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Mythbusting Park Chung Hee: A Reexamination of Park and his Coup

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MYTHBUSTING PARK CHUNG HEE:
A REEXAMINATION OF PARK AND HIS COUP

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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MYTHBUSTING PARK CHUNG HEE:
A REEXAMINATION OF PARK AND HIS COUP

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MYTHBUSTING PARK CHUNG HEE:
A REEXAMINATION OF PARK AND HIS COUP

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Justin W. Malzac

Park Chung-Hee is a divisive figure. For some he is a saint that rescued his country from the brink of collapse and helped it rise into modernity. For others he is a devil, an iron-fisted dictator who cared more about his own power than his people. Both of these are politically slanted myths promoted as part of a corresponding political agenda. But even politically neutral writings on Park unwittingly conduct a mythmaking of their own. This paper is an attempt to show that Park Chung-Hee has become a mythological figure in Korean history because the scope of his power, agency and historical relevance is vastly overstated in the conventional narrative. Often historical analyses and narratives focus on Park Chung-Hee to the virtual exclusion of all other contemporary and relevant agents. By examining various primary sources, this paper attempts to highlight where arguments about Park's historical agency, often presented with certainty, are in fact far from clear and absolute facts. This paper argues that, at least early on in his time in power, Park Chung-Hee as a historical agent could be much less important than we imagine, and that there were several other actors of note who wielded significant power at the same time.

NOTE ON ROMANIZATIONS

For Korean names and terms this paper will utilize the Revised Romanization of Korean system, which was made the official system of the Republic of Korea government by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2000. Because of its official nature, this is the most widely-used system today for the Romanization of Korean outside of academic writing. Korean words and place names will be rendered using the Revised system. For the sake of clarity, the names of persons will be rendered in the most common form in which they appear in the primary record, but the Revised system Romanization will be provided in parentheses when the name first appears in each chapter. Any quotes from sources containing Korean names will be modified to the common rendering of the name in question. Additionally, it is important to note that Korean names are commonly written surname first, usually with a two-syllable given name following. For the sake of clarity, all Korean names will be written in this manner, with the given name hyphenated. An exception to this rule is for scholars who choose to write their names in the Western style. An example of all this being put into practice would look as follows: Park Chung-Hee (Bak Cheong-Hui). If no adjustment accompanies the first appearance of a name, that name is already Romanized following this system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION OF AGENCY

In 2013, Park Geun-Hye (Bak Geun-Hye) became the first woman president of South Korea. She is a conservative, following in the footsteps of fellow party member and conservative Lee Myung-Bak (I Myeong-Bak). Hers marks the second conservative administration after a brief and powerful liberal surge in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But perhaps most important in the eyes of the public today, she is the daughter of former authoritarian president Park Chung-Hee. Since Park Geun-Hye's election, it has been nearly impossible to read about her without any reference to her father. As her administration becomes more strong-armed and hawkish, as it continues to use oppressive measures against the opposition, comparisons with her father's rule become more relevant and more commonplace. It has also created a resurgence of interest in the history of the era when Park Chung-Hee ruled the country. However the historiography has yet to fully catch up with modern standards and theory, or to update itself with fresh perspectives. The literature published in English is especially delayed in this regard.

This paper is an attempt to reexamine a portion of the so-called "Park era," specifically the coup and junta period between 1960 and 1963. On May 16, 1961, Park Chung-Hee, a Major General in the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, participated in a

coup against the recently created parliamentary government of Prime Minister Chang Myon (Chang Myeon aka John M. Chang). The Chang government rose up after the resignation of President Rhee Syngman (I Seung-Man) and dissolution of the latter's government. The Chang regime was in power for less than a year before being dissolved itself. After toppling the Chang government, a military junta was established and ruled until late 1963, when open elections were held and Park was elected president of the ROK under a new president-centered constitution. Park stayed in power until he was assassinated in October of 1979.

The "Park era" is arguably one of the most important periods in modern Korean history. The government during this period instituted changes that raised the country up from poverty. Korea had been one of the poorest countries in the world, but in a matter of decades it became a trade and economic giant.¹ The 1970s also saw the empowerment of the democracy movement in opposition to increases in the Park government's authoritarianism. Most aspects of political and economic life in the ROK today can be traced back to this period, whether it be the explosive democratic politics, the strong trade-centered economy, the near invulnerable status of the *chaebol* (super conglomerates), or the increasing division between the rich and poor. Byung-Kook Kim (Gim Byeong-Guk) writes "few periods have changed South Korean history more than the Park era . . . And after the Park era suddenly ended in 1979, the reactions to what had

¹ In an interview from 1995 Richard A. Ericson Jr., a former American diplomat, he noted "when I first came there in 1945, it was the middle ages and in 1965 in was somewhat better. When I came back and left in 1976, Korea was virtually a modern nation. There were making wooden boats in 1945 and from 250 to 300 thousand ton tankers in 1976. This took some doing and President Park is responsible, I think, for a very, very great part of the success" (Ambassador Richard A. Ericson, Jr., Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 1998).

taken place transformed the country once more.”² It is now increasingly relevant and important to understand this part of Korea’s past.

A Question of Agency

The literature on Park Chung-Hee suffers from several related problems. Park historiography, at least in English, seems to have failed to bring in many of the new ideas and strategies from the discussions of historical theory that have been ongoing since at least the 1960s. Historical paradigms—Marxism and New Social History, which promoted the importance of regular people as subjects in historical analysis; New Historicism, which suggested that historians cannot remove themselves from their modern context and its effect on their analysis; or Post Modernism, which in part has pushed away from the “grand narrative” of traditional history and the centering of narratives around specific agents—have not been effectively applied to “Park era” history.

