

**Public Service Excellence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**Alikhan Baimenov and Panos Liverakos (eds.)**  
**Palgrave Macmillan (2019)**  
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This book is an edited collection of articles on public administration reform and the transformation of civil service systems primarily in post-Soviet and East Asian countries. The context for the country studies is set in a very comprehensive retrospective and prospective overview of reconfiguring the structures of government and the civil service, culminating in what Newland and Argyriades (chapter 1) refer to as 'reclaiming public space'. To do this and meet the requirements of sustainable development goal 16 (promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies) the skills of civil service professionals need to change. One element of that change is embracing technological progress and its impact on labour markets. Conceicao (chapter 2) calls on countries to 'harness technology' in pursuit of SDGs which will require a 'whole of government' effort. With a shift in focus Everest-Phillips (chapter 3) offers a *tour de force* on public sector reform from the third millennium BC (beginning in Lagash) and argues *plus ça change, plus c'est la même* (the more things change, the more they stay the same). He offers several lessons from Lagash of relevance to public administration change over time arriving at a key conclusion that 'neither the private sector nor civil society can substitute for an effective, efficient and equitable state'.

These chapters set the scene for country studies beginning with civil service development in the former Soviet Union countries. Here Baimenov and Janenova (chapter 4) offer an in-depth analysis of reforms in four countries with contrasting trajectories (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Russia). They suggest the emergence of a new model, central to which is: improving the performance of civil servants; enhancing ethics; and, building trust in government whilst acknowledging ongoing challenges around corruption, civil service politicisation and weak capacity.

Chapter 5 (Nakamura & Suzuki), chapter 6 (Yoon) and chapter 7 (Junpeng and Xian) offer very interesting insights into Japan, South Korea and China, respectively. In the case of Japan, the authors tackle the lack of harmonisation between information sharing across various government agencies through a digitalisation process known as 'My Number'. The experience of South Korea is used to reimagine the role of human resources policy in a fast changing system of 21<sup>st</sup> century governance and how they should respond. How civil servants in China are trained provides the focus for Junpeng and Xian. They describe 'civil service training with Chinese characteristics' and how this is 'an important part of China's national governance system, with a direct bearing on the ruling party's ability to govern and its administrative capacity'.

The final chapters in the edited collection revert to wider issues facing the public sector going forward. Leitner and Stiefmueller (chapter 8) focus on how disruptive technologies affect the role of the State. Everest-Phillips (chapter 9) examines both the potential for, and concerns associated with, a big-data driven public service. Baimenov and Liverakos (chapter 10) conclude the book collection with a review of regional and global partnerships as a way

of advancing international development, including peer-to-peer learning as exemplified in the Astana Civil Service Hub.

The preface to this book eloquently written by Pan Suk Kim, an eminent scholar and politician, indicates that the edited collection 'is the incentive...to pursue a board comparative study of civil service systems'. What the edited volume offers is a mix of country studies on civil service systems and global challenges facing public administrators. While this is an eclectic offer, the insights are hugely valuable. The volume has contributions from academics and practitioners which complement the narrative. Moreover, the country chapters on China, South Korea, Japan and post-Soviet countries offer accessible knowledge to Western readers, who cannot always access this scholarship due to language barriers. The edited volume speaks to the goals of the Astana Civil Service Hub by bringing together a corpus of work from countries with very different histories, traditions and cultures which can learn from each other. This also includes bridging the divide between academia and practitioners. The editors are to be commended on this achievement.

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