

## The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee

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“Whom would I choose as the best leader in the past thousand years of Korean history? There were various leaders who were very competent and did their best. Among them, I would choose the one who dedicated himself to the modernization of this nation with foresight, an ability to read the trends of his time, and outstanding knowledge of the economy. That is President Park Chung Hee.”<sup>2</sup>

“Park’s regime transformed the Republic of Korea into an entity entirely different from its past form. ... Of course this change never

resulted from his individual power alone. It testifies to the Korean people’s potential greatness. But we cannot overemphasize that it was Park Chung Hee who forged the necessary conditions and motivations for this transformation. We should avoid becoming hungry again because we curse and humiliate the person who made our stomach full.”<sup>3</sup>

“What is the ‘Park Chung Hee Memorial Hall’ for? ...Do we want to idolize him for taking away the economic development project designed by the administration of Chang Myŏn, which Park overthrew in the 1961 military coup? Do we want to commemorate the Korea-Japan Agreement (1965),

which subordinated Korea to Japan in exchange for political funds, as an admirable act of modernization? ... Do we want to celebrate the growth of the economic conglomerates, achieved at the expense of rural villages, small and medium companies, and consumers, as an economic miracle?"<sup>4</sup>

"Isn't Manchuria a bit less colored by Japanese culture? Even if it is, I cannot live like a weakling without spirit as long as Japan has not perished. Don't you know, brother [addressing an older brother], you're being harassed by a lowly policeman day and night? We need power, especially when we're ruled by the Japanese. For me, it's too arrogant to think about the [Japanese] military in connection with the nation or patriotism. I've never made such a connection; in fact, the opposite might even be true. Anyhow, as long as

we live under colonial rule, I don't want to live like a weakling dominated by even good-for-nothing Japanese. Right now, isn't Japan the place for soldiers? I have the aptitude for a military career and moreover, I feel my life might be a bit less dispirited if I am recognized over there. If I am to answer your question [why Park Chung Hee wants to enter a Japanese military school], this is it: I'll go into a tiger's lair to capture a tiger. Who knows? Maybe I'll catch a big tiger."<sup>5</sup>

## Introduction

Collective memories are integral to imagining a nation. They construct a national identity and maintain it against the vicissitudes of human life.<sup>6</sup> Hence a nation-state institutionalizes rituals of commemoration in memorial halls, monuments, museums, and schools (especially in the teaching of national history, literature, and tradition). This official commemoration goes hand in hand with the consumption of mass-produced images and publications on national glories, revivals, sacrifices, and tragedies.

Commonly interwoven with visceral feelings, collective memories transcend the generation of people who directly experience certain events during a given era. A later generation experiences those events in the past through “prosthetic memory.”<sup>7</sup> Both organic and prosthetic memories are incomplete and ideological, reflecting the cultural politics involved in selective and elusive remembering and forgetting. These memories also reveal as much about those who are remembering, including their wishes, longings, anxieties, and fears, as they reveal about what is being remembered. This article examines the cultural politics of remembering Park Chung Hee in the wake of the Asian Economic Crisis.

Since his assassination on October 26, 1979, Park Chung Hee (b. 1917) has been transformed from a dead president into a cultural icon that incites wide-ranging and often polarized reactions. These reactions are tied to organic and prosthetic memories of Park and his era. Particularly during the past decade, collective memories of him have shifted from the image of an antinational, fascist dictator to that of a superhuman hero and national savior. This phantasmagoric afterlife is embedded in the sweeping economic and political changes that have shaped Korean society since Park’s death. Chun Doo Whan (r. 1980-1987), succeeding Park through a military coup and a bloody crackdown on the citizens’ uprising in the city of Kwangju, deliberately tried

to foster Park’s negative legacy in order to distance himself from Park, both despite and because of his apparent resemblance to him. Despite its repressive control of the mass media, Chun’s regime allowed for the production and consumption of publications and television programs critical of the Park era.<sup>8</sup> This type of tolerance appears to have been an attempt to redirect popular criticism against Chun’s own undemocratic regime.



### Death of a dictator

However, the negative memories of Park began to alter visibly toward the end of the rule of Kim Young Sam (r. 1993-1997), the first civilian government in three decades. Deeply disillusioned by Kim’s incompetent rule, which many blamed for having led to the collapse of the Korean economy and the IMF bailout, the public became increasingly nostalgic about Park as the revolutionary leader who developed the Korean economy. In the aftermath of the economic crisis at the end of Kim’s rule, which left over two million people suddenly jobless and exposed many more to persistent economic insecurity,

both popular and scholarly publications about Park Chung Hee multiplied. The passing of almost twenty years between his era and contemporary Korea also contributed to this growth in publications about Park, as efforts were made to reassess his period.<sup>9</sup> This cultural phenomenon, known as the “Park Chung Hee boom” or “Park Chung Hee syndrome,” has generated a steady flow of publications that enable us to examine how Park has been remembered in the past decade.

Focusing on such popular genres of writing about Park as memoirs, biographies, biographical novels, personal essays,<sup>10</sup> and comic strips (targeted to children), this article identifies recurring themes in these recollective representations. It also discusses the implications of these representations for popular visions of a desirable society. I believe that compared with scholarly writings which analyze and assess Park’s policy, rule, and thoughts, these popular genres present richer texts for observing public memories of Park, both because these popular texts are far more widely circulated and read than scholarly texts and because the popular genres are much more conducive to emotional portrayals, which can reveal collective wishes and longings. Employing a broad concept of remembrance, I include not only memoirs, but also biographies, novels, personal essays, and comic strips. From a cultural perspective, the boundaries between these categories are fluid

because all of them can be seen as recollective representations of Park.<sup>11</sup> For this article, I chose 4 memoirs, 4 single- or multi-volume biographical novels, 2 single- or multi-volume biographies, 8 volumes of personal essays on Park’s legacies, and 1 three-volume comic strip. These works are written from a range of perspectives, including right-wing, left-wing, and relatively neutral. This list of publications does not include all of the publications on Park in those five genres produced during the past decade, but all are popular texts that have been reprinted and/or frequently referred to in newspapers and on internet sites in Korea. These books were written by journalists, scholars/activists, writers, and officials of Park’s administration who were adults or came of age during Park’s era.<sup>12</sup> Their books have been read by the generation which was born and grew up post-Park, linking a younger generation to the experiences of the older generation through prosthetic memories.

The recollective representations of Park in these popular texts can be categorized into three distinct types: glorification, demonization, and humanization. The sharp contrast between the glorification and demonization reflects the underlying ideological positions of writers who contest the relative priority of economic development and democracy for the advancement of the Korean nation and the Korean people. The glorifying memories

commonly reflect a collective wish to affirm the past achievement of economic development against the challenging present, and a collective fear of falling into poverty and insecurity, which a “strong” leader could avoid. The demonizing memories usually question the developmentalism interwoven with militarism and authoritarianism that is perceived to have lowered the quality of life in Korean society. Against the backdrop of this cultural politics pitting “conservatives” against “progressives”, less ideological writers highlight Park as a human being whose actions were affected by complex feelings and thoughts. Their humanizing recollections imply an alternative wish for political maturity among the populace; such a mature public would recognize its own equality with a leader who was an ordinary human being, and not force a leader into the position of superhuman savior or demonic dictator.

### **The Park Chung Hee Syndrome**

While it was not until 1997 that celebratory commemoration of Park became a national phenomenon, individual and collective attempts at this had started appearing in conservative social circles in the late 1980s. During Roh Tae Woo’s rule (1988-1992), a period of democratic transition, conservative voices emerged to reassess Park as a counterweight to the critical recollections that had been circulating during Chun’s rule. In 1989, Park Kün-hye, the oldest

daughter of Park Chung Hee, discussed her father positively in a television talk show.<sup>13</sup> In 1990, the Memorial Society for President Park Chung Hee and First Lady Yuk Yöng-su edited a hagiographic history focusing on Park’s achievements.<sup>14</sup> The city of Kumi, where Park’s hometown (Sangmori) was located, designated his birth house a Commemorative Object (number 86 in North Kyöngsang Province) in 1993 and announced a plan to construct a memorial hall for him, which would begin in 1997.<sup>15</sup> In 1993, a three-volume hagiography was published to eulogize his “revolutionary contribution to 5000 years of Korean history.”<sup>16</sup> During Kim Young Sam’s rule, efforts to commemorate Park expanded beyond the narrow circles of his family, his memorial society, and his hometown. In April, 1997, to commemorate its 77th anniversary, Dong-A Daily conducted a survey on the most competent president in Korean history. 75.9% of respondents chose Park whereas Kim Young Sam, the president at the time, received the support of only 3.7%. In late 1997, the government’s Public Relations Office (kongboch’ö) conducted a national survey on public consciousness and values and found that Park Chung Hee had become “the most respected historical figure,” ahead of the Great King Sejong (who invented the Korean alphabet and has been lauded as the paragon of a sage Korean ruler) and Admiral Yi Sun-sin (whom Park had elevated to the position of “sacred



hero” for his defense of the Korean nation from Japanese invasion during the late 16th century).<sup>17</sup>



**Tomb of Park Chung Hee**

Politically exploiting this public sentiment, the majority of candidates in the 1997 presidential election paid homage to Park as their role model. (One candidate, Yi In-je, even mentioned his own physical resemblance to Park.) In the midst of this swift spread of public nostalgia for Park, ironically, President Kim Dae Jung (r. 1998-2002), Park’s archrival, who had been severely persecuted by Park throughout the 1970s, even embraced Park’s memorial hall project as a campaign pledge.<sup>18</sup> In 1999, he announced partial funding support of the project by the government to complement private donations. Yet this plan generated strong opposition, organized by progressive social groups.<sup>19</sup> In 2000, these opposition groups formed the National Solidarity Against the Park Chung Hee Memorial Hall (Pak Chŏng-hŭi kinyŏmkwanbandae kungminyŏndae) and published a white paper

on Park’s erroneous policies and tyrannical rule.<sup>20</sup> In the midst of the tug of war between progressive and conservative forces, construction began on the memorial hall in 2002, but was suspended due to opposition from NGO’s and the lack of sufficient funds from private citizens in the aftermath of the economic crisis.<sup>21</sup>

