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Classical Literature Analysis: Government Development Strategies for Improving Economy in Joseon Dynasty Period

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Abstract

The Joseon Dynasty lasted for 618 years, from 1392 to 1910, and is regarded as one of the development periods of Korea in various areas, including politics, culture, economy, and society. During this period, the government undertook various measures to try to change the state of the economy and generally transform people's living standards. These were some of the strategies founded on Confucianism, which focused on the right way to govern and manage the economy to attain prosperity for the society. The present study explores government development strategies for improving the economy in Joseon Dynasty period using comprehensive literature analysis via Kci, Scopus, Web of Science databases. Indeed, agricultural transformations during the Joseon dynasty clearly show that knowledge and innovation were critical for encouraging agricultural growth. Therefore, today's South Korean government can implement technological advancement and research to improve its agricultural value chain and food security. Many farmers lack knowledge about improved methods of practicing agriculture or have inadequate capital to invest in research and development; these issues can be dealt with by the relevant government agencies putting in place necessary policies and creating awareness through educational programs and articles.

Keywords: Korean History, Economy in Joseon Dynasty Period, Government Development Strategies.

Major classifications: Economic History

1. Introduction

The Joseon Dynasty lasted for 618 years, from 1392 to 1910, and is regarded as one of the development periods of Korea in various areas, including politics, culture, economy, and society. During this period, the government undertook various measures to try to change the state of the economy and generally transform people's living standards (Dai, 2024). These were some of the strategies founded on Confucianism, which focused on the right way to govern and manage the economy to attain

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prosperity for the society. Also, land redistribution was one of the policy measures adopted to reduce the imbalance and enhance production in agriculture (Lee & Myong, 2022). Through the policy of divide, the government wanted to establish a new order where land ownership belonged to the peasants to eradicate poverty and provide crops for consumption. This not only conferred benefits on the masses but also brought the dynasty a more stable economic basis.

Again, tax reforms were another critical component of the economic policy in the Joseon period. The switch from more of a base tribute system to a better-standardized revenue collection method proved beneficial to the state by limiting the folk's over-taxation (Dai, 2024). This reform helped improve the governance structure and made resources available for public works and other administrative needs. Further, commerce was another critical component in developing the Joseon Dynasty's economy (Lee & Myong, 2022). Trade was encouraged and controlled to positively impact trade and economic progress as wanted by the government. Joseon government opened the ports on production insistence and encouraged merchants to engage in trade relations within and outside the country. It also helped to increase its overall welfare and stability by integrating it with the economies of its neighbors. Other developments that were central in supporting economic growth include innovations in agriculture. The government implemented new farming techniques, brought new crops, and funded irrigation schemes to increase agricultural production. Relaying information to the farming community meant that they practiced modern farming methods; thus, food security was achieved and aided population increase (Dai, 2024). This inclusion and comprehensive analysis of government development strategies during the Joseon Dynasty provides essential reference points for present-day economic policy in the Republic of South Korea. Therefore, by studying these historical approaches, present-day leaders can learn how to tackle modern socio-economic issues and encourage long-term development.

2. Theoretical Framework

Focusing specifically on the Joseon, the literature on the economy and policy of this dynasty can be viewed as developed with explanatory and analytical structures dominating the historical and social discourses (Cho et al., 2023). The existing literature contributes vigor and detail to producing a clear picture of these policies and their effect on the economy. In his paper, Lee (2024) discusses the principal land redistribution policies of the Korean kingdom during the reign of King Sejong as a way of dealing with emerging economic inequality and an attempt to boost agricultural productivity. These policies sought to liberalize big chunks of land under the aristocracy's control and distribute it to peasant farmers. Also, Kim (2024) examines the taxation practice of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea with emphasis on the shift from the tribute system to the implementation of a tax system. The Daedong Law was initiated in the seventeenth century, which took a step forward to revise the laws on taxation that were in the form of kind, mostly rice (Kim, 2024). This reform not only aimed at simplifying the tax structure but also helped minimize the level of corruption in the country and the distribution of tax burdens reasonably. Choi (2023) provided extensive insight into the trade policies of the Joseon Dynasty through the flow chart highlighting the government's attempts to control and encourage trade. Policies like the open-port policies and encouraging merchants' activities were the primary ways to foster development. The control of trade through the merchant guilds and state-authorized markets helped the government oversee trade fairly and effectively. Shim and his colleagues (2022) capture technological improvements in agriculture by introducing new concepts in farming and the advancement of crops, together with state support for irrigation. Government handbooks, including the Nongsa Jikseol (Straight Talk on Farming), contributed significantly to the spread of knowledge in agriculture, increasing food production productivity. However, the current literature needs a comprehensive study of the government development strategies used in the Joseon Dynasty period (Choi, 2023). The absence of evaluation or comparison of these strategies leads to most research works providing fragmented information about specific policies or sectors without looking at the totality of the issue.

