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The Characteristics and Moral Grounds of Political Leadership in Modern Korea¹

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I. Introduction

Leadership is the most significant factor determining destiny in modern Korean politics. Because institutionalization is incomplete and democratization is still in process, leadership cannot but play an important role in deciding major national policies. Accepting the fact that there are both positive and negative effects of leadership, this study attempts to specify the positive and to explore the moral foundation of modern Korean politics. This will provide some guidelines for the current political leadership.

This paper carefully specifies modern Korean leadership as characteristically strong. 'Commitment to public good' is suggested as the main moral foundation of political leadership in modern Korea. The modern Korean state exercised strong leadership, from President Rhee Syngman through Presidents Park Chung-Hee, Chun Doo-Hwan, Roh Tae-Woo, Kim Young-Sam, to the current Kim Dae-Jung. This was done to achieve economic development and political stability, inevitably resulting in sacrificing the basic liberties of the people. In developing countries, the role of government is extensively needed to handle overwhelming problems. In this situation, the state prioritizes economic development or political stability over basic individual liberties. The modern political leadership in Korea has mostly tried to establish Korean identity and autonomy, political stability, and democracy through economic development.

Many studies on Korean leadership have blamed the country's strong leaders for their moral illegitimacy. This paper suggests, however, that strong leadership in Korea has been morally committed to improving the public good. Most national policies by the leadership have focused not so much on short-term vested interests as long-term national interests. As well, when

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modern Korean leaders have decided major policies, they had strong moral convictions regarding the public good. Though varying in degree, modern Korean leaders have all shared this commitment. Leadership in modern Korea has a moral foundation in its commitment to pursuing the public good. By virtue of this public commitment, political leaders were able to receive partial legitimacy from the people.

II. Political Leadership in Modern Korean Politics

Political leadership is an important factor of the developmental state² in modern Korean politics. We can not overlook the leadership factor in explaining for the successes of democratization and economic achievement. Most studies explaining Korean democratization and the success or failure of economic development seem to highlight the characteristics of the modern Korean state, state-civil society relations, the relationship between state, and capital and labor. They do not pay serious attention to the political leadership factor, though. In a sense, political leadership is the core element of the developmental state of Korea.

The developmental state in the modern Korean politics emerged amidst a historical and cultural legacy, an international environment of Cold War, the Korean war and the division of Korea, and, finally, economic backwardness. These backgrounds are, in essence, the structural foundation for the formation of the developmental state. Among the historical legacy, of most importance is Japanese colonial rule, stirring self-respect issues for the Korean people. This historical experience set the background for the opening of modern Korean politics after liberation, which may have stimulated the spirit of self-respect and autonomy among the Korean people. Regarding the cultural legacy, Confucian concepts such as royalty and filial duty have been employed to justify strong leadership. Confucian customs and practices have been conducive in strengthening the roots of the developmental state. The Korean War and the resulting division of Korea, in tandem with the Cold War in the international arena, called for the national unity and security as an ideology. Finally, economic backwardness paved the way for the political leadership to pursue economic development goals by concerted nationwide efforts, deferring the protection of individual freedoms and liberties provisionally. These are the factors that contributed to the emergence of the developmental state in modern Korean politics.

The ideology of the modern Korean state is a mixture of liberal democracy, nationalism, and Confucianism. These three ideologies have been incoherently expressed with regard to the establishment of national identity and autonomy, national security, the achievement of economic development, and the establishment of liberal democracy. Also, all of these may occasionally come into conflict with each other. Prioritization of these values is a problem. For example, a nationalistic emphasis on national identity, autonomy, and security conflicts with liberal democratic principles. While Confucianism was indirectly conducive for the mobilization of the people in establishing national autonomy and security, as an unofficial rule of behavior, it hampers the liberal democratization of Korea. An emphasis on Korean traditions and autonomy prioritizes national unity, which tends to violate or restrict individual freedoms and basic liberties. This possibility runs counter to liberal democracy. In fact, the Korean strong leadership emphasizes national unity. President Park Chung Hee especially emphasized a 'Koreanized democracy', an idea that was developed during the Rehabilitation political system of the 1970s.³ In modern Korea, the establishment of national identity and autonomy has been attempted in tandem with rapid economic developments. The modern Korean state has utilized its powerful leadership to achieve rapid economic development, which has inevitably resulted in a sacrifice of the people's basic liberties. Underlying this strategy is the logic that, in the early stage of economic development, especially with regard to developing countries, the government is needed to handle political stability issues.⁴ The state prioritizes economic development over individual basic liberties. The security problem is also an important factor in explaining the modern Korean strong leadership. A divided Korea has been used to justify strong leadership in the modern Korean politics, making security a component of the strong

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state ideology. This also plays a crucial role in restricting the limitations of individual basic liberties. Nevertheless, despite the mixture and conflicting values, the founding ideology of the modern Korean developmental state reflects attempts to establish a Korean model of politics.

