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South Korea during the Park Chung Hee Era: Explaining Korea's Developmental Decades

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Abstract

Despite the voluminous literature on South Korea's rapid economic development and social transformation in the 1960s and 1970s, the literature in English on Park Chung Hee — the political figure who indelibly marked this era — is still lacking. Furthermore, the existing studies approach the subject of Korea's fateful decades from general theoretical perspectives, such as the developmental state. This approach inevitably flattens out historical particularity in the process. A recent edited volume, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, fills these gaps by bringing political history back into the study of Korean modernization. The goal of this review essay is a critical evaluation of this volume's contribution to scholarship on South Korea. It is posited that *The Park Chung Hee Era* throws light on topics such as Park's leadership that have been hitherto neglected in the analysis of arguably the most consequential decades in the history of South Korea. However, while the edited volume mounts an effective criticism of existing perspectives on Korea's developmental decades under Park Chung Hee's rule, it is less successful in offering a consistent framework to analyze different causal factors shaping the Korean trajectory of economic development.

Keywords

South Korea, Park Chung Hee, development, developmental state, modernization

Introduction

The notion of the developmental state has been both a blessing and curse for the rigorous study of Korean history. On the one hand, the developmental state perspective has provided an effective theoretical lens that enabled students of economic development to understand the miraculous social transformation of South Korea in the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, the classical works of scholars such as Alice Amsden (1989), Bruce Cumings (1984a), Peter Evans (1995), Stephan Haggard (1990), Chalmers Johnson (1982), Jung-en Woo (1991), and Robert Wade (1990; 1992) were instrumental in correcting the

distortions caused by orthodox economic perspectives¹ on development. On the other hand, a general causal theory such as the developmental state implies, inevitably, that the rich complexity of Korean history in the second half of the twentieth century is often subject to selective interpretation.² This tension between general theory and historical particularity is nowhere more acute than in the literature on the most fateful period of the Korean history, the Park Chung Hee era (1961–1979).³ It was in those years that South Korea was transformed from a war-devastated poor country with a corrupt and fragile democracy to an economic powerhouse featuring a highly authoritarian regime (Buzo, 2002; Cumings, 2005; Eckert, 1992; Mason, Cole, Kang, Kim, and Perkins, 1980; Jones and SaKong 1980). South Korea is one of the rare development miracles of the twentieth century, and this miracle happened under Park Chung Hee's rule. General causal theories such as developmental state theory single out a few factors as the cause of this transformation. However, to any student of the rather tortuous history of South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s — a trajectory characterized by multiple twists and turns — such theories obscure as much as they illuminate.

The hefty volume edited by Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, takes issue precisely with this tension.⁴ This collection of twenty-one empirical chapters as well as an introduction and conclusion by Byung-Kook Kim, aims to free the study of the Park Chung Hee era from the tight reins of general theoretical frameworks such as “the developmental state.” It is thus a return to the study of historical complexity that had been flattened by general theory. In addition, this collection of original empirical analyses represents the pursuit of theoretical questions that are sidelined by overarching causal theories.

As a result, *The Park Chung Hee Era* ventures into territories that feature important analytical debates in political science and sociology. One of these

¹ As Smith (2000, p. 5) summarizes, “Neoclassicists stressed that the economically successful economies were by and large those that had got their prices right and had not greatly inhibited market signals driving resource allocation.” For a trenchant criticism of the economic viewpoint, see Amsden (1990).

² A comprehensive evaluation of the concept of the developmental state can be found in an excellent volume edited by Woo-Cumings (1999). In particular, the chapters by Meredith Woo-Cumings (1999), Chalmers Johnson (1999), Bruce Cumings (1999), and Ha-Joon Chang (1999) are worth consulting. See Chang (2009) for a recent criticism of the developmental state theory in the context of South Korea.

³ The tension between theoretical generalization and historical particularity is present in all historical analyses with theoretical ambition. See Rueschemeyer (1984) for an insightful analysis of this analytical issue in comparative-historical sociology.

⁴ Kim, Byung-Kook and Ezra F. Vogel, eds. 2011. *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

issues is agency versus structure (Collins, 1992; Elder-Vass, 2011; Sewell, 1992), which — in a volume focusing on an era marked by a single leader — is a recurring theme. Another recurring theme is geopolitics and the role of Japan and the United States in Korean development.⁵ In addition, the various analyses in this volume revisit state-society relations as well as political and economic institutions Park Chung Hee built during his long rule. As such, *The Park Chung Hee Era* is a deliberate attempt to put political history at the center of theoretical and empirical analyses of South Korea's developmental era (p. 2).

