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(Article begins on next page | Il contributo inizia nella pagina successiva)

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Refereed Article

The Concept of "Political Innovation" and Its Application in China and South Korea*

Weijing Le and Youngah Guahk

Summary
Research on "innovation" has focused mainly on its technological and economic varieties, but there are at present relatively few studies about innovation in social and political contexts. In view of the limited number of relevant studies, this article explores the understanding of innovation from the perspective of Political Science — as well as the Social Sciences more broadly. The first part discusses the concept of "political innovation" by referring to three major characteristics thereof: novelty; crises, risks, and social needs as innovation triggers; and, finally, social impact. We draw attention to the continuing difficulty of drawing a clear dividing line between it and other phenomena such as "change," "reform," or "revolution." Following the term-defining first part, the second half of the article explores the application of the concept within political and academic debates in two East Asian countries, China and South Korea, pointing out the discursive relationships between innovation and reform. The article concludes with a discussion of the differences between the two countries in terms of the application of the political innovation concept, as well as between their core understandings of it and those interpretations thereof that are dominant in the West.

Keywords: Political innovation, reform, innovation discourse, China, Korea

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Introduction

"Innovation" has long been a key theme in economic and social development in East Asia. In the growing body of works making up Innovation Studies, a larger proportion thereof have focused on product and process innovation in the economy — but there have been relatively few studies about social and especially about political innovation. In view of the fact that there are only a limited number of conceptual studies available on innovation in the political context, this article explores the understanding of "political innovation" by relying on that literature originating from social science studies. The conceptualization of innovation has been controversial due to its boundless research content; as described by the Berlin Social Science Center, innovation has become an "overloaded signifier" (WZB 2010). It can be loosely used in any number of situations to describe new products, technologies, ideas, communication tools, institutions, social activities, forms of governance, and so on. The inflated use of the word innovation has obviously been caused by the arbitrary application of it by many different people for many different purposes.

Hence, we differentiate the applications of innovation by political actors from those by academia. Political actors tend to use the word innovation to initiate changes striving for the realization of certain political goals, whereas innovation researchers try to interpret the content and meaning of political innovations in order to theorize the concept in their general discussion of Political Science. These two lines of application have intensified the ambiguity of the concept's understanding. The paper hence aims to provide a structured conceptual framework of political innovation, yet one that is also firmly grounded in the social sciences literature. We define political innovation as follows: new policies, instruments, ideas, or practices that are initiated and implemented by political actors as a reaction to emerging social needs and pressing contemporary problems.

As the major motivation behind this paper is to understand the manifold processes of change in the political development of the East Asian region, we select China and South Korea as the two case studies for analysis. In recent decades, these two countries have experienced an enormous economic rising that has initiated processes of modernization, mobility, and urbanization. Furthermore, rapid economic development within the two countries has gone hand in hand with globalization. These fundamental economic changes constitute one of the most important factors in the build-up of the social pressures that have themselves triggered political institutional responses. In their societal transformations, the two states have applied a range of methods, mechanisms, and instruments to deal with crises and to accommodate social demands. These are the political innovations that we wish to better understand.

While China remains an authoritarian party-state, South Korea has moved from autocratic rule toward a democratic system. Interestingly enough, we identify that

the Chinese government has in fact been much more active in engaging with innovations in political spheres than the South Korean government has. This finding actually contradicts the conventional wisdom that authoritarian regimes tend to resist innovation to avoid potential threats to regime stability and control. We assume that the diverging attitudes on display toward political innovation lies in the different conceptualization and application of innovation by political actors in the two countries. Therefore, based on the definition of political innovations we can analyze thereafter how they are used, and for which purposes, in the two given national contexts.

The paper is structured as follows: in the next section, we establish a conceptual framework of political innovation that helps to identify it and further to frame the analysis of such innovations in the specifically Chinese and Korean political spheres. The third and fourth sections then focus on the dominant usage of the term innovation in the political domain and the academic literature within China and South Korea respectively. The final section sets out our conclusions.

Concepts of political innovation

Since Schumpeter's (1939) employment of the term innovation first to theorize economic development, it has spread beyond its original use for understanding processes of change in economic life to effectively become one of the most fascinating keywords for a range of different social science disciplines — including Political Science and its related fields (Courvisanos 2009). As the term is applied to the study of changes within various social aspects more generally, it has entered into ongoing disciplinary debates with established terminologies and methodological practices. In Political Science, the addition of the term innovation to the conceptual arsenal has the potential to advance earlier debates on sociopolitical change.

We consider political innovations to be a subcategory of social ones, and define, once again, the former as: new policies, instruments, ideas, or practices that are initiated and implemented by political actors as a reaction to emerging social needs and pressing contemporary problems. An analysis of political innovations can be structured according to three aspects: (1) novelty ("newness"); (2) crises, risks, and social needs as innovation triggers; and, (3) social impact. With the three indicators, we aim to interpret the various dimensions of political innovation within the changing dynamics of Chinese and South Korean society. We do not aim to identify an absolute end and outcome of these political innovations. Thus, we do not evaluate some of them as successful and others as failures.