Due to the above ideological mixture, the modern Korean developmental state has an inherent problem: the dual aspects of official rules and unofficial ways of behavior. This problem is characterized by the strong Korean leadership. Formal aspects are represented by official principles and institutions. Official institutions are the democratic systems and guiding principles for the basic structure. This basic structure was predicated on liberal ideas and were adopted from the First Republic. Institutional aspects of modern Korean politics, though, vary from republic to republic. These are distinguished by the presidential model (not adopted only in the Second Republic constitution), separation of power, and regular elections (though sometimes perverted and distorted). In parallel with these official institutions, the basic principles of modern Korean politics are based upon Western ideas. In practice, these ideas are incorporated with the articles of the constitutions and have been incrementally actualized in accordance with the democratization of Korean politics. In the beginning of the modern Korean politics, liberal ideas - especially in the First Republic led by Rhee Syngman - resembled classical liberalism, which emphasized the guarantee of individual basic liberties through constitutionalism and the separation of powers. However, these official institutions and principles have been influenced, positively as well as negatively, by unofficial factors stemming from the cultural and historical heritage of Korean traditional politics. It may be contended that Confucian heritage is the strongest among these factors. These two official and unofficial factors are combined into modern Korean politics, which is represented by 'strong leadership in the developmental state'.

The developmental state in modern Korea is usually characterized by several points. First, it has prioritized the public good over individual values and interests. Second, it has exerted considerable influence over civil society. Third, it has enjoyed a superior position over capital and labor. Fourth, it has adopted the major policies for economic development, sacrificing human rights and basic individual liberties. Fifth, through major economic policies, it has intervened in the market to a considerable degree.⁵ Such characterization, however, does not consider the role of political leadership.

Strong leadership plays the role of a pilot, steering the way of the Korean developmental state. In modern Korea, political leaders have tried to show their firm commitment to the public good by implementing major policies. They firmly believe they know what the public good is and how to realize it. President Rhee, Presidents Park, Chun, Kim Young Sam, and the current president Kim Dae-Jung are examples of strong leaders. In modern Korean politics, people have tended to long for a strong leader who can shoulder the responsibility of the entire Korean people. This expectation may be partly due to the historical legacies of the Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War and the divided peninsula. Alongside this structural factor, Confucian influence may help explain why a strong leader is expected. According to Confucian ideas, an enlightened leader is supposed to exercise extensive power in the realms of politics, economics, and morality. In this vein, Nam properly addresses the implication of Confucian culture in modern politics when stating that "Confucian culture, in which the state is held responsible for all that is happening under the sun - with the result that people and the mass media call for government intervention whenever they see problems in day-to-day life."⁶

Thus, the most characteristic feature of modern Korean politics is a developmental state with strong political leadership. The tradition of strong leadership has been maintained from Rhee Syngman to Kim Dae-Jung, save the Second Republic's Chang Myon. In the First Republic, despite its limited resources, the state under Rhee was strong in comparison to civil society, which had not yet emerged as an organized political power. The power struggle only took

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place among the political elites in the arena of government and politics. In the First Republic, the state was weak in power resources but strong in its exercise of power over the people and its political rivals. The Second Republic exhibited a weak state with weak leadership, which was ineffective in coping with the eruption of social and political issues. It was the Third Republic that brought about a developmental state with strong leadership, following the 5. 16 military coup d'etat. During the Rehabilitation system of the 1970's, it shaped its own features and finally developed into a Korean model of a developmental state with strong leadership under Park Chung-hee. The developmental state-strong leadership model was adopted by the government led by Chun Do-hwan. Even after the civil strife for democratization in June 1987, although somewhat mollified, the strong government and its powerful leadership has always been emphasized and even expected. The Roh Tae Woo government after the 1987 6. 29 Declaration intended to be more democratic in order to create a looser leadership. It is difficult, however, to maintain that it is truly a weak government. The scope and leeway of the governmental power were more limited by the division of political powers among the parties and civil society. Nevertheless, it still exercised extensive control over national policies. In its inception, the Roh regime strove to be democratic and was reticent to exercise power. It still had power to manage national level policies, despite any limitations that can be drawn after comparing it with former regimes such as those of Park and Chun. Kim Young Sam can be described as a powerful leader who initiated innovative policies. His innovative policy had moral implications but, unfortunately, was not successful economically. Despite his strong leadership, he failed to effectively manage economic growth as well as the distribution problems, which led to the economic crisis in the end of 1997. As a result of his regime not being able to effectively handle the crisis arising from the foreign currency shortage, the Korean government had no choice but to accept the IMF bailout. Lastly, Kim Dae Jung's leadership is limited in various ways. First of all, in the early stages of his regime, his party did not win a majority in the parliament, forcing it to establish a coalition with the United Liberal Democratic Party. Kim Dae Jung won the presidential election with the regional coalition of Cholla and Chungch'ung Provinces led by, respectively, the National Congress for New Politics and the United Liberal Democratic Party. While, fundamentally, regionalism in modern Korean politics has constrained his leadership, it may be also argued, it contributed to supporting it. In spite of this fundamental limitation, Kim Dae Jung has the charisma to lead the nation. His influence was enough to innovate extensive areas of Korean society to overcome the economic crisis. Moreover, he initiated the innovative sunshine policy² toward the North Korea, inviting criticism from conservative sectors. His strong leadership relies upon his life-long belief in democratization, the support of the masses, and the results of the Korean economic crisis.

