

Singapore's Anti-Corruption Strategy :

Some Lessons for South Korea*

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ABSTRACT

Singapore is the least corrupt country in Asia according to annual surveys conducted by the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd(PERC) and the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI) in recent years.

The purpose of this paper is twofold : to describe the major features of Singapore's anti-corruption strategy ; and to identify those lessons which are relevant for South Korea's current efforts in combating corruption.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section describes Singapore's anti-corruption strategy in terms of the reduction of both the opportunities and incentives for corruption. The second section analyses how various governments in South Korea have tackled the problem of corruption with the aim of explaining why corruption is still a serious problem in spite of such anti-corruption efforts in the past. The final section identifies those lessons from Singapore's experience in combating corruption which are relevant for South Korea's current attempts in fighting corruption.

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Introduction

Singapore is the least corrupt country in Asia according to annual surveys conducted by the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd (PERC) and the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI) in recent years. In 1996, PERC ranked Singapore as the third least corrupt country in the world, after Switzerland and Australia, and the least corrupt of the 12 Asian countries in the study. According to PERC :

All countries have laws aimed at fighting corruption, but very few governments apply such laws as strictly and consistently as Singapore. Corrupt officials, particularly high-ranking ones, are dealt with in Singapore with a severity rarely seen elsewhere.¹⁾

Singapore's status as the least corrupt Asian country is confirmed by TI's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) from 1996~1999. In 1996, Singapore's seventh ranking on TI's CPI made it the least corrupt of the 13 Asian countries in the 54-nation study, with Pakistan (ranked 53rd) as the most corrupt Asian country.²⁾ Even though Singapore's ranking on the 1997 CPI dropped to ninth position, it was still the least corrupt of the 13 Asian countries in the 52-nation survey, with Pakistan (ranked 48th) retaining its position as the most corrupt Asian country.³⁾ In the 1998 and 1999 CPI, Singapore's seventh ranking confirms its status as the least corrupt of the Asian countries, while Indonesia (ranked 80th and joint 96th) replaced Pakistan (ranked joint 71st and joint 87th) as the most corrupt Asian country.⁴⁾ Table 1 below shows the average ranking of 12 Asian countries on the CPI from 1996~1999.

However, the situation was quite different in Singapore during the British colonial period, when corruption was a way of life. The 1879 and 1886 Commissions found that bribery and corruption was prevalent among the Straits Settlements Police Force in Singapore. More specifically, an analysis of the Straits Times from 1845 to 1921 showed that 172 cases of police corruption were reported during this period.⁵⁾ Corruption was also widespread during the Japanese Occupation (1942~1945) as the rampant inflation made it difficult for civil servants to live on their fixed salaries. The situation deteriorated during the postwar period as "corruption had also become a way of life for many people to enable them to cope with their low salaries and rising inflation."⁶⁾ The British Military Administration, which assumed control of Singapore after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, was also referred to derisively as the Black Market Administration. Finally, in his 1950 annual report, the Commissioner of Police, J.P. Pennefather-Evans, stated that graft was rife in government departments.⁷⁾

How did the People's Action Party (PAP) government minimise corruption in Singapore after assuming power in June 1959? Why is corruption no longer a way of life but a fact of life in contemporary Singapore? What lessons can South Korea learn

from Singapore's experience in combating corruption? The purpose of this paper is twofold: to describe the major features of Singapore's comprehensive anti-corruption strategy; and to identify those relevant lessons from Singapore's experience which can strengthen South Korea's current efforts in fighting corruption.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section describes Singapore's anti-corruption strategy in terms of the reduction of both the opportunities and incentives for corruption. The second section analyses how various governments in South Korea have tackled the problem of corruption with the aim of explaining why corruption remains a serious problem today. The final section identifies those lessons from Singapore's experience in combating corruption, which are relevant for improving South Korea's anti-corruption strategy.

Table 1. Average Ranking of 12 Asian Countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, 1996 ~ 1999

Country	Ranking (From least to most corrupt)
Singapore	1
Hong Kong	2
Japan	3
Malaysia	4
Taiwan	4
South Korea	6
Philippines	7
Thailand	8
China	9
India	10
Indonesia	11
Pakistan	12

Source: See notes 2-4.

Singapore's Anti-Corruption Strategy

As corruption was rife during the colonial period, the newly-elected PAP government realised in June 1959 that it had to curb the problem of corruption in order to ensure that the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) attain the country's development goals. Furthermore, the PAP leaders also realised that they could not minimise corruption if they retained the British colonial government's incremental anti-corruption strategy.