Thus, this volume, with contributions from leading Korean and international scholars, is valuable not because it falsifies the cumulative findings of the developmental state theory. Rather, its value arises from shifting the focus of scholarship to topics that have been hitherto neglected in the analysis of arguably the most consequential decades in the history of South Korea. In this volume, the developmental state retreats to the background, and the analytical focus of the contributors zeroes in on political leadership, institutions, the state-society relations, civil society, and international factors that shaped the Park Chung Hee era. Park Chung Hee's rule ended in 1979 with his assassination, but the institutions he built, the state-society relations he shaped, and the economic machinery he set in motion continue to have an impact on Korean society. *The Park Chung Hee Era* is a timely contribution to the scholarship on South Korea and the broader literature on development.⁶

This article has three purposes. First, I seek to examine this volume's contribution to scholarship on Korean history. Second, I aim to use *The Park Chung Hee Era* to probe into the dialectic between general theory and historical particularity. As my review will show, the pendulum now is on the side of historical particularity in studying South Korea's "developmental" decades. This is a most welcome change of direction, because it will generate a greater volume of rigorous historical research on the period, which is likely to motivate comparativists and students of Korean history to ask novel theoretical questions. However, such a pursuit is not without contradictions, and this is the main argument I make in this article. Historical inquiry motivated by political science and

⁵ There are several sub-headings under this category, including the legacy of Japanese colonialism, the role of Cold War, and the impact of the United States in East Asia. For an excellent but dated overview, see So and Chiu (1995). By now, just the literature on the role of Japanese colonial legacy in South Korea's development amounts to a significant collection. On this important issue that does not necessarily receive much attention in this volume, please see Cha (2006), Cho and Kim (1991), Chung (2006), Cumings (1984b; 2005), Haggard, Kang, and Moon (1997), Jonghoe (2004), Kohli (1994; 2004), Lim (1999), and McNamara (1990).

⁶ Another factor that contributes to the timeliness of this edited volume is the election of Park Geun-hye, the daughter of Park Chung Hee, as the President of the Republic of Korea in February 2013.

sociology should walk a tightrope between particularity (i.e., what is unique in historical outcomes) and theoretical generalization (i.e., what can be posited as general mechanisms producing historical outcomes across cases). An emphasis on historical particularity without appropriate theorization does not avoid general theory and causal analysis. It just relegates them to the background, which leads to historical inquiry guided by unjustified assumptions and unarticulated propositions. *The Park Chung Hee Era* admirably shows that general theories such as the developmental state are silent on several aspects of Korea's developmental decades, including Park's leadership. However, such a criticism in turn gives rise to another analytical question: how to assess the causal weight of Park's leadership vis-à-vis other factors? The volume does not offer a sound answer to this question. Despite its achievements, it fails to avoid the Charybdis of historical particularity while steering clear of the Scylla of general theory.

The Origins of the Park Era

The first three chapters of *The Park Chung Hee Era* revisit the origins of the Park regime. In Chapter 1, Yong-Sup Han examines the armed forces' coup on May 16, 1961. Chapter 2 by Taehyun Kim and Chang Jae Baik delves into the role of the United States in Korean politics prior to, and in the aftermath of, the 1961 coup. In Chapter 3, Hyung-A Kim investigates the development of the Korean state's capacity and infrastructural power through administrative reforms following the May 16 military intervention. These three chapters explain what is usually taken as the *explanans* in the existing literature. The emerging story is full of contingency.

Chapter 1 seeks an answer to a crucial question (p. 55): "Why did the May 16 coup succeed under Park Chung Hee's leadership?" As Yong-Sup Han observes, while the broad discontent with the democratically elected government created the opportunity structure for a military seizure, there were many forces that could have hindered the success of a coup by "a second-tier leader within the South Korean armed forces" such as Park Chung Hee (pp. 35–37). A determining set of factors had to do with the privileged position of the armed forces in an underdeveloped country at the forefront of the Cold War. The South Korean military had legitimacy as well as educated, experienced, and technocratically competent officers. Furthermore, the armed forces featured an unbalanced structure — a result of the rapid organizational expansion during the Korean war — and politicized factions (p. 42). Yong-Sup Han shows that Park Chung Hee had the strategic insight to use this combination of factors in leading the military coup to successfully overthrow the democratically elected government.

