COMPARATIVE GOVERNANCE REFORM IN ASIA: DEMOCRACY, CORRUPTION, AND GOVERNMENT TRUST

Bidhya Bowornwathana and Clay G. Wescott

As the Twenty-First Century moves ahead, it is increasingly evident that globalization and democratization are strong forces playing crucial roles in shaping public sector transformation around the world. For Asian countries, the key questions are, how should selected reform ideas from other countries be diffused, and which parts of one's traditional government and culture should be retained? A common choice among Asian countries is to replace government with governance. Transforming bureaucracies from government to governance involves the acceptance of certain democratic principles such as accountability, openness, transparency, integrity, corruption-free, and high performance standards (Bowornwathana, 2006: 667-680).

Since Asian countries are highly diverse in terms of wealth, culture, and historical experience, reform tools should be used selectively, and adapted to local conditions (Cheung 2005: 274-5). Batley and Larvi (2004: 5-6, 29-30) point out some key differences in context between developed and developing countries. First, the pace and nature of reforms in developed countries are designed and carried out by the respective governments, and with the democratic support of their electorates. By contrast, reforms in developing countries are often designed by international agencies, and not fully understood or supported by citizens. In some cases, these reforms may be carried out by bureaucratic and political elites with the intent of preserving their existing interests, although the eventual outcome could be different (Cheung 2005: 276-7). Secondly, common reform packages designed to address governance challenges in developed countries are being transferred to a highly diverse set of countries, including transition economies, weak capacity and post-conflict states, post-authoritarian democracies, and Confucian meritocracies. Many of these developing countries have much deeper fiscal crises and sharper declines in public service than developed countries, yet programs often used OECD country designs as models. Where programs vary, the reason is often more failure to meet negotiated conditions, rather than differences in design. Thirdly, implementation of reforms in developing countries is uneven, with stroke-of-the-pen reforms often moving quickly, while necessary structural changes move slowly or not at all. In addition, chronic institutional weaknesses in many developing countries hinder reform effectiveness.

Successful reformers take these differences in context fully into account in crafting policy, institutional and regulatory changes for their countries.

CONTENTS

The articles in this issue are intended to be of interest to both academics and practitioners. The diversity of the Asian region is well-reflected in the eleven articles which cover a wide

range of topics, methodologies, and findings. To start with, Bidhya Bowornwathana analyzes how governance is being imported into the Thai Polity, resulting in competing hybrids and reform consequences. The next paper on Hong Kong by John P. Burns traces the evolution of Hong Kong's political and administrative systems from one dominated by its bureaucracy to one dominated by the political executive. He illustrates the impact of the change on the institutional arrangements in one policy domain, food safety. From Indonesia, Prijono Tjiptoherijanto sets out the basics of pay and employment in the Indonesia civil service, the imperative for reform, and some of the challenges being faced. Anthony B. L. Cheung notes that certain aspects of the experience of controlling corruption in colonial Hong Kong may have lessons for China's leadership today, and suggests that if a politically motivated strategy for controlling corruption could be aligned with public expectations for effective action, progress may be possible. Another scholar from Singapore, Jon S. T. Quah, concludes that if political will and the policy context are favorable, the best method for curbing corruption is to establish an independent anti-corruption agency and equip it with adequate powers, personnel and funding; however, where these conditions are not present, alternative modalities should be considered, and great care should be taken if it is decided to set up such agencies. The next article by Professor David S. Jones considers the burdens on business caused by regulatory procedures imposed by bureaucracy in the countries of Southeast Asia, and how the reform of such procedures has varied across region, with a particular focus on certain key business functions. From Taiwan, Milan Tung-Wen Sun attempts to evaluate the results of government reform in Taiwan's local government by focusing on one major question: Have local governments in Taiwan become "smaller and better"? The article by Pan Suk Kim reviews the efforts of the South Korean Government to develop major anti-corruption infrastructure such as the anti-corruption legislation and the anti-corruption agency. He also discusses the role of civil society in curbing corruption and the international evaluation of the South Korean Government's efforts to eradicate corruption. Suchitra Punyaratabandhu investigates citizen attitudes toward control of corruption, their trust in government, and the relationship between trust and corruption in order to determine whether these factors are conducive to governance reform. From Japan, Masao Kikuchi attempts to show the current level of trust in the Japanese Government. Government reform efforts to rebuild government trust at the central and local governments are assessed. Lastly, Gene A. Brewer, Yujin Choi, and Richard Walker use World Bank Governance Indicators to investigate government effectiveness in Asia. The key factors considered are: accountability and voice, control of corruption, wealth and income, and the presence of a democratic form of government.

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