During the colonial period, corruption was rampant and perceived by many to be a low risk, high reward activity. Thus, the PAP government's immediate tasks were twofold: to minimise corruption and to change Singaporean's perception of corruption to a high risk, low reward activity. In November 1993, Senior Minister Lee Kuan

Yew, who was prime minister of Singapore from June 1959 to November 1990, stressed the importance of having a clean government to the 17 leaders from ten African countries, who were participating in the conference on The Relevance of Singapore's Experience for Africa. Lee said :

Our first goal in Singapore was to shape the government into an effective instrument of policy. This required strong, fair, and just leaders, who would have the moral strength to command the respect of the people. Responsibility for the people under their care required that luxurious living whilst our people were mired in poverty and backwardness was out. We ensured complete accountability and open separateness between personal assets and public funds. *Corruption, which we regarded as a cancer, had to be eradicated as soon as detected.*⁸⁾

Accordingly, the PAP leaders initiated a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy in 1960 by enacting the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) and strengthening the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), which was originally established by the British colonial government in October 1952. Since corruption is caused by both the incentives and opportunities to be corrupt, the new comprehensive strategy is based on the logic of corruption control as attempts to eradicate corruption must be designed to minimize or remove the conditions of both the incentives and opportunities that make individual corrupt behavior irresistible.⁹⁾

Reducing the opportunities for corruption

Singapore was a poor country in 1960 as its gross national product (GNP) per capita was US\$443.¹⁰⁾ As the PAP government could not afford to raise the salaries of civil servants, it focused on strengthening the existing legislation to reduce the opportunities for corruption and to increase the penalty for corrupt behaviour.

The POCA, which was enacted on June 17, 1960, had five important features to remove the weaknesses of the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance (POCO) of 1937 and to empower the CPIB in performing its duties. First, the POCA's scope was increased as it had 32 sections in contrast to the POCO's 12 sections.¹¹⁾ Second, corruption was explicitly defined in terms of the various forms of gratification in section 2, which also identified for the first time the CPIB and its Director. Third, to enhance the POCA's deterrent effect, the penalty for corruption was increased to imprisonment for five years and/or a fine of S\$10,000 (section 5). The fine was increased by ten times to S\$100,000 in 1989. Fourth, a person found guilty of accepting an illegal gratification had to pay the amount he had taken as a bribe in addition to any other punishment imposed by a court (section 13). The fifth and most significant feature of the POCA was that it gave the CPIB more powers and a new lease of life. For example, section 15 provided CPIB officers with powers of arrest and search of arrested persons. Section 17 empowered

the Public Prosecutor to authorise the CPIB" Director and his senior staff to investigate any bank account, share account or purchase account of any one suspected of having committed an offence against the POCA. Section 18 enabled the CPIB officers to inspect a civil servant's banker's book and those of his wife, child or agent, if necessary.

To ensure the POCA's effectiveness, the PAP government has amended it whenever necessary or to introduce new legislation to deal with unanticipated problems. In 1963, the POCA was amended to empower CPIB officers to require the attendance of witnesses and to question them. This amendment enabled CPIB officers to obtain the co-operation of witnesses to assist them in their investigations. In 1966, the POCA was strengthened by two important amendments. The first amendment (section 28) stated that a person could be found guilty of corruption even though he did not actually receive the bribe, as the intention on his part to commit the offence was sufficient for his conviction. The second amendment (section 35) was directed at those Singaporeans working for their government in embassies and other government agencies abroad as Singapore citizens would be prosecuted for corrupt offences committed outside Singapore and would be dealt with as if such offences had occurred in Singapore.¹²⁾

In 1981, the POCA was amended for the third time to increase the deterrent effect by requiring those convicted of corruption to repay all the money received besides facing the usual court sentence. Those who could not make full restitution would be given heavier court sentences.¹³⁾ On December 14, 1986, the then Minister for National Development, Teh Cheang Wan, committed suicide 12 days after he was interrogated for 16 hours by two senior CPIB officers regarding two allegations of corruption against him by a building contractor. Teh was accused of accepting two bribes amounting to S\$1 million in 1981 and 1982 from two developers to enable one of them to retain his land, which had been acquired by the government, and to assist the other developer in purchasing state land for private development.¹⁴⁾ An important consequence of the Commission of Inquiry that followed was the enactment on March 3, 1989 of the Corruption (Confiscation of Benefits) Act 1989, which was concerned with the confiscation of benefits derived from corruption. If a defendant is deceased, the court would issue a confiscation order against his estate.

