

Governing South Korea: From Authoritarian to Neo-liberal Governmentality?

Il Joon Chung (Assistant Professor, Korea University)

1. South Korean Politics in Transition: From military rule to civilian rule

For more than three decades, South Korea was ruled by three generals who became presidents, Chung Hee Park (1961-1979), Doo Hwan Chun (1980-1988), and Tae Woo Roh (1988-1993). All of them seized power through military coups d'état, and all consolidated their power with strong military backing. After the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea's presence on the frontlines of the Cold War meant that politics was dominated by national security concerns (National Security State). Even today, more than one million North Korean soldiers stand prepared to fight the 600,000 South Korean soldiers (backed up by thirty-seven thousand more from the U.S. military) along the "demilitarized zone" (DMZ). The Korean peninsula is one of the most fortified regions of the world. Therefore, we might say, reversing Carl von Clausewitz's well known dictum, "War is merely the continuation of politics by other means," in Korea, "politics is the continuation of war by other means." (Foucault, 2003: 15) In other words, until the 1990s, politics in South Korea was never democratic. Instead of political competition and regime change between ruling and opposition parties, South Korea's politics played out according to the logic of warfare and military operations.

On October 26, 1979, President Park was assassinated after 18 years of authoritarian rule. Most Korean people, as well as most of the military leaders, hoped that event would lead to democratic reform. However, another coup led by Gens. Chun and Roh soon ended that dream. Even worse, on their way to seize power, Chun and Roh deployed paratroopers that resulted in killing of hundreds of innocent citizens in Kwangju. During the 5th Republic regime headed by Chun (1981-1988), anti-government social movements escalated, often harnessing the growing anti-American feelings among citizens. Because the U.S. Commander

in South Korea holds operational control over the South Korean army, and because the Reagan administration strongly supported Chun regime, many young Koreans began to raise questions about the U.S. role in propping up dictatorial regimes. Thus by the late 1980s, the growing democratic movement in South Korea had come to challenge the very foundation of South Korean national security doctrines, the South Korea-U.S. alliance structure. At that moment, citizens, the press and social movements all repudiated the logic of warfare as the animus of national, elite-level politics.

These protests culminated in what became known as the “Great June Struggle of 1987.” Most scholars date the initiation of the democratic transition to this period, and indeed, five direct presidential elections (1987, 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007) and five national assembly elections (1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004) have been held in its aftermath. However, in the first transitional election in 1987, another general, Tae Woo Roh was elected as the president. At the time, his election appeared to be a setback to the democratic transition process. In 1992, a civilian candidate, Young Sam Kim (YS: 文民政府, Civilian Government), was elected president, but only because he had merged his party with the ruling party in 1990. Hence, at the beginning of his presidential term, YS shared the same power base as ex-presidents Chun and Roh, which limited just how far he could push the democratic consolidation process. Surprisingly, however, in 1995 YS prosecuted and punished Roh and Chun for corruption, mutiny and treason. Two years later, Dae Jung Kim (DJ: 國民의 政府, People’s Government)– the opposition party leader who had been outlawed by the generals-turned-Presidents for decades – was elected president. For the first time in South Korean political history, a ruling party transferred power to an opposition party. In 2002, Moo-hyun Roh got elected president as the candidate from the ruling party (參與政府, Participatory Government). However, in the presidential election held last December, the ruling party lost

election and ended the 10 years of reform oriented liberal regime of DJ and Moo-hyun Rho. Myung Bak Lee (MB: 李明博政府, Lee Government), neo-liberal candidate from opposition party, Grand National Party, got elected and regained control of government in 10 years. Lee government's Philosophy(國政哲學) is "Harmonious Liberalism(和合的 自由主義)" and Conduct Code (行動規範) is "Creative Pragmatism (創造的 實用主義)".

In this article, I will examine the rise of liberal governmentality through the fluctuating dynamics of regime changes in South Korea. After briefly reviewing the literature on governmentality, I will describe the rise of neo-liberalism after the IMF crisis in 1997. Then I will review how the post-authoritarian regime governs South Korea not *against* but *through* the civil society.

