

SELECTION OF THE KOREAN CIVIL SERVICE : POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND CONSEQUENCES

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In this study, selection policies and practices of, and their impact on, the Korean civil service are analyzed in terms of the three selection perspectives : merit, patronage, and bureaucratic representativeness. In the first section, the social and political culture of the Korean society are discussed, and developments in selection policies and practices of the Korean government are reviewed briefly in the historical context. The socio-political culture and bureaucratic heritages are an important determinant of social attitudes toward the quality and vigor of personnel practices of the government. Thus, an understanding of them is the first step for understanding or evaluating selection practices of the civil service of the society concerned (Shafritz, 1973).

In the following sections, selection policies and practices of the Korean civil service are examined. Special emphasis is given to the manner in which the selection variables have affected selection practices and impact they have had on the Korean civil service. Analytical focus is concentrated exclusively on the Korean administrators in the "General Service," who are covered under the overall application of the National, or Local, Civil Service Law.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Korean Social and Political Culture

The Korean society has had a historical tradition of absolute monarchy, a centralized bureaucracy, authoritarian bureaucratic culture, and well established hierarchical social order. Naturally, among the traditional values which have dominated the Korean society, authoritarianism has been the most salient in terms of its impact on social interaction patterns of public administrators, as well as on Korean people (Paik, 1982). The long-lasting patterns of social distinction and bureaucratic domination of the society, together with the Confucian emphasis upon the paternalistic familism, have reinforced authoritarianism. Authoritarianism emphasizes hierarchical control by the intellectual elites (the concept of "government for the people") with a corresponding loss of democratic participation (the concept of "government of the people" and "government by the people").

Authoritarianism seems to have had two contradictory impacts on the modern public personnel administration of the Korean bureaucracy. Its emphasis on the "government for the people" has reinforced elitism, which, in turn, has produced merit-based personnel practices such as a strictly competitive Senior Civil Service Examination (Gwago) and a regular review of performance in office (Ha, 1990). These practices were devised to select and retain intellectual elites with moral virtue, and screen out those without intelligence and moral virtue (Herper, Kim, & Pai, 1980). Though it appeared the practices were established to protect the philosophical principles and political prestige of the elites, the Examination and review of performance have served as a basis of a merit system (W. Kim, 1981).

However, the practices of authoritarianism entails balancing "dedication to the superiors" with "protection of the subordinates." Through

the process of performance appraisal and recommendation for special employment (Eumbo or Chungo) and promotion, senior bureaucrats could secure loyalty of junior bureaucrats. Instead, they have been encouraged to depend upon ascriptive criteria such as families, kinship, regional origin, or school ties in selecting and promoting their subordinates (Ha, 1990). The ascriptive characteristics of bureaucratic behavior have been strengthened further by familism and factionalism (Henderson, 1968).

In the traditionally status-oriented, familial social system, the individual was not the unit of social life. Instead, the family was the most significant social unit, while the individual was evaluated in terms of his class status (K. Kim, 1984). Nepotism was not considered particularly abhorrent because status, lineage solidarity, and family loyalty were recognized by all as legitimate. Naturally, a family or kinship background was important to one's success in the bureaucracy and the society as well.

As society has undergone modernization, familism has been weakened substantially. Even so, various forms of the ascriptive orientation have persistently survived. Factionalism based on school-ties, military background, and/or provincial origin has gradually replaced familism and become a predominant feature of political life (K. Kim, 1984). Nowadays, new factional variables such as T • K and P • K become more and more salient in the Korean society, which combine school-ties and provincial origin. These factors are recognized by many Korean people as most important to one's success in the organization in both the public and private sectors.

Another impact familism and factionalism have had on the selection practices of the Korean government is a heavy emphasis upon seniority as a selection criterion. Together with the authoritarian, patriarchal Confucian thought, familism and factionalism have given great value to seniority as a principle dominating social interaction in the Korean society as well as in the bureaucracy. Seniority has been a major

promotion criterion in the Korean civil service throughout its history.

Confucian tradition of the Yi dynasty also established a generalist tradition in the selection practices of the Korean government. Such a tradition was reinstated by the legalistic characteristics of the Japanese bureaucracy. The Yi dynasty emphasized leadership by intelligents embedded with Confucian thought and moral virtue. As a natural result, professionals and technicians have been looked down upon. On the contrary, generalists have occupied almost all the highest positions in the Korean society as well as in the bureaucracy. They have been assumed to be able to do nearly any job in government except those requiring highly specialized skills and knowledge (Cho, 1976).

A final point of interest concerning selection practices is the exclusion of women in the civil service. The patriarchal tradition of Confucianism has socialized Korean women to commit themselves exclusively to home affairs. Consequently, women have been excluded almost completely from the labor market as well as from the government. With increasing educational opportunities, the women's share both in the labor market and in the bureaucracy has increased greatly. However, their exclusion from the Korean senior civil service still remains conspicuous.