Additionally, the literature on Park Chung-Hee available in English is relatively scarce, particularly in dealing with the coup and junta period. The majority of journal papers focus on economics or industrialization, rather than the early power politics. The biggest English collection released to date³, *The Park Chung Hee Era*, is largely a

² Kim, Byung-Kook, “The Case for Political History,” *The Park Chung Hee Era [Kindle Edition]*, Byung-kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, eds (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011): Locations 21-24.

³ There are three major releases on the “Park era,” all in the form of essay collections. The largest, at 744 pages, is Byung-Kook Kim’s *The Park Chung Hee Era*. Additionally, there are Byeong-Cheon Lee’s *Developmental Dictatorship and The Park Chung-Hee Era*, which is 384 pages, and Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen’s *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979*, which is 350 pages. Byung-Kook Kim’s work provides the most detailed and comprehensive discussion of the entirety of the “Park era”, dealing with most issues, including the coup, the military, industrialization and foreign relations. The last section of the book even contains comparative studies with authoritarianism in other countries. The book is

traditional history. At least in reference to the English literature, the work does little to distinguish itself, nor does it amount to much of a revision. The authors of the various essays in the collection provide mostly minor reinterpretations of the same arguments and the same narrative that has been popular for decades. They rely overwhelmingly on secondary sources, and rehash the conventional narrative more often than they provide new primary research. This is a trend in the other collections as well. The work is essentially a traditional or national history, in that the narrative is strongly centered on a modern or current Korean viewpoint, and it focuses on a mythological figure, Park Chung-Hee. This paper argues that the literature is mythological because historians of Park Chung-Hee often attribute too much to this one man and his agency. They seem to suggest, if perhaps unintentionally, that most progress during the period, good or bad, stemmed from Park's power and agency.

If Marxism and Post Modernism have added anything beneficial to the historical debate, it is to deemphasize the role of individuals and the power of individual agency in favor of structural or systematic explanations. For example, in regards to industrialization the focus still lies on what decisions or policies Park made as president, and it is assumed that he was the sole individual responsible for these acts. Less work has been done on the attitudes of workers who pushed through the industrialization period despite harsh conditions, or on the government as a coalition of individuals who had to negotiate in order for each policy to be developed and put in action. Park wielded a lot of power as president, perhaps more than most leaders, but it is foolish to suggest that he was

by far the best source available in English on Park Chung-Hee and his government. However, the individual essays are conventional and seem to represent reproductions of the long-standing narrative, rather than new research or new perspectives.

responsible for every idea or every decision. In fact, the historical record contains numerous episodes where this was not the case, and these are just the ones in the public discourse.

This leads to a pressing issue with Park historiography, which is the analysis, or rather lack thereof, of Park's agency. This is why this paper puts the term "Park era" in quotation marks. The period was certainly much more than the story of a single man; the events that transpired were caused by a multitude of interconnected agents. Here the word "agent" is used to describe those historical actors who had the capacity to affect the course of events, examples being government officials who created or approved policies, faction leaders who engaged in power struggles and others whose decisions affected events in some significant way. Understanding the limits of Park Chung-Hee's agency is important for getting at the truth of the time.

Byung-Kook Kim asks "To what degree was Park Chung-Hee personally responsible for the transformation—both political and economic—across multiple sectors?"⁴ Yet the authors in his book do little to truly examine, with clear evidence, the depth and limits of Park's agency and responsibility. Furthermore, they rarely support specific descriptions of Park's thoughts or actions with evidence from the primary record. The other collections are often similar in their lack of evidence supporting absolute declarations of Park's agency. Park's agency seems taken for granted rather than a revelation of the research.

Regarding agency in historical narratives, David Gary Shaw argued that "the agent remains common and prominent in much historical work. If not for the important

⁴ Ibid., locations 26-27.

business—shared by radical, liberal, and conservative historiography—of assigning blame . . . the responsibilities and relevance that cling to agency might have disappeared long ago.”⁵ Blame seems to be one of the key functions of Park historiography, either as praise for industrialization and economic progress, or condemnation for human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Seungsook Moon (Mun Seung-Suk), in her study on Park literature and collective memory, argued “The recollective representations of Park in these popular texts can be categorized into three distinct types: glorification, demonization, and humanization.”⁶ For most of the post-Park era, glorification or demonization has been the norm. Only recently have works begun to accept the limits and contradictions inherent in a human agent. What the three different forms share, though, is an over-emphasis of Park’s role in historic events during the period he was president.

For many discussions of the “Park era,” Park Chung-Hee is the only agent that matters. For example, Young Jak Kim (Gim Yeong-Jak) suggested that Park “should be only partly defended in the case of the authoritarian *Yusin* system, because he carried his defection from liberal democracy and restriction of small freedoms too far and attempted to create a permanent presidency through a constitutional amendment. The blame for this should be placed, of course, mainly on Park himself.”⁷ Although his essay is heavily weighted in support of Park, here he clearly isolates Park as a lone agent, citing “his

⁵ Shaw, David Gary, “Happy in Our Chains? Agency and Language in the Postmodern Age,” *History and Theory* 40, No. 4 (Dec 2001): 3.

⁶ Moon, Seungsook. “The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee,” *The Asia Pacific Journal* 7, No. 5 (May 2009): 3.