2. What is "governmentality"?: Foucault and his successor

Governmentality is a concept first developed by Foucault from middle of 1970s till his death in 1984, mainly through his lectures at the Collège de France. The concept has been elaborated by many Anglo-Foucauldians like Cruikshank (1993, 1996), Dean(1999, 2007), Hindess (1993, 1997), O'Malley (1992), Osborne (1993), Rose (1996, 1999, 2007), etc. It can be understood as being the way governments try to produce the citizen best suited to fulfill those governments' policies or the practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed. In his lectures Foucault often defines governmentality as the 'art of government' in a wide sense, i.e. with an idea of 'government' that is not limited to state politics alone, that includes a wide range of control techniques, and that applies to a wide variety of objects, from one's control of the self to the 'biopolitical' control of populations. It is often used in reference to 'neo-liberal governmentality', that characterizes advanced liberal democracies (Barry, A.,

Osborne, T. and Rose, N. eds., 1996). In this case, the notion of governmentality refers to societies where power is de-centered and its members play an active role in their own self-government. Because of its active role, individuals need to be regulated from 'inside'. A particular form of governmentality is characterized by a certain form of knowledge. In the case of neo-liberal governmentality--a kind of governmentality based on the predominance of market mechanisms and of the restriction of the action of the state-- the knowledge produced allows the construction of auto-regulated or auto-correcting selves.

Foucault's most widely known formulation of this notion is his lecture on "Governmentality" (Foucault, 1978; 1991). A complete definition of the term governmentality must include not only government in terms of the state, but government in terms of any "conduct of conduct" (Dean, 1999). The semantic linking of 'governing' and 'mentalities' in governmentality indicates that it is not possible to study technologies of power without an analysis of the mentality of rule underpinning them. One of the consequences of Foucault's approach to government has been to undermine the opposition between power and domination, on the one hand, and individual freedom and subjectivity on the other hand (Foucault, 1978, 1979). The art of government can use freedom as a technical means for achieving its ends. The liberal task of governing society is as much a governing *through* society as a governing *of* society (Dean, 2007).

Foucault describes the transition which takes place in 18th century, from a form of power targeted on the territory to a form of power bearing on a population. The mechanisms of power change completely, according to Foucault, when the sovereign no longer has to concern himself with the safety of his territory but with the security of the population. In place of the necessity to compel obedience in order to ensure the safety of his territory, the sovereign opts for the proper use of freedom in order to maximize the security of the

population. With the emergence of population there is not only a change in the technologies of power but also in the model of government.

3. Toward a critique of Neo-liberalism: *Political rationality* not political ideology

Today, many South Korean scholars, politicians and businessmen question the idea of being able to govern Korean society. It is said that the role of nation-state, highly centralized government, is displaced by globalization and individualization. Liberalism in South Korea is seen as a suspect doctrine, alien to our way of thinking. Dictators, civilian and military, impose authoritarian social orders from above in the name of “Liberalism.” Thus, the image of liberalism in Korea is coupled with illiberal, despotic political, economic, and social practices. Koreans in general and Korean scholars in particular think against it rather with it or on the basis of it. In our habit of thinking against liberalism without thinking it through and considering what we can learn from it, we fail to grasp the reasons for its strength and unlimited expansion, and we adopt an increasingly rigid and sterile position in the neo-liberalizing world.

Foucault applied himself precisely to grasp the importance of liberalism as a way of thinking about government. His reflections occupy two courses of lectures at the College de France, in 1978 and 1979. Here he showed wonderfully well *how the power of the economy rests on an economy of power*, both at the time of the emergence of liberalism at the end of 18th century as well as at that of neo-liberalism between 1930 and 1950 (Donzelot, 2008).

“I tried to analyze ‘liberalism’ not as a theory or an ideology but, rather, as a practice, which is to say, as a ‘way of doing things’ oriented toward objectives and regulating itself by means of a sustained reflection. Liberalism is to be analyzed, then, as a principle and a method of

rationalizing the exercise of government, a rationalization that obeys—and this is its specificity—the internal rule of maximum economy ... Liberal thought starts not from the existence of the state, seeing in the government the means for attaining that end it would be for itself, but rather from society, which is in complex relation of exteriority and interiority with respect to the state ... Instead of making distinction between state and civil society into historical universal that allows us to examine all the concrete systems, we can try to see it as a form of schematization characteristic of a particular technology of government. ... Rather than a relatively coherent doctrine, rather than a politics pursuing a certain number of more or less clearly defined goals, I would be tempted to see in liberalism a form of critical reflection on governmental practice. ... What would need to be studied now, therefore, is the way in which the specific problems of life and population were raised within a technology of government which, without always having been liberal—far from it—was always haunted since the end of the 18th century by liberalism’s question.” (Foucault, 1997)