Through the major policies by the leaders of Korea, from Rhee Syngman to Kim Dae-jung, we can identify the many positive characteristics that are morally supported by the people. Above all, such strong leadership in modern Korea expresses its faithful commitment to public good, despite any oppressive aspects. This commitment has been accompanied by a clear understanding of what public good truly is.

III. Characteristics of Modern Korean Leadership

The Korean model of strong leadership is shaped by several characteristics. First, strong leadership in modern Korean politics has relied institutionally upon the presidential system. It has also been supported officially by the efficient bureaucracy and unofficially by the affective network. Second, strong leadership in Korea, though officially limited in power by democratic constitutionalism, has been able to exert influence in Korean society, especially with regard to capital and labour. Third, Korean leadership has tried to obtain its legitimacy through achievements in economic growth. Fourth, the normative grounds of strong leadership may be characterized as the mixture of Confucianism, communitarianism, and perfectionism.

Institutional Aspects of Modern Korean Leadership

The modern Korean strong leadership rests upon a presidential system, a competent

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bureaucracy, the military, and the police. The presidential system institutionally makes strong leadership possible in Korean politics, using the bureaucracy to efficiently achieve its planned goals. The bureaucracy has often been used to mobilize the common people to maintain political power. The Saemaul (New Village) Movement represents the most well-known practice of political mobilization. The military, the police, and the secret information agency have been often used, directly or indirectly, to suppress demonstrations, revolts, and uprisings. These institutional apparatuses have played an important role in maintaining a strong leadership.

Political Leadership and the Affective Networks

The Korean developmental state rests upon a strong leadership which is supported by affective networks.⁸ Affective networks in modern Korean society are represented by the clan, school alumni, and regionalism. Officially, the strong leadership has institutions to achieve its goals, such as political parties and bureaucratic systems. Below these official aspects, though, lie unofficial networks which influence political decision making. The leading elite groups emerged, maintained by recruiting their members, made coalitions, and competed with each other through affective networks. The logic of action in an affective network is similar to a push and pull effect, which is often described as patron-client relations. In the hierarchy of political power, a senior pulls his or her junior to a more advantageous position through affective networks. In return for the leader's efforts, those helped are supposed to cast a full push for the leaders' policies or political goals and lines, equivalent almost to blind commitment. This commitment possibly plays an unofficially crucial role in the formation and maintenance of strong leadership. Further, this principle or logic of action within affective networks is not compatible with the official rules of political parties and bureaucracy. This may reflect the dual aspects of the modern Korean politics. Official rules are democratic and liberal, unofficial rules stem from Korean tradition and culture.

Political Leadership and Civil Society

It may be contended that the emergence of the Korean developmental state was possible because of the weak civil society. It was firmly established during Park Chung Hee's leadership when there was insufficient growth of the public sphere. The Korean strong leadership has exercised great power over the civil society despite the resistance and struggle of students, labourers, churches. The lopsided relationship of the state over the civil society has increasingly become more balanced and equal with the democratization of Korean politics. However, the state is still strong vis-a-vis civil society. In the aftermath of the 6-29 Democratization Declaration in 1987, civil rights and civil society movements organizations grew. These trends strengthened the power position of civil society against the state much more. Following the IMF bailout, however, strong leadership was required again to influence the economy as well as individuals, groups, and organizations in civil society.