The reality of the Cold War in the Korean peninsula meant that the United States was a major force in various aspects of life in South Korea, a role buttressed by its sizeable military presence and economic aid.⁷ In Chapter 2, Taehyun Kim and Chang Jae Baik investigate the political interactions between various U.S. Agencies and the military junta. The authors show that despite the overwhelming U.S. presence, “it was the indigenous dynamics of South Korean society that shaped the direction of South Korean political development” (p. 82). The U.S. had no interest in running a client state. Furthermore, the United States was not a unitary actor in its dealings with the South Korean authorities. To the contrary, it was represented by multiple agencies whose interests and objectives were not necessarily harmonious. These factors resulted “in a frustrating game of hide-and-seek and mutual hostage” (p. 83) where the military junta’s policies reflected, frequently, a compromise position between what the junta desired to achieve and what the various U.S. agencies wanted to see implemented. The give-and-take dynamics were most fascinating in the area of administrative and economic reforms.

Thus, in Chapter 3, Hyung-A Kim examines the various reforms that contributed to building the South Korea state. This is one of the most incisive chapters in the volume. Calling developmental state explanations of the South Korean transformation “a myth,” Kim (p. 85) argues that “the role of the state was more complex and uncertain than the developmental state theories would have it.” What the chapter shows, in a convincing manner, is that the early 60s in South Korea were a time of rapid institutional transformation, zigzags in policy-making, and learning by doing. As such, many of the features of the South Korean state that are taken for granted in the existing literature emerged as the unintended consequences of political improvisation and power struggles between the SCNR (Supreme Council for National Reconstruction) and the KCIA (Korea Central Intelligence Agency). This is a story of the gradual development of technocratic rationality embodied in the institutions of the South Korean state, and Kim argues that Park Chung Hee’s determination to pursue economic development through institution building was an essential factor in this process. In the final section of this essay, I will examine in greater detail this issue, the role of Park Chung Hee versus the structural factors in explaining the Korean transformation.

The Transformation of the South Korean State

The Park regime combined dirigisme with market-oriented development strategy, cronyism with technocracy, and formal institutions with increasingly

⁷ See Hasegawa (2011) for a recent examination of the impact of Cold War in East Asia.

personal exercise of political power. The key to understanding the Park Chung Hee era lies in deciphering how this regime embodied these seemingly contradictory features. For that purpose, the authors in this volume delve into political history after the consolidation of power in Park's hands in 1963. The focus of their work is threefold: a) Park's objectives, political preferences, and the ways in which he sought to accomplish his goals — the ideational-power matrix of the regime; b) the organizational and institutional resources that enabled the Park regime; and, c) the crystallization of the ideational, power, and institutional dimensions of the Park rule in the *yushin* regime after 1972.

Given the uniqueness of the Park regime, it is not surprising that Chung-in Moon and Byung-joon Jun's chapter on the ideational influences over Park Chung Hee offers a fascinating study of how ideas shape the trajectory of history. As they (p. 115) put it, "[Park Chung Hee] mixed the Japanese ethos of top-down mobilization and the U.S. ideas of technocracy with Korean nationalism in most un-Japanese and un-American ways to clear the way for economic growth." This was surely a creative exercise in hybridity, one that would infuriate doctrinaire purists. What is surprising is how this mixture of "statism, mercantilism, corporatism, and U.S. liberalism" (p. 138) constituted an effective strategy to transform the Korean society. A crucial determinant of the efficacy of Park's modernization strategy was the way in which Park exercised political power, a theme investigated by Byung-Kook Kim in Chapter 5. By analyzing various turning points during Park Chung Hee's long reign, Kim shows that Park was an institution builder who developed administrative and political control capacities through the Economic Planning Board (EPB), the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), and the Blue House Secretariat.

Hence, the sources of Park's capacity to implement a highly ambitious development strategy were largely organizational-institutional.⁸ That provides a sufficient warrant to examine two crucial power bases of the Park regime — the armed forces and the economic bureaucracy — in greater detail. In Chapter 6, Joo-Hong Kim explains how "the South Korean armed forces as a politicized and professional military could co-exist" (p. 170). Two factors ensured that the armed forces could keep its professional character despite the political role the military played in repressing contention in South Korean society. First, Park monopolized the control of the armed forces, insulating this institution from all other forces in Korean society. Second, the praetorian wing of the armed forces was separated from the field army through "a dual-track promotion system" where the career of a military officer in Park's formidable

⁸ See Akyüz (1999) and in particular the chapter by Cheng, Haggard, and Kang (1999) in that volume for a comparative assessment of organizational and institutional sources of economic growth in East Asia.

apparatus of repression rarely coincided with the career of a soldier in the field army (pp. 170, 197–99).