B. A Brief Historical Review

Throughout Korean history, bureaucrats dominated the elite positions in the society. Government positions were the only source of political power and economic revenue as well as social dignity. Even today, executive power is predominant and the senior civil service is one of the most prestigious occupations in the Korean society. Consequently, competition for the civil service, particularly for the senior civil service, has always been so keen that each political regime has tried to devise a selection system to single out the most intelligent and competent candidates for employment. Naturally, the Korean government has developed

a long tradition of merit-based selection of civil service.

The authoritarian characteristics of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) developed a merit-based selection system which included the Senior Civil Service Examination (Gwago), regular performance evaluations, and strict review of the candidate's qualifications prior to appointment. However, throughout the Yi dynasty, and particularly in its latter half, personnel selection was frequently made on the basis of patronage (e.g., family background, kinship, and school-ties) through personal recommendations by, and special employment of descendants of, the meritorious senior bureaucrats. Selection variables reflecting bureaucratic representativeness (e.g., social status, regional origin, and sex) also entered into selection decisions through status requirement for, and female exclusion from, the Senior Civil Service Examination and discrimination against residents of the northern magistries.

The selection system of the Japanese colonial government (1910-1945) replaced the ascriptive criteria-based selection system of the Yi dynasty with a modernized, merit-based selection system. Success in the Senior Civil Service Examination was still important to one's career in the government. However, status requirement for the Examination was abolished so that anyone could become a bureaucrat, ordinary or senior, if he was qualified. College education was a prerequisite for the Senior Civil Service Examination, and legal training was emphasized heavily. Consequently, administrative elites changed from aristocratic bureaucrats armed with the Confucian philosophy to professional bureaucrats with legal training. The legalistic tradition gave generalists great advantages in transfer and promotion, while technicians were discriminated against. In addition, discrimination against women also was predominant.

The American military government (1945-1948) was very anxious to establish a modernized civil service system by introducing the American concept of "merit" into the Korean government. However, the effort to

transplant the American model to Korea failed for the most part, mainly due to the short period of time and lack of experienced American administrators who really understood the differences in bureaucratic characteristics between the two nations.

The contemporary civil service system was first introduced into Korea in August, 1949 when the National Assembly enacted the Civil Service Law. Since then, a lot of changes have been made in the selection system of the Korean government. However, it still reflects many characteristics of the Yi dynasty and the Japanese colonial government.

II. SELECTION OF THE KOREAN CIVIL SERVICE

A. Classification

The Korean national civil service is divided into two broad categories: the "General Career Service" (Kyongryok-jik) and the "Special Career Service" (Teuksu Kyonryok-jik). The "General Career Service" includes about 97% of all the positions in the Korean civil service (*Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook*, 1993, p. 42). The "General Career Service" administrators are recruited and selected on the basis of individual merit, and their tenure and rights as a civil servant are guaranteed.

Of the "General Career Service" administrators, the "General Service" administrators (Ilban-jik) are covered under the overall application of either the National Civil Service Law or the Local Civil Service Law. Besides, as of 1992, they include 32.9% of the Korean administrators, representing 18.6% of the national administrators and 59.7% of the local administrators, respectively. As a consequence, they represent the Korean civil service and are the main subject of the Korean public personnel administration. They include technicians, researchers, and general administrators. These administrators, except researchers, are

classified again into 58 series of classes (jikyol) according to the nature of jobs, and into nine ranks, from Grade 9 (the lowest rank) to Grade 1 (the highest rank), based on the responsibilities and difficulties assigned to the job.

Of the 58 series of classes in the national "General Service," the "General Administration" series (Haengjung-jik) alone not only occupies 37.5% of all the positions, but dominates the senior positions (Grade 5 or above) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proportion of the "General Administration" Series in the "General Service"

Grade	National Adm.		Local Adm.	
	G.S.(N)	G.A.(%)	G.S.(N)	G.A.(%)
1	62	88.7	—	—
2	314	74.2	11	81.8
3	363	72.5	77	85.7
4	2,496	64.2	678	79.9
5	6,869	58.9	7,846	76.9
6	17,206	43.4	28,913	74.0
7	15,316	37.6	33,865	65.9
8	17,490	29.3	34,940	67.6
9	13,627	22.6	17,681	73.9
Total	73,747	37.5	124,011	70.2

Source: Calculated from *Census of Korean Administrators* (1989) : 144 & 148.

Domination of the "General Administration" series over the "General Service" is much more conspicuous in the local civil service. Seven out of every 10 local administrators and 8 out of every 10 senior local administrators belong to the "General Service" (Table 1).