Foucault’s concept of governmentality has two advantages in theoretical terms for the analysis of neo-liberalism. First, the dividing line the liberals draw between the public and private spheres, that is the distinction between the domain of the state and that of society, itself becomes an object of study. Second, the liberal polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible. From the perspective of governmentality, government refers to a continuum, which extends from political government right through the forms of self-regulation, ‘technologies of the self’ as Foucault calls them (Foucault, 1988).

3. Neo-liberal transformation in South Korea: Neo-liberalism in Korean style?

“Too much neo-liberalism and too small liberalism”

Neo-liberalism is not only a set of ideas and policies producing institutional transformations, but also a social ethos or governmentality producing, shaping and disciplining subjects in a given society. Neo-liberal strategies of rule, found in diverse realms including workplaces, educational institutions and health and welfare agencies, encourage people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well being.

The discourse of freedom has had strong power in the workings of neo-liberal governmentality, constituting subjects as rational and self responsible-individuals free of non-market institutional environments and traditional normative restraints. In such governmentality, those subjects become competitive and flexible workers, self-calculating consumers, efficient investors, self-managing entrepreneurs, or self-blaming ‘losers’ in society. On the other hand, neo-liberal governmentality creates subjects who are well accustomed to or can better endure environmental instability and risks resulting from the implementation of neo-liberal ideas and policies. Thus neo-liberal short-termism and increasing institutional instability tend to bring about the rule of luck or irrational opportunism over the lives of subjects (Jang, 2006).

Since 1993, overseas borrowing by merchant banks had been encouraged by the YS regime’s globalization policy, which sought to attain OECD membership in 1996, and accelerated financial liberalization under OECD advices. This steep rise of overseas short-term borrowing resulted in the financial crisis in late 1997. The institutional framework of economic development in South Korea was “the state-banks-chaebols nexus” into the mid-1990s (Shin & Chang, 2003). In this framework, “Korea Inc.” the three key actors are institutionally interlinked with one another for economic growth. With all encompassing structural reforms following the 1997 crisis, the developmental state in South Korea has been swiftly transformed.

In 1998, new president DJ implemented far reaching domestic structural reforms under the IMF's guidance in exchange for a monetary bailout coordinated by the international financial institution. DJ regime named the direction of the structural reforms "the democratic market economy". But such structural reforms have rapidly exacerbated the concentration of wealth in the upper classes by profiting those who own large assets like land, stocks or bank deposits, which is an intrinsic attribute of neo-liberal policies. The democratic causes in South Korea was hijacked or captured by neo-liberalism which presented itself as anti-authoritarian and anti-chaebol democracy based on market principles. In spite of such claims, neo-liberal reform under DJ regime in reality has had authoritarian and exclusive effects because it structurally increases inequality and poverty. The concentration of wealth and the mass production of the 'working poor' have been accelerated in the name of 'reform' or 'democracy'. The increasing number of emigrants and the rapid fall of birth rates in South Korea seem to be related to tremendous social stress and loss of social hope in the future resulting from neo-liberal restructuring after the financial crisis in 1997. At the same time, neo-liberal reform has encouraged individualized responses to social issues.

If neo-liberal government is to fully realize its goals, individuals must come to recognize and act upon themselves as both free and responsible (Rose, 1999). Thus Neo-liberalism must work to create the social reality that it proposes already exists. Neo-liberalism constitutes an attempt to link a reduction in state welfare services and security systems to the increasing call for subjects to become free, enterprising, autonomous individuals. It can then begin to govern its subjects, not through intrusive state bureaucracies backed with legal powers, the imposition of moral standards under a religious mandate, but through structuring the possible field of action in which they govern themselves, to govern them through their freedom (Lemke, 2001). Through the transformation of subjects with duties and obligations, into

individuals, with rights and freedoms, modern individuals are not merely ‘free to choose’ but obliged to be free, “to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice” (Rose, 1999). This freedom is a different freedom to that offered in the past. It is a freedom to realize our potential and our dreams through reshaping the way in which we conduct our lives.