The co-existence of professionalism with authoritarian patrimonialism within the South Korean economic bureaucracy is the focus of Byung-Kook Kim's analysis of how South Korea "[socialized] investment risks and business losses through the patrimonial but rationalized developmental state apparatus" (p. 231). One of the central arguments in the developmental state literature is that the Korean state's uniqueness arose from its ability to discipline capitalists (Amsden, 1989; Haggard and Moon, 1993; Wade, 1990). This — the Korean state's ability to discipline chaebols — depended, in turn, on the socialization of risks and losses through state controlled finance (Chibber, 1999; Woo 1991). Kim focuses on the policies Park Chung Hee adopted to ensure that the South Korean bureaucracy embodied "purposive rationality" instead of being fixated with procedures and "neutral competence." As such, his analysis is a sophisticated contribution to explanations on the South Korean state's capacity to implement an ambitious growth agenda through private actors.

In Chapter 8, Hyug Bae Im examines why Park Chung Hee imposed, in 1972, a constitution that ushered a new era of stronger authoritarianism in South Korea. This descent into further political repression, known as the *yushin* regime, combined the implementation of heavy and chemical industrialization (HCI) policies that Park Chung Hee sought to enact since the early 1960s. Hyug Bae Im argues that an adequate explanation of the *yushin* constitution and HCI drive should recognize that the *yushin* regime had its roots in the inherent contradictions of the "grow-at-all-costs strategy" of the late 1960s (p. 236). However, the structural tensions and contradictions notwithstanding, the ultimate determinant of the descent into the *yushin* regime was Park's desire to build a nation and a bureaucratic-authoritarian state apparatus that found its inspiration in Meiji Japan.

South Korea in the International Scene

It is clear that Japanese ideas on administrative mobilization and economic development contributed significantly to Park Chung Hee's leadership. However, the role of Japan in Korea's development is not limited to the ideational influences on Park Chung Hee's leadership. Japan was an important factor in Korea's turn toward export-oriented industrialization and capital formation in the second half of the 1960s (Chibber, 1999; Chung, 2007). The turning point was the normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea in 1965. This is an issue examined in Chapter 15. The bulk of Jung-Hoon Lee's chapter is a detailed narrative of the diplomacy, power brokering, and the give-and-take

between Japan and South Korea that led to the signing of the treaty, which resolved various disputes between the two countries. This is a fascinating account in itself. Even more important are the analytical implications of this historical narrative for the students of economic development. It is well-known that Japan was a factor in South Korea's rapid economic development. However, the causal weight of this factor is disputed. For instance, was the alliance between Japanese and Korean firms an essential determinant of the turn toward the export-oriented industrialization in South Korea, as Chibber (1999) argued? Jung-Hoon Lee adds another layer of complexity to adjudicating the role of Japan in Korean development by showing that (1) the normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea was a highly contingent event, despite the fact that Park Chung Hee pursued the matter in a determined fashion, and (2) the timing of the treaty was just right. Had the settlement occurred in a later period, South Korea could have missed "the window of opportunity" for export-led industrialization. This is because, beginning in the 1970s, world markets and especially the North American markets showed declining capacity and willingness to absorb exports from a country with state-subsidized manufacturing (pp. 452–53).

Temporality and the role of the United States in the trajectory of South Korea's developmental decades come into focus in Chapter 14 as well, this time through an analysis of how Park Chung Hee sent approximately 50,000 Korean soldiers to fight in South Vietnam.⁹ Obviously, South Korea did not have an immediate stake in this quintessential Cold War conflict. The reasons behind Korean involvement in the Vietnam War should be sought in Park's objective to guarantee "U.S. acquiescence to his authoritarian rule" (p. 406). 1964 and 1965 were the years in which South Korea began pursuing unorthodox debt-financed growth policies. For Park Chung Hee, strengthening his power in the domestic political arena and securing access to North American markets were of paramount importance. The military escalation that Lyndon B. Johnson initiated in 1965 provided Park an opportunity to prove South Korea an indispensable ally of the U.S. He used this quite shrewdly. In this sense, as Min Yong Lee argues, "The Vietnam War proved to be a profitable political venture for Park" (p. 425).

