on expansion of accessibility and delivery network of urban-based services for wider range of population.

III. Regionalism: Dialectics of Top-Down and Bottom-up Approaches

1. Centralized Distributive System

Currently there are two separate streams of demands gaining ever stronger momentum as the national development is being successfully implemented. One is for more equitable shares of the development "pie" among different income classes and among different regions. And the other is for more democratization of political institutions, including

autonomy of local governments and more active participation in the policy making processes at all levels of government. These two factors will play more and more important roles in shaping the future regional development process in Korea.

Regarding the demands for distributional equity, the central government has indeed been trying to narrow the gap, inter-classes and inter-regional as well as inter-sectoral. More government subsidies for medical insurance funds for rural areas, earlier extension of compulsory education in lagging regions, income tax exemption for below a certain income level, various public assistance programs for those under poverty line, agricultural price maintenance policy, credit and loan assistance for the farm households debts and etc. are some of the distributional measures already taken.

For the purpose of the present paper, more relevant efforts must be the recent attempts of the "agro-industrial estates" development and the shift of planning approach to development of "central place" functions of all the small and medium size cities as discussed above. The former, having been conceived primarily as the supplementary income opportunities for farmers by employing underemployed and off-season farm labour, has achieved a degree of success. Unlike the "Saemaul factories" as discussed earlier, the success of this program is partly due to the wisdom of planning in providing better infrastructures for the industries and covering wider catchment area. While the latter, though still too early to tell the full ramifications as pointed out above, is basically to promote relatively self-contained and self-serving spatial units of settlement within which some basic needs and public services are to be delivered via the urban core of each unit.

All these recent developments can be summarized under the paradigm of a top-down extension of delivery system of distributional shares. In other words, it is to follow a model of highly centralized and hierarchical distributive delivery system on a nation-wide scale, while leaving most of productive capitals out of such constraints and very much to the national market mechanism.

It should not be ignored that a considerable degree of governmental interventions has been exerted upon small and large scale industries for decentralization out of the Seoul metropolitan region. However, since there have been little concerted efforts to provide inducements for decentralization enough to counterbalance the fundamentally unequal institutional structure in favor of the Capital region, only those relatively large scale new investments as planned and supported by the government have moved in the publicly developed industrial estates, especially along the south and the south-east coastline of

newly developed industrial beltway. But as for the small and medium size businesses, the current decentralization incentive system is even unfair to those areas outside of the Capital region. Tax reductions are allowed only to those newly locating industries in the publicly developed "local industrial estates;" and thus, the existing businesses in the host regions are worsened off in competition with the newly decentralized ones. And furthermore, as aptly pointed out by a foreign consultant, (Remy Prud'homme, p. 156) by providing even some local tax reductions to the newly induced industries, the cost of decentralization may eventually be born by the local economy. Besides, regardless of the practical merit of the current decentralization-inducement system, not many new businesses have been induced into local urban centers anyway, while local capital and manpower resources are still flowing out. All in all, it must be admitted that the productive side of Korean regional development has not done very well as compared to the distributive side of it.

The question is, then, whether such a centralized and hierarchical distributive system alone can accommodate the ever increasing demands for participatory democracy and further, whether it will eventually help generate the self-renewing capacities of the local economy. There is a warning that "highly centralized delivery systems within unequal institutional structures are likely to fail because benefits are appropriated before they reach the poor, and often take the form of a distant planner/technocrats' conception of needs rather than that of the poor themselves." (Eddy Lee, 1981, 119) Beside the possibility of failure of the distributive system itself, people outside the center of decision-making will get more and more frustrated at the futility of their own entrepreneurial initiatives unless some means of productive activities are at their disposal. And such frustrations will eventually overburden the central delivery system and make it unmanageable, let alone mounting political discontents at the prospect of permanent "center-periphery" dependency relationship. After all, economic manifestation of participatory democracy is the "bottom-up" initiatives and entrepreneurship in productive activities.

No less important is the need at this stage of Korean development to diversify the economic base. As the size of economy grows and against ever increasing competition and protectionism in international markets, diversification of domestic economic base, both sectorally and regionally, is a way to increase stability and malleability of the national economic system. Such diversification in future can best be attained by proliferation of small and medium businesses regionally and sectorally. Korean industry is already "extremely skewed towards heavy and chemical industry" and "unbalanced in terms of size,

regional distribution and income." (Georg Graesel, 1983, p. 31)

2. Regionalism as a Means of Diversification and Pluralism

The demands for participatory democracy and the needs for diversification of economic base combined point the direction of Korean regional development process for the future. Regionalism is the new motif for regional planning and the new direction of regional development is to be "communalization" of productive potential as well as distributive processes. (Friedmann & Weaver, pp. 357-358)

As the success of small and medium businesses is so much dependent upon individual entrepreneurship and their immediate environment, they are much more the products of social evolution than of the rules of national economic mechanism. The term, "local place-bound" industries, for so many Japanese small businesses in remote regions aptly describes such special nature of small and medium industries, to which is credited so much of the stability and success of Japanese economy. Regionalism is the medium of such social evolution for relatively small scale business enterprises.