The CPIB is the anti-corruption agency responsible for enforcing the POCA's provisions. It has grown by nine times from eight officers in 1960 to its present establishment of 71 officers, comprising 49 investigators and 22 clerical and support staff. The CPIB performs three functions: (1) to receive and investigate complaints concerning corruption in the public and private sectors; (2) to investigate malpractices and misconduct by public officers; and (3) to examine the practices and procedures in the public service to minimise opportunities for corrupt practices.¹⁵⁾ Unlike Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), which has 1,400 personnel, the CPIB is much smaller in size and does not require a large staff in spite of its heavy

workload, as its location within the Prime Minister's Office and its legal powers enable the CPIB to obtain the required co-operation from both public and private organisations.

Reducing the incentives for corruption

The PAP government was only able to implement the second prong of its comprehensive anti-corruption strategy the reduction of incentives for corruption by means of improving salaries and working conditions in the civil service in the 1980s long after it had achieved economic growth. The improvement in wages began in March 1972, when all civil servants received a 13th month non-pensionable allowance comparable to the bonus in the private sector.¹⁶⁾ The rationale for this allowance was not to curb corruption, but to enhance working conditions in the public sector vis-à-vis the private sector.

In March 1985, the then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, justified his government's approach to combating corruption by reducing or removing the incentives for corruption through the improvement of the salaries of political leaders and senior civil servants when he explained why the wages of the cabinet ministers had to be raised. He contended that political leaders should be paid the top salaries they deserved in order to ensure a clean and honest government. If they were underpaid, they would succumb to temptation and indulge in corruption. Lee argued that Singapore needed a corruption-free administration and an honest political leadership to preserve its most precious assets. He concluded that the best way of dealing with corruption was moving with the market, which is an honest, open, defensible and workable system instead of hypocrisy, which results in duplicity and corruption.¹⁷⁾

In addition to reducing the incentives for corruption, the PAP government had to improve the salaries and working conditions in the public service to stem the brain drain of competent senior civil servants to the private sector by offering competitive salaries and fringe benefits to reduce the gap between the public and private sectors. Indeed, the salaries of civil servants in Singapore were increased in 1973, 1979, 1982, 1989 and 1994 to reduce the brain drain to the private sector and the salary gap in the two sectors.

In October 1994, a *White Paper on Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government* was presented to Parliament to justify the pegging of the salaries of ministers and senior civil servants to the average salaries of the top four earners in six private sector professions: accounting, banking, engineering, law, local manufacturing companies and multinational corporations. The White Paper recommended the introduction of formal salary benchmarks for ministers and senior bureaucrats, additional salary grades for political appointments and annual salary reviews for the civil service. The adoption of the long-term formula suggested in the White Paper has eliminated the justification of the salaries of ministers and senior bureaucrats from scratch with each

salary revision as well as ensure the building of an efficient public service and a competent and honest political leadership, which have been vital for Singapore's prosperity and success.¹⁸⁾

Table 2. Monthly Salary of Super-scale Officers in the Singapore Administrative Service

GRADE	MONTHLY SALARY
Permanent Secretary	
Staff Grade V	S\$51,155 (US\$30,091)*
Staff Grade IV	S\$43,865 (US\$25,802)
Staff Grade III	S\$36,570 (US\$21,511)
Staff Grade II	S\$31,710 (US\$18,652)
Staff Grade I	S\$26,845 (US\$15,791)
Staff Grade A	S\$22,935 (US\$13,491)
Staff Grade B	S\$19,340 (US\$11,376)
Staff Grade C	S\$16,065 (US\$9,450)
Deputy Secretary	
Super-scale DI	S\$13,635 (US\$8,020)
Super-scale D	S\$12,365 (US\$7,273)
Super-scale EI	S\$11,465 (US\$6,744)
Super-scale E	S\$10,570 (US\$6,217)
Super-scale F	S\$9,720 (US\$5,717)
Super-scale G	S\$8,875 (US\$5,220)

Source: Public Service Commission, *Careers That Count* (Singapore: PSC, 1994).

* The current exchange rate is S\$1.70 = US\$1.

The 1989 and 1994 salary revisions have increased the salaries of senior civil servants in Singapore to such a high level that they are earning perhaps the highest salaries in the world compared to their counterparts in other countries. Table 2 above shows the monthly salary for super-scale officers in the Singapore Administrative Service. For example, the monthly salary for a permanent secretary in Staff Grade V is S\$51,155 (or US\$30,091), which is more than four times that of the top monthly salary of GS-18 (the highest salary scale for the United States Federal Service) of US\$7,224 (S\$12,280).¹⁹⁾

In short, Singapore's comprehensive anti-corruption strategy since 1960 consists of (1) the combined use of the POCA and CPIB to reduce the opportunities for corruption; and (2) the periodic increase in salaries of the political leaders and senior civil servants to reduce the incentive for corruption.