⁷ Kim, Young Jak, “Park Chung Hee’s Governing Ideas: Impact on National Consciousness and Identity,” *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979 [Kindle Edition]*, Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen, eds (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2011): 95.

defection” from democracy, leaving little space for the influence or plans of others. How others may have acted towards, encouraged, or benefitted from, the adoption of the *Yusin* system is ignored here, as in most of the literature. The only thing that matters is how *Yusin* benefitted Park, and accordingly the conclusion is drawn that the *Yusin* system was put in place solely to keep Park in power. In doing so, authors like Kim miss important details such as the fact that the *Yusin* Constitution was drafted by a state council and voted into law by a public referendum.⁸

Not only were other groups such as the state council and public involved in the process of adopting the *Yusin* Constitution, other agents seem to have played key roles. In an interview with 2001 Donald Gregg, a CIA chief in Korea at the time, he suggested that Lee Hu-Rak (I Hu-Rak) was mostly responsible for the adoption of *Yusin*. Lee was the boss of the Korean CIA (KCIA) at the time and had visited North Korea for secret meetings with the leaders there. Gregg argued that he “always thought that the roots of *Yusin* came from his interpretation, Lee Hu-Rak’s interpretation of what he had seen in Pyongyang. And he said to President Park ‘If we are going to open up a dialogue with them, we have to be as strongly in control in South Korea as he is in North Korea.’ And I think that led to *Yusin*.”⁹ One should not simply reject such accounts because the witness is American. Several diplomats have noted that the American CIA in Korea at the time was quite knowledgeable.¹⁰ It is certainly not any worse than looking for the facts in Lee Hu-Rak’s own memoirs, a major source cited by the authors in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, without any assessment of the source’s reliability. If either of these men had motive to

⁹ Kwon, Tae-ho, “Former Ambassador Donald Gregg Discusses Park Chung-Hee’s Legacy,” *The Hankoreh*, May 13, 2011.

¹⁰ See the Foreign Affairs Oral History Project interviews with Marshall Green and Richard A. Ericson Jr., amongst others.

bend the truth regarding the responsibility for domestic ROK policies, it would be Lee.¹¹ Attributing events like these solely to Park is too simplistic of an explanation. It is easy to argue that Park was a power-monger who would do anything to keep his power. But this ignores both the agency of other members of the ruling collective who had real and significant reasons to keep Park in power for their own sakes, and also the contrary narratives presented in other sources.

Perhaps one of the best examples of mythologically overemphasizing Park's agency and responsibility is Hyug-Baeg Im's (Im Hyeong-Baek) description of the passage of the 1969 constitutional amendment that let Park run for a third term. Im writes "The first political leader to bring up the issue of constitutional revision publicly was acting DRP chairman Yun Chi-Yong of the anti-mainstream faction. . . . [He] called for a constitutional revision to clear the way for a third term for Park . . . Park maintained a low profile on the issue of constitutional revision until he thought his proxies had succeeded in establishing the subject's legitimacy."¹² Though Im notes that other politicians called for the action, the author describes them as "proxies," meaning they lacked their own agency. They were completely bound to Park's will. The author provides no sources for any part of the above statement, nor any citations or evidence elsewhere to prove he has a clear idea what Park's thoughts were at the time. There is, in fact, evidence suggesting the opposite to be true, that Park was resistant to the idea. Such

¹¹ Gregg lays the responsibility for the brutality of the KCIA in the early 70s, including the kidnapping of Kim Dae-Jung and torture of an American professor, clearly at the feet of Lee Hu-Rak, and even suggests Lee was responsible for the authoritarian shift of the government in the 70s. Moreover, Park and Lee had a falling out that they never recovered from. Lee Hu-Rak would certainly be motivated to distance himself from the Park government and his role in it.

¹² Im, Hyug Baeg, "The Origins of the Yushin Regime: Machiavelli Unveiled," *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 3358-3361

evidence might be weak, and the conclusions drawn from it flawed, but its existence should be acknowledged and its commentary refuted, not ignored. Such ambiguity makes it doubly important to support any claims with clear evidence.

It is plausible that Yun Chi-Yong and others personally wanted Park to stay on as President and leader of their party because there was no other strong personality to rally behind and because their opposition was getting stronger. There is no requirement that they must be manipulated to think so. Studies on Korean party politics have shown that political parties in South Korea tend to shatter when they lose their patrons.¹³ Research conducted at the time of these events showed that public support for Park remained high even as support for his government and party fell.¹⁴ Im's chosen title for his essay, "Machiavelli Revealed," only highlights the excessive focus on, and bias against, Park as the agent: the action taker, the ego-maniac, manipulating everything for his own benefit. Branding Park as Machiavelli separates him from the ruling collective, makes him more important than any other historical actor, if not exclusively so. And the very invocation of the name Machiavelli, including quotes from the Machiavellian texts, imposes a blatantly negative and mythological tone on the entire essay, and implies Park was specifically worse than any other politician or leader in Korea.

Perez Zagorin, in his examination of post modernism's relation to historiography, acknowledges that "the overt ideological and political biases that tend to direct or

¹³ For an examination of party politics in Korea see Steinberg and Shin, "Tensions in South Korean Political Parties in Transition: From Entourage to Ideology?" *Asian Survey* 46, No. 4 (Jul/Aug 2006): 517-537.

¹⁴ For further details, see Kim C.I. Eugene, "Korea at the Crossroads: The Birth of the Fourth Republic," *Pacific Affairs* 46, No. 2 (Summer 1973): 218-231.

influence work in certain fields of history” are a problem.¹⁵ Perez also quotes Roger Chartier, who argued that historians must fight against “mythical reconstructions of the past governed by the needs of communities, imagined or real, national or not, that create or accept historical narratives to suit their desires and expectations.” These are certainly not imagined problems. The mythology of Park has perhaps become even more distant from the truth as new writing relies more and more heavily on secondary research, regurgitating the same narrative, lightly-shaded to serve new agendas, under the guise of reinterpretation. Is it no surprise then that new interviews with Kim Jong-Pil (Gim Jong-Pil), co-conspirator of Park, in which he declared that he was the true architect and planner of the coup, seem to have gone largely unnoticed by the public?