Political Leadership, Capital, and Labour

The Korean strong leadership has inseparable relations with capital. To elaborate, the coalition of political power and capital is an important aspect of Korean developmental state. Political power is in a position to bestow favors for Chaebols⁹ supplied capital in return for financial support. This relationship is unofficially connected to produce corruption and places the labour sector in a politically and economically inferior position. By oppressing the labour force, political power has been able to maintain political stability while capital maximizes its interests by sacrificing labour interests. Thus, and as was already mentioned, labourers have been limited in their basic political liberties and sacrificed economically. They were placed to take social burdens in order to maintain economic growth and political stability. So, under the Korean developmental state, the labourers had to fight against political power in order to obtain basic liberties and to struggle against capital in order to enhance their economic interests at the same time. Under the Korean developmental state, though, political power and

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capital have relative autonomy and are in a position to make a coalition representing their respective interests, further oppressing the labourers.

Political Leadership and Individuals

In modern Korean politics, the relation between the political leadership and the individuals may be analyzed from various perspectives. From the perspective of an authoritarian government, the leadership is oppressive toward its people, especially in the area of basic liberties such as freedom of thought and speech, politics, and business. From the Confucian perspective, the leadership is benevolent towards its people, but possesses a monopoly of moral judgments and major policy decisions, which is understood as perfectionist. Within Confucianism, the state's authority to make major political decisions and moral judgments, even without society's consent, is justified to the extent that all people are benefited. In modern Korean politics, the influence and boundary of individual liberties and powers have been expanded. However, the state or the leadership still has abundant leeway to exercise its influence over individuals with regard to moral judgment and political and economic freedoms.

Political Leadership and Major Policies

The major policies initiated by Korea's leaders should be considered most important because they provide the moral grounds of political leadership. We can grasp the common characteristics of political leaders in Korea by inquiring into their major policies. In spite of some differences between those representative leaders of Korean politics, in terms of their viewpoints on the issues, the methods of settlements, and prior determination, they are holding general features in common. First of all, a tendency could be found in those leaders' ways of action that they tried to solve fundamental and public issues with major policies instead of within the framework of basic institutions. According to the two types of leadership in James MacGregor Burns' theory, the Korean strong leadership is closer to the transforming leadership than the transactional leadership.

In modern Korean politics, most political leaders have attempted to secure their moral foundation by pursuing nation-wide policies. We may identify examples with the establishment of liberal democracy for President Rhee Syngman, the economic development for Park Chung-Hee, the success in economic stability through the policy of price stabilization and black ink balance for Chun Doo-Hwan, the house construction policy and the Northward policy which brought about the normalizations with Russia and the People's Republic of China for Roh Tae-Woo, the real name system of finance, the correction of history distortion, and the Globalization push (Segyehwa) for Kim Young-Sam, and, recently, the nation-wide reformation policies and the Sunshine policy for Kim Dae-Jung. Thus, those nation-wide policies are connected to the drastic reformation or readjustment of state system and social traditions.

Ex-Prime Minister Nam Duk-Woo evaluates the role of the modern Korean leaders in relation with the national objectives of Korean politics. Since 1945, the national objectives have been 1) to establish a state on the ideology of liberty and democracy with deterring Communism, 2) escape from the endemic economic poverty, 3) settle the democratic representative system imported from the western world, 4) reunify the divided Korea. Of those objectives, President Rhee performed an important role in the first one and President Park succeeded in solving the second. President Chun could be positively considered in demonstrating his leadership for price stabilization and black ink balance and showing the first case of peaceful power transition, in spite of his unjustly seizing power. Regarding President Roh, the democratization and the Northward policy are positively mentioned.¹⁰

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However, the implementation of major policies demanded the sacrifice of other values. The most serious one among such sacrificed values is the limitation and reservation of basic liberties, especially salient during the period under President Park and President Chun. Economic prioritization in the Park government oppressed human rights and the basic liberties. In the time of the Revitalizing Reform (Yushin), human rights issues attracted a lot of attention, both domestically and abroad. In 1973, one year after Yushin, student groups began demonstrating for democracy recovery and were joined by some intellectuals and religious figures. Then, in 1974, with the presidential decree of emergency proclaimed, those people were punished. In the wake of the event, the issue of human rights abuses was raised and became an issue between the US and Korea. However, from President Roh's government to now, the relative importance of human rights and basic liberties as compared to economic values has increased. There is still some confusion, however, especially after the IMF shock.

It is notable that the strong political leadership in modern Korean politics has tried to provide the public good to people through policies invented exclusively by the leadership without general agreement. This runs counter to the liberal idea that the public good should be formatted through the process of agreement.