The first and most uncontroversial aspect of the definition of innovation concerns novelty, or newness. Rammert (2010) has offered a sophisticated framework to characterize the newness of social innovations in the temporal, physical and social dimensions. In the earlier age of industrialization and modernization, social scientists were preoccupied with the term invention because the tremendous

technological progress being experienced at the time was bringing about profound social changes in existing structures and institutions (e.g. Gordon 2016; Ogburn 1937). Social innovations were thus considered to be structural changes responding to the new needs of modernization.

In the era of postmodernity, we tend to use the term innovation — which is only relatively new — because the phenomenon takes shape within the dynamic and continuous process of change. It does not matter whether an innovation has been used somewhere else or before, it is still relatively new to the unit of adoption (Walker 1969). The physical newness relies on the recombination and re-use of existing elements. A given society will always be confronted with novelty, the quality of which is inseparably intertwined with its impact thereon — in other words, innovation normally takes a different track from the mainstream (Rammert 2010). At first it appears unusual, odd, exceptional, and improper to the society in question, and works against existing routines, traditions, and institutional settings. Hence any innovation needs to be digested by the people in the course of social debates, negotiations, or lobbying practices, until a consensus on its commonness can be reached. As early as the 1930s, the Chinese intellectual Liang Shuming articulated this notion in a similar vein: "If one wants to create something new, he has to make exceptions, […] unified ways of thinking and behaviors do not allow exceptions and thus lack creativity" (2011: 239).

Up to this point, we can briefly wrap up the three dimensions of the newness of innovation as follows: they exist as newly introduced ideas or practices, which are in the first place uncommon and exceptional but will be accepted through intellectual debates and social engagement. We here again emphasize the perception of "relative newness," meaning the ideas or practices that are new to innovation adopters because they differ from existing rules and routines. It is not important whether these ideas or practices have been applied somewhere else previously. Ultimately, there is nothing new under the sun.

The second aspect of the definition concerns the triggers of innovative activity. In the literature on social innovation, which also covers political innovation, it is generally seen as being a reaction to contemporary problems and crises (Zapf 1989). Examples include economic crises (e.g. the global financial crisis of 2007–2008), technological risks (e.g. nuclear power), and demographic challenges (e.g. aging societies). Accordingly, the concept of innovation has been typically discussed in connection with the risk society and second modernity (Beck 1986; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1996; Luhmann 1986). To explain it in broad terms, social innovation can thus be interpreted as collective efforts achieved by modern societies in their response to presenting social risks, crises, and internal problems (Zapf 2004). Political innovations are, by association, thus initiated by the relevant actors in response to these risks and crises.

By stating the triggers of social innovation, we now come to the final characteristics thereof: their social impact. Many scholars consider new political ideas and practices to be innovative once it is proved that they have achieved a wider social impact (Polsby 2004). Along the same lines, Howaldt (2010) further interprets the processes of imitation, diffusion, and institutionalization as the collective social output that will exert sustainable influences on society. Nevertheless, there is no agreement on the evaluation criteria for "successful innovations" or "sustainable influences." It is also the case that innovations will generate positive resonance in some places but draw negative consequences in other ones. Taking policy innovation as an example, successfully implemented new programs might have spillover effects on other regions that tend to learn from the innovators. We should not take replications of a particular political innovation as evidence of its successfulness, but rather as a fact of the social impact of innovations — because, in the long run, newly introduced policies could induce a chain of social changes that require further institutional adjustments within society.

In summary, our reading of the relevant literature leads us to suggest that political innovations represent one part of social innovations (as previously defined). They differ from other types of social innovation, as they are initiated by actors in the relevant political sphere. In order to understand how political innovations are applied in practice, the three aforementioned characteristics of them are scrutinized so as to identify the concrete actions and interactions involved in the innovation process. Our definition and analytical framework of political innovation set the theoretical foundations for the empirical discussion that follows in the next sections. Different innovation practices in China and South Korea can be thus elucidated on the basis of the same standards, which we now do.

Implications of the innovation concepts utilized in China and South Korea

The following section elaborates on the conceptual applications of innovation in the Chinese and Korean political systems respectively. We first discuss how policy innovations are applied within the national reform context in China, and then continue with the analysis of government innovations in South Korea.

Mapping policy innovations in China

This section discusses how innovation is conceptualized and utilized in the Chinese political context. It starts with an overview of the understanding of innovation present in the country's political discourses, and reveals the understandings of innovation and reform adhered to by the Chinese leadership. The conceptual discussion of policy innovation draws on empirical cases taken from the innovation database of the Local Government Innovation Award, which is the very first of its kind for political innovation in China. As the award was initiated and endorsed by

the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, it spurred an array of applications from innovation projects run by local governments. Political and academic such applications will be merged together in the analysis.