The mass media have produced printed materials capitalizing on the surging nostalgia for Park. Major conservative media have also used this public sentiment to increase their political influence in the decade of democratization and of critical assessments of the previous authoritarian regimes. In the late 1990s, Chungang Daily featured a yearlong column on Park Chung Hee, entitled “An Authentic Record of the Park Chung Hee Period” (sillok Park Chung Hee sidae).<sup>22</sup> Choson Daily also featured a regular column on Park written by Cho Kap-je, a leading conservative journalist who has been an ardent supporter of Park.<sup>23</sup> In 2005, Chungang Daily again serialized a memoir about Park, this one written by Kim Sŏng-jin, a journalist who was appointed to the office of the Minister of Culture and Public Information during the Yushin period (1972-1979).<sup>24</sup> In the next section, I will discuss fictional and nonfictional popular texts on Park Chung Hee, including some of the ones I have just mentioned.<sup>25</sup>

### **Recurring Themes in the Cultural Politics of Remembering Park**

### A. *Celebratory Commemoration*

Celebratory memories of Park range from hagiographic portrayals of a superhuman leader<sup>26</sup> and a tragic hero<sup>27</sup> (who has been underappreciated by people who have benefited from the economic development he accomplished) to the portrayal of an effective CEO.<sup>28</sup> The continuum of glowing representations of Park underscores his central role in transforming South Korea from one of the poorest countries in the world in the early 1960s into a developing country in the late 1970s. It also highlights Park's role in transforming the prevailing Korean attitude from lethargy and passivity to a positive "can-do" spirit. At the same time, it forgets or downplays his ambition for uncontested political power and his subsequent authoritarian rule, which was characterized by the brutal repression of political dissidents and labor activists, as well as the exclusion of the populace from politics.

While these glorifying memories of Park are ardently espoused by right-wing groups in society—journalists, politicians, scholars, and writers—they are also widely embraced by the public, as indicated in the national polls mentioned above. This type of celebratory remembrance is not limited to the older generation but is shared by the younger generation. It is not uncommon to encounter celebratory memories of Park in cyberspace, articulated by young men and women who came

of age in the post-Park era. Below, I discuss recurring themes in the glorification of Park in the popular texts I mentioned above.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1. *The Resolute, Hardworking, Revolutionary Leader*

We need to read the frequent references to revolutionary qualities in Park's leadership and behavior in relation to the unresolved controversy over the military coup d'état (May 16, 1961) that catapulted him to the pinnacle of power. Park's regime labeled this coup a "military revolution to reconstruct the nation."<sup>30</sup>

The celebrations of Park represent the coup as a revolutionary act of national salvation that ended the chaos that stemmed from incessant protests and rampant corruption during the Second Republic (April 1960 to May 1961). These celebratory commemorations generally maintain that the coup resulted in revolutionary changes in social institutions and the order of things in Korean society.<sup>31</sup> To support this interpretation, the popular texts highlight Park's revolutionary behavior in pursuit of national modernization and self-reliant national defense.<sup>32</sup> For example, in order to secure hard-to-find capital to build the economy, Park fostered fledgling domestic firms, which could not obtain foreign loans directly from international financial institutions, with guaranteed loans. That is, in the market economy, Park's government obtained direct foreign loans (rather than direct foreign investments) and distributed them among firms

according to their export performance and compliance with its regulations. The popular texts convey that this type of revolutionary measure was not limited to the economy. In mobilizing the populace to pursue “militarized modernity,”<sup>33</sup> Park transformed the mentality of the impoverished masses (*chöngsin’gaejo*), afflicted with apathy and despair, into one of confidence and hope. And in the realm of formal education, in the late 1960s, Park abolished the middle school entrance examination, which had bolstered the hierarchical distinction among middle schools and the larger society and had become excessively competitive, in favor of egalitarian education and less competition, to enhance physical growth among young students.

The popular texts narrate the revolutionary nature of Park’s leadership in connection with his resolute behavioral style.<sup>34</sup> A small but unyielding man armed with iron nerves, he is remembered for carrying out momentous tasks to their completion without being swayed by popularity or criticism.<sup>35</sup> To obtain the capital and technology necessary for implementing the Five-Year Economic Development Plans, the popular texts point out, he normalized Korean-Japanese diplomatic relations (1965) and sent more than three hundred thousand Korean combat troops to Vietnam (1968-1975). He also launched heavy and chemical industrialization in 1973, over strong objections from the World Bank,<sup>36</sup> and consequently laid the foundation for

a self-reliant national defense and dynamic industrial economy. Domestically, the popular texts maintain, he built the Seoul-Pusan highway (1970), which revolutionized the circulation and distribution of goods and the movement of people. Responding to the widespread thirst for learning among young factory workers, Park required factory owners to educate their workers in night schools and validated night school diplomas as legitimate educational certificates. All these decisions, the popular texts highlight, were made in the face of fierce opposition from students, intellectuals, and politicians, as well as Park’s own bureaucrats.

The popular texts glorifying Park also emphasize his diligence and studiousness. As distinguished from a leader who just orders around his subordinates, he was reported to be actively involved in designing major policies and programs, implementing them, and monitoring them; he frequently visited factories, technology and research centers, and construction sites and met with field managers to listen to their experiences and ensure that problems were addressed. To effectively lead economic development, Park was believed to have studied various subjects and topics. These characteristics are seen to have made Park an effective leader, or what Hong Ha-sang calls an ideal CEO of “the Republic of Korea, incorporated.”<sup>37</sup> During his rule, the popular texts indicate, Park himself invented numerous mottoes to publicize his



policies and mobilize the populace for export promotion, population control, New Village movements,<sup>38</sup> and vigilance against communist North Korea.<sup>39</sup> It is also indicated that he composed the New Village song and wrote the lyrics. Whenever he had to make an important decision, the popular texts maintain, he held numerous meetings to discuss relevant issues with experts and bureaucrats, and thought them over carefully. As a result of his hard work, he is reputed to have developed and suffered from stomach ulcers.

## *2. The Nationalist Hero with a Passion for Independence and Self-reliance*

Numerous references to Park as a nationalist figure in the popular texts glorifying him reflect the enduring power of nationalism in postcolonial Korea as a crucial criterion for evaluating individuals, groups, and events. Hence, Park's nationalist credentials are fundamental to positive memories of him. As discussed below, this is equally critical to the "progressive" forces, which discredit Park as an antinational traitor. Among the conservative forces, Park's strong patriotism or nationalist spirit is evident in his total dedication to the reconstruction of the nation through modernization, revolutionizing Korean mentality and achieving a self-reliant national defense. In particular, as discussed above, Park is eulogized for his courageous push to build the heavy and chemical industries which lay the foundation for

a self-reliant defense (against the North), in opposition to the World Bank. This line of nationalist resistance also included Park's attempt to develop nuclear weapons in the face of opposition from the U.S.<sup>40</sup>

Park's nationalist credentials are not confined to the realms of economic development and national defense. He is also praised for reviving national culture and tradition to help establish a national identity in the process of modernization. The popular texts emphasize his commitment to the discovery, restoration and protection of important national heritage treasures and his homage to military heroes who protected and saved the nation from foreign invasions.<sup>41</sup>

To show Park's deep-rooted nationalism, the popular texts excavate anecdotes from his earlier life, during the colonial period. These anecdotes convey a nationalist justification for Park's training at the Japanese military school in Manchuria (1940-42) and the Japanese Military Academy (1942-44) and his subsequent service in the Manchurian Army (1944-1945): these activities are interpreted as motivated by Park's practical nationalism, impelling him to learn from advanced Japan so that when Korea became independent, Park would be able to use the knowledge and skills he had acquired for building modern Korea. While fiercely denying Park's alleged involvement in hunting down Korean independence fighters in Manchuria, this narrative emphasizes his courageous defense of

the nation during the Korean War.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. *A Thrifty, Modest, and Uncorruptable Life*

(*chöngnyȫm kyȫlpaekhan saenghwal*)

The popular texts glorifying Park highlight his modesty, cleanliness, and thrift and thereby conjure up a president who was concerned about ordinary people and keen to overcome harrowing poverty. This image was popularized by Kim Chȫng-ryȫm, Park's chief of staff (1969-1978), who serialized his memoir in *Chungang Daily* in 1997.<sup>43</sup> According to this widely circulated memoir, while obsessed with how to make the country wealthy, Park was not interested in personal luxuries and enrichment. The following anecdotes about Park's thrifty lifestyle became almost mythical.<sup>44</sup> During his presidency, he is portrayed as having used mostly Korean-made products and rarely using foreign luxury goods. He is depicted as always preferring unfiltered Korean rice wine (*makkȫli*) to Western liquor, a luxury item commonly presented to high-ranking officers by their subordinates as a special gift. Allegedly, Park rarely used an air conditioner in his office during the hot and humid summers, to save energy in the country which did not produce a drop of crude oil. Instead, he opened his office windows and ran a fan; flies flew in through the open windows and he used a swatter to eliminate them. He is reported to have placed a brick in his toilet tank to save water each time he flushed it. When he was shot to death, he was wearing a

very old wristwatch and a worn-out belt. And he had a pack of Korean cigarettes in his pocket.