However, as Sung Gul Hong (Chapter 17) and Yong-Jick Kim (Chapter 16) show, U.S. support for Park's authoritarian policies was not unconditional. In fact, two issues put a strain on the relationship between South Korea and the U.S. in the 1970s. The first test of the bilateral relationship emerged after the Korean attempt to obtain nuclear weapons. The declaration of the Nixon doc-

⁹ See Kim (1970) for a detailed analysis of the economic and political impact of South Korea's involvement in Vietnam.

trine in Guam prompted Park Chung Hee to pursue nuclear armament, largely because Park believed that the new doctrine implied an increasingly unreliable ally against the North Korean threat (pp. 486–490). Despite some progress in developing nuclear weapons, the South Korean “nuclear option” fizzled under strong U.S. pressure.

The second strain on U.S.-Korean relations resulted from the human rights abuses under the *yushin* regime. Park's tightening of his grip over Korean politics faced opposition from various social groups, which he repressed mercilessly. Such human rights abuses became the subject of U.S. House hearings in the mid-1970s. Despite raising the visibility of the *yushin* regime's authoritarianism, the hearings did not lead to any immediate damage to the close cooperation between two countries (pp. 462–465). That changed with the Carter administration, which took a highly critical stand against the human rights abuses under Park. The crisis in bilateral relations reached its peak point in 1977, with Carter's announcement of his plans for troop withdrawal from South Korea. However, Carter had major difficulties in implementing his disengagement policy as he faced opposition to such plans in the U.S. Congress. Ultimately, the Carter administration's plans to disengage from South Korea failed, but the crisis in bilateral relations put significant pressure on Park and strengthened the opposition to the *yushin* regime.

Economic Machine

Another important topic that this volume revisits is the relations between private economic actors and the Korean state under Park Chung Hee's rule. Chapter 9, by Eun Mee Kim and Gil-Sung Park, labors in a much plowed territory, the state-*chaebol* relationship. The voluminous literature on this topic notwithstanding, Kim and Park manage to provide a fresh and penetrating model of this relationship and its historical evolution by focusing on three issues. First, as the authors take pains to emphasize, the state-*chaebol* relationship is best characterized as a partnership of mutual guarantors (p. 267). Kim and Park flesh out this argument by showing how the *chaebol* and the Korean state under Park Chung Hee rule enabled the realization of their mutual interests in different historical periods. Second, the authors argue that the contradictory traits of the state (predatory yet developmental) and of the *chaebol* (entrepreneurial but not above cronyism) emanated from the asymmetric political exchange between the partners. Calling the Korean state predatory stretches the notion thin, but the authors have a point.¹⁰ Park Chung Hee provided protection and

¹⁰ See Evans (1995) on the notions of predation and predatory states.

rents to the *chaebol* in return for economic performance. This was obviously an exchange where the state had a stronger position than the individual *chaebol*. Park could use rent-seeking and cronyism, practices associated with underdevelopment, as effective tools for rapid economic growth only because of the inherent asymmetry of this relationship. Third, Kim and Park demonstrate that the state-*chaebol* partnership was a dynamic partnership; and their account of the way in which the various parameters of this relationship evolved from the early junta years to heavy and chemical industrialization (HCI) drive makes particularly rewarding reading.

The state-*chaebol* relationship was clearly the political-organizational basis of the economic machine that led to the transformation of South Korea. It is important to emphasize that, through this partnership, Park Chung Hee aimed to achieve goals that were infeasible from a technocratic standpoint. This is in sharp contrast with the technocratic rationality explanations of Korean success. The automobile industry's birth and development under the Park regime is a case in point. Thus, in Chapter 10, Nae-Young Lee documents how Park's determination to build a competitive automobile industry was a risky gamble both from an economic and a political standpoint. The development of a competitive automobile industry was anything but a smooth process. In contrast, as Nae-Young Lee (p. 297) puts it, "the South Korean auto industry was a graveyard of would-be *chaebol*." Lee shows that Park Chung Hee's leadership and determination to develop South Korea's comparative advantage, even when it was very costly to do so, was as important as the technocratic rationality that the South Korean state embodied.