Conceptual overview

Innovation has been widely used in political discourse in China, but its meaning nevertheless remains elusive. Policy, government, governance, administrative, and institutional innovations are often cross-used, and might indicate phenomena that have overlapping meanings. Here we focus on policy innovations in the Chinese context, which entails "the development of new ideas or concepts and the conversion of these ideas into new policies or policy instruments" (Heberer and Göbel 2017: 9, forthcoming). Thus the object of investigation in this section will be new policies or policy instruments in China. A proper illustration of China's policy innovations relies first on an explanation of the political context, as it exerts a fundamental impact on innovation discourses and subtly constructs the ways in which this term can even be discussed in the first place. Furthermore, it is necessary to differentiate between and to categorize the set of new political phenomena that correspond to the underlying characteristics of innovation as previously discussed in the introduction. The cases of policy innovation presented here draw from empirical studies of Chinese scholars, and the greater part of them have been initiated and implemented by those local governments that have participated in local innovation awards.

The concept of policy innovation in China's national reform context

Innovation has been conceptualized specifically in the political context of incremental reform in China. As such, there is a need to explain what is even meant by incremental reform, and how is it related to innovation. First, Chinese politicians and researchers apply distinct angles to interpret the relationship between reform (gaige, 改革) and innovation (chuangxin, 创新). The Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin has proposed a conceptual hierarchy of reform, social innovation, and social change. Reform is considered to be a part of innovation, while the latter is considered to be a part of the process of social change (Gillwald 2000). To translate this hierarchical differentiation into a simple formula, the relationship of the three concepts is: reform < innovation < social change.

The Chinese understanding, meanwhile, implies exactly the opposite logic. Instead of being the smallest entity, China's reform entails a strong holistic vision that frames the overarching political ideals and goals of how the country should develop. But it does not imply a radical system transformation rather the incremental attempts to optimize the political structure and governance ability (e.g. government efficiency and transparency) in order to eliminate corruption, ensure party legitimacy, and to manage worsening social problems with better solutions (Heberer 2002; Landry 2008; Yu 2011). So incremental reform is very much associated with the macro-

level political agenda of realizing the ideal blueprint of a functional governing system. On top of that, innovation is considered as the means by which to reach the ultimate reform goals — meaning reform will be realized by the cumulative effect of all innovative attempts. At this point, the relationship between innovation and reform in the Chinese context is clear: innovation < reform. Bearing this conceptual differentiation in mind, we can further interpret how the meaning of innovation has been developing in the dynamic reform context.

For the different stages of social development, the Communist Party of China (CPC) tends to employ a variety of terms that can incorporate all the aims and goals in accordance with strategic planning. "Revolution" was a spiritual keyword during the time of class struggle and the party-led campaigns against counterrevolutionaries and "the running dogs of the imperialists." "Reform" turned out to be the next such keyword, following the economic transformation that took off in 1978 — it has remained a buzzword that is continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed over time. In the twelfth Five-Year Plan 2011–2015 (State Council 2011), innovation appears 124 times, exceeding reform which is used 123 times. This by no means implies the decreasing role of reform in Chinese political development, but, rather, adds new explanatory indicators for the country's political reform. Yu Keping, one of the Chinese government's key advisors, mentioned in his speech at the University of Duisburg-Essen on October 29, 2012 that: "We do not like revolution, but we do like reform. Now innovation becomes the new keyword."[1] This is a concise and precise summary of the functional evolution of popular political terms in the dynamic processes of social development.

The usage of innovation reflects its functional role as a means to achieve the goals of reform. It appears frequently as a discourse tool in many important government and party documents. In his collected writings, Jiang Zemin stated that "innovation is the soul of a nation and the driver of the development of a country" (2006: xx). In his speech given during the 18th Party Congress in late 2012, Hu Jintao, former Party Chief and State President, took the last available chance before retirement to propagate his concept of a "scientific outlook on development" as a theoretical innovation (理论创新 lilun chuangxin) — to be achieved through courageous practices and steady learning of Marxism and Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, the Theory of Deng Xiaoping and the "Three Representatives" by Jiang Zemin (Hu 2012). In the No. 1 document of 2013, innovation was to be implemented in facilitating rural public services, improving methods of agricultural production, and assisting social organization (State Council 2013). Wen Jiabao (2013) declared the importance of enhancing innovation in society, specifically in order to better

[1] Based on the authors' translation transcript of Prof. Yu Keping's speech. For more event information, see: https://www.uni-due.de/in-east_former_website/1/news/einzelansicht/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=273.