To show Park's disinterest in personal luxuries and wealth, the popular texts discuss examples from his life prior to his presidency. During his service as an army general in the postwar decade (1953-1963), it is reported that he did not appropriate army resources or accept bribery for personal enrichment. Unlike most generals of the era, who led luxurious lives thanks to bribery and corruption, Park is reported to have lived in humble rented houses. Even when he was the commander-in-chief of the military supplies base in Pusan (1960), where military supplies from the U.S. Army were nationally distributed, he allegedly did not accept the numerous kickbacks offered by army purveyors. Because this base involved ample material benefits in a war-torn country, high-ranking officers there were particularly close to the political elite. These military officers used their control over base resources to bolster the ruling Liberal Party during each election, in exchange for their affluent lifestyle and political influence. Park reportedly refused to comply with the conventional practice of corruption among high-ranking military officers and did not play the political game with them; as a result, his assignment ended abruptly after six months, despite the fact that his tenure there was supposed to last for two years.<sup>45</sup>



**Park Chung Hee as a patriotic and modest leader**



**Park Chung-hee (center) as a resolute and diligent leader who directs public officials.**

**Park is attending the Korean Advanced Institute of Science (KAIS) ground breaking ceremony for its Honglŭng campus (Seoul) on April 14, 1971. Holding the pointer is Mr. Kim Ky-young, Minister of Science and Technology.**

**Standing behind President Park is Dr. Lee**

**Sang-su, the first President of KAIS.**

**Established in 1971 with graduate programs**

**only, KAIS was integrated into the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology in 1989.**

### *B. Contemptuous or Critical Remembrance*

Negative memories of Park vary from a demonizing portrayal of him as an antinational and pro-Japanese fascist, immoral opportunist, and ruthless dictator<sup>46</sup> to a depiction of an authoritarian ruler who left more negative legacies than positive ones.<sup>47</sup> The demonizing representation of Park underscores his active collaboration and identification with colonial and postcolonial Japan (as the unmistakable marker of his antinational identity) and his fascism, which violently reduced individuals to mere instruments of state power. Deeply colored by populist nationalism, this representation denies anything positive about Park. A less-ideological representation of Park emphasizes that his celebrated economic policy generated the enduring collusion between the state and big business, disregard for due process in prioritizing the achievement of goals, and the proliferation of violence and other repressive measures as the primary means of dealing with conflict and differences among social groups. To varying degrees, contemptuous or critical representations tend to ignore Park's discipline and dedication in building an industrial nation with a capacity to defend itself and his leadership in infusing the masses of Koreans with confidence and a shared sense of purpose in

pursuing his project of militarized modernity. They also overlook Park's disinterest in personal enrichment and luxuries, which distinguishes him from both the military and the civilian presidents who have come after him in the past three decades.

The contemptuous remembrance of Park is articulated by left-leaning progressive activists, journalists, scholars, and writers who have been involved in the democratization movement against military regimes. Despite their populist orientation, their scathing critique of Park is not widely embraced by the populace in conservative Korea. Their vitriolic critique of Park has galvanized the conservative response which eulogizes him and redeems him as a "sacrificial lamb" or "suffering Prometheus" for the nation.<sup>48</sup> The leftist writers attribute the popular nostalgia for Park to the Korean people's failure to extirpate pro-Japanese elites and their subsequent dominance in postcolonial Korea. While this account contains a kernel of truth, it is an analysis that is stifled by an essentialist ethnic nationalism that apotheosizes the Korean nation. Ironically, this rigid ideological position overlooks the masses' lived experience of economic transformation from abject poverty and widespread hunger during the annual spring famine, to relative prosperity. Below I will discuss recurring themes in the popular texts mentioned above that represent Park through a contemptuous or critical lens.<sup>49</sup>

### 1. *The Antinational, Pro-Japanese Traitor*

In stark contrast to the celebratory representation of Park as a national hero and savior, this negative remembrance accentuates his strong identification with Japan and particularly with its militaristic fascism, not only during the colonial period but also during the postcolonial era. A series of actions Park undertook is used as evidence for his deep-rooted antinational orientation. Park was portrayed as being eager to become a Japanese soldier because of his deep pro-Japanese tendencies. The popular texts maintain that his pro-Japanese behavior was evident in his unusual method of obtaining admission; when it turned out that he was too old to enter the Manchurian military school, he sent the school a pledge of loyalty to the Japanese Emperor written in his own blood.<sup>50</sup> His enthusiasm for imperialist Japan is allegedly evidenced in his persistent pursuit of a career in Japan's imperial army, including his outstanding performance at the military school, his entrance to the regular Japanese Military Academy as a third-year cadet, and his service in the Japanese Imperial Army. As a low-ranking Japanese military officer in Manchuria, Park purportedly hunted down Korean independence fighters.<sup>51</sup> The popular texts demonizing him recount that Park also used the personal network he developed with other Koreans who served in the Japanese Imperial Army in carrying out the 1961 coup d'état; in contradistinction to the

conservative view of the coup as a patriotic revolution, this progressive representation defines it as an illegal overthrow of a democratically elected government by a group of ex-soldiers of the Japanese Army.

According to the contemptuous remembrance of Park, his strong identification with and close ties to Japan persisted even during his presidency; he learned the techniques of ruling and economic development strategies from major Japanese imperialists, including Sejima Ryujo (1912-2007).<sup>52</sup> In signing the 1965 Korea-Japan Agreement to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries, the popular texts point out, Park failed to demand an official apology from Japan for its colonization of Korea and adequate monetary compensation for the masses of Koreans drafted for productive, military, and sexual labor. Instead, he accepted \$300 million (in the form of loans, investments, and grants) ambiguously named “independence celebration funds” in exchange for closing off any possibility of rectifying these matters at a later date. In the face of widespread protests, the popular texts maintain, this decision was made without any national discussion or hearings. Strongly identifying with the power of Japanese militarism and fascism, Park even sang Japanese military songs at informal parties with his subordinates, and occasionally walked around the Blue House garden in his old Japanese military uniform.<sup>53</sup> He also enjoyed the Japanese

martial art of swordsmanship. In a nutshell, according to the leftist representation, Park was the embodiment of Japanese colonialism and fascism.

## 2. *The Immoral Opportunist*

The contemptuous remembrance of Park as an antinational, pro-Japanese traitor in the popular texts is closely connected to frequent references to his opportunism in the relentless pursuit of power throughout his life.<sup>54</sup> Just as he joined the Japanese Imperial Army during Japan's colonial rule, he joined the Liberation Army (Kwangbokgun) in Beijing, organized by the Korean Provisional Government, right after Japan surrendered. After returning to Korea, he joined the Police Constabulary established by the U.S. Army Military Government (1945-1948) that ruled the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. After the foundation of the Republic of Korea, Park became an officer of the fiercely anticommunist Korean Army. Yet, the popular texts point out, he also was involved with the Southern Labor Party (Namrodang), which was gaining influence over various social groups, including young military officers, in the late 1940s.<sup>55</sup> When these left-leaning military officers were purged by the Korean military after the Yösu-Sunch'ön rebellion (led by military officers) in October 1948, Park was arrested and sentenced to death for his leadership role in the Southern Labor Party. Dramatically, the popular texts underscore, he saved his own life by revealing



the names of his comrades and of others who were not even members of the party, leading to their untimely and wrongful deaths.<sup>56</sup> Park is portrayed as practicing this type of ruthless opportunism and betrayal throughout his rule to maneuver the treacherous terrain of power politics. Even the KCIA directors who were his most loyal confidants, including Kim Jong-p'il and Kim Hyöng-uk, were abandoned when they posed a challenge or became a political liability for him.

### *3. The Brutal Dictator and Destroyer of Democracy*

The representation of Park as a brutal dictator is the most popularized aspect of the negative memories of him. During his eighteen-year rule, the popular texts demonizing Park recount, he escalated his dictatorial rule by repeatedly breaking his promises to restore democracy. After the 1961 coup d'état, he reversed his pledge to return to the military and restore a civilian administration; he ran for the presidency himself in 1963 after expediently becoming a civilian. Then he reversed his pledge to step down after he completed his second term and changed the constitution in 1969 to enable him to run for a third term. After being elected for a third term, in 1971, Park imposed garrison decrees on university campuses nationwide to suppress the spreading students' protests for democratization. In 1972, Park carried out what was essentially the second coup d'état, enacting the Yushin Constitution, which guaranteed him lifetime

presidency. Under the Yushin system, popular elections of the president and legislators disappeared; the president was elected by an electoral college composed of Park's loyal supporters, and a third of the lawmakers were appointed by the president. The judiciary was reduced to being the servant of the executive. During the Yushin period, characterized by mounting protests against his dictatorship, Park ruled with a series of emergency decrees and a heightened secret intelligence operation run by the powerful KCIA. Frequently using the anticommunist ideology of national security, the popular texts maintain, he ruthlessly crushed his opponents and dissidents; he abused the judiciary to try those political enemies and sentenced them to imprisonment and even to death.<sup>57</sup>

### *4. The Authoritarian Ruler and His Negative Legacies*

The less-ideological critiques of Park commonly hold him responsible for negative consequences associated with economic development. First, the fostering of a handful of economic conglomerates (chaeböls) at the expense of numerous small- and medium-sized firms generated not only a huge gulf between the wealthy and the poor, but also complacent big business; spoiled by the special favors and privileges given by the government for decades, those chaeböls failed to rationalize their ownership structures and business practices to remain competitive in the global market. The collusion between state and big business is



believed to be the deeper cause of the 1997 economic crisis sowed by Park's regime. Decades before the crisis, the popular texts recount, burdens of economic development were disproportionately placed on lower-class people to bolster big business as the engine of economic expansion. In stark contrast to the popular memories of Park as a modest and thrifty leader who was in tune with ordinary people, his mantra of economic development at all costs almost always entailed much more sacrifice from ordinary people than from big business.<sup>58</sup>

Second, the relentless pursuit of economic growth is believed to have resulted in pervasive disregard for due process, reducing politics to secret intelligence operations lubricated by enormous amounts of political funds. While Park's modesty, cleanliness, and thrift are recognized by even some of his critics and relatively neutral observers,<sup>59</sup> these qualities are sharply contradicted by his pervasive use of "big and dark money" to build and maintain his power base. After the military coup in 1961, the popular texts indicate, the KCIA played a central role in extracting large sums of money from American, Japanese, and Korean firms to secure political funds. Not only did Park use these funds to control military officers and his civilian supporters and to co-opt opposition politicians, but he also used them to buy influence among U.S. congressmen during the 1970s. Kim Tong-jo, then Korean Ambassador to the U.S., was

directly involved in bribing U.S. lawmakers. Koreagate was a big, well-known bribery operation engineered by Park Tong-sŏn, a U.S.-educated lobbyist.<sup>60</sup> The following recollection by an expatriate journalist living in the U.S. conveys the connection between Park's big political funds and the burden endured by lower-class Koreans (to subsidize those funds) that is obscured by the nostalgic memories of Park's thrift and cleanliness:

The money that Park Chung Hee spread in Washington, D.C. ... So many people so easily forget that the money was the crystallization of the blood, sweat, and tears of Korean women, so many of whom had to carry kegs of fuel oil on their hilly shantytown streets to cook their dinner rice. They bought the oil at a price 30% above the international price of crude oil.<sup>61</sup>

Third, the popular texts criticize the way in which the absolute priority of accomplishing

economic development justified the pervasive use of violence and other repressive measures to deal with conflict and differences among diverse social groups. In particular, the organized violence of the military and the police were mobilized against those who failed to comply with Park's leadership. As a result, society was profoundly militarized, and individual citizens were reduced to instruments of the state, which was sanctified as the guarantor of collective prosperity and security; industrialized Korea became a society where the brutal logic of power has ensured the survival of the fittest and the public tends to be skeptical of the democratic practices of communication and deliberation for their apparent inefficiency in obtaining immediate or urgent goals.