Little work has been done to truly tease out the actions and events that can accurately be ascribed to Park and his individual agency. Most authors take one of two simplified approaches: either they describe everything as being caused by Park, e.g. “Park did this” and “Park decided that,” or they use some kind of generalized phrase denoting the ruling elites such as “Korean authorities”, thus sidestepping the issue of agency and responsibility all together. In the former case, by presuming that Park was fundamentally responsible for most key events, the influence of other historical agents is obscured. For example, the behavior of the KCIA is often attributed to Park and his political objectives of the time. However, Donald Gregg argued that the behavior of the KCIA was more directly related to whoever was the boss at the time, rather than the contemporary politics. Gregg noted that the brutality of the KCIA was reduced when Lee Hu-Rak was replaced by Shin Chik-Soo (Sin Chik-Su), the latter having officially

¹⁵ Zagorin, Perez, “History, The Referent, and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now,” *History and Theory*, 38, No. 1 (Feb 1999): 11.

outlawed torture when he took charge. Park had fired Lee in response to the backlash from the American CIA who hated working with him, due in part to Lee's heavy-handed tactics.¹⁶ This rise of a moderate KCIA chief happened despite strengthening political opposition, so it was clearly contrary to Park's presumed political agenda and plan of action.

What is needed now is a detailed examination of events and an attempt to honestly parse out who was primarily responsible for which decisions, policies or actions. The following paper starts that process of revision. Since the literature overwhelmingly ascribes key events to Park, the focus here will be on highlighting where Park's agency is not clear or even disputed by primary evidence. The arguments will rely almost exclusively on primary sources, including United States Government records, newspaper articles, interviews and memoirs of people who were active during the time, and the collection of books written by Park (which are often ignored by scholars). The one exception is the use Chong-Sik Lee's (I Chong-Sik) biographical work in assessing Park's early life and background. Lee's work was chosen as a source for several reasons. First, the primary records for that period are scarce and only in Korean mixed with Chinese and Japanese. Second, Lee's use of primary evidence is exceptional and allows this author to fully trust his conclusions.

Indeed, what is needed in Park Chung-Hee scholarship is a fresh and thorough examination of the primary record, not a reiteration of secondary sources. This paper will begin that process.

¹⁶ Kwon, Tae-ho, Gregg interview.

The Scope of this Investigation

A large part of this thesis is an examination and critique of the current scholarship. Part of this critique involves the sources used by authors to support their arguments. The largest portion of the current scholarship relies on secondary sources, which can be problematic. Secondary sources originating from the 1980s and early 90s must be interpreted through the lens of the political chaos in which they were written, following the death of Park and the resumption of dictatorial rule by Chun Doo-Hwan (Cheon Du-Hwan). Seungsook Moon notes that

Chun Doo Hwan, 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.¹⁷

In a political environment looking to blame and punish those involved in the authoritarianism of the past, or to lift up the current regime, there was a distinct motive to cast the blame onto Park. That is not to say any of these works are inherently bad or deliberately misleading, but that the contexts of their writing must be accepted.

Another issue is the unquestioning acceptance of comments from memoirs of persons active during the period in question, particularly opponents of Park. When using such sources, authors fail to address potential issues with their bias or accuracy. Writers fail to acknowledge when citing sources by people who were in conflict with Park and would have motivations to color the truth in certain ways against Park and in support of

¹⁷ Moon, Seungsook, 2.

themselves. For example, Kim Young-Sam's (Gim Yeong-Sam) close association with Park and the Democratic Republican Party (DRP) during the period in question has been well noted by historians and has been a severe burden on his reputation. Instead of trying to put up a serious resistance to Park's rule, like Kim Dae-Jung (Gim Dae-Jung), Kim Young-Sam tried to work within the system and even accepted some of the authoritarianisms of the government in exchange for meeting some of the demands of his constituents. Are we then supposed to accept without question Kim Young-Sam's account of secret promises from Park that never came to pass?¹⁸ Indeed, Byung-Kook Kim cites Kim Young-Sam's own book as the source for this narrative detail, without noting that Kim Young-Sam had significant reasons to manipulate the truth. Kim Young-Sam's reputation was permanently scarred by his association with Park. It helped lift rival Kim Dae-Jung onto a higher pedestal; the latter is now often called the "Mandela of Korea." This is despite the two having suffered similar treatment during Park's rule. The latter Kim is still seen as the purest icon of Korean democracy. By suggesting there was some secret promise from Park, Kim Young-Sam can cast aside his share of the blame for helping to keep Park in power. This is not to say that Kim is certainly lying here, but that his account and any other insider account must be approached with a reasonable level of skepticism. It has become commonplace to take Kim Young-Sam, and even more so Kim Dae-Jung, at their word without question. However, neither man was as saintly as the mythology would have us believe.¹⁹

This work bases its primary arguments on a variety of sources, some of which are

¹⁸ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Location 2294.

¹⁹ Richard A. Ericson Jr., who monitored the 1967 election, noted that "It was my observation in Mokpo at the time that Kim Dae-Jung matched Park thug for thug and rock for rock and wane for wane and pitch battler for pitch battler." (Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 1998.)