Domination of the Korean civil service, particularly the senior civil service, by the "General Administration" series is related to the generalist tradition of the Korean bureaucracy, which was embedded by Confucian

tradition of the Yi dynasty and further strengthened by the legalistic characteristics of the Japanese bureaucracy.

Table 2 and Table 3 show the distribution of Korean administrators by fields of academic specialization and grade. Those who specialized in law, public administration, or political sciences have always occupied the largest proportion in Korean civil service. Moreover, their proportion increases from 18.9% in Grade 9 to 50.0% in Grade 1 in the national civil service, and from 11.3% in Grade 9 to 54.5% in Grade 1 in the local civil service.

On the contrary, the proportion of the Korean administrators with academic specialties in engineering or other fields decreases as grade goes up. Such a tendency becomes more apparent in the senior civil service than in the junior civil service.

Analysis of academic specialization may indicate selection practices, particularly promotion practices, of the Korean government which discriminate for administrators with specialties in law, political sciences, or public administration, and against those with specialties in engineering and others. Such a tendency becomes more apparent in the local civil service than in the national civil service. In sum, Table 2 and Table 3 clearly indicate the legalistic and generalist tradition of the Korean civil service, particularly the senior civil service.

Table 2. Fields of Academic Specialization of the National Civil Service*

(as of 1989)

Grade	Law, PS, PA	Econo. BA	Humanities	Engineering	Others
1	50.0	15.0	20.0	11.7	3.3
2	46.9	17.4	16.1	9.5	10.1
3	49.9	15.3	14.4	7.9	12.5
4	39.4	22.0	13.4	14.5	10.7
5	32.5	22.1	14.6	19.3	11.5
6	28.2	20.4	16.7	18.6	16.1
7	25.7	17.7	18.0	19.7	18.6
8	18.0	24.2	16.6	16.8	24.4
9	18.9	21.9	17.4	19.9	21.9
Total	26.2	21.0	16.5	18.3	18.0

*Excludes those without college education.

Source : Calculated from *Census of Korean Administrators* (1989) : 212-214.

Table 3. Fields of Academic Specialization of the Local Civil Service*

Grade	Law, PS, PA	Econo. BA	Humanities	Engineering	Others
2	54.5	—	18.2	9.1	18.2
3	38.7	16.1	14.5	14.5	16.2
4	36.1	12.7	15.0	20.5	15.7
5	29.9	14.3	17.3	18.4	20.1
6	24.5	13.6	19.0	21.6	21.3
7	19.2	9.5	16.8	29.5	25.0
8	17.6	11.1	17.2	28.5	25.6
9	11.3	13.7	15.7	35.2	24.1
Total	19.7	11.9	17.2	27.5	23.7

*Excludes those without college education.

Source : Calculated from *Census of Korean Administrators* (1989) : 220-222.

B. Selection

1. The Senior Civil Service Examination

Among the selection methods, the Senior Civil Service Examination (Gosi), an open-competitive employment examination for Grade 5 of the national civil service, has been believed to be most important to one's success in the government. Successful candidates in the Examination have been believed to be highly qualified, and thus given great advantages in subsequent promotion. The Examination has never been administered for the local civil service, however.

The high prestige of the Korean senior civil service has attracted many young, qualified candidates in the nation to compete for the senior civil service, despite the lack of any positive recruitment programs. The Senior Civil Service Examination, however, has been so restrictive that only a handful of candidates (1.5%) have been successful. Until 1962, when the Senior Civil Service Examination changed from a certification examination to an employment examination, the average number of annual successful candidates was only 27. Since 1963, it has increased sharply. However, it is still so limited that only 128 candidates have been successful in the Examination for the Administrative Service (Haengjung Gosi), and only 37 candidates in the Examination for the Technical Service (GisulGoshi), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows changes in annual average competition ratio and number of successful candidates in the Senior Civil Service Examination. In spite of a sharp increase in the number of successful candidates during the seventies and eighties, competition for the Examination had become even more competitive. The competition ratio had increased from 38 : 1 in the sixties to 108 : 1 in the eighties for the Administrative Service, and 24 : 1 to 77 : 1 for the Technical Service. However, it reversed to decrease sharply during the early nineties, from 108 : 1 to 66 : 1 for the

Administrative Service, and from 77 : 1 to 45 : 1 for the Technical Service. The decrease of competition ratio during the early nineties seems to be caused partly by the increasing number of successful candidates and partly by the lowering prestige of the Korean senior civil service.

Table 4. Competition Ratio in the Senior Civil Service Examination
(annual average)

Period	Adm. Service		Technical Service	
	Comp. Ratio	Succ. Cand.	Comp. Ratio	Succ. Cand.
1963-1969	38:1	43	24:1*	5*
1970-1979	45:1	160	28:1	44
1980-1989	108:1	127	77:1	38
1990-1992	66:1	227	45:1	42
Total	69:1	128	50:1	37

*Average ratio and number of the period of 1967 to 1969.