To fill the existing gaps, this project systematically explores the government development policies of the Joseon Dynasty and their applicability to modern-day South Korea. By so doing, this investigation seeks to complement the existing literature on the numerous economic strategies through a more elaborate assessment of multiple economic policies over time within this period. More importantly, it aims to identify lessons that can be learned from past and present economic policies about present issues in the South Korean economy.

3. Methods

Based on an empirical and systematic review conducted by various scholars, this discussion focuses on the development strategies of the Joseon Dynasty's governments (Cho et al., 2023). The guidelines from PRISMA were followed, and the

articles were searched and retrieved in a way that complied with the standard of a systematic review. To commence with, this first technique involved an expert search of several academic databases in which articles were accessed, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Korea Citation Index. Using such search terms, possible papers associated with 'Joseon economic policies,' 'government development plans,' and 'Korean historical economy' were explored and identified (Glomb & Lee, 2020). Such a basic search provided many articles, books, dissertations, and other publications to consider.

During the screening phase, or rather stage, the titles and abstracts of papers identified from the databases were examined to select the relevant papers for the objectives of this study. To make this selection, only articles and papers that presented and discussed the Joseon Dynasty's understanding, structure, strategy, actions, and plans for the economy and government were considered for further analysis. For example, in the article by Glomb and Lee (2020), in the eligibility stage, the rest of the articles were screened based on their titles, abstracts, and full texts in cases of uncertainty. While choosing the source from the Joseon period, more attention was paid to the works that explained the economic policies of the times and the results of their application. This action helped filter out the sources and ensure that the analysis given in this work was confined to the existing strategic economic plans (Phommahaxay et al., 2019).

The last step involved selecting the final set of reliable and adequate articles for comparison and analysis. These selected studies formed part of the findings that also allowed for the conclusion on the Joseon Dynasty government's development strategies (Glomb & Lee, 2020). This systematic approach made it possible to reach an objective and comprehensive conclusion based on the state of available literature.

4. Findings

4.1. Land Redistribution Policies

Another great feature of Joseon's policy related to the management of the land was the redistribution of the land to solve the problem of social inequality and encourage farming. The government made several vital moves to implement land reforms, which involved providing land rights to the people, mainly the peasants from the higher classes or the landlords (Choi, 2023). The first of these is the Gyeongguk Daejeon. This is a compilation of laws made during King Sejo's reign. This policy was the directive to facilitate the land distribution process in the country so that peasants could be easily provided with the land they would require to cultivate crops. Since the government was interested in supporting food production and economic progress, it attempted to partition large tracts of land and allocate them to smallholders.

The results of these land reforms were tremendous. The government ensured peasants were well endowed with land to cultivate food for their households and the nation (Glomb & Lee, 2020). Not only did this raise the peasantry's quality of life, but it also boosted the dynasty's economic base. Another way land redistribution policies dealt with social justice issues was the equal distribution of the country's land. It also helped regulate rural society and minimize conflict caused by democratizing land ownership. Furthermore, about the latter, positive changes in agricultural productivity that stemmed from these reforms bore consequences for the entire economy. High crop production levels from a more productive agricultural sector meant food security, which boosted the human population and urbanization (Choi, 2023). The excess production encouraged higher trade activities since farmers could sell the leftovers, enhancing economic turnover. The effectiveness of these policies in land redistribution proves the significance of fair distribution of land in stabilization and the growth of the economy. The fair distribution of the land can provide more resources to a comparatively large number of people, positively affecting the country's economy.

4.2. Taxation Reforms

Another significant measure adopted in Joseon economics was taxation reforms. The government realized the importance of restructuring the tax body to help achieve the government-set revenue and ease the burden on the commoners (Hou & Hu, 2023). The Daedong Law, one of the most effective reforms conducted during the period of King Injo, was one of these changes. This law regulated the collection of taxes in kind, particularly rice, which reformed the tax administration and curbed the inefficiency resulting from corruption.