Political leadership and determination are also the causal factors Sang-young Rhyu and Seok-jin Lew underscore in their explanation of the emergence of the steel industry in South Korea. Not surprisingly, this is "the story of one single company, POSCO [the Pohang Iron & Steel Company]" (p. 324), but the theoretical implications of this one single company are manifold. As Rhyu and Lew show in Chapter 11, building a steel industry in South Korea was a far cry from a rational investment, especially from the viewpoint of neoclassical economics (pp. 325, 344). In fact, a World Bank report in 1968 suggested that "plans to develop an integrated steel mill were premature because of the lack of capital, technology, and market" (p. 332). Undeterred by such thinking, Park Chung Hee allocated a significant amount of resources to creating the steel industry in South Korea. A crucial factor underlying his determination, in addition to the desire to develop South Korea on the model of Meiji Japan, was the reality of the North Korean security threat. Park saw an integrated steel mill as a crucial component of South Korea's capacity to defend her borders, which explains why he did not waver in the face of significant setbacks in the

development of the steel industry. It is also significant that reparation funds from Japan were what enabled Park to finally reach his goal. Since Rhyu and Lew's chapter recounts how politics — both domestic and international — and the geopolitical situation were the real determinants of how POSCO came to be a leading steel mill in the world, it is one of the most trenchant criticisms of theoretical explanations that stress technocratic rationality in accounting for the Korean miracle. Bureaucratic and technocratic rationalities might have been necessary factors for the implementation of Park Chung Hee's grandiose plans, but by themselves these factors say very little about the remarkable trajectory of South Korea in the 1960s and 70s.¹¹

Civil Society and Politics

Next, contributors to this volume focus on the social determinants of politics under Park Chung Hee's rule. This is, again, an area that has been examined extensively in the literature on South Korea. Thus, there is a rich body of scholarship on labor (Deyo, 1989a, 1989b; Koo, 1990), the middle classes (Davis, 2004), agrarian and class conflict (Im, 1987; Shin, 1998), and contention (Lee, 2009).¹² The topics examined in this volume — rural support and the contention by the *chaeya*, a diffuse network of dissident intellectuals and activists — did not receive as much attention in the English-language literature. For that reason, these chapters make quite informative and rewarding reading.

In Chapter 12, Young Jo Lee examines why the countryside supported the Park Chung Hee regime. This chapter takes a revisionist perspective and challenges the dominant explanations of rural support for Park's authoritarian rule. As such, he discounts the thesis that much of the rural support for Park originated from Korean peasants' traditional, conservative, and conformist culture. Instead, Lee contends that the rural support for Park was not unflinching, but rather contingent upon the incentives and rural mobilization policies that Park implemented during his rule. Lee often invokes the notion of the "rational peasant" (Popkin, 1979; Scott, 1976) without much direct evidence on Korean peasants' rationality in the 1960s and 70s. However, despite this

¹¹ Thus, the analysis offered here provides support to Chibber's (2002) critique of the relationship between bureaucratic rationality and the developmental state. Chibber (2002) shows, through a comparison of India and Korea, that bureaucratic rationality can be a paralyzing factor within state institutions and hence can produce outcomes that inhibit, rather than buttress, economic development.

¹² An overview of state-society relations and politics during the Park Chung Hee era can be found in Cumings (2005), Kil (2001), and Koo (1993).

shortcoming, his emphasis on machine politics in explaining the countryside's role in South Korea's politics during the long Park reign is a useful correction to the existing accounts.

While Park Chung Hee enjoyed strong support from the countryside, he encountered an uncompromising opposition by the *chaeya* who were able to form a multiclass alliance against the Park regime. As Myung-Lim Park remarks, the “coexistence of a strong state and a contentious civil society” was paradoxical (p. 374), but this paradox is the key to understanding state-society relations under Park Chung Hee. As he argues in Chapter 13, the state that Park built was an effective economic and political machine. Yet it was also bereft of links to civil society. Park repressed workers, emaciated party politics, and placated farmers. However, his authoritarian rule was vulnerable to challenges from groups who mobilized around strong moral convictions. By directing their criticism against the injustices of Park's political repression and growth-at-all-costs policies, the *chaeya* activists and intellectuals built a formidable opposition to the Park regime. A causal link between *chaeya* activism and the end of Park regime — which came through the unexpected assassination of Park by none other than KCIA director Kim Chae-gyu — is hard to establish, but it is clear that the resistance of the *chaeya* exacerbated the internal tensions of the *yushin* regime.

