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## Mater Asia

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*Pan Suk Kim, ed.*, *Public Administration and Public Governance in ASEAN Member Countries and Korea (Seoul: Daeyoung Moonhwasa, 2009)*. 344 pp. \$17.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9788976443267.

*Pan Suk Kim, ed.*, *Civil Service System and Civil Service Reform in ASEAN Member Countries and Korea (Seoul: Daeyoung Moonhwasa, 2010)*. 414 pp. \$20.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9788976443519.

*Pan Suk Kim, ed.*, *Public Sector Reform in ASEAN Member Countries and Korea (Seoul: Daeyoung Moonhwasa, 2011)*. 447 pp. \$23.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9788976443861.

The books reviewed in this article might be said to form a trilogy. They explore a complex phenomenon from three related perspectives, harping on a common theme but with distinct

approaches. They offer, in effect, three complementary accounts of the genesis, development, and ongoing course of change in the institutional framework for public administration and governance in a singular grouping of countries. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born in 1967 as a club of five developing countries, uncomfortably positioned among rival regional giants. Today, with 10 member states, ASEAN forms a foremost institution looking to charter a course of closer cooperation in ways reminiscent of Europe, which still is pursuing this course with obstacles and challenges at every step of the way. With 583 million people, ASEAN rivals the population of the European Union (EU) but covers a much larger area (approximately 1.7 million square miles/4.5 million square kilometers) in a part of the world that is of growing strategic importance. Its position at the crossroads of major routes of commerce and civilization accounts for its diversity but also explains the synergies

and conflicts that gave shape to the history and the systems of governance of the several countries concerned.

Considering the singular complexity and diversity of the subregion, the task of bringing together three sets of national studies on distinct but cognate themes, and relating them all to Korea, the editor's own home, may rightly be considered a tour de force. Pan Suk Kim, currently the president of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), put his stamp on the enterprise: first, the common structure of the three books in question, with a preface and an introduction by the editor himself, and national accounts of roughly the same dimensions in the alphabetical order of the particular countries (Korea being the exception), irrespective of their size or geographic location. To put these chapters together, the editor has been able to count on a veritable galaxy of scholars and practitioners, most hailing from the countries whose development they trace. Even the several chapters conform to a similar pattern. They feature, in all cases, surveys of the history and background, accounts of recent developments, and contemporary challenges and general conclusions. This shared approach makes for easy reading. It helps in the drawing of parallels and in attempting prognoses about the future of ASEAN as a whole.

The push for greater unity and cooperation has helped redefine a geographic area hitherto better known for diversity and fragmentation. The editor and authors have done an excellent job of identifying the forces that brought the countries together and shaped the course of development of their respective systems of governance and administration. The preface and introduction as well as the opening sections of each of the national chapters provide insights on this subject. The factors and forces in question may be summed up as follows:

- The integrative influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam, which spread at different times and variously affected the different parts of the region.
- Colonial domination by the Dutch, the British, the French, and the United States, to which Japanese occupation was added, for a time, during World War II.
- The birth and rise of nationalism, to which expected reaction to foreign occupation and exploitation contributed significantly.
- The struggle for emancipation from foreign domination and the protracted wars of national liberation, compounded by the effects of the Cold War.
- The tide of globalization, which greatly gathered momentum with the end of the Cold War and carried in its trail shifts in the distribution of power worldwide, and in Asia in particular. (Warsaw 1988)

All three volumes offer accounts of this long march to independence and institution building, complicated as it was by domestic unrest, civil war, and the periodic imposition of dictatorial regimes in the name of safeguarding the peace or restoring law and order. With Myanmar, the latest to accede to civilian rule, it may be asserted that after six decades of mostly uneven progress toward the rule of law and democratic governance, all of the ASEAN countries have reached a state of "normalcy" and overall development, political and economic, which makes their cooperation and further rapprochement much easier to envision and, indeed, to bring about.

To be sure, wide disparities persist. The distance separating the per capita income levels of Singapore or Brunei, on the one hand, from those of Myanmar or Laos, on the other, are still daunting. Of course, in terms of size and population, the gap between Indonesia and Brunei or Singapore is even more remarkable. Such differences, however, also apparent in Europe, are matched by common goals and a sense of a shared destiny that, as with the EU, recently found expression in the design of a banner to fly with the national flag outside of public buildings in all ASEAN member states. A set of institutions, located mostly in Jakarta, and subregional activities—of which the structured dialogue that gave birth to these three volumes is but a telling example—suggest that more is coming.