Several advantages can be attributed to the Daedong Law. In standardizing payments, the government ensured that tax affects everyone and does not target only certain regions of the country or particular classes of the population (Dai, 2024). This helped the commoner minimize his burden and paved the way for steady incomes for the state. These funds were essential to finance common concerns like the construction of roads, other amenities, and other governing responsibilities.

Standardization of the tax payments also minimized such issues by eradicating regional discrimination and minimizing the chances of tax evasion and corruption, making tax collection more efficient.

In the same way, the Daedong Law also helped improve financial management, budgeting, and resource mobilization in the government's operation. Due to a stable and predictable source of income, the government could fund other projects that contributed to the country's economic growth, including the construction of roads, rehabilitation of irrigation facilities, and putting up buildings and other infrastructural facilities (Lee & Myong, 2022). In return, these investments fostered economic activity and enhanced the populace's well-being. These taxation reforms show that there is a need for an efficient taxation system as a promoter of economic stability and growth. A good structure of taxes wherein the taxes are shared relatively across various sectors and branches of the government and free of corrupt influences is vital for economic growth in the long run. In this way, the government can fairly distribute the contribution burden, support social order, and invest in public welfare within the state.

4.3. Trade Promotion and Regulation

The stimulation and control of trade were two key elements that the Joseon Dynasty included in its economic plan. Trade was seen as a vital factor that could help the country experience development, and several policies were put in place by the government to enhance trade across the nation (Im, 2022). Opening ports or harbors and promoting trade through merchants was one of the ways that ensured the exchange of products and ideas. Trade regulation through merchant guilds and state-administered markets made conducting trade activities appropriately and reasonably possible. Therefore, by offering a stabilized and controlled trading platform, the government ensured that Joseon's economy was revived and connected to its neighboring countries. It also made the dynasty more resilient and prosperous as a whole. These trade policies prove the significance of encouraging and controlling trading activities to stimulate the economy.

The open port policies made it easier for foreign merchants to trade, thus exposing them to new products, methods, and traditions. This exchange benefited the domestic economy and helped the producers have larger product markets (Im, 2022). With efforts to boost merchant endeavors, the authorities ensured that a healthy commercial base was developed to help foster the economy. Merchant guilds acted as intermediaries and oversaw all market commercial dealings as appropriate and ethical. Through these guilds, people could set standard practices within particular trades and industries, sort out conflicts, and assist their members (Im, 2022). State-sponsored trade fairs ensured that business was conducted in safe environments and conditions, minimizing the risks accompanying commerce. They contributed to creating an enabling climate for commerce, thus boosting business and globalization.

Promotion and regulation of trade benefited the Joseon Dynasty not only economically but also in the advancement of culture and technology. To achieve this, the government preserved operational and balanced trade relations so that acquiring material resources benefited not only a particular lineage or specific city but the whole society (Rayhan, 2024). The effectiveness of these trade policies shows the need to encourage and facilitate trade to pursue economic liberalization and growth.

4.4. Agricultural Advancements

Modernization in agriculture was one of the essential aspects of the Joseon dynasty's need for food stability and economics. The government developed policies to enhance food production through fertilizer, encouraging proper farming methods, distributing improved seeds, and establishing irrigation systems (Lee, 2024). For instance, education encouraged adopting better practices like crop rotation and using fertilizers, leading to production and soil productivity maintenance. The government also decided to promote the production of high-yielding variety seeds, which were supplied to farmers, accompanied by packages containing information on the high-yielding variety seeds. These measures helped form a reliable system of providing the population with the necessary food, which was important for developing large cities. Irrigation facilities significantly improved overall crop output by providing water to crops in the required quantities (Lew et al., 2020). The government frequently paid to construct and manage irrigation canals and reservoirs, so people understood it was interested in agricultural activity. Such infrastructure investments supported farmers in reducing the effects of drought and allowed farmers to farm on their land efficiently.