IV. Moral Foundation of Political Leadership in Modern Korea

There may be a variety of approaches to investigate the normative grounds of the strong leadership in modern Korea. The following interpretations will provide a general understanding of possible investigations of the normative grounds.

A Confucian Interpretation

The strong leadership has been justified in Korean politics from the perspective of Confucian morality. The rationale of the Confucian state rests upon two moral principles. One is that those persons who have elevated themselves to moral perfection and wisdom are qualified to take charge of politics that deal with public affairs. The other is that these morally elevated persons with superior wisdom are responsible for the people in economical as well as in moral disputes, in return for the people's full support. In this vein, the Confucian state resembles an aristocracy in the sense that the superior and talented have moral responsibility for those who are inferior or less talented. The core idea of aristocracy is that more superior or capable persons are to make public decisions while, at the same time, take the moral and practical responsibilities for those more inferior or less capable. The modern Korean state possesses the above benevolent aspects of Confucianism. In other words, the leadership of the state is responsible for people's lives in return for controlling the monopoly of political decisions. In Confucian political philosophy, the relationship between the state or leader and the people is unequal and hierarchical in relation to 'give-and-take' principles. While the state is fully responsible for people's lives, the people give full support, political and moral, to the state. Herein lies the reciprocal but unequal exchange of different values. The state offers the guarantee of the people's lives in return for the people's legitimization of its political and moral support. As such, the state or political leader is justified to possess the monopoly of political decisions.

In practice, Confucian morality justifies strong leadership that monopolizes the political decisions, regardless of people's consents. In other words, Confucian ideas are employed for the mobilization and support of the masses to implement national major policies. By analyzing the governments of Presidents Park, Chun, Roh, and even Kim, we can identify Confucian aspects. It is argued that the successful drive toward industrialization under the longevity of President Park's rule owed much to the combination of the modern state apparatus and the Confucian tradition. Park skillfully employed the traditional Confucian discourse in managing the strong military-security-bureaucratic apparatus to engineer astonishing economic growth. Presidents Chun and Roh are also said to have used this combination to push for economic development and to justify their rule.¹¹

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Perfectionist Interpretation

Some may employ the perfectionist approach when investigating the moral grounds of strong leadership. There are some aspects of perfectionism in the strong leadership in modern Korean politics. In a philosophical sense, perfectionism contends that some values or conceptions of 'good' are intrinsically superior, and it regards the best state policies as those which promote such values or conceptions of good. Theoretically, philosophical perfectionism does not lead to exclusive justification for state perfectionism. According to state perfectionism, all efforts are legitimate that promote a good that, as the state believes, is superior to others. Philosophical perfectionism may be attained through policies of state neutrality that must not coerce citizens to make their lives better. According to the concept of state neutrality, the state must be neutral towards conceptions of 'good' among individuals. As such, there are competing arguments about whether state neutrality or state perfectionism is the best policy for attaining philosophical perfectionism.¹²

The strong and benevolent state in modern Korea is somewhat perfectionist in the sense that it always possesses a monopoly of decision making on major policies. Also, it runs counter to the idea of state neutrality, which is the core idea for the liberal state. According to the ideal of state neutrality associated with Rawls and Dworkin, "the state must not only coerce citizens to make their lives better, it must not do anything, coercive or otherwise, to promote some ways of life for others."¹³ In the politics of the developmental state in modern Korea it is assumed that the leadership has the intellectual capability to decide which policies or which conceptions of good are beneficial for Korean people. Also, it is assumed that the capabilities of the leaders or political elites are superior to those of the common people. Leaders in modern Korea, thus, have decided major issues without even the consent or support of society.

A Communitarian Interpretation

Communitarians hold that the good of community and the integrity of its traditions should be promoted by a variety of means, including the deliberate utilization of public policy.¹⁴ Communitarianism is comprised of two arguments. One states that politics should promote the common good independent of individual preferences or conceptions of 'good'. The other claims that the common good may be found in social traditions and practices. In a communitarian society, the common good is seen as a substantive conception of the good life, defining a community's 'way of life'. This common good provides the standard by which those preferences are evaluated. The community's way of life provides the basis for a public ranking of conceptions of the good, and the weight given to an individual's preferences depends on how much she conforms or contributes to this common good. A communitarian state can and should encourage people to adopt conceptions of the good that conform to the community's way of life, while discouraging conceptions of the good that conflict with it. A communitarian state is a perfectionist state, since it involves a public ranking of the value of different ways of life.¹⁵

Justification for the strong leadership in modern Korea may be made through arguments based on communitarianism. The strong leadership is required for preserving and advancing the common good of the Korean people. For this line of reasoning, the common good of the people in modern Korea is, above all, the maximization of economic benefits for the people. When there has been absolute scarcity of social and economic resources, priority has placed economic development over the protection of basic individual liberties. Underlying this policy is the prioritization of the common good over individual freedoms and liberties, reflecting communitarianist ideas. This argument, however, has continuously been challenged by the liberal justification that prioritizes individual basic liberties over the enhancement of economic benefits.