Significantly, these books represent the outcome of the ROK-ASEAN Public Management Forum, indicating that the move toward integration has elicited an interest in ASEAN's northern neighbors, notably in Korea. Each of the volumes in question is a synthesis of sorts of the national experience in developing the structures of a modern sovereign state. Taken together, the volumes—a veritable trilogy—explore the interface of civil service systems, public service reform, public administration, and governance in the 10 member states of ASEAN and Korea.

The merit of the forum and of a shared approach that brings the books together to form a whole is that all three highlight commonalities and differences among the countries concerned. Considering disparities of size and population—the island state of Singapore, at one end of the spectrum, and the vast kaleidoscopic archipelago of Indonesia on the other—as well as cultural differences and divergent points of departure of these nine former colonies and the kingdom of Thailand, their overlapping trajectories speak volumes on the shared problems that they have had to face. The progress, in all cases, accomplished in the space of 67 years, is nothing short of remarkable. Still, challenges remain, and where they emerge more forcefully, they might pose serious obstacles to the attainment of the goals that the countries have

proclaimed and that the contents of the books set out in some detail: good democratic governance, effective public management, and socioeconomic development for growing populations with rising expectations.

The prevalence of graft and the growth of corrupt practices in all but Singapore are widely explored in depth, though mostly in the volumes on civil service systems and public sector reform. Closely tied to combating corruption is the need to develop professionalism and, to this end, to secure the required degree of autonomy in the selection and management of public service cadres in order to safeguard the prevalence of merit, as well as cost-effectiveness and orderly administration. To accomplish these objectives, the member states of ASEAN have followed distinct paths. This could be hardly surprising, given the different policies and often conflicting trajectories that they have adopted since the days of independence. What is more striking is the degree to which these paths increasingly have converged in certain areas, a point that all three books explore in some detail. This may be taken to show the impact of ideas—the hegemony of models, one is inclined to argue, that have prevailed worldwide—since the early 1990s. It also brings to light the effects of international cooperation, notably through the network of institutions, both regional and global, that helped spread these models and ideas.

The swift advance of globalization after the decline and fall of the Soviet Union paved the way for the quick triumph of the New Public Management (NPM). What started as a policy to address particular needs in New Zealand, Australia, and Great Britain soon made inroads in the region. From Korea to Indonesia, from Malaysia and Singapore, to the Philippines and Thailand, adoption of the lingo of NPM soon led to its embrace as the paradigm to follow in “reinventing government” and reforming the public service. Authored by notable scholars, the chapters on these countries that appear, in particular, in the two books on governance and public sector reform afford some telling examples of its pervasive influence and popularity. To quote from one of these chapters,

The idea of reinventing government (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), provides a new perspective for public sector reform (PSR), which is technically referred to as “New Public Management” (NPM). NPM has been embraced as the contemporary paradigm through which governments need to be reformed and the public sector re-engineered (Antui and Analoui 2008 and, as quoted in Analoui 2009). This new management concept tends to challenge public managers to act as entrepreneurs who push efforts towards a privatized government that places

values on the use of public money (Denhart and Denhart 2000).<sup>1</sup>

In forceful terms, the author describes the amazing sweep that, in some 20 years, transformed the public sector in Southeast Asian countries and beyond and certainly influenced deeply the ways of thinking on government, perceptions of the state, and views on what should properly be the chief goals of reform. Some of these goals are shared. As in his introduction, the editor points out, they include trimming the size of the civil service, particularly in countries where, either through patronage practices or for other diverse reasons, it has exceeded all bounds; making public sector management more accountable, transparent, and results based; and streamlining administrative processes (14). These are certainly worthy objectives of public service reform. They have formed part of the agenda of administrative reform since the very early days (Caiden 1969, 1971; Caiden and Siedentopf 1982).

The purport of such concepts as public service professionalism, transparency, accountability, value for money, performance evaluation, streamlining, and innovation are prominently featured by most of the contributors to these three volumes, notably in chapter 12 of *Public Sector Reform in ASEAN Member Countries and Korea*. Authored by Pan Suk Kim and Kil Pyo Hong, it sets, in 39 dense pages, what might well be described as a comprehensive agenda for public sector reform, modernization, and good governance. The ground that it covers includes most of the objectives that we would associate with reform efforts worldwide—namely, civil service reorganization, anti-corruption strategies, decentralization, financial and budgetary reform, regulatory reform, informatization, and public–private partnerships (392).

