**[[essay] My journey in anticorruption has come full circle](http://ti.or.kr/xe/108436)**

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                            My journey in anticorruption has come full circle
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    My interest in corruption and anticorruption began in university, while working on a research paper for a class titled “International Relations of East Asia.”  As a Korean-American, it was a natural decision for me to focus my research on Korea.  In the process of my research, I stumbled across various political corruption cases involving past presidents and became more and more interested not only in the corruption cases themselves, but also about why so many people in positions of power felt the need to partake in acts of corruption.  It was during this time that I first read and heard about Transparency International.

    During my time at the University of Chicago, I took courses that fostered my interest in anticorruption and corruption.  My early thesis research focused on the impact of civil society on the degree of perceived corruption/levels of transparency in Japan and South Korea.  Over the course of researching the connection between civil society and corruption levels, I analyzed numerous case studies examining the same connection in various developing countries, trying to discover any discrepancies between those cases and that of Japan and South Korea.  Also, I read numerous documents focusing on anti-corruption policy adopted by various countries and organizations, which only solidified my desire to pursue work in anti-corruption.

    I came to Korea in June 2006 to try my hand at an NGO abroad and to perfect my Korean, supplementing both endeavors by teaching English classes in the evenings.  During the previous year, I was one of three interns at Transparency International USA (TI USA), working with five full-time lawyers.  During that time, I was able to take on a lot of responsibility and focus on two key areas: regulatory transparency in development aid (the World Bank, Millennium Challenge Account, and Iraq Reconstruction); and procurement and anti-bribery regulations in free trade agreements.  Although I learned a significant amount about the anti-corruption movement with TI USA, the majority of my work revolved around international issues and organizations; the work I did had little to do with domestic transparency and anti-bribery issues.

    When I joined Transparency International Korea (TI Korea), I expected to work on similar issues to TI USA, such as improving legal and regulatory transparency, transnational bribery, and anti-corruption laws in the public and private sectors.  But I quickly learned that TI Korea is not the well-established and funded organization that TI USA is; rather, TI Korea is an under-funded and under-staffed, seemingly grassroots organization that is spear-heading a growing anti-corruption movement.  This difference keeps me on my toes, whether I am analyzing recommendation reports or just translating monthly newsletters into English.  The small size of the office also challenges me to push the limit on how quickly I can learn Korea’s laws and become familiar with the Korean and East Asian anti-corruption movement.  For example, within my first month of volunteering at TI Korea, I was given the responsibility of translating and actively participating in a three-day conference of the East and Southeast Asian Transparency International chapters held in Seoul.  I was required to become not only proficient in and knowledgeable on Korea’s anti-corruption movement and TI Korea’s activities in a very short period of time, but I also had the opportunity to coordinate parts of the conference and prepare relevant documents.

    Another dynamic experience that I have had with TI Korea that I never would have expected at TI USA was on International Anti-Corruption Day in 2007.  It was a joint campaign with KICAC to gather signatures for a petition to the Korean government to ratify the UN Convention Against Corruption, which took place in Myongdong, the busiest shopping district in Seoul.  This was my first truly grassroots campaign experience.  Although the day was cold and my Korean skills were lacking, at the end of the campaign there was a definite feeling of solidarity and accomplishment: solidarity because we were all working toward the same goal and accomplishment because we were actually talking directly to people and students out on the streets trying to educate them o UNCAC.

    TI Korea has evolved considerably since I began volunteering two years ago, and I have met many amazing people dedicated to anticorruption work.  The organization has expanded its focus and research on youth education, and I am excited to participate in future workshops geared towards this issue.  As I reflect on my experiences with anticorruption work, it is some what hard to believe that I have actually had the opportunity to work with such an amazing organization and group of people.  My journey in anticorruption has come full circle.  I now not only have the chance to continue researching my interests, but am now able to see my research and class room experience in action and can better understand the impact that this work has on people.  This has been an amazing opportunity and am truly grateful for the people at TI Korea for allowing me to work with them.