**Young Park Chung Hee in Japanese Army officer uniform in Manchuria (circa June, 1944):**

**This information is based on Un-hyŏn Chŏng's *Silrok Kunin Park Chung Hee* (2004), p. 117.**



**Park Chung Hee during the military coup in May 1961.**

### *C. Humanizing Remembrance*

Against the backdrop of the polarizing memories of Park discussed above, some writers try to remember his humanity, bringing out the inner world of his thoughts and feelings. This line of representation is found in biographical novels that can reconstruct complexities and contradictions in Park's behavior and thoughts inflected by his ambition, frustration, love, desire, humiliation, and insecurity.<sup>62</sup> To understand him beyond the ideological taxidermies, this line of representation explores him as a child and adolescent from an impoverished rural family, living under colonial rule, and as an ambitious and tenacious youth whose military career was frequently punctuated

by larger historical events that he could not control. These biographical fictions also portray Park as a husband and father relating to his family, as well as a revolutionary soldier who became a shrewd and self-righteous politician. Below I discuss Park's life story narrated in Chŏng Yŏng-jin's *Young Man Park Chung Hee: Biographical Novel* and Yi Su-kwang's *Novel Human Being Park Chung Hee*.

### *1. The Child and Adolescent Growing Up in Colonial Korea*

Born into a destitute rural family and growing up in colonial Korea, Park experienced early on the stark contrast between the old world, represented by his family residing in the remote village of Sangmori, and the new modern world represented by the Japanese schools he attended outside his village. As the youngest child in the family, with a large age difference from his siblings, Park received uncontested special affection from his mother (Paek Nam-ŭi), who gave birth to him at the age of 45. Park's indulgent relationship with his mother was shadowed by his father (Pak Sŏng-bin), an impoverished son of a Yangban (landed nobility) family. The father wasted all his inheritance in preparing for his unsuccessful military office examinations, and by the time he passed the test, the Confucian bureaucracy had been abolished in the declining Chosŏn Dynasty.<sup>63</sup> As a result, Park's father was forced to work as a tenant farmer for a livelihood. Frustrated by this

unexpected turn, the father was mostly drunk and unable to improve the family's situation. Throughout his childhood and adolescence, abject poverty frequently exposed Park not only to deprivation but also to the humiliation of asking for help and being at the mercy of other people for such basic necessities as food and money for tuition and lodging. In addition to this grinding poverty, Park, unlike his father and older brothers, had a small build as a boy, which contributed to his deep sense of insecurity and disposed him to cultivate his ambition. From childhood on, Park wanted to become a soldier because he was impressed by the soldiers' appearance.

Strongly identifying with the modern world represented by his school, Park was an excellent student in elementary school and the head of his class during his three upper-class years. Because of his academic excellence, his teachers urged him to enter an elite teachers' school located in the city of Taegu. Although his parents were opposed to this idea because of their poverty, his third brother (Sang-hŭi), who was virtually Park's father figure and a graduate of the same elementary school, persuaded the family to let him go because of his talent. However, Park's school days in Taegu were filled with painful and discouraging experiences. In this prestigious school,<sup>64</sup> there were many students from relatively better-off families with much more cultural capital than Park. While he excelled at

military drill, his academic performance was less than mediocre and he remained at the bottom of his class during the last three years. Although the tuition was free (in exchange for mandatory teaching service after graduation), Park had to pay for room and board.<sup>65</sup> He missed many school days because he could not obtain living expenses, and these absences brought his academic performance down even further. Caught in this vicious cycle, Park became a more lonesome introvert who spent most of his time daydreaming about his success in the future.

Another source of great stress for Park during this period was his arranged marriage to Kim Ho-nam, a girl from his village. In his late teens, Park was forced by his ailing father and older brothers to marry this rural girl. The marriage made him anxious because the school prohibited marriage among students and punished married ones with expulsion. Although Kim was good-looking and had received a two-year primary education,<sup>66</sup> Park was not attracted to her. She symbolized the old world he was anxious to move away from,<sup>67</sup> and he callously distanced himself from her (and their daughter) until he divorced her in 1950. During his school vacations, he returned to his hometown but stayed mostly with his friends and hardly lived with his wife. He was so negligent of her that his older brother, Sang-hŭi, once even forced him to stay with her.

On a positive note, the teachers' school exposed

Park to the Korean nationalism and socialism that was brewing among a significant number of Korean students.<sup>68</sup> Nationalist resistance to Japanese rule spread among intellectuals and students as the colonial authorities became even more repressive during the 1930s, the decade of Japan's militaristic expansion.<sup>69</sup> Although the Japanese school purged "ideological criminals," some Korean teachers surreptitiously instructed their students in Korean history and culture, emphasizing that the Chosŏn dynasty perished because the people were ignorant and its military was weak. In this milieu, Park's vague childhood dream of becoming a soldier was turned into a specific means by which he could overcome humiliating poverty, pursue his talent, and strengthen the future independent Korean nation.<sup>70</sup> Through study trips to the Diamond Mountain,<sup>71</sup> Manchuria, and Japan, the school also enabled Park to see the larger world beyond the provincial city of Taegu.

Park managed to graduate and find a teaching job at Munkyŏng Elementary School, in the township of Munkyŏng (close to his hometown).<sup>72</sup> With this stable employment, he permanently moved away from his traditional family and village life to embrace the modern life of an urban professional. During his mandatory teaching service of three years, Park was an energetic and inspiring teacher who cared about his poor students who, like himself as a child, could not bring their lunches.<sup>73</sup> Yet deep down,

he was not satisfied with teaching, which confined him to working with children and living in a provincial city. In fact, his close friends from the teachers' school all left their jobs for better careers after completing mandatory teaching service. During the 1930s, Park sensed that a military career could open an effective avenue for success for a poor young man like himself. After finishing his teaching service, and following his father's death, Park quit his job and applied to a military school in Manchuria. In planning his military career, he contacted Arikawa Shuichi, a Japanese soldier and military drill instructor who had praised him for his talent at the teachers' school and was then serving in Manchuria. Park was also advised by Kang Chae-ho, a man from Taegu who served in the Japanese Army in Manchuria. Although Park was old for entering the military school, he overcame this obstacle by sending a Manchurian newspaper his petition letter asking special permission; this letter, as I mentioned earlier, contained a loyalty pledge written in his own blood. Despite vehement opposition from his family, he abandoned his secure job and left for Manchuria to enter the military school at the age of 23.

## *2. The Tenacious Young Soldier*

Despite his stellar performance at the military school and the Military Academy, Park's military career encountered dramatic tribulations and setbacks. His career as an aspiring Japanese officer was short, ending abruptly with Japan's

surrender to the United States. Following other Korean officers in the Japanese Army, Park then joined the Liberation Army, which was established in Beijing after Korean independence. But this army was soon disbanded, because it could not feed its soldiers as growing numbers of expatriate Koreans who funded the army returned to Korea. In mid-1946, Park returned to his hometown penniless, frustrated, and lost. Like his father, he drank his days away and lived off his family and friends for several months. Then, realizing that the new nation would need a military, he joined the Police Constabulary, newly founded by the U.S. military, and completed its six-month training course. Now almost 30 years old, Park resumed his military career as a second lieutenant of the fledgling Korean Army.

Park's delayed career in the Korean military was also truncated, this time by his involvement in the Southern Labor Party, which he joined in late 1946.<sup>74</sup> He was arrested while he was a major in the Army Headquarters Intelligence Department. As discussed above, after being sentenced to death, Park was dramatically spared because he gave information about other party members and because of his personal ties to high-ranking Korean officers who recognized his talent and ability. He managed to survive but was discharged from the military. Sympathetic senior officers allowed him to work as a civilian in the Intelligence Department without any official



position. This period brought both immense difficulties and fortune; Park had to work as an informal assistant to other officers who were much younger and lower ranked than himself. But he endured this ordeal and was recognized for his incisive analysis of military intelligence and his ability to write excellent reports. As mentioned above, although he predicted the Korean War and wrote reports about it, his reports were repeatedly ignored by the military and civilian leadership. And yet, at the same time, at this nadir of his career, Park met a group of younger officers (the 8th class of the Korean Military Academy) who recognized his leadership and capability; these officers became the backbone of the military coup he led in 1961. Park also encountered other personal difficulties during this darkest period in his life, including his mother's death and a breakup with Yi Hyŏn-ran, a beautiful student at the elite Ewha Woman's University. Park had met her in the fall of 1947, at a subordinate's wedding, and fallen madly in love with her. Eager to marry her, he tried to divorce his first wife and rushed an engagement with Yi. The couple lived together, but Yi left him after she realized that he had been imprisoned for being a communist; this was shocking to her as a North Korean refugee who had endured separation from her family to escape from communist North Korea.

The dramatic reversal of Park's career came after the outbreak of the Korean War. When the war

began, he was visiting his hometown for his mother's commemoration ritual. Although not officially a soldier, he returned to the Army Headquarters in Seoul in the midst of the massive movement of refugees. He wanted to prove that he was not a communist but a soldier of the Korean Army willing to fight for the nation. Impressed by this behavior, General Paek Sŏn-yŏp helped him be reinstated as a major in the face of a dire shortage of officers. In the process of fighting the war, Park was rapidly promoted, becoming a brigadier general in late 1953; he finally realized his childhood dream. The bloody war brought other good fortune to Park. During the first six months of the war, he was introduced to Yuk Young Soo, the daughter of an exceptionally wealthy family from Ch'ungju, North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. Like most Koreans who escaped to southern provinces, her family became refugees in the Taegu area, where Park was serving. Against fierce opposition from his proud father-in-law but with the strong support of his mother-in-law, the couple married in December 1950.<sup>75</sup>

While serving as a general, Park observed numerous cases of corruption that lay at the heart of the collusion between the military and civilian elites. Even during the war, President Rhee Syngman abused the military as his political tool; to pass a constitutional amendment that would allow for his reelection, Rhee imposed martial law in the Pusan area, which required relocation



of troops from combat areas. Along with other critical officers, ambitious Park began to entertain the idea of removing the corrupt and ineffective civilian government. Yet Rhee's regime was overthrown by a student-led protest in April 1960, before the military acted; dissatisfied with Rhee for his defiance, the United States also supported his removal in the name of democracy. The subsequent Second Republic turned out to be internally divided (especially between President Yun Po-sŏn and Premier Chang Myŏn) and mired in numerous protests from various sectors of society. Seeing this situation as dangerous chaos, Park led a coup with the support of only a few thousand soldiers.