United States Government sources from the State Department and intelligence agencies. One key weakness of these sources is that American officials were seldom present when political decisions were being made. Even so, the CIA proved skilled at discovering such information. Also utilized here is a series of interviews with American diplomats who served in Korea made available by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project. In addition to the American witness testimony this paper utilizes narratives of Korean witnesses, one being a book released by a Korean reporter, Kim Chong-Shin (Gim Chong-Sin), shortly after the events this paper discusses, and another being the set of new interviews with Kim Jong-Pil published in the *Korea Joongang Daily*.²⁰ As forms of memoir, these sources suffer the same weaknesses described above. However, it should be noted that despite the public backlash against Park, the KCIA, and the coup, Kim Jong-Pil actually accepts more responsibility than is generally given by historians. Certainly Kim's narrative seems more believable than, say, Lee Hu-Rak's, since the former is accepting responsibility for issues viewed negatively by the Korean public, and thus opening himself up to public backlash, whereas the latter skirts away from responsibility by blaming Park. Of course it is impossible to know absolutely who is telling the truth, but scholars should always evaluate their sources for reliability. Kim's account is also better supported by the primary record than others, and his narrative even conflicts the bias one would assume him to have.

The last significant group of sources is the collection of Park's books. These sources, too, cannot be accepted out of context. It should be noted that the authorship of at least one book, one of the first released, was questioned by U.S. officials. These

²⁰ The English language publication of the *Joongang Ilbo*.

officials suggested that the junta published it in Park's name.²¹ This is not an unreasonable idea, since it was noted how long and hard Park worked at governing, and how much time he spent out on inspection tours.²² Another important consideration is that even though no translator is acknowledged for the books, it is unlikely that Park did his own English translations as he was reported as having poor English skills. Meaning could be lost in the translation, or even twisted for the new audience. The original books were targeted towards the Korean public, but the English versions clearly were not. Despite these weaknesses, it seems foolish for scholars to argue from Park's point of view without at least having a general understanding of these writings. Even if they were not all written by Park, they still represent the common views of the ruling elites of whom Park was chief. One of the major functions of these works as a source in this thesis is to fill in the gaps made by the lack of their use in current scholarship.

Unfortunately, in addition to its lack of sufficient citation and sourcing, much of the literature is missing any sort of visible evaluation of sources when they are used, especially secondary sources. This acritical reliance on such sources poses a problem for the next generation of scholars. Thus, I attempt to address some of these specific issues by reexamining the primary record. Though theory has been cited as a factor in highlighting these issues, this work is not a direct application of theory. Nor is it rooted in

²¹ Brazinsky, Gregg Andrew, "From Pupil to Model: South Korea and American Development Policy During the Early Park Chung Hee Era," *Diplomatic History* 29, No. 1 (Jan 2005): 87, note 16.

²² Regarding the junta being overworked, a telegram from Ambassador Berger in Korea, dated 28 October 1961, noted that "Physical breakdowns from overwork becoming problem. PriMin has not been well for a month; Min of Comm and Ind Maj Gen Chonghmae-hyok [sic], one of ablest, collapsed from exhaustion at Cabinet meeting but now back to work after two weeks rest. Chairman Economic Planning Board and Vice Premier, Kim Yu-Taek, ordered take two months off. Chairman Pak himself showing some signs of strain from overwork" (*FRUS, Volume 22*, Document 244). For a contemporary discussion of Park's inspection tours, see Kim Chong-Shin's *Seven Years with Korea's Park Chung Hee*, Chapter 14. Kim suggests that Park "travelled more than 100,000 miles within less than two years after the military revolution" (171). In light of these details, doubts regarding Park's involvement with writing of these books are reasonable.

a current agenda. Perez Zagorin notes that “the business of history is with the past as a possible object, not the future.”²³ This work is simply an attempt to reevaluate our understanding of this part of the past. The limited scale of this analysis cannot cover the whole “Park era.” As such, this paper will focus on the coup and junta period. This is doubly relevant since it is the most overlooked period in the historiography. Byung-Kook Kim’s book does provide two essays that specifically deal with the period, but they pale in comparison to the detail given to other periods and topics. Other scholars simply gloss over this period in order to get to their topics of concern, which is usually something economic and taking place in the 1970s. This rushed presentation often ends up being a highly distorted description of the period. It seems the literature views the coup as simply the vehicle which gets us to the industrialization period, or something that is insignificant by itself.

This thesis is not a defense of Park Chung-Hee, nor a criticism of the man. In fact, this work is an attempt to deemphasize Park as a historical agent. I will begin to highlight flaws in the scholarship’s interpretation of Park’s historical role, specifically in relation to agency and power, and to offer some alternate explanations of the events specified throughout. It is this author’s opinion that Park Chung-Hee’s historical role, at least in the early stages of his rule, is overstated by scholars. It is the author’s opinion that the mythologizing of Park Chung-Hee has led to conclusions about his actions, plans, and intentions that are not firmly based on evidence or even inconsistent with the primary record. I will analyze these issues with evidence from the primary record.

The fact is that regardless of one’s politics, Park is the one of the most important

²³ Zagorin, 12.

figures in modern Korean history. For some he is a symbol of power and nationalist self-reliance that Koreans can look back upon with pride. For others he is a symbol of the lust for power that has undermined the social values in the country. It is only natural for people to want historical figures to have some sort of grand, independent power. It makes remembering and dealing with the past easier if events can be attributed to one or two individuals rather than a countless multitude. Who can the country praise or blame if Park Chung-Hee was merely one member of a vast ruling collective, bound in part to the whim of the public? Even the most casual discussions would be more complicated if they tried to include all the various groups involved in the progress of history. However, it is reasonable to question whether his status as a key national symbol, good or bad, has led scholars to take much of the traditional narrative for granted, to too easily accept Park's great power and agency without question. The time has come to really see how much of it was actually Park's doing.