facilitate public services. There is a continuous emphasis on innovation in the key policy documents and speeches put forward by political leaders. Starting with the Xi-Li administration, innovation has been granted with a new function: as a panacea to ease the pain endured from reform obstacles. Li Keqiang, China's Prime Minister, unveiled his ambition of political and government structural reform at the press conference of the 12th National People's Congress, which was broadcast live to 1.34 billion Chinese people: "China's reform is now navigating uncharted waters […] nowadays, stirring the vested interests is much harder than laying a hand on a soul. […] Reform is about curbing power; this is a self-imposed revolution that requires real self-sacrifice and it will be painful."[2]

The message is clear that reform continues to be the main theme on the political agenda, and the new leadership is clear about the resistance and unwillingness to embrace it that exists — but the firm determination from the center to push it through is communicated via public announcements. This reinforces the legitimacy and rightfulness of the reform agenda. Chairing his first meeting of the State Council, Premier Li explicitly underlined the significant role of innovation: "To fulfill the plans of the reform, we shall construct an innovative government, […] and innovation will be an important trend of political development in China" (Bai 2013). Holding up the positive image of innovation, the functional role of China's political innovation becomes more significant in the context of the country's reform.

There is another trend in political discourses on innovation in China: top-level designed policy innovations. Already at the fifth plenary session of the 17th Party Congress the CPC proposed the concept of "top-level design (顶层设计 dingceng sheji)," which has become the guiding principle for policy innovations regarding key social problems (Xia 2012). The CPC leadership has become more and more concerned about the serious social disparities caused by the intensive process of economic development. The twelfth Five-Year Plan 2011–2015 (State Council 2011) also reiterates the importance of top-level design for policy innovations. This political rhetoric is a signal to local officials that they should seek higher-level approval for any innovative policies (Yu 2016).[3] The changing dynamics of political innovation can only be fully understood through the empirical investigation of concrete cases; the following subsection will offer such discussions based specifically on the cases found in the database of the Innovation and Excellence of Chinese Local Government (hereafter: IECLG).

2 Authors' transcription of Premier Li's press conference at People's Hall on March 17, 2013.

3 Prof. Yu Jianxing gave a lecture at the DFG Research Forum at the University of Duisburg-Essen on December 13, 2016. He showed empirical evidence of changing processes of policy innovation through the initiation of "top-level design." For more details about the lecture, see: https://www.uni-due.de/in-east/news.php?id=169.

Empirical cases of policy innovation in China: Economic and social needs, social impact

Since 2000 the IECLG award has been taking place Beijing biyearly.[4] A growing number of local governments have participated in the competition. Innovation projects can be submitted by various levels of local government (provincial, prefectural, county, and township). They are evaluated according to six criteria: originality, participatory space, social benefits, significance, cost effectiveness, and transferability.[5] The award has raised local officials' awareness of innovation issues and, more crucially, has created communication channels between central leadership, local officials, and scholars. The award database has so far accumulated hundreds of cases of local policy innovation that can serve as research sources for scholars.

At the inception of China's reform and opening up, the country's economic sectors experienced the most dynamic shifts. Thus, policy innovations were at first mainly driven by the need of rapid economic growth and the institutional adaption to market rules. Earlier studies on innovation took a historical approach to trace the trajectory of policy ones, so as to explore their functional roles during the era of economic boom. Guo (2000) argues that innovations at the local level have played a productive role in the transition period from planned to market-oriented economy in China, and the frictionless implementation of innovations at the local level has been guaranteed by the constitutional amendment of 1982 (and the ensuing enacted laws and regulations for local autonomy), decentralization initiatives, and an ideological shift among local cadres. Policy innovations that contributed to the economic success experienced in Wenzhou were carried out due to mutual interests and the tacit direct understanding between local governments and private enterprises (Chen 2004).

Moreover, the role of the leadership's and cadres' personal attitudes to innovation seems to be a prominent factor for project implementation. It was reported in some cases that cadres' enthusiasm and feeling of responsibility largely smoothed the way for the implementation of innovation projects (Gao 2011; Li 2011). These findings support Sorensen's (2016) argument that policy innovations include processes of change in the polity and politics, and that the implementation of them depends not only on what is politically possible but also on what is technically feasible in a given context. To transform a planned economy into a market one, policy innovations in

4 This is an official award initiated and organized every two years by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (a division of the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics), the Central Party School (Center for Comparative Study of World Political Parties), and the China Innovation Center (at Beijing University). Since the fifth award (2009–2010), Beijing University has become the sole organizer of this competition.

5 For detailed award rules and regulations, see: http://www.dfzlw.org/html/43-1/1283.htm.

economic fields induced changes in the institutional environment; new actors have also emerged in the meantime.