Though the authors of this chapter make extensive references to the United Kingdom and the United States, their sights are set firmly on Asia, with a focus on the ASEAN member states and Korea. With this group of countries in mind, they are the first to admit that an overly hasty adoption of the New Public Management, across the board, may now be viewed as flawed, and that faith in some of its precepts is also largely misplaced. The meteoric rise of NPM is best explained in terms of a transient combination of trends and events, which also explains the addiction to market-based solutions, hostility to government, and a pronounced penchant for neoliberal creeds. Since the latest crisis, which still afflicts vast swaths of the world population, the appeal of neoliberalism and the New Public Management is probably on the wane. This does not mean, however, as Kim and Hong make clear, that NPM is passé, with nothing solid to offer.

NPM is still in use. In fact, as they point out, “administrative paradigms are not disconnected... but

rather ... overlapping.” There is a lot of value in many of the prescriptions we owe to NPM (391). Therefore, there is no need to throw out the baby with the bath water. What, on the other hand, may be rejected outright is the intellectual scaffolding that gave the New Public Management its peculiar antistate, antigovernment orientation. As pointed out already, this was the product of circumstance. Pushed to libertarian extremes, the intellectual underpinnings of the New Public Management soon led to contradictions, desultory results, and the field itself off at a tangent.

At the root of it all was a concept highlighting “public management” but openly hostile to all things collective and bent on privatization as almost a “good in itself.” To paraphrase David Brooks (2012) in describing current expressions of this rampant belief system, its acolytes insist “that only if the government gets out of the way, then people’s innate qualities will enable them to flourish.” In reality, however, as Brooks later adds, “the skills that enable people to flourish are not innate but constructed by circumstance” or, one might add, by government, communities, and public administration. In the New Public Management, hostility to government was carried to extremes. Often allied with a cult of “entrepreneurial managers” and “individual leaders,” it has certainly been tied to the “great men idea”—those known as “job creators” in neoliberal parlance. Sometimes it has amounted to a veritable “hero worship.” Though this has been discredited in recent years, it is still “alive and well,” particularly in right-wing and neoconservative circles (Haruna 2009, 943). One may argue with Donald Moynihan, underlining the significance of a “contextual approach” to administrative values, that such trends have moved us away “from mainstream . . . into an intellectual ghetto, while ignoring the main concern of the public, which is improved government performance” (2009, 813; see also Demir 2009).

It is high time to restore the “public” in public administration and “community” as the context that makes governance important, and that adds meaning and significance to public sector reform (Nabatchi 2010, 2012). It is time to rekindle the “Light of Public Space” (Scott 2009), a concept that provides the common thread that runs through all three volumes, underscoring the need for a historical, contextual approach to the study of public governance and public administration.

It is time to recognize that public administration—and also public management—make sense only in the context of what we consider as *public*: the commons, the general interest, the public sphere or sector, and public goods. Removed from this context—uprooted, so to speak, from what offers it vitality—public administration and governance lose much of their importance. Reduced to mere techniques—to the

pursuit, in fact, of speed and cost-effectiveness—they still fulfill a function whose value should not be discounted. Where they lose out, however, is the essential role that, properly understood, they are called on to play in democratic governance, the building of communities, the promoting of public welfare, and the protection of citizens. This point was made forcefully by the United Nations Development Programme’s director of democratic governance practice in her Guy Braibant keynote address at the IIAS International Congress in Lausanne in July 2011 (Fraser-Moleketi 2012).

The merit of the books, “the trilogy” as we may call it, may lie in the fact that they have placed the triptych—public administration, public service, and public governance—firmly in the context to which it belongs: the national community, the commonwealth of citizens in the ASEAN member states and the Republic of Korea. The particular structure preferred in the drafting of the chapters and in presenting the countries made this eminently possible. The reader is always reminded of what the books are about: the actual public services, the living institutions of 10 specific countries in comparative perspective. In each of the several chapters, the reader is introduced to the history and the culture of the countries there described, invited to understand the countries’ institutions in light of their development and the particular challenges either already met or likely to be faced, also in a given context. It is a rewarding exercise to which the overall quality of the trilogy contributes.