The neo-liberal forms of government feature direct intervention by means of empowered and specialized state apparatuses, but also characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without being at the same time being responsible for them. The strategy of rendering individual subjects ‘responsible’ (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc., and for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible and moral individual and transforming it into a problem of ‘self-care’. The key feature of the neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between *a responsible and moral individual* and *an economic-rational actor* (Lemke, 2001). This strategy can be deployed in all sorts of areas and leads to areas of social responsibility becoming a matter of personal provisions (Rose, 1996; O’Malley, 1996).

Neo-liberalism encourages individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form. The theoretical strength of the concept of governmentality consists of the fact that it construes neo-liberalism not just as ideological rhetoric or as a political-economic reality, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists.

If we could see that crisis as an epoch-making crisis, it is because it caused the crisis of representation of economic reality. The IMF crisis had been regarded as a crisis of all the members of society not limited to crisis of certain economic agents like *Chaebols* or the failure of policies, laws and institutions of the government. In terms of it, that crisis involved

the crisis of representation not capable of delineating the economic reality in a consistent and coherent way. As a result, it began to propel the changes in all directions, that is to say, a modification or replacement of political rationality to bring together the discourses to represent the reality with the technologies to implement the ideals, rationales, and norms raised by the imaginary. In other words, it produced the discourses to determine the truths of domains such as administration, education, welfare, health as well as economy in a novel way. And it should be linked to the formation of subjects adaptable to the discourses and their technologies. The financial crisis made Korean society re-problematize its whole features.

What is more, they contributed to shift the discursive field of previous self-help practices known as “the science of success(成功學)”, “the living of art(處世術)” into valuable and respectable normal discourse sought for by “everyone”.

Neo-liberalism is a species of the political rationalities which are historically contested and metamorphosed. This process was not restricted to the domains of economic life and political sovereignty. In addition to them, we should include the constructing process of making up people who conforms to those changes. Put bluntly, we might say that the “re-structuring of capital” was on a par with the “restructuring of laboring subject” and the “re-engineering of economic life” was identical to the “re-engineering of personhood” (Seo, 2005).

Neo-liberalism could be defined as a political rationality which may be analyzed as the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualized, the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities, notions of the appropriate forms, objects and limits of politics, and conceptions of the proper distribution of such tasks among secular, spiritual, military and familial sectors. On the other hand, it should also be analyzed in terms of their practical technologies, the complex of mundane

programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to ambitions (Fouault, 1991: Rose & Miller, 1992).

Neo-liberalism as political rationality forges a kind of alignment between a certain political reason and the technologies for the regulation of the self. During the last 10 years neo-liberal programmes had evolved out of a variety of ‘reformations’ such as ‘innovation’ in the government, ‘flexibilization’ or ‘restructuring’ in the business practices, ‘making self-managing subject’ in everyday existence and so on.

The self-management comprises a large number of discursive and material practices, which could not be limited to consciousness, attitude or ideas. Firstly, it produces and carries out knowledge about “who I am, what is my success and well-being, and what I can do to achieve them”. In terms of it, the self-empowerment discourses are creating and proliferating the knowledge of the self. In order to do that, the self should become the object or the surface knowable to analyze, diagnose, and read. In other words, the self should be incessantly translated into fixed entity which the self-empowerment could provide the feasible ways to answer the concerned questions. Thus, the self-empowerment should not be separated from a body of knowledge with which people make it possible to transform them into the object to know and act on. It might be called ‘the problematisation of the self’. Secondly, the self-management should be integrated into various and detailed ‘the technologies of the self’. The self is not a given substance, which could be developed, improved and reformed by certain ways. In fact, the self consists of a number of targets to be act on. They could be psychological targets such as affections, aptitudes, capacities as well as personality. Or, they could be the physical body and components. What is more, they could be the habits or the way of time usages. Therefore, the knowledge of self-management has to be combined with the technologies to lead to well-being, change, success, improvement, growth, and so on.