### *3. The Husband and Father*

Park became a proper husband and father only after his second marriage, to Yuk, who remained his life companion until she was shot to death by a North Korean spy who was attempting to assassinate Park at the national independence anniversary in August 1974. As a husband, Park had a deep affection and admiration for his graceful wife, who was highly regarded by broad sections of the populace. While, like many other male rulers of the past and the present, he had sexual encounters with other women even while his wife was alive, he maintained a lasting bond with his wife. Because they married during the war, they were soon separated, while still in their honeymoon period. They wrote love letters to each other and Park also wrote poems for her.

They saw each other whenever they could in the midst of the war. After Park was promoted to the rank of general, his romantic side was replaced by the conventional behavior of a Korean husband; he often brought his subordinates to his home for socializing over dinners and drinks. He often spent a large portion of his salary on meals and drinks for his subordinates. This habit posed financial difficulties for his wife, who had to manage the household on Park's meager salary, without any extra resources from bribery. Before he decided to carry out the coup, he agonized over the possibility of failure and of his being executed for treason; this would have left his wife and young children to be ostracized by society. Although he was a taciturn introvert, after his ascendancy to the presidency, he shared his ideas and concerns with his wife, who played the role of loyal opposition in the Blue House. He felt deeply guilty about her death and tearfully recollected her simple wish to retire in a small rural house where she could cultivate vegetables in a garden. He missed her particularly in the early morning when he woke up and on Saturday afternoons, when most of his staff left the Blue House.<sup>76</sup>

Park fathered a daughter (Chae-ok) with his first wife and two daughters (Kŭn-hye and Kŭn-yŏng) and one son (Chi-man) with Yuk. While he was minimally involved in raising them, his children managed to bring out a tender or ambivalent side of him. He felt guilty about

Chae-ok, whom he had neglected during her childhood and adolescence. He worried about Chi-man, the sensitive last child, who lost his mother at the age of 15. After discovering that Chi-man was smoking in high school, Park asked him to quit smoking and promised that he himself would do so as well. While Park forced Chi-man, who was interested in literature, to enter the Military Academy, he also worried about his adjustment to the military environment. Park was particularly concerned about Kün-hye, who in her mid-twenties, after her mother died, had to play the role of first lady. Park asked his daughter to find a companion for her life. He was anxious about her apparent disinterest in marriage. At times, Park was engaged with his children; being a good trumpet player, he collaborated with Kün-yöng, a music student, to compose a “wholesome song” (könjöngayo) that Park’s regime actively promoted in order to reform Korean mentality. Apart from these paternal concerns and engagement with his children, however, Park found himself in the position of an old-fashioned parent whom his children could not understand. Chi-man complained that his prohibition of long hair among young men was too draconian. The three children (from the second marriage) also criticized his penchant for playing the traditional Korean flute at night and singing very old songs; to their ears, those sounds made him pitiful.

#### *4. The Shrewd and Self-righteous Politician*

During the junta period (1961-63), Park was transformed from a soldier who despised politicians into a politician who viewed himself above all other politicians. He loathed professional politicians for their wordiness and indecisiveness and distinguished himself from them; he had clear goals of reconstructing the economy and building a self-reliant defense for the nation; he identified specific methods to accomplish these goals and dedicated himself to following them through to the end. The economic development was not only for the sake of material prosperity, but to make people independent and confident. This pursuit of independence for the sake of overcoming humiliation and insecurity resonated profoundly from his personal life. Throughout Park’s life, he was often distressed and humiliated by his own poverty and the widespread poverty in the nation. Independence was like his secular (monotheistic) religion. Hence, he could not deal with those who opposed him. For example, he was enraged by the students’ protest against the 1964 Korea-Japan Agreement because, he believed, they did not understand its real significance.<sup>77</sup> He was also infuriated by politicians of his Republican Party who opposed his constitutional amendment to legalize the third term of his presidency when, he believed, the nation needed his leadership.<sup>78</sup> It is noteworthy that he commonly considered opposition to his ideas and actions to be “resistance to order” (hangmyöng), mercilessly

and unreservedly punishing those who challenged his power.

As Park energetically pursued his project of militarized modernity, often against fierce opposition from students, politicians, bureaucrats, and foreign powers, he felt deep loneliness and even anger at the lack of understanding and appreciation for his dedication and hard work. The following portrayal of his inner world conveys this sentiment:

Am I a dictator?  
 Several times I  
 restrained myself  
 from screaming no. I  
 reflected on myself  
 and, like everyone  
 else, accepted this  
 label. But there is no  
 other choice but to  
 practice dictatorship  
 now under our  
 country's conditions.  
 I'm going to retire  
 someday. People  
 think that I'd stay in  
 this position to the  
 end of my life, but  
 that was not my  
 intention at all. I'd  
 like to rest, too. I'd  
 like to drink with my

close friends near a  
 creek and till the  
 land. But as my  
 classmates in the  
 teachers' college  
 used to say, I am a  
 tough cookie, I am a  
 person with tenacity  
 and strong ambition.  
 I have to accomplish  
 what I planned to  
 feel at ease with  
 myself.<sup>79</sup>

These remarks also convey the self-righteousness that blinded Park, particularly during the last decade of his rule. At the pinnacle of political power, he believed that he had a heroic destiny to save the nation and that the people had no choice but to follow his leadership.



**Park Chung Hee (with sun glasses) with two journalists and the mayor of Pusan (the first from the right) in the Haeundae Beach, Pusan in the early 1960s (description based on Un-hyön**

Chŏng's *Silrok Kunin Park Chung Hee* (2004), p. 211. (Cyber Park Chung Hee memorial hall established and managed by the City of Kumi, North Kyŏngsang Province)



Park at the piano. (Cyber Park Chung Hee memorial hall)



Park Chung Hee with his wife and children, playing *yunnori* on a New Year's Day

In the final section below, I will discuss what these recollective representations of Park reveal about the collective wishes and longings of the Korean public. They imply competing popular visions of a desirable society.

### Implications for Popular Visions of a Desirable Society

The glorifying memories of Park reveal a collective wish to assert the achievement of economic development that transformed Korea from one of the poorest countries in the world into an industrialized one that joined the OECD, a transformation that was completed in three and a half decades. Such an affirmation or even celebration is highly appealing to Koreans, especially in the face of the economic downturn and insecurity experienced by most Koreans in the era following the Asian economic crisis. The figure of Park serves as a totem around which the people can band together to gain confidence and inspiration through their identification with a heroic leader. Understandably, this collective wish for self-validation is particularly strong among the older generation, who lived through Park's era as adults and built industrial Korea. In his personal essay, Kim Che-bang explicitly mentions that "we want to be proud of our accomplishment of transforming the nation."<sup>80</sup> The wish for self-validation is easily turned into suspicion of patriotism of those who do not embrace the "heroic leader." In his novel about Park (in which Park continues to rule Korea until

2007), Ch'oi Daniel compares Koreans critical of Park with an American guide he encountered at the Vernon House, the birth house of President George Washington, near Washington, D.C. Ch'oi contrasts the guide's tearful admiration for George Washington as the country's founding father ("although he owned hundreds of slaves to cultivate his vast land") to "our reluctance to pay unreserved respect to Park, who loved our nation passionately under more difficult conditions."<sup>81</sup>

The celebration of economic growth as the source of self-affirmation and pride, accompanied by the selective erasure or overlooking of brutalities and negative consequences, characterizes Park Chung Hee nostalgia and underscores the hegemony of economic developmentalism in the current era of globalization. The accelerated expansion of the capitalist market economy in the post Cold-War world has intensified transnational competition for the accumulation of profit under the mantra of "free trade agreements" in Korea and elsewhere. Human labor has become even more expendable within any given country because capital moves more rapidly across national boundaries and employment security has become a relic of the past, even for a majority of the middle class in Korean society. It is precisely at such a moment of resurging social Darwinism that economic developmentalism increases its influence over the populace. The hegemonic image of a desirable society invoked by the

glorifying memories of Park in this context is the society with perpetual economic growth or sustained economic security. While the centrality of economic prosperity to the popular view of a good society is not peculiar to Korea,<sup>82</sup> it is further accentuated in Korea by the recent history of rapid economic development and the subsequent dramatic downturn. A majority of Koreans feel deeply vulnerable in this era of "unlimited competition," with little social security to rely on other than their own families, whose capacities for providing individuals with welfare have been profoundly undermined by structural changes in society.<sup>83</sup> Such popular sentiments of vulnerability and insecurity serve as fertile soil for nostalgic longing for a "strong" leader who can deliver economic stability and preferably growth.<sup>84</sup>

In this popular vision of a desirable society, democracy takes a secondary seat at best. Under the rubric of "benevolent dictatorship," those nostalgic memories glorifying Park justify his authoritarian rule as the inevitable condition for the achievement of rapid industrialization in a "less-developed" country like Korea. His authoritarian attitudes and the way he pushed his ideas through against resistance and opposition--not only from foreign powers but also from his own supporters, dissident politicians, business leaders, and grassroots Koreans--are generally portrayed as signs of strong-willed power and resolute leadership.