Source : Calculated from *Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook* (1993) : 108-109 & 116-117.

Table 4 also shows a generalist tradition. Although more than three times as many candidates have been successful in the Examination for the Administrative Service as those in the Examination for the Technical Service, competition for the Administrative Service has been much higher than that for the Technical Service.

Despite the increasing number of successful candidates, however, the proportion which the Examination occupies as a selection method decreases. During the eighties, the Examination provided about one fifth (21.6%) of new appointees to Grade 5, while the remaining four fifths were provided by either promotion (68.6%) or special employment (9.9%) (Ha, 1993, p. 77). Since the late 1980s, however, the proportion of selection through the Examination has decreased continuously, even to 9.9% in 1992, as shown in Table 5. Consequently, the number of successful

candidates in the Examination has been so limited that open-competitive employment to Grade 5 through the Senior Civil Service Examination has been regarded as an exception, rather than a principle.

Table 5. Composition of Selection Methods

(as of 1992 ; %)

Grade	National Civil Service			Local Civil Service		
	Open-Comp.	Special Emp.	Promotion	Open-Comp.	Special Emp.	Promotion
1	—	42.5	57.5	—	—	100.0
2	—	9.9	90.1	—	—	100.0
3	—	—	100.0	—	—	100.0
4	—	4.6	95.4	—	1.6	98.4
5	9.9	7.2	82.9	0.4	7.2	31.4
6	—	3.2	96.8	0.1	2.7	97.2
7	10.1	10.3	79.6	5.7	2.1	92.2
8	—	23.4	76.6	1.9	20.4	77.7
9	71.6	28.4	—	80.3	19.7	—

Source : Calculated from *Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook* (1993) : 154-155 & 158-159.

Another important characteristic of the Senior Civil Service Examination for the Administrative Service is its heavy emphasis on law. Since the Japanese domination, the predominance of legal subjects on the Examination has continued. Though legal subjects have been reduced and many other subjects traditionally excluded from the Examination have been included as elective subjects during the past two decades, emphasis on legal subjects in the Examination still lingers on. Even today, two (constitutional law and general provisions of the civil code) out of five compulsory subjects for the preliminary, multiple choice-type examination are legal subjects. Administrative law is still required for the main, essay-type examination, which only the survivors in the preliminary examination can take.

Though emphasized less than legal training, areas of political science, public administration, and economics have also been emphasized in the Senior Civil Service Examination. Concentration on training in the above fields has given candidates with academic specialization in those fields an advantage in passing the Examination. Moreover, domination of the "General Administration" series in the Korean senior civil service also has given these individuals an advantage in regard to later promotion, as shown in Table 2.

2. The Grade 7 Employment Examination

In Korea, open-competitive examinations for junior positions have been administered almost exclusively for Grade 7 and Grade 9 positions in both the national and local civil service. As shown in Table 5, in 1992, the national Grade 7 employment examinations (G-7 Examinations) provided 10.1% of new appointees to Grade 7 positions. However, its proportion decreased greatly from about 25.0% during the eighties to 10.1% in 1992. Instead, the proportion of promotion from Grade 8 increased from about 65.0% during the eighties to 79.6% in 1992 (Ha, 1990, p.100).

The proportion of employment to Grade 7 by the local G-7 Examinations is 5.7%, about a half of that by the national G-7 Examinations. However, it increased, though very slightly, from 5.0% during the eighties to 5.7% in 1992 (Ha & Kang, 1993, p.22).

Table 6 shows the competition ratio of and number of successful candidates in the national G-7 Examinations. As shown in the Table, starting from 1987 the competition ratio began to decrease rapidly while the number of successful candidates began to increase. Despite a rapid decrease in competition ratio, the Examinations are still highly competitive. The higher competition ratio for the Technical Service than that for the Administrative Service in the national civil service seems mainly due to a smaller capacity allocated for recruitment.

The local G-7 Examinations show a similar trend of changes in

Table 6. Competition Ratio in the National G-7 Examinations

Year	Adm. Service Exam.		Technical Service Exam.	
	C.R.*	S.C.*	C.R.	S.C.
1980	40:1	395	—	—
1985	81:1	300	207:1	69
1987	116:1	200	237:1	35
1989	96:1	200	159:1	20
1991	48:1	300	84:1	63
1992	41:1	550	81:1	93

*C.R. = competition ratio ; S.C. = number of successful candidates.