In the Korean context at this stage of development, the virtue of regionalism is not in creation of closed circuit spatial units of self-reliance and of complete autonomy. Nor should it be geared primarily to the so-called "agropolitan districts" of relatively small scale settlement. (cf. Friedmann & Weaver, pp. 361~363) It is rather a cultural, economic and political basis of "co-adaptation" between the functionally integrating national economy and the territorial autonomy of sub-national units of settlement. The cultural and political factors plus economic resources of each of the sub-national territorial units make the homogeneity of a region an active rather than passive element in the development process. And this active element is the force that moves "up from below" to meet the "center-down" force of nationally integrating economy.

As the national economy has already achieved high level of territorial integration, complete closure of a sub-national spatial unit is not only unfeasible but also self-defeating. And yet, merely passive openness will only serve "mercantile regionalism" at best (Odum & Moore, p. 13); that is, regional development will be entirely at the mercy of the rules of efficiency from the point of view of national economy. Therefore, at this stage of development in Korea, regionalism is to selectively induce and/or reject linkages with development from outside in consideration of its own ecological, cultural, social and economic resources and expectations. Such a "selective closure" (Friedmann & Weaver, p. 10) and/or openness can best be defined in terms of co-adaptation process.

“Selective closure” is only possible when there is in fact a degree of regional political autonomy to do it. And therefore, regionalism as a motif for regional development is very much a problem of political institution and for that matter a normative issue. Social, cultural, ecological, and historical homogeneity of a region is of course the basis as well as the substance of regionalism and its identification is an empirical task. Yet the question of how much homogeneity and of what indices to use in identifying a region for regional development is a normative issue. Furthermore, this normative issue ought to be resolved by regional political process and not by the “cut-and-dried procedures” (Lewis Mumford) of technocratic planners. In other words, “the discovery of the rough outliness and elementary components of the region in all its varied potentialities as a theater of collective action is a task for democratic politics.” (Friedmann & Weaver, p. 55) Definition of a region itself is one of the most important communal action for regional development in terms of selective closure and/or opening vis-a-vis the outside world. And therefore, the region in regional development based upon regionalism is “characterized not so much by boundary lines and actual limits as it is by flexibility of limits.” (Odum & Moore, p.14)

In the Korean context, a province can very well be activated as the geographical unit of regionalism for future regional development. Each province has rather a unique historical background and some degree of particularized culture as well. A few provinces have even somewhat unique ecological characteristics. The size of a Korean province is also “large enough to embrace sufficient range of interests” to deal with the rapidly expanding national economy and at the same time, “small enough to keep these interests in focus and to make them subject of direct collective action.” The only exceptions are the two dominant metropolitan regions of Seoul and Pusan, though with some reservations for the latter. These metropolitan regions are not the bases of regionalism as it is defined here, because it is not a territorial integration of culture and history in which all inhabitants share. (Odum & Moore, pp. 133~134) However, the missing link and the most important one at the moment to integrate a province as a territorial unit of regionalism is the political institutions for autonomy. Without it they are merely geographical units with no activating force for regionalism. Therefore, the foremost task in Korean regional development toward the future is the institutionalization of such political autonomy.

IV. Conclusion

When development does not "trickle down" very well "from above" or innovations do not diffuse downward as expected of so many urgent development processes, it is quite natural to attempt a radical turn-around to find a solution. And thus came the sudden upsurge of interests in development "from below." As far as the regional development in developing nations is concerned, it has now become almost a fashion to advocate for the so-called "bottom-up" approach. There is even an instinctive mistrust of "trickle down" or downward diffusion, as such a development linkage "from above" is believed only to reinforce the "center-periphery" dependency relationship. Autonomy, self-reliance, self-help, "basic needs" and so forth are deemed as the overriding virtues in this age of development "from below."

However, in a country like Korea where land-based resources are so scarce and population pressure is greater in poorer regions, autonomy, self-help, and/or self-reliance alone do not guarantee even the very "basic needs." Some degree of inter-active relationship with the outside world is inevitable and some degree of compromises of autonomy and self-reliance ought to be accepted. In such a context, more important point is that the terms of compromise should not be dictated from above but mutually adjusted. In the field of the politics of bargaining power, such mutual adjustment can be guaranteed only when the bargaining parties have somethings to exchange and also, some degree of autonomous decision making ability. Inter-regional economic diversification, regionally autonomous political institutions and regional cultural, ecological identity and consciousness will provide such conditions. This is what is expected of regionalism today in Korea and therefore, the geographical unit of regionalism has to be larger than the space of self-help and mere "basic needs." In this sense "regionalism" is the most feasible form of dialectics of developments from "above" and "below" in Korea today.

As much as the "basic-needs oriented, labour intensive, small-scale, regional resource-based, often rural-oriented" (W.B. Stohr & D.R.F. Taylor, p. 1) development programs can no longer be viable options for regional development in Korea, provision of the top-down nationwide distributive delivery system by itself does not suffice. Beside the point as raised earlier that it will not satisfy the demands for participatory democracy, such a system is very likely to break down in the long run by quantitatively standardizing the

different qualities of life across the nation and thereby, raising expectations uniformly over the entire national territory to an unmanageable limit. Diversification of quality of life and pluralism of standard-setting have to be introduced in the national development process at some point; and regionalism is the alternative way to bring about such diversity and pluralism.

And finally, one of the most important point for the policy-makers and expert-planners to understand at this stage of development in Korea is that regional planning is no longer merely a technical, professional task to be undertaken only by technocrats and professionals. Admitted that it can not be totally left to the politics of community control and organization as in the cases of relatively small-scale "community development" programs, the regional planning process itself has to be open now to a wider range of participants. And the experiences of participation will in turn reinforce regional consciousness.

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