South Korea's Anti-Corruption Strategy

Corruption has been a serious problem in South Korea since the 16th century, when the participation of the king's relatives in politics led to increasing nepotism and

corruption in administration.²⁰⁾ As corruption has been identified since 1948 as a serious social ill facing Korea, all new presidents, upon taking office, have promised to take every possible measure to eradicate corruption.²¹⁾ According to Young Jong Kim, corruption scandals in recent years have led to the description of South Korea as a ROTC(Republic of Total Corruption) by the people and mass media.²²⁾

Anti-Corruption Campaigns of Presidents Park, Chun and Roh

The fight against corruption in South Korea began with President Park Chung Hee, who assumed office in May 1961 after ousting the government of Chang Myon because of its involvement in corruption, its inability to defend the country from communism, and its incompetence in initiating economic and social change.²³⁾ Park created the Board of Audit and Inspection(BAI) in 1963 to act as a direct check on the economic bureaucracy.²⁴⁾ The BAI was thus the first de facto anti-corruption agency in South Korea. In March 1975, Park introduced the *Seojungshaeshin*(General Administration Reform) Movement to curb corruption in the civil service.²⁵⁾ As punishment of corrupt personnel was emphasized by the *Seojungshoeshin* Movement, the number of civil servants prosecuted increased from 21,919 in 1975 to 51,468 in 1976.²⁶⁾

Park's assassination in October 1979 led to the assumption of power a year later by his successor, Chun Doo Hwan, who re-affirmed his government's anti-corruption stance by purging corrupt public officials and introducing ethics laws to reward honest officials and to enhance the structures for civil service reforms.²⁷⁾ However, Chun's government lacked legitimacy because of opposition by rival political parties, student leaders, intellectuals, and progressive Christians.²⁸⁾ Chun's unpopularity led to his retirement in February 1988 at the end of his seven-year term. In this connection, Caiden and Kim have criticised the past anticorruption campaigns of Park and Chun for being sporadic, periodic, episodic, incidental and improvisatory, too cosmetic and lip-serving, and for being implemented quickly and without careful preparation.²⁹⁾

The peaceful transfer of power to President Roh Tae Woo enabled him to investigate the abuses and corruption during his predecessor's regime. During the parliamentary hearings in November and December 1988, Chun, his two brothers, and his wife's family were accused of massive corruption. On November 23, 1988, Chun and his wife apologised for their misbehaviour and returned 13.9 billion won (US\$20 million) to the government. In July 1989, Chun's brothers were convicted for corruption and sentenced to between four and seven years imprisonment. Mark L. Clifford has commented on the consequences of the corruption of Chun and his family thus :

What became apparent after Chun left office was the depth of corruption and the degree to which it had been quietly tolerated, even expected. The pervasive corruption is another of the ugly legacies bequeathed by the Fifth Republic. Corruption had long been part of

the Korean system, but *Chun did the country a tremendous disservice by allowing his relatives to prosper*. For all his faults, Park had never allowed his family to profit personally from his position. Unfortunately, the Chun and Lee families set an example of egregiously corrupt behavior that still undermines the Korean social contract.³⁰⁾

While Roh remained committed to the establishment of democracy during his presidency, he was nevertheless plagued by the long-festered problem of political corruption, as six legislators were found guilty of extorting funds from the business community. The Hanbo scandal of 1992 shocked the country when Chung Tae Soo, chairman of Hanbo Construction Company, was accused of contributing substantial funds to the ruling and opposition political parties for favours involving land development.³¹⁾ However, Roh himself was not immune as it was discovered in October 1995 that the major business conglomerates and numerous individuals had contributed almost \$600 million to his private political fund, which he had used to reward supporters and kept for himself and his family.³²⁾

Kim Young Sam's Anti-Corruption Campaign

When Kim Young Sam became the first civilian president in February 1993, he launched an intensive anti-corruption campaign to curb the Korean disease namely corruption. He began with the voluntary disclosure of his personal assets and those of his extended family amounting to 1.77 billion won (or US\$2 million).³³⁾ Kim encouraged his cabinet colleagues and ruling party members to follow suit. In June 1993, the Public Officials' Ethics Law was revised to institutionalise the disclosure of public officials' assets, and all senior officials were required to periodically register and disclose their assets.³⁴⁾ He gave up golf, which had become a symbol of corporate-government cronyism and the exchange of corrupt gifts.³⁵⁾ In August 1993, President Kim issued an emergency presidential decree to establish the Real-Name Financial Transaction System (RNFTS), which banned the use of anonymous financial accounts and required individuals to use their own names for opening bank accounts, as the anonymous or false-name account had been the backbone of the black economy and massive fraud, corruption and tax evasion schemes.³⁶⁾