Source : *Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook* (1993) : 121 & 132-133.

competition ratio and number of successful candidates. However, their competition ratio is much lower than that of the national G-7 Examinations. For example, the competition ratio of the Chungbuk Provincial G-7 Examinations decreased from 38 : 1 in 1987 to 17 : 1 in 1991, while the number of successful candidates increased from 15 to 30 during the same period (Ha & Kang, 1993, p. 24). The lower competition for the local G-7 Examinations is mainly due to the very limited promotion opportunities of local administrators. In the Chungbuk provincial government, for example, 45 out of 92 positions (48.9%) on section chief level and 27 out of 30 positions (90%) on bureau chief level or above are occupied by national administrators (Ha & Kang, 1993, p. 21). Such a domination of national administrators over the senior positions of the local governments has been caused by subordination of the local governments to the national government. In Korea, local governments have been placed under the full control of the President and the Minister of Home Affairs, who have exercised appointing power to the governor, mayor, magistrate, and many other senior positions of the local governments.

The G-7 Examinations are legally required to be set to the educational level of junior college graduates. However, competition for the

Examinations is still so sharp that the educational level of successful candidates heightens every year. The proportion of those who have college educations or above among the successful candidates in the national G-7 Examinations for the Administrative service increased sharply from 21.0% in 1980 to 74.3% in 1985, and to 92.9% in 1992 (*Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook*, 1993, p.123). Their proportion for the Technical Service also increased from 59.4% in 1985 to 96.8% in 1992 (*Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook*, 1993, pp.136-137).

Final points of interest here are subjects and type of the G-7 Examinations. Applicants for the Examinations have to take four subjects in the preliminary examination and four to five additional subjects, depending on the series of classes to which they apply, in the secondary, main examination. Only the survivors of the preliminary examination can take the main examination. Both the preliminary and main examinations are multiple-choice type. Too many subjects in the multiple-choice type examination, along with very strong competition, have made the Examination a simple memory test, rather than a selection test to measure each candidate's comprehensive capabilities and potentialities.

3. The Grade 9 Employment Examination

During the eighties, the Grade 9 employment examinations (G-9 Examinations), open-competitive examinations for Grade 9, which is the lowest grade in the Korean civil service, provided about 67% of new appointees to Grade 9 in the national civil service (Ha, 1990, p. 100), and 72% in the local civil service (Ha & Kang, 1993, p. 22). Their proportion increased to 71.6% in 1992 in the national civil service and to 80.3% in the local civil service, respectively (Table 5). Table 5 also shows that the proportion of selection through G-9 Examinations is higher in the local civil service (80.3%) than in the national civil service (71.6%).

The composition ratio of and number of successful candidates in the

national G-9 Examinations show a similar trend of changes to those in the national G-7 Examinations (Table 7). The competition ratio began to decrease from 1987, from 61 : 1 in 1987 to 33 : 1 in 1991 for the Administrative Services and from 175 : 1 in 1987 to 27 : 1 in 1991 for the Technical Service. The decrease of competition ratio has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of successful candidates during the same period, as shown in Table 7. However, the competition ratio reversed to increase again in 1992.

Table 7. Competition Ratio in the National G-9 Examinations

Year	Adm. Service Exam.		Technical Service Exam.	
	C.R.*	S.C.*	C.R.	S.C.
1985	54:1	321	—	—
1987	61:1	343	175:1	20
1989	49:1	354	72:1	30
1991	33:1	452	27:1	75
1992	47:1	561	32:1	120

*C.R. = competition ratio ; S.C. = number of successful candidates.

Source: *Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook* (1993) : 138-139 & 150.

The local G-9 Examinations also show a similar tendency in changes. As in the case of the G-7 Examinations, their competition ratio is far lower than that of the national G-9 Examinations. For example, in the Chungbuk Provincial G-9 Examinations during the period of 1987 to 1991, the competition ratio decreased from 12 : 1 to 6 : 1, while the number of successful candidates increased from 157 to 740 (Ha & Kang, 1992, p. 24).

Despite a continuous decrease of the competition ratio accompanied by an increase of the number of successful candidates, the educational level of successful candidates in the Examinations becomes higher every year. The proportion of those with college educations or above among the successful candidates in the national G-9 Examinations for the

Administrative Service increased drastically from 7.3% in 1980 to 31.5% in 1985, and to 72.7% in 1992 (*Ministry of Government Administration yearbook*, 1993, pp. 142-143). Their proportion in the Examinations for the Technical Service also increased from 20.0% in 1987 to 63.3% in 1992 (*Ministry of Government Administration yearbook*, 1993, p. 152). Even in the local G-7 Examinations and G-9 Examinations of the Chungbuk province, their proportion increased from 35.7% in 1987 to 62.5% in 1991, with a corresponding decrease of the proportion of those with secondary school education or below from 51.6% in 1987 to 27.1% in 1991 (Ha & Kang, 1992, p. 25). Given that the G-9 Examinations have been supposedly set in tune with the level of secondary school education, the proportion of college graduates obviously indicates over-qualification of the successful candidates at the sacrifice of those with secondary school education or below.