Conclusion: Steering Between General Theory and Historical Particularity

Without doubt, this volume makes important contributions to the English-language scholarship on Korean society under Park Chung Hee's rule. The literature on South Korea's trajectory since the early 1960s is enormous. Yet, the contributors to this volume show that the existing scholarship has several blind spots. The chapters in this volume, many of them authoritative and insightful, prove that factors that rarely receive explicit theoretical recognition in the existing literature — Park Chung Hee's leadership, international relations, ideational factors such as Meiji-style dirigisme, the role of the United States — are among the most important determinants of the Korean developmental trajectory in the Park Chung Hee era. Among the uniformly high-quality chapters by Korean authors, some of them offer a *tour de force* on issues that have otherwise been thoroughly examined in the existing literature.

However, the theoretical contribution of the volume is less evident. In his introduction to the edited volume, Byung-Kook Kim (p. 2) highlights the focus of *The Park Chung Hee Era* as the study of modernization with a focus on political history. The warrant for political history emerges from the eventful trajectory of South Korea's modernization, whose zigs and zags can only be explained

through political factors such as domestic and international coalition-building. Thus, Kim (p. 3) criticizes broad theoretical perspectives such as developmental state theory for their failure “in explaining motives behind, as opposed to the outcomes of, Park’s policy decisions.” Kim has a point, and the chapters in this volume provide ample support for his claim.

Yet, this criticism is misguided in at least one aspect. Kim attacks a general theory for its failure to account for an outcome that the theory, by design, does not aim to explicate. It is true that the objective of general causal theory in historical analysis is “to account for unique historical outcomes” (Swidler, 1993: xiii), but the unique historical outcome — the *historical individual* to use a more accurate terminology (Oakes, 1987; Kalberg, 1994; Weber, 1949) — in this case is not South Korea’s modernization trajectory under Park Chung Hee. In other words, it is not correct that developmental state theory aims to explain the modernization trajectory of South Korea in its totality. To be strict, developmental state theory, in its various incarnations, strives to throw light on the historical trajectory of South Korea *as opposed to* the multitude of developmental failures in Latin America, Middle East, and Africa. An overwhelming majority of nation-states in the developing and underdeveloped world stagnated during the period when South Korea was on her way to join the ranks of industrialized nations. It is this context, a development miracle in an ocean of economic and social stagnation, which gives purpose and substance to the developmental state theory. In other words, developmental state theory is a general causal theory whose propositions are, by necessity, comparative. Historical outcomes are unique to the extent that they are different from other cases, which is why this type of theory accounts best for differences across cases (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Smelser, 1976).

And this is precisely where this otherwise excellent volume has shortcomings. The contributions in *The Park Chung Hee Era* illustrate the particularity and uniqueness of South Korea’s trajectory under Park Chung Hee’s rule. They also demonstrate that there is much to uncover and learn from South Korea’s modernization trajectory. However, the warrant for the study comes from criticism of general causal theories applied to the Korean case, and there is no theoretical vision unifying the individual chapters. As a result, many of the analytical issues that deserve consistent consideration are treated in an *ad hoc* and unsatisfactory manner. The ensuing theoretical ambivalence of the edited volume can be illustrated by examining an issue that is highly pertinent to understanding economic development and modernization in Korea and elsewhere: political leadership.

If there is a single theme that contributors to this volume visit repeatedly, it is the importance of political leadership. For instance, in Chapter 11 Rhyu and Lew (p. 343) write that “POSCO’s success was the product of leadership,” and

“Park’s unswerving commitment” was the key to the development of the steel industry — an essential component of South Korea’s economic modernization. Similarly, Byung-Kook Kim (p. 140) contends that “the political leadership of Park Chung Hee is key to understanding his success in prolonging his rule and bringing economic growth.” Without appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks to measure the preponderance of Park’s leadership vis-à-vis structural factors, such statements smack of modern day Carlylism. The analytical problem here is not one of theoretical indeterminacy concerning agency and structure, as this volume seems to imply. Rather, it is the lack of general theory with clear propositions regarding the extent to which Park Chung Hee’s leadership is a determining factor within the constraints imposed and capacities created by a particular structural context.