CHAPTER II

THE VIEWS OF PARK CHUNG-HEE

Several works supposedly written by Park Chung-Hee have been published. In a publication that was released while the junta was in power, Park wrote,

The Leader should be neither an authoritarian nor a privileged personality standing apart from and reigning over the masses, but rather should share their destiny and be imbued with a strong sense of camaraderie. He must be prepared to experience their hardships and joys. He must be kind and humble in guiding the people; must personally set the example in tackling difficult problems.²⁴

In this single passage we can see much of Park's professed ideals and behavior. Ironically, the historical literature on Park often describes the man in the very manner Park here opposes. According to passages from Park's writings such as this one, Park opposed dictatorships, suggesting a collective of minds was much more capable of dealing with problems than a single, iron-fisted leader. Park's writing suggests he was strongly against corruption and graft, one of the main rallying cries of his revolution. And indeed, history has found him personally to be one of the least corrupt presidents in the country's history; the hidden stash of hoarded cash that his critics seek out has never been found.²⁵ Park did not stand aloof from the public, but often was seen interacting with common people on

²⁴ Park, Chung Hee, *Leadership: On the Revolutionary Process* (Seoul: Ministry of Public Information, 1962): 6.

²⁵ Hyung-A Kim notes "Park's financial probity, even more than two decades after his assassination, has not been challenged" (Kim, "Political Corruption," 13).

their farms or at the beach, though he did often keep away from the press and political arena. Finally, we can see the core of his political philosophy here, that a leader must guide the people. In contrast to Western democracy which idealizes the power of the people to make political decisions, Park suggested in his writings that in a Korean-style democracy people elect their leaders but then must follow what the leaders decide regarding political matters. In all, there is much insight to be gained from analyzing Park's writings, which is why it is regretful that they are usually ignored by scholars.

Park Chung-Hee's political philosophy and personal views are available in several official books published during his time in power. Since these books were a public forum for political thought, and many were published by the government, they should not be taken fully at face value. Moreover, the authorship of the works, especially the first, was questioned at the time of their release. It is also unclear who did the English translations for these works. Therefore it is impossible to say for certain whether these works were directly (or indirectly) written by Park. Certainly, as government publications during his time in power, Park must have had some level of oversight. They also do express the views of the ruling collective of which Park was the head, so they can still shed light on the political views of Park and his peers. From here on this paper will reference Park as author of the works for the sake of simplicity.

It is important to note that Park wrote these books for a domestic Korean audience, to explain his ideas and plans, and to convince his people to support these policies. Interestingly, the consistency of many arguments throughout almost twenty years of writing adds a sense of honesty and genuineness. Though the books tend to focus on different issues, they often incorporate similar themes and arguments. The most

common are a critical view of Korean history; a strong hatred of corruption and dishonesty; and a focus on raising people from poverty as the first step of development. What does tend to change in the later books is the specificity and tone of the arguments. In earlier works the arguments feel like vaguer concepts, whereas in the later works they are more focused and have a stronger tilt towards propaganda.²⁶

Park's writing can be divided into four key themes. First, Park expressed his negative view of Korean history and how events led to contemporary circumstances. Park held little back in his attacks on the Korean past, particularly the weakness of the Joseon Dynasty rulers. Second, Park explained Korea's position on the global stage and how international experience could be applied to the Korean situation. Park could be rather aggressive in criticizing how global powers had abused Korea throughout history. He also was very knowledgeable about the contemporary position of Korea and how global politics affected the country. Third, and one that is more frequently seen in the early works, Park argued for the necessity of revolution in Korea. He often cited the corruption of government officials and mismanagement as being key factors that led him to decide to participate in a coup. Forth, in a collection of interrelated topics that are more present in the later works, Park described his views on industrialization, modernization and democracy. Park was consistent in his idea that development must target the poor and that strong industrialization is necessary for national security due to provocation from

²⁶ For example, the idea of national self-reliance is a recurring concept throughout all of Park's writing. Early on this is more of a general sentiment, sometimes related to Park's shameful views of Korea's history and national weakness in the past. In one of his last books he gives this idea a distinct name, tying it to the Korean term *jaju*, which he defines as a spirit of political and economic self-reliance. This could be the result of a more than a decade of fine tuning his political philosophy, but it also rings of propaganda designed to capitalize on a rising ethnic nationalism in Korea at the time. As such, his early works do tend to come off as more sincere than the later ones.

North Korea. Park argued that merely copying Western democracy in Korea had already failed and would continue to fail because of the different cultural context. Park suggested that a more communally-focused democracy, where the needs of the state override the needs of individuals, is a better fit for the Korean context.

The following chapter will look at some of these themes and analyze quotes from Park's books in detail. The ideas Park expressed regarding democracy and industrialization, however, are not very relevant to the early period of Park's rule, since a junta is by definition non-democratic, and industrialization had not begun at that time. Instead, this chapter will focus on the ideas that created the impetus for revolution. The examination of Park's writings should be a component of any analysis of Park's rule, and one should not ignore the many places where government actions contradicted his recommendations. The most obvious example is the conflict between Park's professed support of democracy and his government's authoritarianism, especially in later years. It is possible that Park and his critics defined democracy differently, or that government actions were the result of external pressures that Park had to comply with regardless of his personal views. Even a hardline critique of Park's government's authoritarianism should consider the contradiction of word and action. From either direction, it stands out as something that doesn't comfortably fit the events and issues of the time. To assume he was simply lying when he praised democracy is risky given the myriad of forces that pushed the government's policies away from the ideals expressed in Park's writing. Divining what these forces were is far beyond the scope of this paper, except to acknowledge their existence and encourage scholars to consider them. This chapter will attempt to parse out Park's views as described in his writings as preparation for the later

analysis of the historical actions attributed to Park being addressed by this paper.