Like the G-7 Examinations, these Examinations have been criticized for being a simple memory test, rather than being a comprehensive selection device. Every applicant has to take seven to eight subjects in both preliminary and secondary tests. Both tests are multiple-choice type. In addition, such compulsory subjects as national ethics, Korean history, mathematics, and English are regarded as of little use to performance on the job by the occupants of junior positions (Ha & Kang, 1992, pp. 31-32).

4. *Special Employment*

While open-competitive employment is declared as a principle, special employment has also been used widely. In principle, special employment is supposed to be used only for the positions which require political considerations or highly specialized qualifications, where an open-competitive examination is difficult to administer. However, in practice, it has been widely used, particularly for the Grade 8 and Grade 9 positions. Though it decreased to some extent during the eighties,

special employment still provides about 20% to 30% of the new appointees to the Grade 8 and Grade 9 positions (Table 5).

In the Korean government, special employment has been criticized for being abused for patronage selection, which has been based frequently on kinship, school-ties, regional origin, or military background. With the increasing industrialization and democratization, patronage selection based on blood-ties and military background had begun to decrease and is believed to be abandoned to a considerable extent. However, patronage selection based on political consideration or factional ties, such as school-ties or regional origin, had been used continuously.

C. Promotion

Among the selection methods used, promotion has been the predominant method of filling vacancies in the Korean civil service. Promotion has become even more prevalent recently. For example, its proportion in selection of the national Grade 5 administrators increased from 68.6% during the eighties to 82.9% in 1992, with the corresponding loss of the proportion of the Senior Civil Service Examination, from 21.6% during the eighties to 9.9% in 1992 (Ha, 1993, p. 77 ; Table 5).

As shown in Table 5, with the exception of the national Grade 5 positions to which assistant to vice-ministers have been transferred frequently through special employment, almost all the positions, junior or senior, in both the national and local governments are filled by promotion. It is used even more widely in the local governments than in the national government. Even in the local Grade 7 positions where open-competitive examinations have been administered annually, 92.2% of vacancies are filled through promotion from below.

Such a wide use of promotion may have positive aspects, however. At some levels of a bureaucracy, this may be the optimum way of strengthening the professional civil service. However, the Korean selec-

tion patterns show a different case. Even at the crucial threshold of senior civil service (Grade 5), 8 to 9 out of every 10 incumbents are promoted from the clerical level. Moreover, almost all the administrators on bureau chief level or above also have been promoted from below. The extremely high promotion ratio in the Korean senior civil service may contribute to its stagnant atmosphere and decreasing productivity.

Promotion examinations have never been required for promotion except for promotion to Grade 5. Promotion to bureau chief level (Grade 3) or above depends entirely on the discretion of the head of each ministry or agency (J. Y. Kim, 1989). Only a minimum number of years of service is required for being candidates for promotion. Promotion to section chief level (Grade 4) or below is solely based on the ranking of each candidate on the promotion eligibility list. Each candidate's ranking on the promotion eligibility list is determined on the basis of performance rating (50% for Grade 5, 40% for Grade 6 or below), working experience in the civil service (35% for Grade 5, 45% for Grade 6 or below), and training record (15%).

Promotion from Grade 6 (the highest grade in the junior civil service) to Grade 5 (the lowest grade in the senior civil service) must be based on the promotion examination. The Open-Competitive Promotion Examination, where competition is government-wide, has been rarely used. Consequently, most promotions to Grade 5 have been made through the General Promotion Examination, which limits competition for promotion within each ministry where the candidates are working. Each candidate's ranking on the promotion eligibility list is of critical importance here again. Not only does it determine eligibility for candidacy for the promotion examination, but it is combined with each candidate's test scores to select the successful candidates in the promotion examination.

Given the objectivity of seniority and training records as criteria, performance rating appears to be the most important determinant of promotion in the Korean civil service. Performance evaluation, how-

ever, has been criticized for being subjective and arbitrary. Confidentiality and ambiguous criteria of performance evaluation has also made subjective judgment much easier.

Indeed, 7 out of every 10 Korean senior civil servants believe that promotions are made on the basis of non-merit factors. Among the factors, personal connection is believed to be the most influential factor (36.8%), followed by individual competence and performance (30.1%) (Suh, 1975). School-ties, military background, and provincial origin, among other factors, have been repeatedly reported to be most important to formation and maintenance of personal connections in the Korean government. Recently, however, military background began to lose its influence substantially with a rapid progress in democratization of the Korean society.