In March 1994, the Election for Public Office and Election Malpractice Prevention Act was enacted to reduce corruption in politics by ensuring transparency in campaign financing, limiting campaign expenditures, preventing electoral irregularities, and imposing heavy penalties for offenders.³⁷⁾ However, the most important reforms introduced by President Kim were the strengthening of the BAI into the first de jure anti-corruption agency in South Korea, and the creation of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (CPC), which is an advisory body of private citizens formed to assist the BAI's chairman in the task of fighting corruption. In March 1993, the

government formed a team of 100 special inspectors within the BAI to implement Kim's anti-corruption campaign by focusing on officials handling taxes, government contracts, procurement, military conscription and licences who are suspected of being corrupt.³⁸⁾

According to the Constitution of Korea and the BAI Act, the BAI has three functions: to confirm the closing accounts of the state's revenues and expenditures; to audit those organisations subject to its audit; and to inspect the administrative duties of government agencies and public officials. Its chairman is appointed by the president for four years with the consent of the National Assembly. The BAI's commissioner is also appointed by the president for four years on the recommendation of the chairman.³⁹⁾ In August 1993, the BAI had 776 officials involved in audit and administrative inspection. Article 24 of the BAI Act enables the BAI to conduct anti-corruption activities by scrutinising the behaviour of civil servants.⁴⁰⁾

President Kim's anti-corruption campaign confirmed that corruption is a way of life in South Korea and exposed its pervasiveness in the country. As Kim turned the spotlight on such [corrupt] practices, it exposed more dirt than the Korean people had ever imagined or are comfortable with⁴¹⁾ Young Jong Kim has lamented the lack of political will in South Korea's efforts to curb corruption, especially under the regimes of Presidents Rhee, Park and Chun.⁴²⁾ Although Kim's anti-corruption drive was hindered by the May 17, 1997 arrest of his son for bribery and tax evasion in the Hanbo loan scandal and his sentencing to three years' imprisonment five months later, Kim has clearly demonstrated his commitment to eliminating corruption by not obstructing the legal arrest and sentencing of his son. Nevertheless, the Hanbo scandal and his son's arrest and imprisonment had seriously undermined Kim's legitimacy and jeopardised the continued success of his anti-corruption drive. Moreover, despite all these efforts made against corruption, there is no evidence that corruption has been contained during the Kim Young-Sam administration.⁴³⁾

How effective have President Kim's anti-corruption campaigns been in controlling and eradicating political corruption, which is endemic in Korea and fueled by thirty years of authoritarian rule? How effective has his moral crusade against illicit and unethical behavior been in transforming the primordial and particularistic standards of behavior among the Korean people?⁴⁴⁾ The 1996 Korean Democratization Survey found that 71% of the respondents experienced some degree of decrease in political corruption and only 4% reported having experienced an increase in corruption. However, the 1997 Korean Democratization Survey reported that 49% and 36% of the respondents perceived the level of corruption of Kim Young Sam's government to be high and very high respectively.⁴⁵⁾ According to Doh C. Shin, this finding illustrates the fact that for all the important steps Kim took for the 1993~97 period, the age-old custom of corruption was not dying at all in the Korean political marketplace: instead, the informal norms were still overpowering the formal rules of the newly implanted democratic political

game.⁴⁶⁾

Jon Moran has argued that Kim's anti-corruption reforms were initially successful but floundered on at least three problems. First, these reforms were viewed as part of Kim's strategy of removing past opponents to secure his position. Second, the economic crisis and the need for economic growth compelled Kim to abandon by 1995 his attempts to reform chaebol structures in production and finance. Finally, Kim's anti-corruption reforms rebounded on himself as the real name system flushed into the open massive secret accounts held by Chun and Roh and exposed the full extent of informal network politics and the links between the state elite, the chaebol and the politicised financial system.⁴⁷⁾ On the other hand, Kim's anti-corruption reforms were successful because they inaugurated important legislative initiatives, laid the groundwork for future reforms and provided a further legitimisation for the oppositional activities of civil society activities.⁴⁸⁾

Kim Dae Jung's Comprehensive Anti-Corruption Campaign

Kim Dae Jung won the December 1997 presidential election and was inaugurated as president on February 25, 1998. He has demonstrated his concern in combating corruption through the establishment of a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy with the objectives of ensuring clean and upright public office, transparent and reliable government, and a just and fair society in order to become a transparent state and to improve its ranking on TI's CPI from 43rd in 1998 to 20th by 2003.⁴⁹⁾

President Kim's comprehensive anti-corruption strategy consists of the following six aspects. First, to improve the existing system of corruption control by establishing an Anti-Corruption Committee to co-ordinate anti-corruption programmes and activities; and formulating the Anti-Corruption Law, to provide protection for whistle-blowers, to strengthen citizen watch and participation in anti-corruption movements, and to reinforce detection and punishment for corrupt practices. The second component is the reform of the attitudes and consciousness of public servants by enforcing codes of conduct and education, and the increasing the salaries of medium to low level officials to match those in the private sector within five years. Third, public awareness of corruption is promoted by means of education in school and other social and cultural education centres, the use of mass media to publicise anti-corruption materials, a national movement against corruption, and strengthening of international co-operation in fighting corruption.