We should not underestimate the regional variance in policy innovations in China. Thus, the social acceptance of new ideas and practices there are affected by distinct factors. Due to these strong regional differences, the same factor can accelerate innovation in one place but hamper it in another; or, the same factor promotes one policy but restrains another all in the same location. The traditional perception is that wealthier and developed areas (the eastern coastal region) are more ready to innovate (Chen and Huang 2011; Chen 2011; He 2011; Wu et al. 2011). Yet the state of fiscal revenue is revealed to have both positive and negative correlations to local innovation (Yang 2011), and in some cases being in a stronger economic condition can be a fatal weakness for local innovation. Zhu Guangxi (2013) reported that richer local governments embedded in poorer regions have greater constraints to policy innovation, because the fact of regional backwardness will arouse media and public suspicions about underlying intentions herein and, moreover, neighboring governments within the region tend to lobby against such innovation in order to keep the annual horizontal transfer payments from their richer neighbors. The economic variables are thus issue-specific factors that need to be analyzed by individual context, for the strength of the local economy or fiscal revenue can only be interpreted as the existence of one of the many resources that any innovation may demand.

Based on the IECLG award database, Wu Jiannan (2012) lays out five types of innovation by Chinese local governments: service, technological, management, collaborative, and governance. With the help of this typology, we can identify local governments' focus on certain policy areas. In addition to economic needs, social demand has increasingly become another major trigger for policy innovations by local governments. Social groups can now use multiple channels to articulate their demands regarding public services. The response of the local governments has been more deliberate and accurate, to ensure that the new policies will be accepted by the local people.

In a broader sense, the emergence of new actors' groups and new means of demand articulation can be seen as the social impact of innovation efforts. Furthermore the roles of the local governments have become more diverse and flexible than before; Chen Tianxiang (2002a, 2002b) categorizes them into three groups: pioneers, agents, and supporters.[6] Government authorities are no longer a monolith of state power with the exact same interests. Different authorities have engaged with policy

6 The translation of the three roles of government has been slightly amended according to the contextual meaning. The original text refers to the "primary action group" (第一行动集团 diyi xingdong jituan), "agents" (代理者daili zhe) and "secondary action group" (第二行动集团di'er xingdong jituan).

innovations in the domains falling under their responsibility. Despite the bureaucracies for public sectors, party organizations as well as legislative and judicial units have also constituted the innovation actors (Chen 2011: 99). Many of their policy innovations received awards from the IECLG committee: the two-ballot democratic election in Guangshui in Hubei Province (Zhou 2007), the democratic deliberative forum in the county-level city Wenling (Lang 2005), and the establishment of the Center for Judicial Settlement in Pudong District in Shanghai (Zhong 2007).

While the IECLG database has doubtlessly created great opportunities for analyzing policy initiatives in a more comprehensive manner, it also implicitly leaves the definition of the term "innovation" to the competition organizers themselves. On the other hand, the unreflective adoption of their definition can also be said to mirror the way innovation is treated more generally in the Chinese context. As shown above innovation is used in a very practical way there, covering all minor policy initiatives that might contribute to the realization of the ultimate goal of gradualist reform at the macro level. Initially, policy innovations were induced by economic needs; gradually, with the development of society, social demands become a pull factor for local governments to engage with innovative ideas. There is an obvious variance in the factors that influence innovation implementation, meaning the acceptance of innovation in a given local context. The process of policy innovation has also evoked institutional changes and the emergence of new actors in the political spheres. In that sense, the Chinese application of innovation is explained by the characteristics that were identified in the second section. This particularly pertains to social impact, which seems to be associated with macro-level reform. We do not aim to generalize the modes of policy innovation as either top-down or bottom-up in the normative sense. It seems that different cases of innovation reveal different trajectories of policy development, due to the strong regional diversity in the country. As indicated before, however, we can at least anticipate a trend of a more top-down process occurring, that through the initiation of the aforementioned top-level design.

Mapping government innovations in South Korea

After identifying the criteria for political innovation in the Chinese context, this section will now look into the concept's presence in South Korea and specifically how the term is used in that society. First, it will clarify how the term political innovation is used from central government to local government, as well as in the policymaking arena. Second, a specify case study will be used to see whether political innovation can indeed be observed in Korea.

Conceptual overview

The word innovation is explained as something that is new in terms of method and technology, and also as something that improves the existing entity in the Korean

term. The Korean word *hyeogsin* (혁신: in Chinese character: 革新), an equivalent of the English word innovation, is also used to explain the English word reform. That is, in the Korean context, innovation and reform are the same word and are thus used interchangeably. The word innovation is also often used in South Korea, as this is itself quite familiar in the country. However, it is not often used outside economic and technology contexts.

While the term innovation is familiar in South Korean society, the combined term "political plus innovation" is less well known. The term political innovation per se is not very widely used or referred to in political speeches or in the political discourse among South Korean academics, which differ a lot from the Chinese phenomena. As also mentioned above in the Chinese case, the term political innovation is a fuzzy one and has no clear meaning that is widely understood and shared in the South Korean political context. Innovations in the political context have used many different nomenclatures, such as "government innovation," "policy innovation," "administrative innovation," "institutional innovation," "E-government innovation," "governmental reform," "administrative reform," "public sector reform," and "regional reform." It seems that "politics" or "political" do not have clearly defined boundaries, and therefore include comprehensive meanings for the government in its policies. In the case of South Korea, the term government innovation in particular has often been referred to from the early 2000s onward.

