

# Media Governance in Korea 1980–2017

Daeho Kim

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# Preface

On 10 March 2017, South Korea's president, Park Geun-hye, was impeached, as all eight Constitutional Court justices voted to uphold the impeachment motion. The country's first president to be ousted in such a manner, Park Geun-hye was accused of using her authority as the representative of the state for her own interests and of an inability to settle political disputes.

In fact, the media played a crucial role in her impeachment. From September 2016, newspapers and broadcasts began to report the president's mishandling of state affairs, with both conservative and progressive media exposing her corruption. Once the public was made aware of this, citizens engaged in peaceful demonstrations. As a result, the Constitutional Court unanimously decided to impeach the president. In particular, JTBC, a recently established general programming channel, reported major evidence that led to legal action being taken. The irony here is that the four general programming channels, which began broadcasting in 2013, were originally criticized by both progressive opposition parties and civil society as conservative media tools. However, they played a decisive role in criticizing and overturning the conservative president and government. This was an unexpected turn of events.

As recently as the late 1980s, Korean media was a relatively small industry, which did not enjoy the freedom to act as a watchdog of democratic society. However, with economic growth and democratization, the

country's media began to change dramatically. Globalization and the development of information and communication technology (ICT) had a direct impact. In particular, as Korea's growth strategy promoted an information society, the media greatly expanded its content and outlook.

The media industry has grown in size, and the number of operators and people participating in it has increased. In addition, there has been a change from traditional media such as newspapers and broadcasting to the internet and mobile-oriented media. The media now has greater influence in politics and society, as it played an important role in the democratization process of Korean society, and is critical in presenting and creating the societal agenda.

Informatization promoted the digitization of media and greatly increased citizens' media use and participation. According to the world digital index, Korea is ahead of other countries in this latter area. The media, originally a government-led system, has changed to one led by various stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society. Since the 1980s, Korean media has expanded in breadth and depth.

However, this change was not smooth. Media policy was impacted each time conservative and progressive governments took power, with, in some cases, each new government overturning previous media policy. There was also constant conflict among those governmental departments in charge of media, which delayed the digitization of broadcasting and even changed the nature of new media. The types of companies involved in the media industry also changed dramatically. In addition to traditional media companies, internet companies and telecommunication operators, as well as companies from totally different fields, joined the media sector. The emergence of civil society greatly influenced the media, as it played a role in balancing the industrialization and public nature of the field. Furthermore, the development of ICT resulted in civil society becoming an important stakeholder in media policy.

Therefore, Korean media was no longer a system dominated by either government or corporations, but rather a system determined by various stakeholder agreements. In other words, a system of media governance had been established.

Since 2000, the term ‘media governance’ has been widely used in media studies. As Manuel Puppis pointed out, media scholars used this as a catch-all phrase to describe new polities, politics, and policies in the media sector. In particular, media governance was seen as a good conceptual framework when emphasizing citizen participation or the impact of globalization. This example led to internet governance being established in the internet sector. Therefore, the media governance approach is a suitable framework for explaining changes in the media field in Korea.

I deal with changes in Korea’s media governance over the past three decades from the 1980s. In particular, I want to address the fact that the Korean media sector has served as a rare case that shows how industrialization, democratization, and informatization have changed media governance. I emphasize that the change of such governance in Korea not only serves as a special case but also enriches the media ecosystem as a whole. In addition, I have focused on the formation of the system in which not only government, but also the private sector and civil society, have interacted as multi-stakeholders. This illustrates the direction that media policy and regulation should follow in a very complex modern society. This could be seen in the same context as the internet governance creating a new governance model based on multi-stakeholderism. In this sense, Korea’s media governance suggests a new model of media governance.

Incheon, Republic of Korea

Daeho Kim

# Acknowledgements

This book has developed as a result of my long career and experiences in media and the ICT sector. Coincidentally with another turning point in modern Korean history ending the Third Republic of 18 year administration, I began media studies in 1980, and have continued to work in this field ever since. I am lucky to have studied, worked, and served in many places within this dynamic area—at a time when media and ICT have grown so much and contributed to the nation’s prosperous developments. In this regard, this book is not possible without many people who have worked at in media and ICT areas.

During the last 37 years, I have worked with many individuals from Korea and around the world. It is to them and their networks that I owe a great debt of gratitude. Internationally, among others, Eli Noam of Columbia University, USA; Kiyoshi Nakamura of Waseda University, Japan; Yu-li Liu of National Chengchi University, Taiwan; Manuel Puppis of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland; and the late Michael Green of University of Birmingham, UK. In Korea, all the heads and colleagues of the defunct Korea Broadcasting Commission (KBC), the Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI), Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), Korea Telecom (KT), the Korea Broadcast Advertising Corporation (KOBACO), the Korea Internet and Security Agency (KISA), and the National Economic Advisory Council under the President of the Republic of Korea. The National Research Foundation of

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Media Governance</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Changes in Korean Society Since 1980</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Fluctuating Media in the 1980s</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Media Liberation Following Democratization in 1987</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Changes in the Media Industry's Value and Governance in the 1990s</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Introduction of New Media: Informatization and Media</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>2000 Broadcasting Act and 2005 Newspaper Act: Balancing Public and Market Interests</b>	<b>89</b>

