There are two great mysteries in the political economy of South Korea. How could a destroyed country in next to no time become a sophisticated and affluent economy? And how could a ruthlessly authoritarian regime metamorphose with relative ease into a stable democratic polity? The Korean State and Social Policy observes South Korean public policy from 1945 to 2000 through the prism of social policy to examine how the rulers operated and worked.

After the military coup in 1961, the new leaders used social policy to buy themselves legitimacy. That enabled them to rule in two very different ways simultaneously. In their determination to hold on to power they were without mercy, but in the use of power in governance, their strategy was to co-opt and mobilize with a sophistication that is wholly exceptional among authoritarian rulers. It is governance and not power that explains the Korean miracle.

Mobilization is a strategy with consequences. South Korea was not only led to economic development but also, inadvertently perhaps, built up as a society rich in public and civil institutions. When authoritarianism collapsed under the force of nationwide uprisings in 1987, the institutions of a reasonably pluralistic social and political order were there, alive and well, and democracy could take over without further serious drama.

This book is about many things: development and modernization, dictatorship and democracy, state capacity and governance, social protection and welfare states, and Korean history. But finally it is about lifting social policy analysis out of the ghetto of self-sufficiency it is often confined to and into the center ground of hard political science.

"...a landmark study on the long road towards the de-colonized world's development and democratization."
—Alice Amsden, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"...will change many people's understanding of South Korean development, demonstrating as it does how the foundations for a modern welfare state were actually laid during the military dictatorship. This is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the linkage between governance and development."
—Francis Fukuyama, Johns Hopkins University and Stanford University