Lastly, the self-empowerment should always be related to the delimited political goal. Whether to construe laboring subject, efficient economic life in the economic terrain or to make up the citizens integrated with the security, education, health, well-being in the political terrain, they are always forced to subjectify the self that falls within each field of practices. After all, we could divide the self-management into three components: *problematization* and its accompanying a set of knowledge, which define and elaborate the self as the objects to be changed, modulated and improved.: it entails the *technologies* to judge, measure, correct, and ameliorate the life of the self,: it is integrated with *telos* or goal as we think that the self should reach, whether to be successful life or well-being (Seo, 2008)

“Self-esteem means about as much as ‘positive thinking’ meant in the 1970s and ‘empowerment’ meant in the 1980s, and ‘enterprise’ will mean in the 1990s. (Cruikshank, 1993)” In this remark, when Cruikshank depicts the passages of the self-esteem practices, it seems to be not far distant from the historical vicissitudes of self-empowering discourses in South Korea.

Foucault says that “(the problematization) defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to. This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, that is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought” (Foucault, 1997; Osborne, 2003). As he says, the problematization is not to ask what intrinsic truth a given entity ‘expresses’ and ‘manifests’. It is an effort to articulate a series of practices produced at a time when a given entity is constructed as a knowable object imbued with specific representations.

Given that the democratization during the 1980s-1990s was driven by the will to freedom, it also went hand in hand with a variety of efforts to construct forms of governing through rearrangement of the economy. The reverse side of democratization is a neo-liberalization which we could employ it as a generic term to embrace all the changes to transform South Korean capitalism in crisis. The neo-liberalism as political rationality mediates both, the will to freedom and the will to change. Therefore, we could not separate the democratization from the neo-liberalization in principle. In order to confront the neo-liberal governmentality which subordinate individual through the will to freedom, what should we do? (Nietzsche's view of liberalism) The freedom of self-managing subject is nothing but an effect of self-deceptive confusion or perverted illusion. In liberalist democratic society, freedom has been endlessly invented, reformulated and modified throughout centuries. One of the radical or critical traditions to have existed running through modernity, have thought the freedom is an equivalent to the thinking or reason (Foucault, 1997, 2000, 2003; Rose, 1999). For it, the reason was identical to the freedom, if we could presume that the reason is a procedure that one presents its own practices to the object to be thought and raise the questions of conditions, meanings and purposes of them. In order to think, we always should appeal to the freedom. So then, we ought not to withdraw from the freedom.

What is important is not whether to approve or reject the freedom. It is no doubt that we have to elaborate the question about what freedom is and together preserve the freedom through the politics of freedom. The politics of freedom might be such logic of power that governs and regulates the social life through mobilizing freedom and further determine how we subjectify our own selves. On the contrary, the politics of freedom might be a logic of critique that reproblematicize the mobilization of freedom through returning to the reason such practices formed by the power.

Over the decades in South Korea, one sought to be liberated from dictatorial regime, disciplinary factory and school, repressive familial life, in short a range of obstacles restricting freedom. After the neo-liberal transformation of South Korea, we seem to be trapped in the irony of practicing freedom to undermine the very foundation of freedom. As a consequence, the will to freedom could be reversed into the contempt or hatred of it. We are on trial in the court of freedom.

5. Imposing neo-liberal governmentality?: MB regime in prospect

“The Presidential Transition Committee”

‘87 regime’ and/or ‘97 regime’: Democratization and/or neo-liberalization?

Social Index(Suicide rate) and social trend(소득양극화, 중산층 가치분 소득감소)

Tourism abroad(해외여행), Education Exodus (조기유학)

How to govern South Korea?