<b>9</b>	<b>Age of Media Convergence</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Establishment of the Korea Communications Commission in 2008</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Revision of Media Laws and Cross-Ownership of Newspaper and Broadcasting in 2009</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>From Media Governance to ICT Governance</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Internet Governance</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Changes in Media Governance 1980–2017</b>	<b>185</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>203</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>213</b>

# Author Biography

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# List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Media governance framework	19
Fig. 3.1	GNI per capita (Source: Statistics Korea 2016)	22
Fig. 3.2	Industrial production in Korea (Source: Statistics Korea 2016)	22
Fig. 3.3	Growth of export (1956–2014) (Source: Korea International Trade Association)	26
Fig. 3.4	Gini coefficient (Source: Statistics Korea 2013)	26
Fig. 3.5	Growth of wired communication services and mobile phone subscribers (1970–2012) (Source: Statistics Korea 2016)	27
Fig. 4.1	Growth of advertising revenue (1980–2014) (Source: KCC 2015)	44
Fig. 5.1	Growth of global media Industry (Source: PwC (Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2005, 2011, 2014), Ministry of Culture and Sports (Cultural Industry White Paper 1997), Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Cultural Industry in Statistics 1998))	52
Fig. 5.2	Major daily newspaper revenue Growth (Source: KOSIS (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism))	56
Fig. 5.3	Increase of Periodicals (Source: KOSIS (Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism))	56

## **xvi**      **List of Figures**

Fig. 6.1	Broadcasting programme Exports (Source: Broadcasting Industry Survey Report, Contents Industry Statistics, Broadcasting Imports/Exports Statistics (Korea Communications Commission, Ministry of Culture, Sport, and Tourism) (Units: USD thousands))	69
Fig. 8.1	Local newspaper revenues trend (Source: 2007 Culture Industry White Paper (Financial Supervisory Service 2006 Audit Report), 2011 Cultural Industry White Paper (Electronic Disclosure System of Financial Supervisory Service (Data Analysis, Retrieval and Transfer System, DART)), 2015 Content Industry White Paper (Korea Press Foundation, 2015))	104
Fig. 8.2	Local broadcasting revenues trend (Source: KCC (White Paper on Local Broadcasting Development Committee, 2013), Korea Press Foundation (Analysis of Media Business Performance 2008), KCC (Evaluation of Competition Situation in Broadcasting Market 2014))	104
Fig. 8.3	Local Newspaper Support Fund (Source: Local Press Development Committee 2016)	105
Fig. 8.4	Local Broadcasting Support Fund (Source: KCC (Budget and Fund Management Plans 2013, 2014, 2016))	105
Fig. 9.1	VOD revenue growth (Source: KCC 2016)	126
Fig. 9.2	IPTV subscribers increase (Source: KCC 2016)	128
Fig. 11.1	Share of terrestrial channels, general programming channels, and CJ E&M channels (Source: KCC (2016))	154
Fig. 12.1	Layer model	163
Fig. 12.2	ICT ecosystem	168
Fig. 14.1	Daily newspaper revenues (Source: Newspaper and Broadcasting (1996.2); Newspaper Financial Analysis (2012–2015))	187
Fig. 14.2	Growth of Korean media industry (Source: PwC (2005, 2011, 2014); Kwon (2005))	195
Fig. 14.3	Trend of subscribers of pay TV providers (Source: KCC (2016) (Unit: thousand))	196

# List of Tables

Table 3.1	Changes in the Korean economy	23
Table 3.2	Korea's National Development Index	25
Table 3.3	International Information Society Index	28
Table 4.1	Expenditure of public interest fund	42
Table 4.2	Comparison of licence fee and advertising income	43
Table 4.3	Objective of the civil society media campaign	46
Table 6.1	Broadcasting policy committees in Korea	65
Table 6.2	Ratio of production cost to revenue of terrestrial broadcasters (2008–2011)	67
Table 6.3	Civil media movement cases	71
Table 7.1	Cable TV regulation	80
Table 7.2	Cable TV subscribers expected in 1995	80
Table 7.3	Cable TV PP licence in 1993	82
Table 7.4	Additional channel authorization in 1995	83
Table 7.5	Cable TV industry structure in 1995	84
Table 7.6	Types of public channel	87
Table 8.1	Cable TV subscribers	99
Table 8.2	Cable SO income and expenses	99
Table 8.3	Changes of PP licensing system	99
Table 8.4	OhmyNews citizen reporter composition	102
Table 8.5	Protection of audience interests in 2000 Broadcasting Act	109
Table 9.1	Global BMTV standards	115
Table 9.2	Major IPTV service subscribers	116

**xviii**      **List of Tables**

Table 9.3	Process of digital broadcasting	117
Table 9.4	DMB and mobile internet	123
Table 9.5	T-DMB sales	127
Table 10.1	Ministries' views on broadcasting and telecommunications	138
Table 11.1	Deregulation of ownership after revision of media laws	151
Table 11.2	Trend of audience-share index	155
Table 11.3	Share of major media's public opinion influence	156
Table 11.4	Channel reliability on KI (KCC index)	159
Table 14.1	Recognition of factors limiting freedom of media in 1989–1997	188
Table 14.2	Informatization Index	189
Table 14.3	History of Korea's information plans	190
Table 14.4	Change of government department in charge of media	192