The fourth aspect concerns the creation of a social and cultural environment against corruption through the scrutiny and strict control of former government officials, enhancing the transparency of private industries, and eroding the collusion between politicians, government officials and businessmen. Fifth, detection and punishment for

corruption is reinforced by improving the reward/protection system for informers, activating citizen watch and report against corruption, creating a special inspection office to focus on the corruption of senior government officials, and increasing the financial penalty for corrupt officials by retrieving personal gains and government losses, and confiscating the bribes. Finally, administrative reforms were promoted in six corruption-prone areas of tax administration, construction, housing, food and entertainment, environmental management, and police work. More specifically, these reforms focused on implementing deregulation, forming the Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Applications (OPEN) system, reducing personal contacts between civil servants and the public, and improving overall accountability.⁵⁰⁾

Lessons for South Korea

Singapore was ranked seventh and South Korea was ranked joint 50th with Jamaica and Lithuania in TI's 1999 CPI.⁵¹⁾ What lessons can South Korea learn from Singapore's experience in minimising corruption? Table 3 below shows that as a city-state, Singapore is smaller in size and has a smaller population than South Korea. Indeed, South Korea is 153 times larger than Singapore in terms of land area, and its population is 14 times that of Singapore. On the other hand, Singapore's gross national product (GNP) per capita is more than three times that of South Korea's. However, both countries have 20 civil servants per 1,000 of the population. Given the significant contextual differences between Singapore and South Korea, is Singapore's anti-corruption strategy relevant and useful for South Korea? Even though there are important differences between both countries, Singapore's experience in curbing corruption provides several important lessons for South Korea's current efforts in implementing President Kim Dae Jung's comprehensive anti-corruption strategy.⁵²⁾

Lesson 1. Political will is crucial for curbing corruption.

The most important lesson from Singapore's experience is that a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy will fail if it is not supported by the political leadership in a country. Sahr J. Kpundeh has defined political will as the demonstrated credible intent of political actors (elected or appointed leaders, civil society watchdogs, stakeholder groups, etc.) to leaders, civil society watchdogs, stakeholder groups, etc.) to attack perceived causes or effects of corruption at a systemic level. Furthermore, he contends that political will is a critical starting point for sustainable and effective anti-corruption programmes as without it, governments' statements to reform civil service, strengthen transparency and accountability and reinvent the relationship between government and private industry remain mere rhetoric.⁵³⁾

Singapore's experience has shown that the political leaders in a country must be

sincerely committed to eradicating corruption by demonstrating exemplary conduct and adopting a modest life-style themselves. Those found guilty of corruption must be punished, regardless of their status or position in society. Indeed, if the big fish (rich and famous) are protected from prosecution for corruption, and only the small fish (ordinary people) are caught, the anti-corruption strategy lacks credibility and is doomed to fail.⁵⁴⁾

Table 3. Singapore and South Korea Compared

Country	Singapore	South Korea
Land Area	647.5 sq. km.	99,274 sq. km.
Population	3,163,500	45,700,000
GNP per capita	US\$32,810	US\$10,550
Size of Civil Service	62,853 (1997)	899,826 (1993)
Civil servants/1,000 population	20	20

Source: John Andrews, *Pocket Asia* 5th ed. (London: Economist and Profile Books, 1999), pp. 160 and 170; *Singapore 1999* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1999), pp. 26 and 35; *Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 1997* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, 1998), p. 46; and Jong S. Jun and Jae Poong Yoon, *Korean Public Administration at a Crossroads: Culture, Development and Change*, in Ahmed S. Huque, Jermain T.M. Lam and Jane C.Y. Lee (eds.), *Public Administration in the NICs: Challenges and Accomplishments* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 100.