The government's innovation discussion started from a particular body of academic literature. *Reinventing Government* by Osborne & Gaebler (1992) attracted particular interest, and led the debate among the country's academics (Park 2007; Kim 2009). Innovation studies were conducted in various disciplines, including the Social Sciences. In the latter context, the "diffusion" and "adoption" of innovation studies occurs broadly (Kim, 2009).

In the South Korean academic debate, it is also pointed out that reform and innovation are used interchangeably and thus understood as one similar concept. Comparably, reform has focused on the improvement of something incomplete or bad to it being good or better — and in order to do so it covers policy and/or the system. Innovation contains a more value-neutral meaning, and is more broadly applied and extended to different disciplines (So and Choi 2006). Park (2008) has also added some valuable discussion points on the topic, for example that reform implies the "politics of improvement" and the reshaping of the nature of the "administrative-political system." Innovation implies a "continuous process" and involves an "interdisciplinary approach," while reform could denote "instant change."

Government innovation in the South Korean context

This section will illustrate how government innovation is discussed in South Korean politics and academia. The concept of improving government or government reform has been on everyone's lips in South Korea ever since the 1990s. This was the

period when Korean democratization was initially achieved (1987), and for the first time a civilian was inaugurated (1993) as president of the Republic of Korea after more than 30 years of having military generals fill the position.

The Civilian Government (Kim Young-sam Administration, 1993–1997) stated as its goals the "reckoning with the past" and "reform," in order to create a more efficient government. The government also formed an Administrative Reform Committee made up of government officials and civilians. The committee members were asked to exist as a legislative body, rather than being an advisory council to the president. Moreover, they adopted a bottom-up approach and received suggestions from the people and administrative organizations on policy (PCGID 2007).

One of the biggest achievements for the Civilian Government would be the "real-name financial transaction system" that was first implemented in 1993, designed to break business–politics collusion and eliminate corruption in South Korean society. The Civilian Government's reforms addressed various areas that ranged from government administration, finance and tax reform, business sectors, education, and even the military (PCGID 2007; Kim 2012). The Kim Young-sam government made its best efforts to end the culture of military rule and authoritarianism and to create a truly democratic society.

During the People's Government (Kim Dae-jung Administration, 1998–2003), "government reform" was put high on the agenda so that structural administrative reform could be implemented (Yeom, Ha and Gil 2008). The government aimed for administrative reform in the public sector in order to create a "small but efficient government." The ideas of the People's Government also embraced the customer-oriented and performance-oriented measures of New Public Management. The People's Government also presented a wide range of reform regulations and a Regulatory Reform Committee was constituted based on the Act on Administrative Regulations (PCGID 2007).

This was the time (1998) when the South Korean economy was deeply affected by the Asian financial crisis, which triggered, on the one hand, International Monetary Fund (IMF) interference in the country's domestic affairs. On the other hand, this IMF crisis also provided the opportunity to implement the proposed reforms more smoothly within South Korean society. In particular it allowed the People's Government to push forward reform on the *chaebols* (conglomerates) without too much resistance from the business sector, due to the fact that there was a general consensus in South Korean society that reform was absolutely necessary in order to overcome the financial crisis (Kim 2012).

The term government innovation, and not only that of government reform, was stressed by the Participatory Government (Roh Moo-hyun Administration 2003-2008) and was widely known to South Korean society (Im and Park 2015). Then President Roh established the Presidential Committee on Government Innovation and Decentralization (PCGID) in 2003 (Park 2008), whose main task was to manage

major innovation projects such as those of decentralization, administrative, personnel administration system, finance and tax systems reform, as well as the promotion of E-government (PCGID 2007).

The Participatory Government advanced "building a leading innovative country" as its main slogan, and identified five goals that it should achieve: efficient, service-oriented, transparent, decentralized, and participatory government (Yoon 2006). The participatory government's innovation can be categorized into two major types: administrative reform and decentralization. The administrative reform can itself be divided into two further elements: improvement of the administrative system (Government 2.0) and structural reform (Park 2007).

As the evidence above shows, government innovation is strongly emphasized in the context of central and/or local government, and in administrative structures, systems, and services. The following section will look more closely at innovation by the South Korean government to try and link in with the academic discussions on political innovation, as addressed earlier in this paper. The case study about South Korean government innovation will tackle whether it is possible to draw the conclusion that government innovation is an actual example of political innovation in this setting. As discussed in the conceptual part, four elements will be scrutinized: newness; crises, risks, and social needs as innovation triggers; and, social impact.