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A Utilitarian Interpretation

The utilitarian interpretation may contribute in some degree to justification for strong leadership in Korea. We must now explore the moral grounds of the strong leadership in modern Korea from the perspective of utilitarianism. According to utilitarianism, the state should promote the maximization of the utility or happiness for all. Policies concentrating upon economic development by the strong leadership in modern Korea are to be understood as efforts to maximize happiness or utility for all Korean people. This utilitarian conception of justice is implemented through the maximization of social economic benefits which occur with rapid economic development. In theory, utilitarianism regards society as a personified individual. In reality, however, society is composed of individuals with different conceptions of 'good'. Thus, a utilitarian state fails to consider the distinction between individuals. For the sake of maximizing social utility, a utilitarian state sacrifices individual basic liberties and preferences. In practice, the strong leadership in modern Korea has taken this kind of strategy, resulting in the sacrifice of individual freedoms and liberties, undermining the moral grounds of the strong leadership.

A Liberal Interpretation

In contrast to the perspectives above that illuminate relatively positive aspects of the strong leadership, we must explore the negative aspects of strong leadership in Korean politics from a liberal perspective. The strong leadership in modern Korea basically runs counter to any justification founded on liberalism. Officially, the developmental state in modern Korea justifies itself morally via liberal ideas while, in practice, takes a form of authoritarian government. The Korean developmental state characterizes the discrepancy between official moral justification and actual practices. Official ideologies were imported from western societies while actual political practices have been greatly influenced by Korean traditions and culture. One may characterize this discrepancy as a liberalism-Confucianism conflict. Liberal democratic ideas provide moral justification for the modern Korean state while Confucian ideas determine unofficial political practices. According to this interpretation, the economic crisis following the liquidity crisis at the end of 1997 originates from this discord between official ideology and real politics. However, the process of democratization reflects the establishment of liberal ideas in the political as well as economic realms, reducing the amount of discord. The process of Korean democratization means that the realization of liberal ideas in political practices eventually legitimizes Korean politics.

On the base of the above analyses, we may summarize that the Confucian, the communitarian, and the utilitarian interpretations may contribute to the justification for the Korean strong leadership in a limited sense while the liberal interpretation undermines the moral justification for it.

IV. The Korean Political Leadership and the IMF Bailout

IMF intervention in Korean politics has instigated another dimension of social and economic conflicts. In the Korean government's agreement with the IMF on December 3, 1997, the Korean government outlines, through the memorandum on its economic program, "a comprehensive policy package to address the structural weaknesses that are at the root cause of the present difficulties so as to restore market confidence and arrest the decline of the won," which is built around: (i) "a strong macroeconomic framework designed to continue the orderly adjustment in the external current account and contain inflationary pressures, involving a tighter monetary stance and substantial fiscal adjustment; (ii) a comprehensive strategy to restructure and recapitalize the financial sector, and make it more transparent, market-oriented, better supervised and free from political interference in business decisions; (iii) measures to improve corporate governance; (iv) accelerated liberalization of capital account transactions; (v) further trade liberalization; and (vi) improve the transparency and timely reporting of economic data."¹⁶

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The principle underlying this policy is predicated on the ideas of liberalization. Further, this policy is bound up with the new role of the political leadership. The guiding principle of the comprehensive reform policy of the Korean government under the IMF bailout reflects the liberalization of the economy from the political regulations.

It is very important to explain why Korean politics came under IMF intervention from the normative perspective. In this approach, there are various explanations. First of all, IMF intervention in the Korean politics stems from the fundamental difference between dominant international rule and dominant domestic rule. Between these conflicting rules, international rule, represented by the ideas of free market, overwhelmed the rule of the Korean politics and exposed the problems of Korean domestic rule. Still, there are two more interpretations. One states that the cause of the IMF situation in Korean politics is due to an inferior normative principle in comparison to dominant international rule. The other perspective claims that international power politics decides the 'normativeness' or superiority certain rules over others. Per this explanation it is assumed that normative criteria varies from society to society, making it impossible to compare the superiority of one rule over another. Based on this assumption, it is difficult to explain the causes of the IMF situation in Korean politics from a normative perspective. By adopting the first interpretation, it is only natural to conclude that the problems of Korean rule will be inevitably exposed when compared with international rivals. Thus, the Korean situation under the auspices of the IMF originates fundamentally from moral problems and weaknesses of Korean politics. Of all explanations related to this approach, in this line, the most powerful one is that personal values such as kinship, friendship, regionalism and academic ties dominate impersonal values such as fairness and impartiality in Korean politics. This reflects the conflict between official rule and unofficial behavior patterns. Corruption occurs when personal values encroach upon impersonal values.¹⁷ If we accept this interpretation, it has profound implications for Korean leadership in the process of nation-wide reforms.