President Kim Young Sam demonstrated political will in introducing many anti-corruption reforms, but his credibility was impaired by his son's involvement in the Hanbo scandal. However, it should be acknowledged that he did not prevent the sentencing and imprisonment of his son. Moreover, his lack of political will was manifested in his abandonment in 1995 his attempt to reform the chaebols. According to Peter M. Beck, Chaebol reform has been attempted by successive governments since 1980, but in each case the effort ultimately failed due to a lack of consensus within the economic bureaucracy and strong vested interests in the private sector.⁵⁵⁾ President Kim Dae Jung has certainly shown his political will in introducing the comprehensive anti-corruption strategy, which includes, inter alia, the improvement of transparency in the private industries through the introduction of codes of ethics, and the breaking-up of collusion between politicians, civil servants and businessmen. Only time will show whether President Kim Dae Jung has sufficient political will to implement all six components of his comprehensive anti-corruption strategy successfully. Furthermore, if he is not re-elected for a second term, it remains to be seen whether his successor will continue with his anti-corruption strategy or replace it.

Lesson 2. Make corruption a high risk, low reward activity by punishing those found guilty.

As corruption is an illegal activity in all countries, individuals found guilty of corrupt offences should be punished accordingly. However, in reality, the probability of detection and punishment of corrupt offences varies in different countries. Corruption thrives in those countries where the public perceives it to be a low risk, high reward activity as those involved in corrupt practices are unlikely to be caught and severely punished.⁵⁶⁾

For Koreans to perceive corruption as a high risk, low reward activity, the incumbent government must publicise through the mass media the detection of corrupt behaviour among civil servants and politicians and their punishment according to the law if they are found guilty. Leslie Palmier has contended that the mass media reduces corruption by exposing it as corruption thrives in secrecy, and withers in the light.⁵⁷⁾ If the mass media emphasise the harmful effects of corruption and publicise the punishment of public officials for their corrupt offences, such negative publicity serves as an effective deterrent against corruption. In 1987, Singapore's prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, stressed that the strongest deterrent is in a public opinion which censures and condemns corrupt persons, in other words, in attitudes which make corruption so unacceptable that the stigma of corruption cannot be washed away by serving a prison sentence.⁵⁸⁾

According to Article 129 of the South Korean Criminal Code (Hyongpop), officials found guilty of corruption were sentenced to less than five years of imprisonment or disqualified from government service for less than ten years. Article 133 provided a penalty of less than five years imprisonment or a fine of less than 20 million won or US\$25,000 for those who had promised, gave or expressed their intention to give bribes.⁵⁹⁾ In comparison with the penalty of five years imprisonment and/or a fine of S\$100,000 (US\$59,000) for those found guilty of corruption in Singapore, the punishment for bribery in South Korea is less severe. The new Anti-Corruption Law that is being formulated by Kim Dae Jung's government should consider the imposition of heavier penalties for corrupt behaviour to serve as a more effective deterrent against corruption in South Korea.

Lesson 3. Reduce opportunities for corruption in vulnerable government agencies.

Governments concerned with minimising corruption must identify those public agencies which are wet or vulnerable to corrupt practices. Such agencies should review their procedures periodically to reduce opportunities for corruption. Unnecessary regulations and excessive red tape should be reduced and cumbersome administrative procedures must also be streamlined to remove opportunities for corruption. In July 1973, the Ministry of Finance in Singapore issued a circular to all permanent secretaries instructing them to implement these measures in those departments particularly exposed to corruption:

improving work methods to reduce delay; increasing the effectiveness of supervision to enable senior officers to supervise the work of their staff; rotating officers so that none of them remain too long at an operational unit; carrying surprise checks on their officers' work; and reviewing these anti-corruption measures once in three to five years with the aim of introducing further improvements.⁶⁰

President Kim Dae Jung's anti-corruption strategy includes, inter alia, the promotion of administrative reforms in the six corruption prone areas of tax administration, construction, housing, food and entertainment; environmental management, and police work. Deregulation was introduced to review rules and regulations with the aim of abolishing unnecessary regulations. These moves are steps in the right direction and it remains to be seen whether the reforms in the six areas will be implemented.

Lesson 4. Who will guard the guardians? Ensuring the incorruptibility of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

How do we ensure that the anti-corruption agency (ACA) is incorruptible? The ACA must be incorruptible to ensure its credibility for two reasons. First, if its personnel are corrupt, such corruption makes a mockery of the institution itself as these officers, who are appointed to investigate corrupt offences, have themselves broken the law by engaging in corrupt behaviour. In short, the ACA's legitimacy and public image will be undermined if its members are corrupt.