Views on Korean History

Park's writings often include sharp criticisms of Korea's former leaders and elites. These views influenced most of Park's main ideas: the need for revolution, the need to fight corruption, and the need for industrialization and modernization. When reading Park's analysis of his country's history, one cannot help but feel a sense of shame in him for his country's weakness in the past. Park evinces concern about repeating past mistakes and failing the country himself, as many of these past leaders did.

So, too, do his historical views show the effect that historical discourse during his upbringing had on his perception of history. Many of these ideas were based on a concept of Korean racial purity, of a country with a long and continuously connected history. As noted by archaeologist Hyung-il Pai (Bae Hyeong-il) in her book *Constructing "Korean" Origins*, these ideas were often factually flawed, and were descended from Japanese imperialist agendas. Even by the time of Park's writing, some of these ideas were beginning to become outdated. For example, Park regards "the Korean race with more than four thousand years of history."²⁷ In another book he states "it is Koreans who shaped an ancient history that goes back over five thousand years. . . . a homogenous people who have shared unusual solidarity through thick and thin."²⁸ Both the ideas of a pure and ancient Korean race and the five thousand year old origin of Korean state

²⁷ Park, Chung Hee, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction, Second Edition* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing, 1964): 107.

²⁸ Park, Chung Hee, *Korea Reborn: A Model for Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1979): 21.

history have since been debunked by scholars like Pai, as well as by modern study of ethnology and migration.

Park often relied on loaded terms like “the orient,” and comparisons with the West in his discussions.²⁹ He often gauged the level of development of these “oriental” countries—co-opting the Western use of the term describing Asia and the Middle East—by comparing them to a Western standard. For example, when describing the rise of modern Japan and China, Park noted,

Korea, due to her geopolitical position and topography, remained as the sole unmodernized country, though all others opened their doors to the onrush of Western civilization. . . . It is in fact under these conditions the independence of countries depended on how quickly and efficiently they digested Western civilization. It also became the norm by which to measure the degree of civilization in Eastern countries.

At this point one might think that he was critiquing Asian capitulation to Western powers, but he added, “We were a hermit nation. Why did we remain behind while other countries marched forward to modernization? The answer to this question may vary with the opinions of different people, but internally, our leaders were too negative, evasive and blind toward the changing pattern of the world.”³⁰

Interestingly, Park contradicted himself on this issue in later works. His early works suggested that Westernization was the proper path for development. Though he did argue that purely Western democracy was not a good fit for Korea, he initially held that general Western social values were superior to their Korean counterparts. Park’s attack on what he saw as a negative, do-nothing attitude in the song *Arirang*, was such a critique. In *Arirang*, the singer curses the lover who abandoned him rather than trying to get her

²⁹ Park, Chung Hee, *The Country, the Revolution and I, Second Edition* (Seoul: HollyM Corporation, 1970): 92.

³⁰ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 107-108.

back. Park suggested that “Western European girls would have clung to the lover’s neck.”³¹ He also compared Korean “honor” and European chivalry, noting that the Korean version conveyed a sense that people “preferred to die easily and avoid responsibility.”³² Later works stepped back from this, emphasizing the protection of Korean tradition and focusing more on the mixing of Eastern and Western ideas. For example, in one of his last books, Park argued that “[n]ot a few learned people, misled into thinking that modernization was Westernization, blamed our age-old poverty and historical stagnation of Korea’s traditional-bound culture.”³³ The distinction is not a complete reversal, but more of a shift from a slight Western emphasis to a slight Korean one. While he probably did change his views during the years he was in power, this shift in focus might also have been an attempt to capture the ethnic nationalist sentiments so prevalent when the book was released.

Park often needed to compare his culture with that of the West in order to make a point, such as with his critique of *Arirang*. It was less than two decades later when Edward Said’s groundbreaking work brought these “orientalist” arguments into serious doubt. But the above quote on geopolitics does highlight one of Park’s major historical concerns: the *Joseon* regime’s weakness and consequent failure to prevent imperialism.³⁴

As the above passages suggest, Park saw the *Joseon* period as being the root of all of Korea’s modern problems. For example, he argued that “Our present national traits of

³¹ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 75,80.

³² *Ibid.*, 80.

³³ Park, *Korea Reborn*, 33.

³⁴ The irony is that in a post-orientalism world, the *Joseon* Dynasty might deserve praise for trying to hold on to its cultural identity in spite of external aggression. Park also seems to contradict himself at times when he argued elsewhere that Koreans need to protect their culture and that Western democracy needs to be modified for a Korean context.

reliance upon others, truckling, and blind obedience to the ruler, all have their origin in the five centuries of the Yi [*Joseon*] Dynasty. Our factionalism, exclusionism, and special privilege consciousness which abet national disunity, are all direct derivatives of the feudal caste system and mandarin bureaucracy of the Yi Dynasty.”³⁵ Here we can see many of Park’s early targets for critical attack, specifically factionalism and special privilege. He saw these character faults as barriers to development and linked them directly to the Confucian politics and philosophy of that time. In another work he argued that “Not long ago in Korea, it was almost considered demeaning, under Confucian influence, to engage in manual labor. . . . No society that despises labor can expect to develop itself.”³⁶ He directly connected these faults to past tragedies. For example, Park wrote, “The ceaseless factional strife under the Yi Dynasty invited the national disaster of the Japanese invasion masterminded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi.”³⁷

Park centered his critique on the *Joseon*, Yi Dynasty, arguing that “[b]efore the Yi Dynasty the Korean people had by no means been a subservient nation. The Kingdom of *Goguryeo* was an Oriental power of the first rank with wide territories in what is now Manchuria; the people of *Goguryeo* were progressive culturally and aggressive in war.”³⁸ Park directly criticized the founder of the Yi Dynasty, Yi Song-Gye (I Song-Gye), by

³⁵ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 13.