The IMF bailout has greatly changed the reality of Korean politics. The so-called IMF situation reflects that not only the structure and institutions but also the logic and morality of Korean politics in the past could not run Korean society any more effectively. We can arrange the distinctive features of what is truly occurring in Korean politics after IMF intervention. Above all, it reminds us of the fact that the survival environment of Korean society is closely related to the influence of international society. This means that Korean politics is within the boundary of liberalization and globalization. It also requires that the domestic structure of politics, economy, and society be readjusted. At the same time, it requires us to review the morality issue of 'moral hazard'.

It is necessary to investigate the morality predicated on traditional values and behavior patterns which have been influencing the public sector as well as the private sector. In terms of publicity, this problem must be worked out. This is related to the distinction between the public and private sectors.

In addition, the expansion of liberal trends in Korean society raises several problems. One problem regards moral disagreement. Such disagreement shows up according to which belief we are considering as we understand the political matters. It also accompanies political conflicts. For example, whether prioritizing moral weights over individual freedom and rights, or giving priority to the values of community or public good, there is a relationship with fundamental moral beliefs. It is also related to the conflicts and confusion between oriental values and western values, as we may identify in debates on Asian values. Generally speaking, while western values emphasize individual freedom and rights, oriental values emphasize community, public good, family, and social solidarity. When we try to establish the basic direction of practical reforms, this debate could become a fundamental difference. Another is

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the conflict among the interests of groups, which is related to arguments for rights and actions for improving one's own interests. The conflicts between employees and employers - and between medical doctors and pharmacists in the process of reforms in Korea - gives us an obvious example of group egoism.

This reality of Korean politics definitely demands that Korean society readjust its whole structure and reestablish morality. While such a demand may not change the fundamental framework which maintains the settlement of democratization and the establishment of a market system, it requires readjustment of the basic structures and the reestablishment of morality which might support a new political, economical, and social environment. This new reality raises several questions regarding political leadership. For example, considering the current situation, can a strong political leadership in Korea still be effective? Furthermore, can other types of leadership - such as a liberal leadership - be an alternative to the tradition of strong leadership in Korea? Present Korean politics is in the process of reestablishing its institutions. Because on-going comprehensive reform requires renovation of existing institutions and habitual practices, there are many limitations to applying a liberal political leadership. Current comprehensive reform intends to realize the politics of institutions. However, in the process of reform, transforming leadership is usually required. Such transforming leadership aims to reform existing rules and institutions and contradicts with liberal political leadership as a simple mediator to resolve conflicts, which is expected in an institutional stability. A strong leadership that has predicated on the exclusive creation and promotion of the public good would also face considerable limitation. The reason is that in Korean society, regardless of the forms, the weight of individual rights and freedoms and the emphasis on human rights has increased to a considerable extent. The gradual expansion of the liberal trends requires political leadership in Korea to make an agreement with the people in dealing with public matters.

V. Conclusion: Leadership of the Public Good and Agreement

Since the foreign currency crisis at the end of 1997, Korea has been in bailout from the IMF. The reality requires the readjustment of the basic structure of Korean society. In this situation, Koreans are expecting an expanded role of political leadership. However, liberal trends in Korean society have gradually expanded. This situation demands politics of agreement. Considering this dual reality in present Korea, Korean people seem to expect that political leadership should play a leading role in readjusting the basic structure and its guiding principles through politics of agreement. In presenting a vision and policies for the adjustment, leadership is necessary to work through the deliberative process and reach an agreement among the members of political society. In this deliberative process, the acceptability of specific arguments and policies for the public good should be seriously considered.

We must now summarize the requirements for the current political leadership to reform the fundamental structure. First, the political leadership in Korea should realize the public good in agreement with the people. To reform the structure, political leadership is demanded to play the role of guardian and address visions and policies as former strong leaders did. However, the current leadership is to face another demand for the politics of agreement. This new demand arises from the reality of democratization and the expansion of liberalization in Korea. Without invoking an agreement among people, continual comprehensive reform can not be supported and, thus, can not be successful. Considering the abundance of liberal trends prevailing in Korea, agreement is a prerequisite for successful reforms.