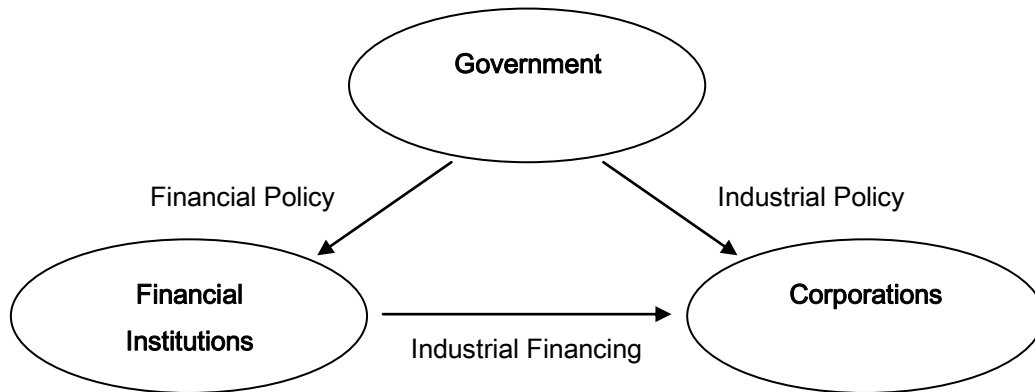
정동영 ‘가족행복시대’(가족행복시대, Happiness for the Family) communitarian value(engaging)

이명박 ‘국민성공시대’(국민성공시대, Success for the People) neoliberal ethic(ambivalent)

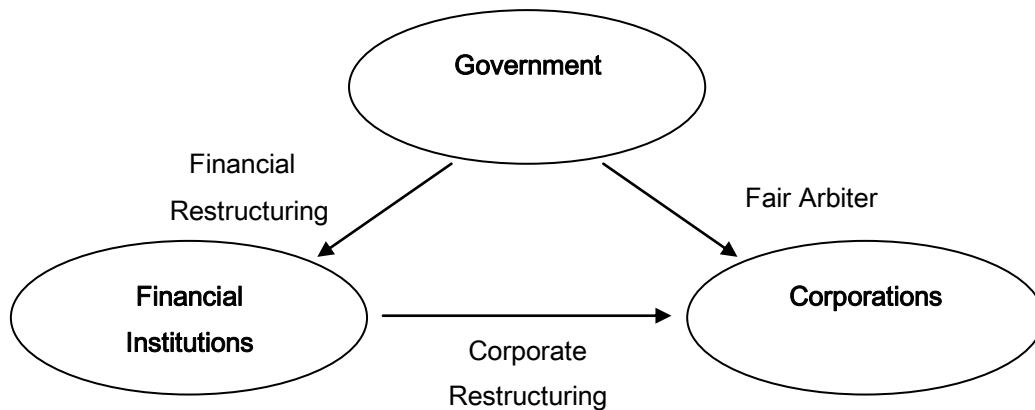
이회창 ‘반듯한 대한민국’(법치주의, fair ROK) liberal(confronting)