All these agricultural innovations significantly changed these early societies' social and economic lives. Improved yields in agriculture enhanced people's breeding and generated a surplus of foodstuff that could be taken to markets within and outside the community. This surplus helped in economic diversification as the task focused on other sectors, particularly the

sale of crafts and other produce. The boost in food production was also helpful in curbing any forms of social upheavals and thus promoting political stability.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Findings

Research Purpose	Evidence Literature
Total Four Results in the Current Literature regarding Government Development Strategies for Improving Economy in Joseon Dynasty Period.	Lee (2024), Kim (2024), Choi (2023), Shim et al. (2022), Choi (2023); Glomb and Lee (2020), Hou and Hu (2023), Dai (2024), Lee and Myong (2022), Im (2022), Rayhan (2024), Lee (2024), Lew et al. (2020)

4. Implications

The government development strategies formulated and implemented by the Joseon Dynasty at different points in its history hold a lot of lessons for modern economic policy formulation and implementation in South Korea (Kim & Kim, 2021). First, it is worth noting that many countries that have pursued redistributionist land policies have recorded improved agricultural productive capacities and social justice that we see and appreciate in modern-day developed economies (Lew et al., 2020). Regarding the contemporary problems of concentration of land ownership and housing accessibility, modern South Korea has experienced this precedent in history. Taking measures and ensuring that policies of land distribution and availability of shelter are reasonably provided across the different strata of society will go a long way in reducing economic imbalances and, hence, the social problem (Lee, 2024). For example, the current campaigns like land reforms, affordable houses, and provisions for ecological cities would guarantee more people's equal access to land and housing, preventing gaps in class and division of the community.

The analysis of the Joseon Dynasty shows that even significant state efforts, such as taxation reforms, are necessary for creating a fair and efficient taxation system in terms of stable economic development. South Korea must apply fair and non-corruptive taxation laws and practices that would distribute the tax burden fairly across the country's population (Kim & Kim, 2021). Through rationality in implementing and formulating the tax system, the government can thus enhance collection and implementation and ensure adequate revenues for implementing public projects and welfare services. Sustaining progressive taxation that ensures that people with large incomes and businesses pay more taxes is also a policy that can assist in the fight against income inequalities of economic justice (Rayhan, 2024). This approach also ensures consistent revenues and revolutionizes the issue of income inequality.

Considering the socio-economic development during the Joseon Dynasty, it is now possible to understand how promoting and regulating trade effectively enhanced the country's economy. In light of the contemporary setting, South Korea could further encourage the growth of international trade by lowering tariffs, negotiating for better trade policies, and aiding industries to open up their bids for the international market. Promoting innovation and competition in domestic industries strengthens their prospects and competitiveness in the global market. Implementing sound trade policies engages competition honestly, and the principles aim to shield domestic industries and consumers from predatory trade practices (Rayhan, 2024). The following strategy may assist the South Korean government sustain its position in the global market and improve trade liberalization by ensuring its favorable impact is felt across society.

Indeed, agricultural transformations during the Joseon dynasty clearly show that knowledge and innovation were critical for encouraging agricultural growth. Therefore, today's South Korean government can implement technological advancement and research to improve its agricultural value chain and food security (Lew et al., 2020). Many farmers lack knowledge about improved methods of practicing agriculture or have inadequate capital to invest in research and development; these issues can be dealt with by the relevant government agencies putting in place necessary policies and creating awareness through educational programs and articles (Shim et al., 2022). Additional investments that can be made to increase agricultural productivity and improve its ability include the construction and improvement of irrigation and storage facilities, respectively (Lew et al., 2020). Indeed, these approaches can assist in making progress in maintaining agricultural viability as a means of supporting the food security pillar in Tanzania and ensuring economic stability.

Besides, the Joseon Dynasty's approach focusing on the grand strategy of seeking ways to integrate different sources to build up a sturdy and affluent social system is another lesson for policymakers (Shim et al., 2022). Here, using an integrated

model that combines several facets of the economy is feasible for modern South Korea success. When taken together, a new economic policy can be created that will work through land redistribution, implementation of taxes, promotion of trade, and improvement of agriculture (Lew et al., 2020). This approach acknowledges that these policies are interrelated and promote economic growth that is sustainable and inclusive.

In brief, the findings on the government development strategies of the Joseon Dynasty suggest and indicate that political historical lessons are still significant for South Korea's economic policy today. By analyzing historical experience and including several aspects of the economy into a single concept, modern South Korea can work on her today's tasks and threats (Lee & Myong, 2022). In this case, it can create favorable conditions for economic growth. Factual and practical taxation, equal distribution of land, encouraging and regulating commerce and agriculture, and encouraging specific sector improvements can help build a stronger and more robust economy that favors every citizen. These strategies based on the Joseon experience would help the country effectively respond to modern economic threats and ensure sustainable, sound development in South Korea.

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