To ensure its incorruptibility, the ACA must be controlled by honest political leaders or be made accountable to independent committees or Parliament. Second, the ACA must also be staffed by honest and competent personnel. Overstaffing should be avoided and any staff member found guilty of corruption must be punished and dismissed. Unlike the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in Hong Kong and Sydney, which has 1,400 and 140 members respectively, Singapore's CPIB has only 71 members. Accordingly, the proposed independent and central anti-corruption organisation in Kim Dae Jung's anticorruption programme should not be overstaffed as it might be difficult to ensure that all its members are incorruptible. As the BAI had 776 officials in 1993, the new ACA does not need to have so many staff members as it is located within the Office of the Prime Minister.

Lesson 5. Pay political leaders and civil servants adequate salaries to reduce their temptation to be corrupt.

Since low salaries constitute an important cause of corruption, Palmier concluded that adequate pay was an essential ingredient in reform to prevent officials from being tempted into corruption and disaffection.⁶¹ Similarly, Mauro has argued that when civil service is too low, civil servants may be obliged to use their positions to collect

bribes as a way of making ends meet, particularly when the expected cost of being caught is low.⁶²⁾ Consequently, Leiken recommended that when the people pay government functionaries decent salaries, they are buying a layer of insulation against patronage and bribery.⁶³⁾

Singapore's experience demonstrates the importance of reducing the incentive for corruption by keeping the salaries of civil servants and political leaders competitive with the private sector for they will be more vulnerable to corruption if their salaries are low.⁶⁴⁾ Meredith Woo-Cummings has recommended that in South Korea, civil service salaries, which constitute only 70 percent of private sector wages, should be improved to reduce corruption.⁶⁵⁾ President Kim Dae Jung's government has recognised the need to increase the salaries of civil servants to match those in the private sector within five years. Finally, his government will be unable to minimise corruption by increasing salaries alone if it does not have the political will to curb corruption and ensure the incorruptibility of the new ACA, and if it does not punish corrupt officials or reduce opportunities for corruption in vulnerable agencies.

Lesson 6. The Anti-Corruption Agency must be removed from police control as soon as possible.

The ACA must be removed from the police as soon as possible as its location within the police prevents it from functioning effectively, especially when the police is corrupt. The first ACA in Singapore was the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The ACB was ineffective because it was staffed with only 17 members and had to compete with other sections of the CID for limited manpower and resources. The CID had many priorities as reflected in the fact that combating corruption was only one of the 16 duties of Assistant Commissioner of the CID in May 1952. Perhaps, the most important reason for the ACB's ineffectiveness was the prevalence of police corruption and its inability to deal impartially with the police. The British colonial government appointed a team to investigate the October 1951 robbery of S\$400,000 worth of opium and found that there was widespread corruption in the police force, especially those involved in protection rackets. The opium hijacking case highlighted the ACB's ineffectiveness and made the British colonial government realise the importance and value of establishing an independent ACA that was separate from the police. Consequently, the ACB was dissolved and replaced by an independent agency known as the CPIB in October 1952.⁶⁶⁾ In short, Singapore took 15 years to establish the CPIB as an independent agency in 1952. As the new ACA in South Korea is not connected with the police the problem of removing it from police control does not arise. Special care must be taken to recruit honest and competent personnel to staff it. BAI officials must be carefully screened to ensure that only honest and competent

individuals are appointed as members of the new ACA. This final lesson shows that South Korea has not made the same mistake like India or Mongolia in allowing the police to assume a major role in fighting corruption.⁶⁷⁾ Indeed, the non-involvement of the police in South Korea in combating corruption is a tremendous advantage in the country's current struggle against the Korean disease.

Conclusion

In my comparative analysis of the anti-corruption strategies of South Korea and Thailand, I argued that South Korea was more effective than Thailand for three reasons. First, President Kim Young Sam was more committed to fighting corruption than the Thai political leaders. Second, the BAI was strengthened by President Kim Young Sam's comprehensive reforms, but the Commission of Counter Corruption in Thailand was ineffective because it did not have power to punish corrupt officials, the constant conflict between the cabinet and bureaucracy, and the acceptance by the Thais of corruption as a way of life and not against the public interest. Third, any incumbent Thai government will encounter more obstacles than its South Korean counterpart in combating corruption, because Thailand is a bigger country, with a larger population and civil service, but with fewer resources to devote to anticorruption efforts given its lower GNP per capita.⁶⁸⁾

Finally, in my comparative analysis of the anti-corruption strategies of seven Asian countries, South Korea was classified together with the Philippines and Thailand as adopting ineffective anti-corruption strategies because their anti-corruption measures adopted were adequate but the political leadership's commitment is weak, thus resulting in the nonenforcement of anticorruption measures.⁶⁹⁾ Thus, for South Korea's anti-corruption strategy to be effective, President Kim Dae Jung must demonstrate his commitment to fighting corruption in South Korea by implementing impartially the comprehensive anti-corruption reforms he has introduced.

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