Among the school-ties, Seoul National University has been most predominant not only in the national senior civil service, but also in the political executives. Its graduates have occupied more than 40% of the national senior administrators and political executives on the vice-minister level or above (Ahn, 1990 ; Rho, 1979).

A similar tendency can also be found in the provincial governments. Domination over a provincial government by the graduates of the most prestigious college and/or secondary school in that province also exists to a large extent.

An analysis of provincial distribution in the national senior civil service clearly shows a disparity in bureaucratic representation. In spite of the somewhat equitable provincial distribution, the analysis reveals two important points concerning bureaucratic representativeness: discrimination for Kyongbuk province and against Chonnam province. Moreover, the disparity in recruitment ratio between Chonnam and Kyongbuk provinces increases in higher grades (Ha, 1988, p. 101). The cumulative effect of discrimination by provincial origin in the senior civil service has produced significant regional conflicts between those prov-

inces.

Seniority has been the most important criterion for promotion in the Korean government. A regression analysis of promotions in the national senior civil service shows that, among 12 variables included, seniority has the largest positive impact on promotions (beta coefficient on years of service is 1.27, with statistical significance at the .01 level), though its impact decreases with additional years of service (beta coefficient on the squared term of years of service is -0.51, with statistical significance at the .01 level) (Ha, 1988, p. 168).

Seniority often accompanies not only occupation-related skills but organization-specific skills and knowledge, which are of great value to the ministry (Becker, 1964). However, wide use of seniority as a promotion criterion, together with the high promotion ratio in the senior civil service, has a significant negative implication for the Korean civil service :

Through simple accumulation of seniority, clerically oriented bureaucrats could reach the top in sufficient numbers to dominate the whole bureaucracy. In fact, this domination occurred, and the bureaucracy was ruled by a cult of seniority and routine. What mattered most was precedent. Knowledge of precedent, mostly going back to the Japanese colonial period, claimed administrative pre-eminence. Innovations and reformist initiatives were jealously checked. (Lee, 1968, p. 106)

Another important factor concerning promotion is experience on certain key positions which has been regarded as a prerequisite for subsequent promotions. Transfer to these key positions, however, has been dependent exclusively upon the wish of the head of each ministry or agency. If properly used, transfer represents a good opportunity for developing occupational and organizational skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, however, transfer has been frequently used as a means of

punishment or as reward for personal loyalty (Cho, 1980). One study reports that 4 out of every 10 Korean senior civil servants surveyed believe that personal connection is the most important factor in transfer, just as it is in promotion (Suh, 1975).

III. SELECTION OF THE FEMALE CIVIL SERVICE

Traditionally, Korean women have been excluded from the labor market. Recently, however, they have begun to participate actively in the labor market. Naturally, their share in both the private and public organizations also has increased rapidly. As of 1992, they occupied 25.6% of all the Korean administrators, and 16.3% of the "General Service" administrators (*Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook*, 1993, p. 164).

Korean women have occupied only a small portion of the "General

Table 8. Female Administrations in the "General Service"

(as of 1992)

Grade	Total		National		Local	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	3	0.9	3	0.9	—	—
3	10	1.6	10	2.1	—	—
4	78	1.7	55	1.7	23	1.7
5	401	2.1	144	1.7	257	2.3
6	2,669	4.5	1,036	5.0	1,633	4.3
7	9,099	14.2	2,813	14.1	6,286	14.3
8	14,605	23.5	3,541	15.9	11,064	27.7
9	14,808	32.1	3,128	23.5	11,680	35.6
Total	41,673	16.3	10,730	12.1	30,943	18.5

Source: *Ministry of Government Administration Yearbook* (1993) : 164

Service" administrators: 7.0% in 1978, 7.9% in 1983, and 8.5% in 1987 (Ha, 1988, p. 105). Since then, however, their share in the "General Service" has increased rapidly, from 8.5% in 1987 to 16.3% in 1992. Today, they comprise 12.1% in the national "General Service," and 18.5% in the local "General Service," respectively (Table 8).

Many factors have contributed to the increase of women's share in the Korean civil service: abolition of the quota system imposed on female candidates, increase in women's educational level, changes in women's attitudes toward active participation in the labor market as well as in the government, strong stability and tenure of the public service, increasing economic needs for better living, and an increasing number of female administrators working after marriage.

Among these factors, abolition of the quota system seems the most important factor. Under the system, a quota had been given to the female candidates in order to guarantee a minimum level of women's share in the Korean civil service. Since the late 1980s, however, the number of female candidates competing for the civil service has increased substantially. Consequently, female candidates began to be discriminated against in selection by the quota system which had been designed and implemented to give preference to them. Since the abolition of the quota system in 1991, the success ratio of female candidates in the local employment examinations has almost doubled. Their success ratio in the local G-7 Examinations increased from 7.0% in 1990 to 15.0% in 1992, and in the G-9 Examinations also increased from 26.0% to 47.0% during the same period.