This nostalgia for strong leadership is often coupled with a strong undercurrent of suspicion of democratic procedure, which requires discussion and negotiation across differences among various social groups, as inefficient and prone to chaotic feuds. Although some authors in this camp view the Yushin system as a fatal mistake (which destroyed democratic procedure and thereby strengthened left-wing opposition),<sup>85</sup> other authors rationalize it as a temporary measure, or even an experiment to develop a “Korean-style democracy.”<sup>86</sup> Han Sŭng-jo articulates this conservative view of democracy, prevalent among ardent supporters of Park Chung Hee:

Western democracy prioritizes the legitimacy of procedures and means over the rationality of goal achievement in a political system. In comparison, Korean democracy prioritizes the results achieved by a political system over procedural legitimacy and processes. The former is *the logic and*

*values of decent people whose stomachs are full and the latter is the logic and values of hungry people who cannot afford to act decently most of the time. Hence, the clash between the two is inevitable.*<sup>87</sup>

This conservative view discredits democracy as a foreign import that is not quite suitable for Koreans. In doing so, it converts the universal evolutionary logic of development into cultural relativism. This rhetoric, albeit fallacious, finds many receptive ears among those who cannot successfully compete as individuals in the globalized economy. To this vulnerable majority, Park’s a-democratic<sup>88</sup> call for building and sustaining a strong nation-state is appealing because it is selectively remembered that his call delivered security, basic necessities, and even prosperity to the members of that nation.

The glorifying memories of Park also imply that a good society is one guided by a masculine leader. The image of a strong leader invoked in this group of popular texts is deeply gendered. The popular nostalgia for a strong leader is implicitly a nostalgia for the lost patriarchy and a fully masculine nation. For those who glorify Park, he embodies the “peerlessly courageous man” (yonggammussanghan sanai) who can



stand up against both domestic and foreign opposition for the sake of the nation.<sup>89</sup> This yearning for a fully masculine leader takes a fascinating psychosexual turn in a hagiographic novel about Park by Chu Ch'i-ho. In his narration of Park's unsuccessful first marriage to Kim Honam, the masculine leader is portrayed as one who can detect women's deadly sexual energy (*salgi*). Chu portrays Park as having left his wife because she was a "perverted woman," who could kill men who were sexually involved with her. Although his first wife was in fact abandoned by ambitious Park, as discussed above, the novel reverses the story to tell it from a deeply misogynistic point of view. After being separated from Park, Chu recounts, his wife lived with three other men, but all of them died mysteriously.<sup>90</sup> This interpretation echoes the Confucian view of a (masculine) ruler who can cultivate himself first, and then rule his family, before he rules a country. The cultivation of the self involves the control of one's passion and sexuality, tied for a man to the control of his wife.

The demonizing memories of Park reveal a collective wish to recognize human necessities beyond economic security and prosperity; they refuse to accept the reduction of politics and governability to the efficient management of the national economy. These memories serve as a significant antidote to the economic developmentalism, interwoven with militarism and authoritarianism, which has lowered the

quality of life in Korea. Questioning the hegemonic view, critics of Park insist that economic growth cannot be the goal in itself, but a means to bring about the qualitative improvement of human life. As discussed above, they point out the negative consequences of rapid economic development, including the lack of basic economic and social security for a majority of Koreans. They tend to attribute this pervasive problem to the absence of democracy during Park's rule and to his continuing legacies. Hence, the image of a good society these critical memories invoke is a democratic society where individuals are valued for their intrinsic quality rather than for their instrumental utility to the state's project, and where social minorities are treated equally despite their differences from the majority. The critics of Park consider democracy to be a universal value that can be accepted across cultural boundaries. From the perspective of liberal universalism, Kim Chae-hong, a journalist, articulates a common argument against Park and his supporters' rationalization of authoritarianism as "Korean-style democracy":

During the military rule, including the Yushin system, there were no genuine political processes in which social conflicts were addressed and resolved in terms of

the principle of communitarian justice. There was only compliance and obedience to the Yushin system, and such preconditions for communitarian justice as individual choice and contracts based on free will were ignored. These preconditions are universal norms to be applied to any human society. Yet they were packaged as Western clothes that were not suitable for Korean bodies, and the Yushin system was asserted to be the democracy suitable for the Korean constitution.<sup>91</sup>

From this perspective, Park's dictatorship cannot be justified as a necessary condition for rapid economic development; rather, economic development was a necessary condition for maintaining Park's uncontested power. This view is more persuasive because it resonates with

Park's own "leader-centered political thought" that underlies his political behavior.<sup>92</sup>

Although this lofty view has been influential among progressive groups of intellectuals, students, workers, and politicians, its appeal among the masses of Koreans has been waning in the age of globalization. Ch'oi Sang-ch'ŏn, an internal critic of the progressives, reflects on this problem and argues that democracy in Korea has been a prime value for the educated and privileged with talent and resources.<sup>93</sup> He is implicitly critical of the normative apotheosis of liberal democracy devoid of the consideration of basic economic security for grassroots men and women. While converging on a conservative view in appearance,<sup>94</sup> this criticism underscores the centrality to democratic society of enabling social conditions, rather than rejecting democracy as a foreign thing. Building on this point, I contend that liberal individualism champions the fundamental civil rights dear to those who can compete as individuals, but that these fundamental rights do not automatically guarantee basic economic security for the masses of people who do not have the educational credentials, individual talents, social capital, and luck required for individuals to compete successfully. This means that unless the ideal of a democratic society addresses economic security as a fundamental aspect of collective life in the nation, its popular appeal would remain tenuous or ambiguous at best.

Humanizing memories of Park hint at a collective wish for demystifying Park. They strip him of hagiographic aura or evil persona. This apparently simple wish contains a far-reaching implication for the vision of a good society. Recognizing Park as a person with weaknesses and contradictions, as well as talents and abilities, these humanizing memories suggest that a desirable society is one that is governed by people themselves. This idea of self-governing, in reality, commonly takes the form of representative democracy (rather than actual practices of self-governing) in mass societies. The implicit democratic idea is that men and women who are the grass roots of the country will become mature enough to realize that there is neither a superhuman leader who can save them from troubles nor a demonic leader who is responsible for all troubles in their lives. Because leaders are not very different from ordinary human beings, or even more deeply flawed by their ambitions than ordinary people, the populace needs to accept them as public servants whose exercise of delegated power should be monitored. This sobering view of a leader is psychologically democratizing because it reduces the artificial gap between leaders and followers and questions the leader-centered views of social change implied in both glorifying and demonizing memories of Park. This view calls for the routine participation of ordinary people in political processes of scrutinizing their public servants. In this vision of a desirable society,

politics is not so much a dramatic stage for saintly or demonic leaders as a mundane mechanism that mature members of society have to nurture for their own economic security and well being.

In post-military rule South Korea with procedural democracy (although it has exhibited a conservative trajectory for the past two decades), this call for democratizing the relationship between a leader and followers would be more practicable than the once progressive call for heroic struggle against Park, the dictator, and now against his specter to protect the lofty ideal of democracy. Such struggle is usually daunting to ordinary citizens who are preoccupied with making their living and pursuing domestic and personal enjoyments. However, ordinary citizens can be educated to keep their watchful eyes on their all too human and deeply flawed leaders as a minimum precondition for ensuring their lives with economic security and well being. Such education in both formal and informal contexts would also require the nurturing and cherishing of democratic institutions that enable ordinary citizens to monitor their leaders. Without these institutions, the role of grassroots watchmen and women can be another overwhelming task.

### **Conclusion**

The various commemorative representations of

Park in the post-economic-crisis era allow us to glean competing views of a good society connoted in the collective wishes and longings of the general public. Unlike the liberal assumption of a readily collaborative or causal relationship between (capitalist) economic development and (procedural) democracy, the politics of remembering Park reveals the tension between the two in varying degrees. The glorifying and nostalgic memories of Park suggest that economic growth and affluence lie at the core of a good society and that the populace needs a strong leader who can deliver economic security and prosperity, even at the expense of democracy. It is assumed that there is a trade-off between the efficiency of economic development and the development of democracy. The demonizing memories of Park imply that the recognition of individual rights and the practices of democratic procedures are essential to a good society and that people need to reject the justification of repressive dictatorship as an inevitable condition for rapid economic growth. This rejection assumes an apparent trade-off between the two when we read it as connoting that democracy, as the ideal principle of how to organize the collective life of a nation, comes before economic security and prosperity. However, we can also read it as connoting that economic development and democracy can go hand in hand. This reading invites an array of competing claims about and verifications of the efficiency of democratic polity in generating

economic growth in specific social contexts and their replicability across cultural boundaries. In this type of deliberation, the thorny question would be how to measure or assess efficient economic growth because its quantitative indicators fail to capture such hidden costs as human and environmental costs. The humanizing memories of Park suggest that the political maturity of ordinary people, epitomized by their equality with their leader, is crucial to a good society and that the people feel entitled to monitor their leaders, who are complex human beings like themselves and even more flawed by their extraordinary ambitions. While this view is ambivalent about the relationship between capitalist economic development and procedural democracy, we can ponder what the enabling conditions are that would make people feel equal to their leaders and monitor them. Those conditions would include basic economic security and critical education; capitalist economic growth does not automatically guarantee these conditions for the mass of the population, although it would be a necessary condition for economic security.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the Romanization of Korean names and words follows the McCune-Reischauer system, except for names whose personal orthography is publicly known. In the main text and endnotes, Korean names are written in the Korean order of surname first, followed by given name.

<sup>2</sup> Chu (2005), preface; author's translation.

<sup>3</sup> Han (1999), p. 48; author's translation.

<sup>4</sup> Han (2001), p. 210, p. 211; author's translation.

<sup>5</sup> Chŏng (1997), vol. 1, p. 327; author's translation.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson (1991) and Gillis (1994).

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from Alison Landsberg. Prosthetic memory refers to a memory about the past of which a person does not have direct and lived experience but which is nevertheless crucial to the production and articulation of her or his subjectivity. Like prosthetic limbs attached to the body, prosthetic memories are "sensuous memories produced by an experience of mass-mediated representations" (2004, 20). Such experience includes watching a film or a television series, visiting a museum, and reading mass-produced books.

<sup>8</sup> During the later years of Chun's rule, such critical publications multiplied. For example, see *The 1960s* (edited by Kim Sŏng-hwan, 1984); *Politicians: Their Day and Night* (by Ch'oi Chu-yŏl, 1986); *Park Chung Hee and His Women* (edited by the Korean Politics Studies Center, 1986); *Park's Regime, 18 Years: The Inside of the Power* (by Yi Sang-u, 1986); and *Yushin Coup d'état* (by Yi Kyŏng-jae, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> According to the National Assembly Library catalogue

(<http://u-lib.nanet.go.kr:8080/dl/ViewApply.php>), monographs on Park Chung Hee between 1980 and 2007 come to 304 volumes. A majority of these were published in the past ten years.

