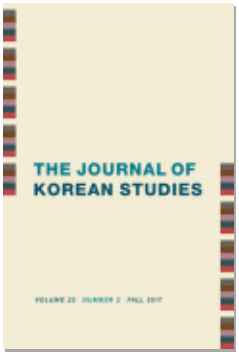
The Korean State and Social Policy: How South Korea Lifted Itself from Poverty and Dictatorship to Affluence and Democracy by Stein Ringen et al., and; *State-centric to Contested Social Governance in South Korea: Shifting Power* by Hyuk-Rae Kim (review)



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Journal of Korean Studies, Volume 22, Number 2, Fall 2017, pp. 459-462 (Review)

Published by Duke University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2017.0021

Book Reviews

The Korean State and Social Policy: How South Korea Lifted Itself from Poverty and Dictatorship to Affluence and Democracy by Stein Ringen et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 137 pp. £35.99 (hardback)

State-centric to Contested Social Governance in South Korea: Shifting Power by Hyuk-Rae Kim. New York: Routledge, 2013. 202 pp. $140.00 (hardback). $49.95 (paperback)

A late industrializing nation-state, South Korea was characterized as "the miracle of the Han river" up until the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. And it was praised for rapidly overcoming the crisis, both by international financial organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and by nation-states that went through contemporaneous national economic crises. Scholars and experts attributed these achievements to the role of the South Korean state and the strong government initiatives and intervention in business and markets that had marked its administration and bureaucracy since the Korean War.

Scholarly work on the developmental state (Kim 1997; Woo-Cumings 1999) centered on whether the Korean government under the military regimes developed national wealth by largely controlling the big conglomerates (*chaebŏl*) or whether the regimes and the capitalists collaborated to produce economic growth. Despite the significant attention given to the economic growth of the South Korean developmental regimes, the role of the government in social development has been understudied. However, public awareness of social development, or "improving quality of living (*sam ŭi chil hyangsang*)," has been growing since the 1990s, when South Korea joined other nations in donating foreign aid and after the

The Journal of Korean Studies 22, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 459–73
DOI 10.1215/21581665-4226523

establishment of the National Basic Livelihood Security in 1999 under the Kim Dae Jung regime. In this context, *The Korean State and Social Policy: How South Korea Lifted Itself from Poverty and Dictatorship to Affluence and Democracy* by Stein Ringen and colleagues and *State-centric to Contested Social Governance in South Korea: Shifting Power* by Hyuk-Rae Kim are timely contributions to the field of South Korean state and social-development studies.

Reading these two books together is captivating because they seem to be having a dialogue with one another, even if they do not directly address each other. Both books consider the ways in which the South Korean government navigated its relationship with multiple stakeholders, especially participants in civic organizations, in working towards a democratic process. I would like to elaborate the imagined dialogue between the two books by identifying some key common narratives and differing perspectives or foci. The two books highlight the importance of detailing the institutional history of the South Korean state rather than simply lumping South Korea into the regional category of the (East Asian) developmental state (emphasized in Kim), or reducing the "mysteries" of rapid achievements to authoritarian state power (emphasized in Ringen et al.). The books share a narrative of "dynamics," "metamorphoses," "mutation," "shifting," and "change," whether it is from poverty and dictatorship to affluence and democracy (Ringen et al.) or from a (centripetal) state-centric mode of social governance to a (centrifugal) contested one (Kim).

In particular, Ringen and colleagues, coming from a political science background with a thematic focus on social policy and the East Asian welfare state, contend that social development was gradually expanded throughout the history of modernization, including during the Japanese colonial regime and before, and during and after the military regimes. In other words, they argue that social development did not suddenly begin with the appearance of the universalized welfare state during the conjunction of the Asian financial crisis and the Kim Dae Jung regime. With this argument, they want to show that what matters is not measurement of the capacity of state power but interrogation of the art of state power—how such strong state power was used and administered to achieve a goal of national prosperity, including social development. For instance, they provide data demonstrating that civil volunteerism, as a sign of democratic social governance, was already salient and crucial during the Park Chung Hee military dictatorship. It was especially evident in the new village campaign, a rural (and urban) development project the state initiated. Military dictator Chun Doo Hwan also identified social welfare as a key national issue during his regime. Given that the military dictatorships are pictured at best as charismatic drivers of economic growth, forsaking social freedom and equity issues, and that the post-Asian financial crisis welfare state is still criticized because of its minimal expansion of public provision (following the model of the cut-back welfare state in advanced capitalist nations, also known as the Third Way or neoliberal welfare state), this is certainly a heterodox interpretation. It showcases South Korea as having a long history of social development through policy, redefining the welfare state as a policy-based intervention.