Analysis of South Korean government innovation compared to the political innovation contexts

When a new administration is formed in South Korea, usually some sort of committee is also created that will assist the president with reform and innovation processes. There was the Administration Reform Committee in the case of the Kim Young-sam Administration, and the Regulatory Reform Committee played a similar role in the case of the Kim Dae-jung Administration. In the case of the Roh Moo-hyun Administration, the PCGID was established. The term government innovation was stressed and repeatedly mentioned in various media outlets at that time, and has become popular with the country's citizens since.

Compared to the previous two Kim administrations, the Roh one focused more on innovation than on reform. The PCGID's role is currently much broader than under the previous administrations and includes aspects such as administrative reform, personnel issues, fiscal and tax matters, and even decentralization (PCGID 2 2007). The PCGID was in charge of the whole government innovation project, including the implementation plan, while working closely with the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (MOGAHA) as well as other ministries and with local governments, based on specific innovation plans. Moreover, the president's secretariat also had a key part in managing and reviewing the innovation implementation plan (PCGID 1 2007). Government innovation focused on six different disciplines: administrative reform, personnel reform, decentralization, the tax and financial system, e-government, and archives. The interesting point here is

that the English version of the 'Innovation and Decentralization of the Participatory Government 2007' document specified all six of those disciplines as subject to reform, whereas the Korean version of the document only used that word in relation to two categories: administrative reform and personnel reform (PCGID 2007a; PCGID 2007b).

The PCGID worked on six different areas (all information taken from PCGID 1 2007). First, in order to build an efficient administration system, the committee's mandate included the construction of a national evaluation infrastructure, the adoption of Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), the creation of a flexible organizational culture, the restructuring of government organizations, and the developing of a horizontal policy coordination system (PCGID1 2007). Second, the Roh administration also paid attention to personnel issues. Human resources are one of the main infrastructure elements in government institutions, so the government applied strategic personnel management, integrated the national personnel functions into the Civil Service Commission, and encouraged the decentralization of staff management at the local level.

Third, the Roh Administration's vision was to create a decentralized state. In order to achieve that, the government needed to shift authority to the local level, encourage local governments' innovation activities, devolve government functions, and expand public support. The Decentralization Expert Committee was formed and developed a roadmap for decentralization. This roadmap identified seven basic directions and 20 priorities. The basic directions involved redistributing authority to the local level, supporting decentralization with respect to the financial independence of local governments, promoting local legislation and election systems, and strengthening local governments' autonomy and accountability. Fourth, tax and financial system reform involved the decentralization of the national financial system so as to promote growth and distribution. In order to achieve this, four objectives were set: fiscal decentralization, the rationalization of taxation and tax administration, enhanced expenditure efficiency and financial transparency, and strengthened fiscal regulations.

Fifth, an e-government was established to create transparent administration through innovation in information resources management and so as to accomplish a more participatory government. The implementation plan consisted of four essential categories: innovation in public officials' working arrangements, in services for the public, in information resources management, and in the legal system. Sixth and last, the Roh government planned to establish an archive management culture within government institutions. To realize efficiency and responsibility through process innovation as well as build the information through systems innovation, national records management and international standards were considered necessary. The project committee thus developed the document management cards based on ISO 15489.

This government innovation was implemented during the Roh administration's reign from 2003 to 2007, occurring in various policies and at different levels of government and within state institutions. Thus it is not easy to give a full description of all the changes witnessed. However, the following part links the elaboration of government innovation in South Korea with the earlier conceptual discussion about political innovation.

Newness

One of the crucial elements of the conceptual discussion on political innovation is newness. Many new issues were introduced and implemented in the South Korean context, of which only a few significant and physical effects and changes can be highlighted here. First, the open government website (www.open.go.kr) was launched in April 2006 to provide a one-stop service for administrative information that related to 744 government institutions. The purpose hereof is that citizens can now easily and actively access information via the internet in fulfilment of their right to be informed (PCGID1 2007). Second, no sufficient evaluation system had been used by the South Korean government previously. For that reason, the government bodies wanted to improve their own work capacity by using evaluation systems — including for policy, work performance management, and financial performance management evaluation. Consequently, the government developed the Integrated Public Service Evaluation System (IPSES), and enacted a basic law on evaluating government affairs and public services. Third, with regard to the digitization of documentation, the South Korean government adopted a stable e-document transfer system so that all the electronic documents are shared by all administrative institutions from the central to local level, thus not only being limited to the institution directly responsible. This brought about more efficient work processes within government institutions and also helped to prevent the duplication of paperwork between them (Kim 2005).

Crises, risks, and social needs as innovation triggers

This element is difficult to verify, since no major crises or risks were visible in South Korean society at that time. However Yeom et al. (2008) argue that the IMF crisis was an instance of "social needs" that triggered and required innovation in South Korean society during the years of the Kim Dae-jung Administration as well as those of the Roh Administration too. President Roh, who was elected from within the same liberal political party as his predecessor Kim Dae-jung, was therefore also obliged to carry on and developed further the reform and the innovation of the preceding Kim Administration.