Despite a rapid increase of their share, Korean women are still underrepresented considerably in the Korean civil service, particularly in the senior civil service. As shown in Table 8, among the 25,245 Korean senior administrators, only 492 (1.9%) are women, with only 78 (1.7%) at the section chief level and 13 (1.4%) at the bureau chief level (Grade 3 and Grade 2). Not a single woman occupies Grade 1 positions.

Their underrepresentation in the senior civil service is more conspicuous in the local civil service than in the national civil service. Women's proportion in the local civil service (18.5%) is larger than that in the national civil service (12.1%). However, no female administrators can be found on bureau chief level or above in the local civil service.

The extremely small proportion of women in the Korean senior civil service appears to be mainly due to their early retirement. Most Korean women still tend to retire, voluntarily or involuntarily, from their work just before or after marriage so that they can commit themselves fully to their family. In fact, in 1983, women comprised only 2% of the Korean administrators whose age was 35 or above, while they occupied 22.1% of those in the age group of 28 or below. In other words, among the Korean female administrators, 78.7% belonged to the age group of 28 or below, while only 9.5% was at the age of 35 or above (Ha, 1988, p.106).

Another important reason for the exclusion of women from the Korean senior civil service seems to be their educational background. Though they are enrolling in colleges in increasing numbers, their majors are still concentrated heavily in areas such as teaching, nursing, home economics, and liberal arts, which are not related to the subjects on the Senior Civil Service Examination. In fact, only eight women were successful in the Examinations for the "Administrative Service" during the period from 1973 to 1985, comprising as low as 0.4% of 1,809 successful candidates (Ha, 1988, p.108).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes selection policies and practices of, and their impact on, the Korean civil service from the three selection perspectives: merit, patronage, and bureaucratic representativeness.

Among the Korean political culture, authoritarianism has had a strong effect on all the three types of variables: merit variables through

elitism, patronage variables through its emphasis upon "dedication to the superiors" and "protection of the subordinates," and representativeness variables through its emphasis upon paternalistic ethics and hierarchical social order.

Merit selection is represented by the open-competitive Senior Civil Service Examination. However, the Examination has been so competitive that only a handful of candidates have been successful, causing the wide use of special employment and promotion where patronage and favoritism can be readily employed. Even the G-7 and G-9 Examinations have revealed a similar tendency. Despite the abolition of educational requirements for the Examinations, the presence of so many candidates has caused the Examinations to be dominated by those with college education or above, which in turn is related closely to the parental socioeconomic status.

Another important point regarding the Senior Civil Service Examination is its heavy emphasis on subjects of law, political science, and public administration. Emphasis on such subjects not only reflects the generalist tradition, but also causes discrimination against women in recruitment and promotion in the Korean senior civil service.

The generalist tradition, which has been reinforced by position classification system, has imposed too many subjects on the G-7 and G-9 Examinations. Some of the subjects, however, are regarded by the occupants as of little use for doing the jobs in office. More importantly, together with a strong competition, too many subjects in the multiple-choice type examinations have made the Examinations a simple memory test, rather than a comprehensive selection device.

Patronage and representativeness variables are also entered into selection decisions, particularly decisions for special employment and promotion. Special employment has been used as widely as the open-competitive employment. However, it has been misused frequently due to consideration of patronage factors such as school-tie, provincial origin,

or military background, rather than being based on special skills and knowledge.

Selection patterns of the Korean civil service show the characteristics of a closed civil service system, where most senior positions are filled through promotion. However, performance evaluation, the most significant factor in determining each candidate's ranking on the promotion eligibility list, has been so subjective and arbitrary that it has been criticized for allowing much room for making promotion decisions based on the patronage and representativeness variables. Among others, provincial origin and school-ties have been the most enduring and predominant variables. Nowadays, new variables which combine school-ties and provincial origin become more salient.

Seniority has also been an important determinant of promotion. Together with the interagency orientation of the promotion practices, seniority restricts interagency mobility. Inter-agency transfer has worked frequently against promotion because it is often accompanied by a loss of seniority.

Despite a rapid increase in their share, Korean women are underrepresented considerably in the civil service, particularly in the senior civil service. Traditional social prejudices have socialized them to be concentrated heavily in the so-called female areas of specialization in college, and to retire from work after marriage.

The above findings clearly reveal the coexistence of and competition among the three types of selection variables in the Korean civil service. More importantly, it strongly suggests a need for reforming the selection system of the Korean government. The selection system should be changed not only to include more merit variables in selection decision, but also to reduce discrimination based on the patronage and representativeness such as provincial origin, school-ties, and sex. It should also be reformed to encourage professionals and specialists to enter the Korean government.

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