

Preface

The definition of ‘government’ seems to elude understanding by the humans who invented it. What is meant by ‘government’ varies, as demonstrated by sages and scholars who have ever attempted to define it in simple terms. Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle referred to the government as ‘the helmsman’ in the frame that views the nation as ‘a ship’. T. Lowi has gone to extremes to associate it with ‘conquest’, though it seems a bit far-fetched. Gregory Henderson, referring to a particular cultural matrix of Korea, echoed ‘vortex’, which denotes ‘a powerful, upward-sucking force active throughout the culture’. Examining the eight Republics that have woven the recent political history of South Korea since the liberation, I term it ‘the cycle of domineering’. The way in which each Republic has operated, invariably invites reference to ‘particularity’, as expressed in a particular person, a particular group, or a particular coterie surrounding it. When a domineering group split into rivaling factions, the Republic collapsed, with a new one following and perpetuating the vicious cycle of domineering.

Dominance by a particular group in power to the virtual exclusion of others, subject to demise if a brake was put on ‘running alone’, was the only way to keep a particular group in power. Is the vicious cycle of domineering an outgrowth of Korea’s native pattern of political culture? Is it characteristic of the developing countries in their quest for political stability and economic growth? Or is it the combination of the two? Seeking answers to these questions led me to grapple with a greater theme, ‘elites and political power’, around which the contents of this book are organized. This theme runs through the four parts that comprise this book. Part I examines problems related to its political and ruling systems by illuminating Korea and the Korean government in the global context. Part II explores Korea’s cultural and political matrix that renders a unique substance to the patterns of governing and political norms in the frame of ‘continuity and change’. Part III analyzes political power, the political parties and the elite in terms of their contribution to the vicious cycle of dominance. Part IV develops an understanding of the Korean government, with particular attention given to the unique pattern of its administrative system vis-à-vis that of other systems.

In publishing this book, there are many to whom I owe a great deal. The wisdom and insight of fellow professors of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies provided the over-arching guidance that made this publication possible.

My special thanks go to Professor Kim Byung-joon, Professor Oh Moo-keun and Professor Kim In-chul. My regular commitment to a winter course on the Korean government at the University of Delaware brought about scholarly interactions with Professor William W. Boyer, a valuable input into my effort to refine and systematize the content. On behalf of the publisher, Mr Edward Elgar provided encouragement and support, for which I am greatly indebted. Had it not been for the decision to publish it in an English version, this book might have lost access to foreign readers. Every line is the reminder of my indebtedness to Professor Hong Sah-myung who translated the manuscripts into English. For any deficiencies and errors found in this book, I am solely responsible.