Figure 1. Ideal Types of Different States in South Korea

A. Developmental State (1960s-1980s)



B. Transitional State (1980s-late 1990s)



C. Neo-liberal State (1998-present)

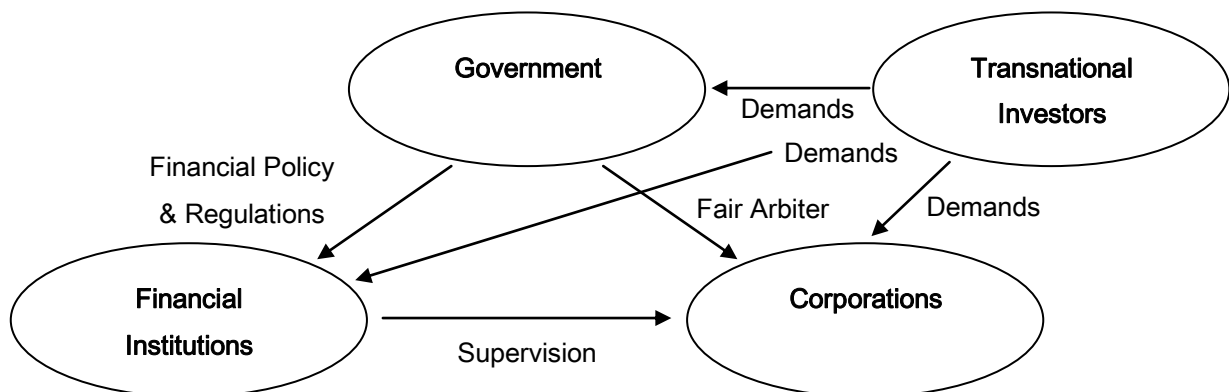


Figure 2. Governmentalization of Civil Society

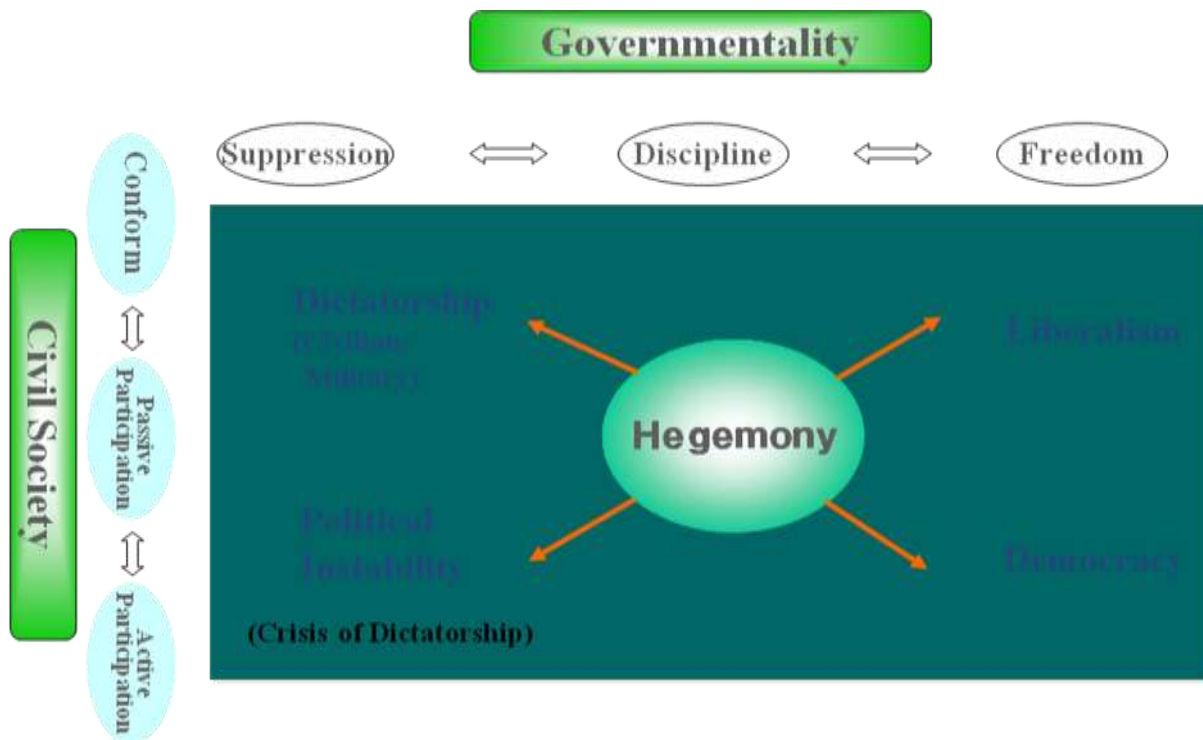
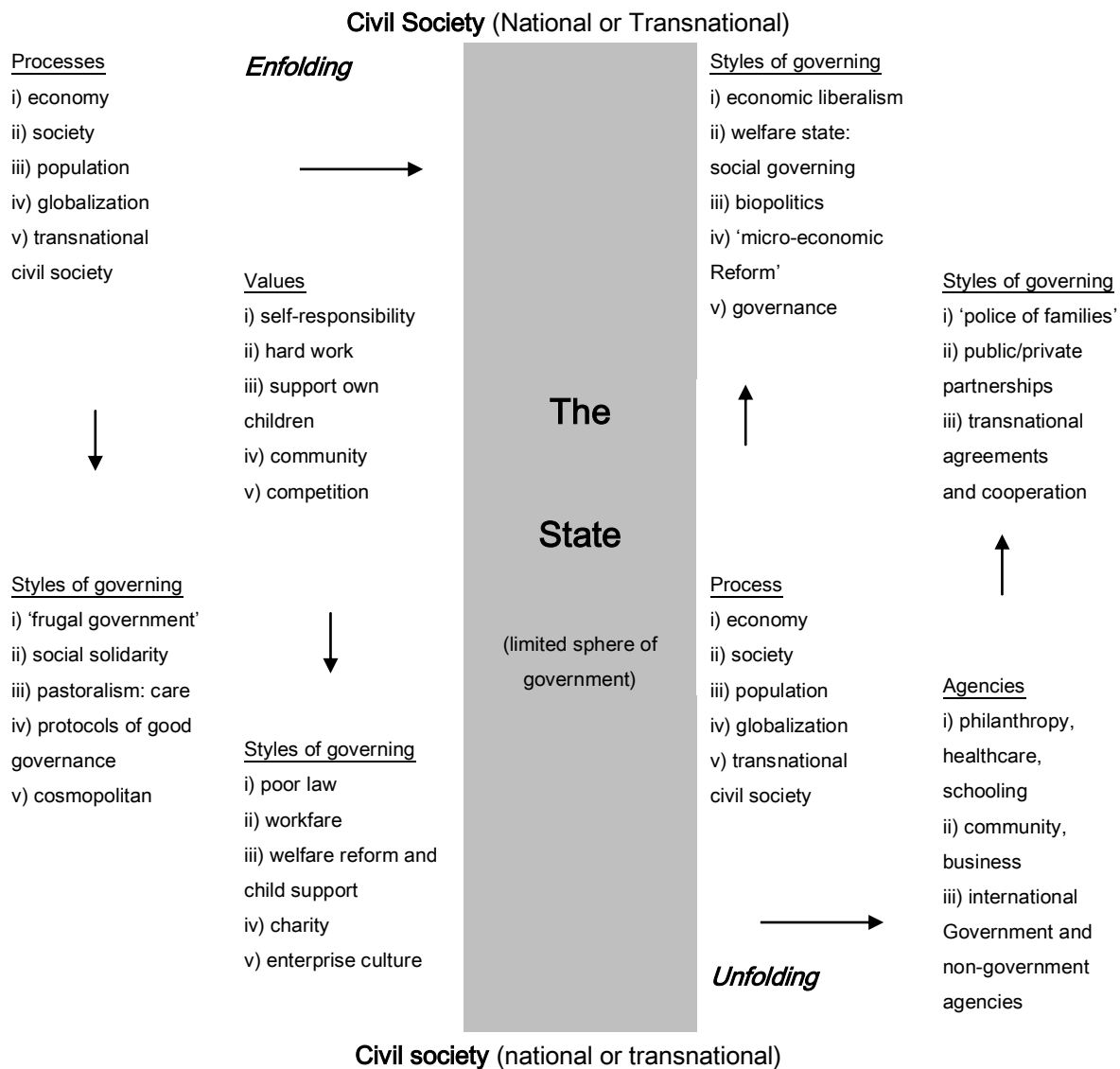