Park (2007), however, provides a different opinion. While there was no serious crisis in South Korean society at that time, there nevertheless were problems and issues such as divided public opinion, the opposition party becoming the majority in parliament, a deepening gap between rich and poor, corruption in the public sector, and conflict between different political and social groups. Therefore, it was

necessary for the newly elected president to provide a fresh vision and plan for the future.

Social impact

The last element of the conceptual discussion on political innovation is regarding social impact. According to Park and his colleagues (2006), government innovation showed a positive change in and impact on South Korean society. With regard to administrative services provided to the country's citizens, the comprehensive satisfaction level increased from 63.8 points in 2002 to 64.5 points in 2003. The satisfaction level with public entities rose positively from 76.8 points in 2003 to 80.6 points in 2005 meanwhile (Park et al. 2006:32). Moreover, the South Korean government's work on corruption also improved per the International Corruption Index. The country's ranking worldwide improved from 50th place in 2003 with 4.3 points to 40th place in 2005 with 5.0 points (Park et al. 2006:33). All this evidence reveals that a positive social impact can indeed be said to have been triggered by the government innovation undertaken in South Korea.

Conclusion

"Innovation" has become an important concept in many academic disciplines, including in Business Studies, Management Studies, the Social Sciences, and in Economics. However, while many studies have been conducted on the role of innovation in a variety of different domains there has to date been very little application of the innovation concept from the perspective specifically of Political Science. Therefore, this paper has sought to conceptualize "political innovation" in the academic literature and to identify evidence for its application in political practice. Particular emphasis has been on the East Asian region, with China and South Korea having served as the two chosen examples.

The conceptual part looked into the various contributions to the relevant literature, and identified the difference between reform and innovation. Then the term innovation was also studied closely, and the "newness" of it was discussed with respect to three dimensions: time, physical and the social one. The paper also pointed out that social — and political in particular — innovation is driven by the crises, risks, and social needs forcing society to innovate. "Social impact" is also an important element of political innovation. Because new political ideas and practices are considered innovative, once what is new has become successful then it has to be accepted and to have a wide-ranging social impact too.

After the theoretical groundwork, the paper then studied two specific country cases in East Asia: China and South Korea. First, each of the subsections discussed the interpretation and practice of political innovation in each country and then, second, looked into a particular area of empirical application (policy innovation in China and government innovation in South Korea). In China, innovation has been widely used in political discourse. It has a rather functional role, and is perceived as a new means

of achieving reform at the macro level. Scholarly research has revealed an academic focus on the correlation between contextual factors and the implementation of policy innovations. Economic needs have been the major trigger for policy innovations during the reform era, whereas growing social demands have been a pull factor for the Chinese government to engage with new policy solutions. The cases mentioned mainly come from the policy innovations that have been well documented and appraised in the biyearly innovation award for local governments in China. They reveal the growing innovative activities at the local levels in China, and clarify the bifurcated and diverse understandings of policy innovation among proponents, policymakers, and high-level officials. However, innovative activities have induced changes in existing institutions and led to the emergence of new actors' groups in society. These phenomena can be viewed as the wider impact of policy innovations in China.

Like in the Chinese case, South Korea has also used the word innovation often in various contexts — from business to politics. It seems that there is no clear-cut distinction between the terms innovation and reform in the South Korean context, whereas Chinese politicians differentiate these two concepts clearly. We assume this to be the major reason why innovation, as a political term, is much more widely used in China. However political innovation has had a wide application in a variety of areas of South Korean government life, from administrative reform to institutional innovation. Government innovation became a particularly popular term during the Roh Moo-hyun Administration in the 2000s, and has since persisted. Government innovation involves two approaches: first, shifting power from central to local government and, second, providing effective administrative services to citizens by actively using the internet (a concept called "Government 2.0"). After this conceptual discussion, government innovation was presented as a case study by which to observe one example of political innovation in South Korea. Government innovation illustrated evidence from the conceptual discussion, focusing on newness, social needs, and social impact.

In conclusion, the paper has provided a conceptualization of political innovation in East Asia. However, we also have to recognize that there are several limitations to our study. First, while our country studies provided some insightful knowledge on how political innovations are carried out in China and South Korea it would have been desirable to include the Japanese case as well — in order to acquire a broader understanding of the concept's application across East Asia. Second, while the Chinese and South Korean cases delivered interesting views, studying the same type of case or policy area would have been useful — especially considering how the two states differ, from their political systems to economic situations. These observations might be useful for the future research agenda in this field to bear in mind, especially with regard to how the cross-country comparison of political innovation can reflect distinctive patterns of state–society relations within different political systems.

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