

[SUMMARY]

## **Ecological Social Market in East Asian State-Centered Approaches: Green Growth Strategy of South Korea**

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This paper addresses the concept of ecological modernization (EM), which aims to solve environmental problems through innovation. It is an environmental and economic policy concept that was first proposed by political economists and environmental political scientists in West Germany in the early 1980s (Mol and Jänicke 2009). It offered a new approach in which the environment and the economy are in a win-win relationship. EM also suggests integrated environmental and economic policies, incorporating not only traditional command-and-control policy but also new methods such as environmental innovation, industrial greening, eco-labeling, and disclosure of environmental information. Since the 2000s, it has spread extensively outside Europe as a theoretical foundation for policy development.

EM has been driven by international pressures and advances in policy on global environmental issues such as climate change. The concept of EM has spread to a variety of regions including East Asia. However, it has been pointed out that the implementation of policy differs greatly from the original European model (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000, p. 6). EM is a concept proposed for societies characterized by decentralized decision-making. M. Jänicke, one of the proponents of this theory, has criticized centralization and supports decentralized, consensus-led decision-making. This is because innovative, future-oriented actors cannot be involved in the decision-making process and political inertia cannot be remedied in the absence of effective consensus-led decision-making (Jänicke, 1986, p. 224). Relevant actors include not only corporations, but also citizens, environmental Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders (Kato, 2018).

Given this diversity, how are EM policies progressing in societies that adopt decision-making processes that are not decentralized and consensus driven? For example, many countries in East Asia are characterized by state-led, top-down decision-making processes. It has been reported that problems may also arise, such as the emphasis on economic growth rather than environmental

protection, the lack of attention to environmental problems not linked to economic growth, and the difficulty of involving actors other than the government.

In South Korea, President Lee Myung-bak introduced the “Low Carbon Green Growth Strategy” as a new national development strategy in 2008. The Green Growth Strategy involved “sustainable growth that reduces greenhouse gases and environmental pollution” and “a new national development paradigm that creates new growth engines and jobs through green technology and clean energy<sup>1)</sup>.” In this policy framework, economic growth and environmental protection took complementary roles against the background of global warming, resource and energy depletion, the need for a new driving force for growth, and the need to escape the limitations of the existing economic growth paradigm with a new paradigm (Kato, 2018, p. 4). Although Korea has since experienced two changes of government, the Second Five-Year Plan was prepared and implemented in 2014, and the Third Five-Year Plan in 2019. These plans have been the result of a strong, top-down, presidential process that has been criticized for the lack of civil society participation in decision-making. Especially in the early stages, environmental damage caused by large-scale river construction and limited effectiveness in the promotion of renewable energy and reduction of greenhouse gases have been causes of criticism. In other words, while it could be said that global policy learning occurred, domestic policies proceeded in a different way from that originally envisioned by EM.

From these perspectives, this paper discusses problems as below: will attempts at EM by centralized states result merely in greenwashing? Under what model of governance are such policies actually implemented in South Korea, and what challenges exist? This paper focuses on South Korea’s Green Growth Strategy and discusses the process, achievements, and challenges of its implementation. The First, Second, and Third Five-Year Plans for green growth have been prepared

by three different presidents. The changes in the governance of each also has been reviewed.

The greatest achievement of this government-led strategy has been the establishment of a framework to implement the vision of “economic development through environmental protection” as a policy in East Asia. Lee Myung-bak’s initiative led to the enactment of the Basic Law on Green Growth and in turn to the formation of a cross-sectoral consultative body. It is also commendable that the government has developed important policies related to the environment and energy, such as the Five-Year Plan, the Central and Local Promotion Plans, the Basic Plan for Climate Change, and the Basic Plan for Energy, and has established a framework for their implementation and evaluation. Even if policy priorities change due to changes in government, social conditions, or political issues, policies must be implemented so long as the framework for integrated environmental and economic policies based on the Green Growth Basic Law exists. It is remarkable that this framework has allowed the Green Growth Strategy to continue with only minor changes despite of the succession of two subsequent presidents in South Korea, where a change of presidents can cause a break in policy.

Nonetheless, a gap clearly exists between the social and economic goals of the Green Growth Strategy and EM and reality. For example, the level of civil society involvement has varied from president to president. It is thus necessary to open a route for civil society to participate in policy making regardless of the administration. In terms of environmental protection, results have also been poor. The 2017 Green Growth Indicators Analysis Report notes that there has been a decoupling of greenhouse gas emissions from Gross Domestic Product growth and an improvement in renewable energy consumption since 2008, but total greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption have increased (Statistical Research Institute, 2018). In addition, although the penetration rate of renewable energy is increasing, it remains low compared to the OECD average, and many

challenges remain before South Korea becomes a “green powerhouse.”

#### Note

- 1) Lee Myung-bak’s speech on 15th August, 2008.

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