

How the World Bank Traveled: Policy Learning and the Basic Pension in South Korea

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WEDNESDAY 4TH JUNE

1500-1700

LG.11, 40 GEORGE SQUARE



This study examines how the World Bank's multi-pillar pension model influenced the development of the Basic Pension in South Korea. While existing research on Korean pension reforms emphasizes domestic dynamics, we foreground the often-overlooked influence of global social policy. Applying a Situated Learning Approach with the Advocacy Coalition Framework, we conceptualize policy transfer as dynamic interaction between global models and domestic actors. Through comparative historical analysis, we investigate three pension reforms (1998, 2007, 2014) using document analysis and elite interviews. The findings show that the World Bank model was not transplanted but vernacularized by domestic advocacy coalitions in response to the prevailing domestic contexts. The effectiveness of policy transfer varied across the reforms, depending on resonance and the political-institutional opportunity structure. We refine the theorization of policy transfer as a driver of welfare reforms and challenges methodological nationalism in social policy analysis.



Kim Won-Sub is a professor of Sociology at Korea University in South Korea and is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford. He has taught at Bielefeld University in Germany and Kyung-Sang National University in South Korea. He was also a visiting scholar at the University of North Carolina in the US.

He studied sociology at Korea University and Bremen University, and received his PhD from Bielefeld University (Institutionalisation of a new welfare state in East Asia? A case study on South Korea). Since then, his research and teaching have focused on the fields of new welfare states in East Asia, pension politics, and comparative social policy. He has published articles in journals such as Zeitschrift für Soziologie, Government and Opposition, International Journal of Social Quality, Policy and Society, and Asian Politics & Policy.