Hyuk-Rae Kim, on the other hand, comes from the discipline of political sociology, with a thematic focus on the state and civil society. By featuring changes in state involvement in social governance, his book demonstrates how civil society, or more concretely nongovernmental agents—whether civic organizations or online blog participants—became crucial in social governance by making decisions about social policies and the operation of social programs. Kim's book posits the sweeping increase in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and cyberactivism since the Asian financial crisis as evidence that the state is not the sole guardian of social policy, and that top-down direction is no longer viable. Although Kim acknowledges that NGOs and civic forces existed before the late 1980s' democratization and the late 1990s' crisis, he differs from Ringen and his colleagues in that he sees the dictatorship era as sidelining social development. The goal of Kim's book is to refine the concepts of governance and civil society based on empirical data. The meanings of those notions have not been agreed upon by scholars, yet they are commonly used to overgeneralize their implications based on the Western context.

In short, despite the different periodical and disciplinary foci, the two books are predicated upon a solid position that the South Korean state, or any state, cannot be understood without consideration of its specific local history and political economy. They agree that these are not separable from the global environment, but they deserve meticulous attention to challenge stagnant understanding and interpretation. Both books contest the theorizing of social development based on the Western-history-based model of the welfare state and mode of social governance.

Having read these two books, I wonder whether the notion of the state is necessarily external to the social, or what is called *civil society*. Can we reduce the meaning of the state to the national government or bureaucratic machinery without considering people's influence on sovereignty regardless of democratic polity? If it is not exactly so, what would be the contribution to critical thinking of reproducing the binary premise, the state versus civil society? Maybe exploring this question is beyond the scope of these two books, as one of the books clarifies that the primary method does not include philosophical perspectives. However, critical thinking about the binary premise could be a groundbreaking venue to think of the notion of the state in relation to related concepts, such as governance, government, and governmentality. The Foucauldian notion of governmentality is certainly not reducible to governance because it suggests that the technologies of the governing population (or society) and the self (or individual) are inseparable, and therefore, the idea of who/what is governing is unanswerable in the division between the state and civil society, or between society and the individual citizen. It is true that the concept of governmentality was developed to capture the novel moment of creation of the liberal political economy or the mode of state operation in Western nations, most prominently in the eighteenth century, and its mutation to neoliberal governmentality in the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, insight from governmentality regarding state power, or any power—coerciveness and fostering are both technologies of regulatory power, not a sign of reduced

state power—might be a useful tool for thinking about the variations in the developmental and postdevelopmental state in non-Western nations, such as South Korea, instead of assuming that the coercive aspect of the developmental state is simply nonliberal or nonmodern.

I think both books would be useful textbooks for classes in contemporary Korea in addition to contributing to thinking about theories of social policy and social governance in relation to statehood. It is not only useful to understand the relationship between economic development and social development, but further, it allows us to broaden perspectives of development as a conceptual and historical notion.

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The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea by Hyun Ok Park. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 349 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $60.00 (cloth). $59.99 (e-book)

The pithy, remarkable claim at the opening of Hyun Ok Park's latest book—that "capital has already unified Korea in a transnational form" (p. 3)—is a claim about both an empirical reality and an ideological situation. The unification Park identifies is not of the territorial kind, nor does it concern separated families or irredentist notions. The empirical quality of unification revealed in Park's study is capitalist integration driven by the flow of commodities—specifically labor, money, and ideas—across the borders of North Korea, China, and South Korea. Park's fieldwork in Northeast Asia traces this flow, and the book presents fascinating interviews of the people who make these journeys. One theme among the North Koreans' experience is the narrative of "I didn't have to come but still . . . , " which Park considers as a discourse of migration within global capitalist integration: entrenched in the narrative is nothing less than the North Koreans' own notion of freedom grounded in market democracy (p. 256).

It is no longer secret that North Koreans move in and out of the North Korea-China border (albeit illegally, but not too different from the Mexico-US border)