



Urbanisation and land use transition in a second-tier city: The emergence of small factories in Gimpo, South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This research incorporates tenets of growth regime theory through the case of Gimpo, a Seoul-dependent second-tier city. To put second-tier cities in a context that includes the concept of Korean and East Asian nuances, we suggest conceptualising the development of a growth regime theory through a dialogue that considers the departure from an agreement with the Western paradigm and path dependence of developmental states. The development of Gimpo has been heavily constrained by the central government's control of the overwhelming growth of the Seoul Capital Area. Since the 1990s, however, the deregulation of the area has driven the creation of thousands of small factories. Based on in-depth interviews, a focus group, archives, and site visits, the research demonstrates, first, that the central government and the city government have wavered between remaining interventionist and taking a neoliberal approach. The state allowed industrialisation of Seoul's suburban cities, and the city government attempted to attract businesses into planned industrial parks but ended up allowing even more dispersed small factories. Second, the growth regime has emerged, including city government, real estate agencies, village leaders, landowners, entrepreneurs, and migrant-supporting organisations. They drove the development of the small factories by responding to policies and the influx of migrant workers. The village leaders, *eejangs*, who are both elected leaders and landowners, played a critical role by turning into developers and entrepreneurial mediators and persuading landowners to accommodate factories on their agricultural land. By examining the interaction between the urban growth regime and urban hierarchy, this research contributes to the debate on urban growth and development in various contexts.

1. Introduction

This research examines how an urban growth regime, defined as collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors for urban growth emerged in a small city to respond to external dynamics. It focuses on the importance of urban hierarchy, especially Asian second tier cities, with regards to urban growth regimes that were responding to deregulation. The analysis incorporates tenets of growth regime theory and explores path dependence of the developmental state¹ through the case of Gimpo,² a Seoul-dependent city. The paper looks at how this particular urban growth regime has emerged in key actors' attempts to cope with deregulation of the Korean central government since the 1990s. By using the conceptual framework of a growth regime, this research contributes to a better understanding of

the politics involved in the urbanisation process and urban development in a Korean second-tier city. The concept of a growth regime allows one to see how, in the political economy of South Korea, new governing arrangements take shape and what motivates key actors to take action and collaborate with others.

The Korean context offers interesting insights into the concept of growth regime. The concept has been dominant in urban political studies for the last decades, mainly focused on the Western context. This study seeks to understand if this growth regime is similar to or diverges from the dominant Western paradigm. Based on in-depth interviews, focus groups, archives, and site visits, the research demonstrates that a growth regime emerged and displayed a distinct feature: rather than the city government that was a key actor in many other cases, village heads turned into entrepreneurs cum developers. By examining the

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¹ Based on representative East Asian states including Japan, South Korea, and China, developmental state in this study is broadly defined as a nation state that has led by pursuing economic growth as a top priority.

² Gimpo (김포, 金浦) is also spelled as Kimpo.

interaction between the urban growth regime and policy changes in an East Asian small city, this research contributes to the debate on urban growth and development in various contexts.

The growth of Gimpo has been managed as part of the Seoul Capital Area (SCA, hereafter)³ in South Korea. The development of Gimpo has been heavily constrained by the Korean state's control of the overwhelming growth of the SCA. Seoul has become the world's third-largest metropolitan area, but second-tier cities in the SCA, including Gimpo, have struggled to cope with economic challenges, rapid growth, and the declining agriculture. Since the 1990s, however, as the nation state's control became decentralised, the developmentalism has become localised in order to survive in the face of global competition. The deregulation of the SCA drove the creation of thousands of small factories dispersed throughout second-tier cities around Seoul despite the government's attempt to invite them to industrial parks. Those factories emerged in shifted zoning lands such as former agricultural fields or residential areas.

We use the concept of a growth regime to elaborate the reconstruction of local elites including business owners and landowners, the formation of a newly emerging coalition of elites centred around property and economic growth, and the commodification of space as a result. The growth regime approach contributes to the understanding of urban development politics by focusing on particular actors, beyond governing authorities (Blanco, 2013; Stoker and Mossberger, 1994). Furthermore, to put dependent second-tier cities in a context that includes the concept of Korean and East Asian nuances, we suggest conceptualising the development of a growth regime theory through a dialogue that considers the departure from an agreement with the Western paradigm, and path dependence of developmental states. The intervention and transition by Asian developmental states made a particular impact on the formation of these growth regimes (See Hsu, 2011 for the case of Taiwan).

This paper asks: How has the growth regime in Gimpo, a second-tier city whose development used to be controlled by the central government, emerged in a response to the deregulation?