Table 1. Liberal government of society



Dean (2007), p. 117.

Table 2. Sovereignty, security and governing societies

<i>Styles of project of government</i>	<i>Sovereignty</i>	<i>Security</i>	<i>Key Exceptions</i>	<i>Relations to project of governing societies</i>
	Right to death. Monopoly of final decision. Establishing order.	Threat to life. Managing potential disorders, threats, uncertainty.		
Early modern establishment of the territorial state	Sovereignty as supreme power and as an end of government	Techniques of the 'holding out' of the state against external and internal enemies, e.g. reason of state. Techniques of production of good order, e.g. police.	Civil war to be overcome	Precondition for governing societies.
Classical liberalism	Condition of liberalism but to be limited. Establishes territorial enclosure of civil society	Mechanisms of security within civil society. Relation to liberty. International vs domestic security issues.	Temporary state of emergency to be overcome to return to constitutional order	Governing society as a container. Domestic and international security.
Advanced liberalism	Belief in supercession of national sovereignty. Annihilation of sovereign decision in choice.	Multilateral cooperation in face of global risks. Management of individual risk in life-planning.	Violations of human rights. Genocide.	World risk society. Cosmopolitan democracy. Governance.
Authoritarian liberalism	Strengthening states and international bodies to implement globalization policies. Exercising and delegating sovereignty.	Hyper-securitization. Pre-emptive intervention.	Mass of exceptions and practices defining normal frame of life. Creeping emergency.	Hierarchies and hegemons. Language of exception, necessity and emergency.

Dean (2007), p. 192.

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