Moreover, the current political leadership in Korea is expected to have a set of moral concepts different from those of the past. In the past, the morality of political leadership was to effectively increase economic values. In this process, human rights or individual rights was set aside. This morality, however, is no more acceptable in the present situation. Since many

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people have come to know about the importance of human rights and individual basic liberties, they no longer accept politics centered on the improvement of economic values. In short, to gain support from the people for the successful implementation of on-going comprehensive reforms, the current political leadership has to balance both economic values and human rights/individual liberties. This will be most beneficial in the formation and implementation of major reform policies.

Footnotes

1. This work was supported by the Center for Future Human Resource Studies in Korea and the Brain Korea 21 Project, and prepared for the International Leadership Association 2000 Annual Meeting, November 3-5, 2000, Toronto, Canada [\[return to text\]](#)
2. In characterizing modern Korean politics, some analysts have used the term 'authoritarian state' while some employ 'developmental state'. Other theorists may prefer still other terms. An authoritarian state interpretation highlights the negative aspects of the state role in the developing countries. In this paper I characterize the modern Korean state as developmental in order to illuminate its positive aspects in modern Korean politics. In the modern Korean developmental state, strong leadership is enshrined, which played a significant role in directing the nation. [\[return to text\]](#)
3. In his book, *The Way of National Rehabilitation* (written in Korean) (Seoul: Kwangmyung Publishing, 1978), Park tried to justify his own conception of the Koreanized democracy, the Rehabilitation political system. He attempts to establish Koreanized democracy that considers traditions and cultures beyond a mere Western model of democracy. [\[return to text\]](#)
4. See Nam Duck Woo, *Korea's Economic Growth in a Changing World* (Seoul: Samsung Economic Research Institute, 1997), pp. 112-3. [\[return to text\]](#)
5. See Yeon-ho Lee, "The Kim Dae-jung Government's Economic Reform and Limitations in the Rise of the Neo-Liberal State," *The Korean Political Science Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4((Winter 1999), p. 292. [\[return to text\]](#)
6. D. W. Nam, *Korea's Economic Growth in a Changing World* (Seoul: Samsung Economic Research Institute, 1997), p.121. [\[return to text\]](#)
7. For the Sunshine policy in detail, see Chung-in Moon & David I. Steinberg, eds., *Kim Dae-jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999); The Society for Northeast Asian Peace Studies, *The Kim Dae-Jung Government: The Sunshine Policy* (Seoul: Millenium Books, 1999). [\[return to text\]](#)
8. As for 'affective network', which may be versed into other terms in English, see Lew Seok-Choon, Chang Mi-hae, & Kim Tae-Eun, "Affective Network and Globalization of East Asia" (preliminary paper for the Second International Conference on Liberal, Social, and Confucian Democracy, Andong, Korea, March 13-17, 2000). In this paper, the authors analyze the functions or social effects of networks. Opening the possibility of employing affective networks to settle the confrontational relation of state and market. [\[return to text\]](#)
9. As for the formation and the role of Chaebol in Korean economy, see Kang Myung Hun, *Chaebol and Korean Economy* (Seoul: Nanam, 1996); Lee Han Ku, *The History of the Formation of Chaebol in Korea* (Seoul: Bibong, 1999). Both books are written in Korean. [\[return to text\]](#)

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10. Nam Duck-Woo, *The Korean Economy in the Era of Internationalization* (Seoul: Samsung Economic Research Institute, 1997), pp. 323-324. [\[return to text\]](#)
11. Chaibong Hahm, "The Confucian Tradition and the Economic Reform," Jongryn Mo and Chung-In Moon, eds., *Democracy and the Korean Economy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), pp. 45-50. [\[return to text\]](#)
12. Thomas Hurka, "Indirect Perfectionism: Kymlicka on Liberal Neutrality," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 3. No. 1(March 1995), pp. 36-57. [\[return to text\]](#)
13. Ibid, p. 36. [\[return to text\]](#)
14. J. Donald Moon, "Communitarianism," *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, Vol. 1 (San Diego Academic Press, 1998), p 552 [\[return to text\]](#)
15. Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 207-8. [\[return to text\]](#)
16. "The Korean Government's Agreement with IMF", *Korea Observer*, Vol. XXIX, No. 3(Autumn 1988), p. 583. [\[return to text\]](#)
17. For an explanation of the causes of corruption in relation to the unclear distinction between public and private realms, see Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 91-110. [\[return to text\]](#)

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