<sup>10</sup> According to the National Assembly Library catalogue

(<http://u-lib.nanet.go.kr:8080/dl/ViewApply.php>), monographs on Park in these four specific genres grew significantly in 1997 (6 titles) and 1998 (8 titles). While there has been some fluctuation in the number of such publications from year to year, 2006 (6 titles) and 2007 (8 titles) showed a continuation of the trend.

<sup>11</sup> In light of the "cultural turn" in social sciences, focusing on inquiries into "systems of signification and subjectivity as importantly constitutive of social reality," the social production and consumption of memories and knowledge are always mediated by language, and epistemological access to such linguistic representations involve interpretation. See Steinmetz (1999), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> These writers were born between 1935 and 1962.

<sup>13</sup> The interview was broadcast on May 19th, 1989, during "Pak Kyŏng-jae's Current Affairs Talk Show" on MBC (the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation).

<sup>14</sup> See *Kyŏreŭi chidoja: Pak Chŏng-hŭi taet'ongnyŏngŭi ch'ijŏgŭl chungsimŭro han han'gukhyŏndaesa* (The National Leader: A

Contemporary Korean History Seen through Park Chung Hee's Executive Accomplishments), published by the Yuk'yŏng Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> See Chŏng Sang-ho (1998), p. 110. The city of Kumi also established "Cyber Park Chung Hee Memorial Hall (<http://www.presidentpark.or.kr>)."

<sup>16</sup> See Wiin Pak Chŏng-hŭi (Great Person Park Chung Hee), authored by Chŏng Chae-kyŏng (1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Chŏng Hae-gu (1998), p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Some observers point out that Kim's positive attention to Park preceded the election campaign. Visiting the city of Taegu on May 13, 1995, Kim Dae Jung announced that "President Park Chung Hee now should become a respected leader in our history." This was interpreted by the public as willingness on Kim's part to forgive Park and move forward to reach reconciliation. See Kim Che-bang (2006), p. 306.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, historians came together to form a national group to reject the idea of building Park's memorial hall with a government fund. This group published a monograph that articulated the group's critique of the project and alternatives to it. See the National Gathering of Historians in Opposition to the Establishment of Park Chung Hee Memorial Hall with Public Funds (1999).

<sup>20</sup> See National Solidarity against the Park Chung Hee Memorial Hall (2000).

<sup>21</sup> See Han'guk Daily, January 17, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> This series was published in 1998 as a

monograph, entitled *Silrok Pak Chŏng-hŭi: han'gwŏnŭro ingnŭn che 3 konghwaguk* (Chronicle of Park Chung Hee: Reading the History of the Third Republic in One Volume).

<sup>23</sup> Cho published an expanded version of this series as an 8-volume biography of Park between 1998 and 2001. See *Nae mudŏme ch'imŭl paet'ŏra*: kŭndaehwa hyŏngmyŏngga Pak Chŏng-hŭiŭi pijanghan saengae (Spit On My Grave: The Tragic Life of Park Chung Hee, a Modernizing Revolutionary). Seoul: Chosŏn Daily Co.

<sup>24</sup> This serial was published as a chapter in his book, entitled *Pak Chŏng-hŭirŭl malhada: kŭi kaehyŏkchŏngch'i kŭrigo kwaingch'ungsŏng* (Taking about Park Chung Hee: His Reform Politics and Excessive Loyalty) in 2006.

<sup>25</sup> The boundary between fiction and nonfiction in these texts is at times ambiguous, as the nonfiction stories are strongly colored by personal points of view and the novelists try to present accurate portrayals of Park based on empirical evidence, to address the extremely polarized views of him among the public. I try to verify the factual accuracy of certain claims in endnotes, where necessary, in my textual analysis below.

<sup>26</sup> See Ch'oi Daniel (2007) and Chu Ch'i-ho (2005), Kim Sŏng-jin (2006).

<sup>27</sup> See Cho Kap-je (1999; 2001), Han Sŏng-jo (1999), Kim Che-bang (2006), Kim Chŏng-ryŏm (1997) Monthly Chosŏn Editorial Board (2004).

<sup>28</sup> See Kang Ch'i-gŭn (2007), Hong Ha-sang



(2005), Pak Mi-jöng (2007),

<sup>29</sup> See endnotes 26, 27, and 28 for the texts consulted for this analysis.

<sup>30</sup> See *Kunggawa hyöngmyöngkwa na* (The State, Revolution, and Me) written by Park Chung Hee (Seoul: Hyangmunsa, 1963).

<sup>31</sup> See Han (1999), p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> The list of “revolutionary” behaviors commonly cited by the popular texts I consulted are factually accurate, but its meanings vary depending on one’s political orientation. The list resembles well-known components of economic development policies discussed by numerous academic studies. See, for example, *Asia’s Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* by Alice Amsden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), *Big Business, Strong State: Collusion and Conflict in South Korean Development, 1960-1990* by Eun Mee Kim (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> I coined this phrase in my book. See Moon (2005).

<sup>34</sup> Those writers leaning toward hagiographic representation tend to view this behavior as an expression of Park’s exceptional prescience and insight. For example, placing Park on a pedestal with great military heroes like Yi, Soon-sin, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Douglas McArthur, Chu Su-ho (2005), Cho Kap-je (1998; 2001), and Kim Söng-jin (2006) discuss numerous anecdotes. Well-known ones include Park’s bold initiatives for science and technology development projects

that led to the establishment of the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), the Science Academy, and the Technical College. These projects were closely connected to the initiative for heavy and chemical industrialization, which was essential to long-term economic development. Other popularized examples of his prescience include the construction of the subway Line One in Seoul (between 1971 and 1974) and the construction of the Seoul-Pusan highway and Seoul-Inch’ön highway. A rather obscure anecdote conveys his ability to predict the North Korean invasion of the South when he was working in the Army Intelligence Department during the 1949 and 1950.

<sup>35</sup> The following list of examples is largely accurate. See note 33.

<sup>36</sup> The World Bank opposed this project because it did not believe that Korea economically developed enough to handle it.

<sup>37</sup> See Hong (2005).

<sup>38</sup> Initially, the New Village movement was a rural development program that was launched in the early 1970s to increase household income. It promoted a spirit of diligence, self-help, and collaboration among the rural population. After it achieved significant success, the model was expanded to factories and urban areas.

<sup>39</sup> This report of Park’s activities is factually accurate. See Chöng Chae-kyöng (1991), *Park Chung Hee sasangsösöl—huihorül chungsimüro* (Introduction to Park Chung Hee’s Thoughts—a

Focus on His Calligraphy). Seoul: Chimmundang.

<sup>40</sup> This collective memory accounts for the popular success of *Hanbando* (1999), a 2-volume mystery and political fiction that narrates the U.S. conspiracy behind the assassination of Park Chung Hee by Kim Chae-gyu, a director of the KCIA, in 1979. The first edition of this novel was printed 65 times and the second edition was printed 19 times by the end of 2007. See Kim Chin-myŏng (Seoul: Haenaem, 1999/2007).

<sup>41</sup> Park himself was quite conscious of the importance of this type of cultural politics (Moon 1997). In a speech given at the cornerstone laying of a culture center on April 25, 1967, he stressed that “The establishment of the consciousness of national subjectivity is the most critical question for us pursuing the project of national modernization to accomplish national independence” (Chŏn Chae-ho 1998, 245). In 1962, his junta enacted the Cultural Assets Protection Law and in 1968 his government established the Ministry of Culture and Public Information for the systematic administration of the discovery of Korean cultural assets, their public display and protection. During the 1970s, Park’s government launched the Five Year Cultural Assets Development Plan (1969-1974) and the Five Year Cultural Revival Plan (1974-78). Under these large-scale projects, it particularly focused on the construction of memorial sites tied to the themes of national protection and defense (*ibid.*, 243 ).

<sup>42</sup> See Chu (2005), vol. 1:144.

<sup>43</sup> This series was published as a monograph entitled *Ah, Pak Chŏng-hŭi: chŏngch’i hoegorok* (*Ah, Park Chung Hee: A Political Memoir*) in 1997.

<sup>44</sup> These anecdotes are repeatedly used in biographical novels and biographies of Park Chung Hee and in personal essays on his legacies. See Ch’oi (2007), Cho (2001), Han (1999).

<sup>45</sup> The examples listed in this paragraph are largely accurate, according to his biographies. See Chŏn (2006), p. 155.

<sup>46</sup> See Chin (1998), Ch’oi Sang-ch’ŏn (2007), Han Sang-bŏm (2001), and Kang Chun-man (2002).

<sup>47</sup> See Chŏng Un-hyŏn (2004), Kim Chae-hong (1998), and Moon (1999).

<sup>48</sup> See (Han 1999, 16, 57).

<sup>49</sup> See endnotes 47 and 48.

<sup>50</sup> While the incident of the blood letter is evidenced in Cho’s multi-volume biography (1998, vol. 2: 96), written from a conservative point of view, Chŏng Un-hyŏn, a left-leaning journalist, is rather skeptical of it because the Manchurian Newspaper that published Park Chung Hee’s unusual letter did not mention a blood letter (2004, 81).

<sup>51</sup> According to empirical studies, it is very unlikely that Park was directly involved in any such hunting operation. Between 1944 and 1945, he served in the Manchurian Army that fought against the Palo Army led by Mao Tse-tong. It is possible that this Communist guerrilla army included some Korean fighters collaborating with

Chinese Communist fighters. See Chŏng Un-hyŏn (2004), ch. 6 and Chŏn (2006), p. 91.

<sup>52</sup> Sejima graduated from the Military Academy at the top of the class of 1936 and was a leading officer during Japan's military expansion. He served on Japan's Supreme War Council and was a general in the Kwangtung Army in Manchuria. When Japan was defeated, he was captured by the Soviet Army and detained as a prisoner of war for 11 years. After being repatriated in 1956, he was hired by the Itotsu Trading Company. As a competent businessman, he is believed to have transformed the company from a mere textile manufacturer into one of the largest general trading companies in Japan. Because of his military and economic credentials, he advised four prime ministers in postwar Japan and also advised Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan, and Roh Tae Woo. See the Hangyŏre Newspaper internet site: <http://english.hani.co.kr/popups/print.hani?ksn=212582>.