The findings argue, first, that the central government and the city government have wavered between remaining interventionist, in accord with the strategies of the developmental state, and taking a neoliberal approach. The central government played a critical role in allowing industrialisation of Seoul's suburban cities with an aim towards national growth. The city government attempted to attract businesses into planned industrial parks but ended up allowing even more small factories. Second, the growth regime has emerged, with the support of city government, real estate agencies, village heads, landowners, entrepreneurs, and migrant-supporting organisations. The response to these policies and the influx of migrant workers drove the emergence of small factories. The village heads, called *eejangs*, who are both elected leaders and landowners, played a critical role by turning into developers and entrepreneurial mediators and persuading landowners to accommodate factories on their agricultural land.

To support the above arguments, the rest of the paper is organised as follows. The literature review section critically examines the existing theoretical frameworks of growth regime and developmental states in relation to state transformation and its influence on urban development politics. The case study of Gimpo is then briefly introduced. Following a description of our research methods, the results and discussion section discusses the spatial strategies of public sectors such as the central government and the city government for the second-tier city in the context of globalisation and urban competition. We focus on Gimpo as a specific example of growth regime formation. This is followed by an analysis of other local actors' spatial strategies, including deregulation and mobility; the role of each local actor, especially *eejangs*; and how they drove the development of small factories. The conclusion discusses

the prospects and resilience of second-tier cities in the context of global competition.

2. A dialogue between the urban growth regime and the Asian second-tier cities

The concept of growth regime has been dominant for decades in the area of development politics (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001). As Molotch argued in *The City as a Growth Machine* (Molotch, 1976), local politics revolve around land development and is dominated by a pro-growth regime.⁴ Integrating a Marxist approach, the concept also helped to understand the urban struggle between exchange value and use value of land (Logan and Molotch, 1987) so that landowners' utilisation of political power can be better understood. By focusing on the link between economic interests and political governance, the study of growth regime clarified what particular actors drive urban development with economic and political powers.

The regime approach, more comprehensively, has focused on the collaboration between governmental actors and non-governmental actors. A regime is an informal yet relatively stable coalition, in which governmental actors provide authority and non-governmental actors provide economic resources (Harding, 1994; Stoker and Mossberger, 1994). The local government is meant to attract mobile capital as well as people and, likewise, the role of businesses is critical for economic development (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001; Stone, 1989). The regime approach focuses on how the existing structure of society and power relations privilege particular actors in pursuing their interests (Blanco, 2013; Stoker and Mossberger, 1994). Based on political economy, the concept of growth regime challenged both the government-oriented approach to decision-making and the pluralistic approach, as well as economic determinism.

The use of the growth regime concept contextualises new actors' involvement in the elite coalition for property development. Although the case of Gimpo has not illustrated the existence of a stable coalition, the new growth regime's process of emergence has illustrated how local elites are constituted through exchange of the access to political and economic resources. While exchange politics is a main condition of regime politics, the growth regime also allows for the emergence of oppositional forces such as the antigrowth movement and antigrowth entrepreneurs (Schneider and Teske, 1993). The formation of a growth regime is the process in which the social structure of a city is co-produced by newly arranged elite groups. The process depends on specific contexts such as how governing arrangements take shape and what motivates key actors to pursue an agenda (Stone, 2004). The characteristics of the central government and the relationship between the central government and local cities have a particularly heavy influence on shaping a local regime.

Previous studies, however, have not paid an enough attention to the dynamics of growth regimes in the East Asian context. Previous studies on Asian cities have relied on conceptualisations based on the urban experiences of North America and Western Europe. As an alternative, the Global South including Latin America (Foster, 2009), South Asia (McFarlane, 2012), and Africa (Hansen and Vaa, 2004), was suggested as a location for case studies. Based on their different urban phenomena, the distinction between developed countries (Global North) and developing countries (Global South) is important, but it does not necessarily explain the power relations between global, national, and

⁴ There has been criticism of the growth machine mainly because it narrowly and rigidly focuses on property (Imbroscio, 2003). Other components of urban politics have been suggested, including collective consumption, the right to the city (Mayer, 2009), inclusion and citizenship, and distributive justice (MacLeod, 2011). In addition, there has been a debate as to whether or not the regime theory is a useful approach in more specific contexts. Davies (2003) argued that regime theory is not appropriate for the UK context. While acknowledging those criticisms, our focus is on how governing arrangements take shape and what motivates key actors to pursue an agenda as argued by Stone (2004).

³ The metropolitan area of Seoul is located in the northwest of South Korea.

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