The difference that theory-driven analysis makes can be illustrated by comparing the four comparative chapters in this volume, each written by a highly accomplished social scientist: Ezra F. Vogel on nation rebuilders, Paul D. Hutchcroft on Park Chung Hee and Ferdinand Marcos, Jorge I. Domínguez on dictatorships in five countries, and Gregory W. Noble on industrial policy in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Vogel in chapter 18 focuses on four major leaders in the twentieth century, Atatürk of Turkey, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Deng Xiaoping of the People’s Republic of China, and Park Chung Hee. He proclaims (p. 513) that a comparison among these four leaders can illuminate what is unique to Park Chung Hee and common to all “transformative leadership.” Yet what follows in his analysis is a loosely structured list of factors Vogel deems important in the life histories and political trajectories of these “nation-builders.” Thus, the author recounts the social background, early education, young adulthood, rise to power, political mindset, economic strategy, and the inner circle of these leaders. Not surprisingly, these impressionistic comparisons culminate in an inconclusive manner with a section on the public memory of Atatürk, Lee Kuan Yew, Deng Xiaoping, and Park Chung Hee. Lacking in historical depth and theoretical substance, this chapter is the only underwhelming and uninformative analysis in the entire volume.

In contrast, Paul D. Hutchcroft in Chapter 19 provides a theoretically sophisticated comparison between Ferdinand Marcos and Park Chung Hee. The comparison is fascinating, simply because the Philippines under Marcos is the “reverse image” of South Korea under Park Chung Hee. While South Korea leapfrogged in the development race through rapid industrialization, the Philippines was a canonical case of “disastrous economic predation” (p. 543). Hutchcroft observes that the Marcos regime embodied patrimonial bureaucracy while the Park rule combined institutionalization with personalization, and that the two leaders differed sharply in terms of their objectives (pp. 543–545).

He then shows that the differences in the political leadership of Marcos and Park had their origins in a number of structural factors. One crucial factor was the impact of colonial rule on the old elite and aristocracy. As Hutchcroft argues, Japanese colonial administration significantly weakened the *yangban* class in Korea, whereas in the Philippines, American colonialism solidified an oligarchy constituted of local political bosses and landed aristocracy.¹³ The *coup de grâce* to the ruling class of the *Joseon* dynasty came through the land reform after the Korean War. In contrast, land reform attempts in the Philippines after the Pacific War were unsuccessful. Such a structural account attentive to historical continuities and discontinuities enables Hutchcroft to offer a nuanced analysis of political strategies and institutions in Park's Korea and Marcos's Philippines. It should be observed that Hutchcroft does not minimize the importance of political leadership in his account. Instead, he demonstrates how social structures and path dependence enable certain types of leadership while constraining others.

In chapters 20 and 21, Jorge I. Domínguez and Gregory W. Noble dissect Park Chung Hee's leadership by comparing authoritarianism and industrial policy in South Korea with various cases from Latin America and East Asia. Based on an institutional analysis of state-society relations, Domínguez argues that compared to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, South Korea was the country most favorable to "perfect dictatorship" (p. 577). His argument is in line with that of Hutchcroft, who contends that Park in 1961 found a state structure that enabled consolidation of power through centralization and institutionalization. Similarly, by comparing South Korea with Japan and Taiwan, Noble shows that the state-*chaebol* partnership — perhaps the signature achievement of Park Chung Hee era in economic strategy — emerged from the necessity to build alliances in a country lacking strong political parties that could harness social support for Park's regime.

The comparative chapters by Hutchcroft, Domínguez, and Noble in this volume highlight what is missing in the other chapters focusing solely on South Korea. The empirical chapters on the various aspects of the Park era are meticulously researched and rich in detail. However, they often leave the reader in the dark on the nature of the theoretical claims they make. This is not a problem in chapters where the objective is empirical depth and the exploration of an issue such as the *chaeya* contention that has not received attention in the existing literature. It becomes problematic in analyses that treat the

¹³ See In-Joung (2001), Jeon and Kim (2000), Mitchell (1949), and Pak (1956) on land reform in Korea. Kay (2002) offers an insightful comparison of East Asia and Latin America on the issue of agrarian reform.

developmental state as a myth without offering an equally powerful framework to explain Korea's developmental trajectory. Thus, *The Park Chung Hee Era* is an unfinished but generative work. It is a scholarly analysis that opens up new areas of research on South Korea's history. This volume deserves careful study and should be one of the necessary starting points for further theoretical work on Korea's development.

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