<sup>53</sup> See Han (2001), pp. 73-77 and pp. 80-81.

<sup>54</sup> This portrayal of Park is particularly evident in *Naked Park Chung Hee* by Ch'oi Sang-chŏn (2007).

<sup>55</sup> Park was introduced to the Labor Party after Pak Sang-hŭi, his third older brother, who was a local leader of the Party, was killed during the Taegu rebellion in October 1946. In the midst of a local protest, he was shot to death by policemen. Sang-hŭi's bereft family was looked after by Hwang T'ae-sŏng and Yi Chae-bok, officers of

the Labor Party. These partisans approached Park Chung Hee and asked him to join the party in order to avenge his brother's death and inherit his legacy. This personal dimension might have been combined with Park's calculation about gaining access to the leadership of the influential Labor Party through Hwang, a key officer of the organization. See Chŏn (2006), pp. 100-101 and Chŏng Un-hyŏn (2004), pp. 141-146.

<sup>56</sup> These incidents are factually accurate. But a more important factor in Park's unusual survival was his ties to the military elite at the time who were willing to save him for his ability as a military officer. See Chŏn (2006), pp. 104-105.

<sup>57</sup> The list of actions in this paragraph is factually accurate. See Yi Kwang-il (1998) and Chŏng Un-hyŏn (2004), ch. 13.

<sup>58</sup> For example, in 1972, Park's regime issued "8.3 measures" to freeze the private loan market, in order to rechannel domestic capital into big business; this caused the masses of ordinary families to lose their private investments.

<sup>59</sup> The following reminiscence by Moon Myŏng-ja, an expatriate journalist, is an example of such a recognition:

"There was something evidently simple and artless about Park Chung Hee as a person. That day he wore a jumper. During the conversation, he never acted ostentatiously and his face turned red when he heard a piece of flattery because he felt bashful. His biggest charm was his somewhat awkward and shy smile. I wonder how he, so tough and cruel, could wear such an innocent

smile. While he had a shy personality, his voice became resounding when he stood in front of people. An introvert but of an extremely tough kind. This was what I observed of Park Chung Hee as a person" (1999, 86 – 87; author's translation; emphases added)

<sup>60</sup> See Moon (1999), p. 15 and chapter 4.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>62</sup> See Chŏng Yŏng-jin (1997; 1998), and Yi Su-kwang (2005). While using the fictional form, both authors mention in their preface and/or epilogue that they paid faithful attention to empirical facts because Park has been either so mythologized or so demonized. In addition, Yi points out that his novel tells about real people, some of whom are still alive, and that this made him pay attention to factual accuracy and confine his fictional imagination, in portraying the inner world of Park and other characters, to a significant degree.

<sup>63</sup> While there are a few different accounts of how the father lost his inheritance, the rest of the information here is accurate. See Chŏn (2006), p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> During the colonial period, there were only three teachers' schools in entire Korea; one was in Taegu, the second one was in P'yongyang and the third one was in Seoul. See Yi (2005), Vol. 1: 134. See also Chŏng (2004), p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> There was a scholarship to cover tuition and the living expenses of those who were in the top thirtieth of the class (Chŏng 1997, vol. 1: 122) or the top fortieth of the class (Chŏng 2004, 48).

<sup>66</sup> In 1934 the colonial government instituted this two-year primary education under the category of "simplified school" (*kani hakgyo*) in order to instruct Korean children in basic literacy in Japanese and other basic skills necessary for productivity. See Chŏng (1997), vol. 1:281.

<sup>67</sup> In his biographical novel, Chŏng offers a more detailed account of Park's alienation from his first wife. According to this version, Kim, like Park, married to obey her parents; she hadn't seen him even once before their wedding night. Although he was considered good groom material because of his elite status as a student of Taegu Teachers' School, she was disappointed at his appearance and his family's extreme poverty, the sensitive spots for Park. Hence she acted depressed around Park, and he was insulted by her behavior, in spite of her good looks (vol. 1: 259-262). In his biography of Park as a soldier, however, Chŏng presents a different version that alludes to the first wife's "sexual perversion." This information is putatively based on a memory of Park's own words about his relationship with his first wife (2004, 76).

<sup>68</sup> According to Chŏng's narrative, Korean students represented 90% of the student body and Japanese students represented 10% in this school. In contrast, the composition of the faculty was 76% Japanese and 24% Korean. Some of these Korean teachers, including such real figures as Hyŏn Chun-hyŏk and Kim Yŏng-gi, worked to instill Korean nationalism among Korean students, especially during Korean language

classes (1997, Vol. 1: 45, 74).

<sup>69</sup> According to Chǒng's narrative, a significant number of Korean students in the teachers' school dropped out or were expelled by the growingly repressive school. When Park graduated in March 1937, the class had been reduced to 70 students from the initial group of 100 (1997, Vol. 1: 269).

<sup>70</sup> Park's nascent nationalism is apparent in a poem he wrote when he took a study trip to Diamond Mountain (currently in North Korea) during the third year at the teachers' school. In this poem, Park expressed his appreciation of the natural beauty of this famous mountain and contrasted its beauty to the miserable conditions of Koreans living under colonial rule. See Chǒn (2006), p. 64.

<sup>71</sup> This is the famously beautiful mountain where Hyundai, one of Korea's largest economic conglomerates, built tourist facilities and has entertained South Korean tourists since November 1998.

<sup>72</sup> This was the only elementary school for Korean children in the township of Munkyǒng. There were approximately ten teachers, including the principal, and some five hundred students. See Chǒng (1997), vol. 1: 281.

<sup>73</sup> Due to his warm attitude toward his students, he was popular among them. Some of the older students were in their late teens, and he was involved in a romantic relationship with one of his older female students. He entertained the idea of marrying her, until his older brother came to

visit and revealed to her family that Park was already married, with a daughter (Yi 2005, vol. 1: ch. 1). There were also some fathers of older female students who considered Park to be a good husband material for their daughters (Chǒng 1997, vol. 1:284; Chǒng 2004, 62).

<sup>74</sup> Yi, a novelist, reconstructs Park's complicated decision to join the party as follows:

Yi Chae-bok handed me the Party application form. I was immersed in my own thoughts for a moment, then I filled it out and signed with my seal. I couldn't refuse his request when he had been helping my brother Sang-hŭi's bereft family after he was killed.

After returning to Seoul, I was thinking a lot about my brother's death. I didn't think that he was a brutal communist who killed innocent peasants. The Korean government was not formed yet and society was extremely chaotic. Because of my training at the teachers' school and the military academy, emphasizing discipline and order, I despised mushrooming political parties and the politicians who made society chaotic. Perhaps I joined the labor party because of such disorder and because of the oppressed peasants. My father was a poor peasant and my brothers Mu-hŭi and Tong-hŭi were the same. My brother Sang-hŭi had struggled to escape the fate of a tenant farmer. He became a communist because he wanted to change reality, and he resisted Japan because he opposed the Japanese landlords who exploited poor peasants.

When I recollect the incident of my joining the



labor party, I feel my chest was burning. At that time, like many intellectuals, I thought that communism was an ideology that would create better lives for workers and peasants. But I couldn't imagine that it would turn into the source of the internecine war between Koreans. (2005, Vol. 2: 65-66; author's translation).

<sup>75</sup> Park finally managed to divorce his estranged first wife right before the second marriage.

<sup>76</sup> See Yi (2005), ch. 3.

<sup>77</sup> See Yi (2005), Vol. 3: 154.

<sup>78</sup> See *ibid.*, Vol. 3: ch. 7.

<sup>79</sup> See *ibid.*, Vol. 1: 109-110; author's translation.

<sup>80</sup> See Kim (2006), preface.

<sup>81</sup> See Ch'oi (2007), epilogue.

<sup>82</sup> In his theoretical discussion of the postmodern condition, characterized by the decline of metanarratives, Lyotard argues that the public in postmodern society prioritizes its leaders' economic and political abilities to perform over their moral qualities. This common criterion is compelling in postmodern society, with its continuation of the modern ethos of skepticism, which has secularized social relations and led to the decline of religion and science as authoritative metanarratives with any claim of exclusive access to truth. See Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (1984).

<sup>83</sup> See Chang Kyöng-söp (1997) and Cho Uhn (2005).

<sup>84</sup> It is noteworthy that in recent years, voters in France and Italy have elected political leaders

who promised economic recovery.

<sup>85</sup> See Chu (2005), vol. 2: 259, 262.

<sup>86</sup> See Han (1999), Kim Che-bang (2006), Kim Chöng-ryöm (1997), and Kim Söng-jin (2006).

<sup>87</sup> See Han (1999), p. 52; author's translation; emphases added.

<sup>88</sup> In agreement with Chön In-kwön, I argue that Park was not an antidemocratic ruler but an a-democratic one. His personal and social contexts did not allow him to understand democracy. In his goal-oriented and elitist leadership, Park viewed democracy as a means to achieve his goals rather than a fundamental principle of ruling; hence, democracy is one of many possible methods to be suspended or chosen, depending on its practical efficiency in achieving a given goal (2006, 329-331).

<sup>89</sup> See Han (1999), p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> See Chu (2005), ch. 12.

<sup>91</sup> See Kim (1998), p. 351; author's translation.

<sup>92</sup> See Chön (2006), pp.157-161 and pp. 164-180

<sup>93</sup> See Ch'oi (2007), p. 5 and p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> For example, Kim Söng-jin points out that "The objective of the realization of democracy" demanded by the 4.19 student protest was not an urgent problem for ordinary citizens. That was "a demand by politicians and intellectuals who were relatively well off" (2006, 106; author's translation).

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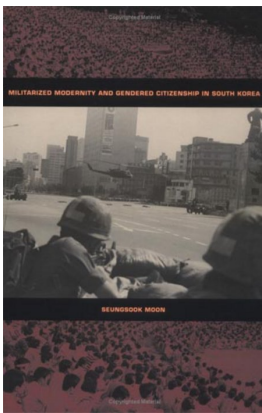
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