The three books reviewed here fill an important gap. While studies of discrete East Asia systems abound, it would be hard to find a comprehensive account of all of the ASEAN countries in terms of public management, of civil service reform and governance prepared in comparative perspective. What is more, it would be hard to find a counterpart on ASEAN to the voluminous output already out in print on the EU. The success of ASEAN countries in projecting their identity as a new and important grouping of independent states may change this situation.

Indeed, the present trilogy may be a welcome harbinger of things to come. Considering the concept of “administrative space” and the role that this concept has played in the shaping of shared norms for the construction of Europe (Timsit and Argyriades 2012), it may be time to ask how relevant this concept may be or may soon become the ASEAN experience. How close are the member states of this community of nations to adopting such shared norms of governance or to committing themselves to a “common South East Asian administrative space”?

The issue is worth exploring for yet another reason. There can be little doubt that, until very recently,

a student immersed in the reading of textbooks on “good governance” or public administration might come out of this task believing that he had mastered “best practices” and norms, whose origins lay rooted in Western countries exclusively. In the words of a notable scholar, the surge of the New Public Management represented that precisely: “the most recent urge to develop a science of administration with principles of universal validity” (Heady 2001, 391). In light of this approach, a public sector reform, in whichever part of the world, came dangerously close to being conceived in terms of partaking of a movement and adjusting to the requisites of what “is also referred to as Global New Public Management” (Prasojo 2011, 83).

The value added of studies like those offered in the trilogy produced by Pan Suk Kim is that they may dispel such myths of “global convergence” (Pollitt 2001) and the related creed that public administration and governance are theoretical constructs fashioned solely in Western Europe or the United States. Even a cursory reading of Max Weber would suffice to lay such creeds to rest. To another famous German, Friedrich Nietzsche, we owe an important distinction between the warrior-type and scholar—or mandarin-type of government and administration.

In the words Sang Jun Kim writing on this very subject, “China and Korea witnessed an early decline of the martial aristocracy compared to the West, Japan and other civilizations. The . . . Confucian elite, which competitively shared governmental offices and struggled with the ascriptive feudal aristocracy, mainly through the civil service examination system, finally won.” Already, by the late fourteenth century, a new Confucian elite had replaced the military warlords (Kim 2002, 57–59). It could fashion the structures of governance on principles and guidelines sharply contrasting with those which prevailed in the rest of the world. To China, humanity owes the earliest example of public service as a career, with competitive recruitment predicated on merit and excellence. It is hardly surprising to find that attempts to replicate this approach in the United Kingdom, during the mid-nineteenth century, were met with disbelief, hostility, and the fear that it would be introducing alien principles to the British mode of governance (Kim 2001, 57–58).

Max Weber opened his essay on the “Chinese Literati” with the profound remark that for no less than “twelve centuries, social rank in China has been determined more by qualifications for office than by wealth” (Gerth and Mills 1957, 416). To this observation, he added that in China, as in India, the literati were the decisive exponents of the unity of culture. “Territories not administered by officials educated in literature, according to [this] model, were considered

heterodox and barbarian,” in the same way as enclaves or populations not organized in a *polis* were by the Greeks.

With Weber, Nietzsche, his contemporary, shared both an encyclopedic knowledge of world civilizations and a deep admiration for Asia. By contrast, he believed that Europe had seen better days. Already in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, he prophesied the emergence of a united Europe. He added, however, this thought: “Europeans deeply believe that they represent, on this earth, the highest form of humanity. Asians, of course, are infinitely better” (Mann 1949, 116). For this reason, he looked to the rise of as many other powers on the world horizon as possible, in order to bring forth a “truly global perspective” on major global issues. As a concluding remark, one might express the hope that, with more publications like the books reviewed in this article, students of administration and governance will better appreciate the wide range and diversity of ideas and practices in Asian countries, of course, but also in the world as a whole. And arguably, in the long run, that we shall open our minds to perspectives that truly embrace the experience and the needs of humanity at large.

## Note

1. This excerpt is from Pairote Pathranarakul, “Public Sector Reform and Governance in Thailand,” in *Public Sector Reform in ASEAN Member Countries and Korea*, p. 311.

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