³⁶ Park, *Korea Reborn*, 77-78.

³⁷ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39. – This is arguably an inaccurate statement. Although *Goguryeo* was more independent than the other early Korean states, it was still dependent on China to some extent. Its leaders still sought legitimacy from the Chinese emperor and asked China to intervene in certain conflicts with its neighbors. Moreover, the progressive culture that Park cites here was largely imported from China. Park suggests that “Throughout the five hundred years of the Yi Dynasty, its basic foreign policy was vassalage” (*Our Nation’s Path*, 38-39). The fact is that vassalage to China was much more common than not with the early Korean states, even *Goguryeo*. Park attributes the idea of Korean vassalage in its history as a product of *Goryeo* historian Kim Pu-sik (Gim Pu-sik). Hyung-il Pai, in her comprehensive work, shows that such attacks on Kim were rooted in the nationalist revisionism that was prevalent during the first half of the 20th century.

suggesting he “had not been inspired by any new ideals of statecraft and benevolent government, but only by a desire for personal power.”³⁹ Here Park drew a distinct line between rulers who held benevolent ideals and those who only desired power.

It is worth considering such passages when attempting to argue that Park was personally driven to keep power for himself. This is often the argument made in current scholarship, and is often lacking in clear evidence. Not that the accusations are necessarily inaccurate, but we should expect some specific proof that counters the above commentary. To be clear, this paper does not dismiss outright Park’s drive for power; it does, however, argue that evidence proving either case is circumstantial at best. The historiographical problem is the tendency to argue opposite cases in absolute terms despite the lack of clear proof when each is an educated guess unworthy of additional weighting.

The faults of the *Joseon* elite were embodied for Park in the story of Chun-Hyang. This is the story of a courtesan’s chaste daughter whose *yangban* lover, Yi Mong-Ryong leaves her to become an official in the capital. She is later abused by a lustful governor while the local people, intimidated by their ruler, do nothing to help. Eventually her lover returns as a royal inspector, saving her and taking down the villain. Contrary to the common view that Yi was a hero, Park argued that his action “evinces the cowardliness of his class by sacrificing his love for the sake of his status and official position.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Park noted that the story as a whole “brings to light the diseased state of Yi society in which the spirit of popular resistance to authoritarianism was totally non-

³⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

existent.”⁴¹

Park ultimately blamed Koreans for their own historical problems. Regarding Korea’s victimization by imperialistic world powers, Park suggested,

Even if the geographical position of Korea has made it a place of suffering and although the international situation made this country a battleground for foreign powers, Korea need not necessarily or inevitably be a victim of foreign aggression. History is made by man. History is moulded [sic] by the subjective efforts and desires of man. Whether the country was protected or lost, whether the national culture was improved or degraded, nobody but the Korean people were and are responsible for the development of Korean history.⁴²

Here we can see the early roots of Park’s ideological focus on self-reliance. He was well-versed in world history, and was not reluctant to highlight the role that foreign powers played in Korea’s tragic past.

Park argued that “[w]hen Japanese imperialism swept across the Korean Peninsula it destroyed the balance of power in this region and, thus, peace in Asia.”⁴³ Even so, he still faulted Koreans for failing to resist these powers. Park suggested “[t]he Port Hamilton incident might well have marked the decisive moment for Korea to turn her eyes toward the outside world, but the royal court did not sufficiently grasp the meaning of the incident or the warning it contained.”⁴⁴ The incident in question was a conflict between Russia and Britain over the opening of ports in Korea, which took the form of a series of foreign interventions and aggressive acts, and the end result of which was Japan’s annexation of Korea as a colony. Foreign powers had caused the catastrophe, but Park blamed the Korean rulers for not preventing it. He stated “What could be found in Korea in the age of imperialism was a power vacuum. Neither the Korean government

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 135.

⁴³ Park, Chung Hee, *To Build a Nation* (Washington D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1971):138

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33.

nor its ruling class possessed the capability of mobilizing the people for the nation's defense. The caste-ridden ruling class curried foreign favor in its own struggles."⁴⁵ Not only are Park's common critiques of factionalism and power struggles seen here; so is his recognition of the power vacuum created by the existence of a crippled Korean government surrounded by imperial powers. The idea of power fluctuations and vacuums appears repeatedly in Park's writings, suggesting a sincere concern that Korea might end up in the same situation if it didn't industrialize and strengthen itself. He genuinely feared such a power vacuum in Korea again, or perhaps worse, that he could be the ruler in charge when Korea again fell prey to foreign powers.

Even without that worst case scenario, Park's view of the history of his country was highly pessimistic. "So weighed down by the force of negative historical conditions have we been," he lamented, "that seldom have our people had a chance to stand up straight and straighten their backs."⁴⁶ However, Park also sought out parts of Korea's past that could be utilized for nationalist purposes. Especially in his later works, Park wrote respectfully of Korean traditional culture and a need to protect it, a contrast with early works that hints at political spin. In one of his last books, Park argued

Not so long ago, it used to be fashionable among some intellectuals to study the history and acquire the culture of other nations at the expense of our own . . . Few things are more unfortunate or shameful than this habit. He who does not comprehend himself will not understand others; he who does not grasp his country's past will never understand the world.⁴⁷

This is a step beyond his early critique of those who equated "modernization with Westernization."

⁴⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁶ Park, *Korea Reborn*, 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

Park certainly did have a keen grasp of the world and his country's place in it. He did not have to look hard to find heroes in his country's history that he could invoke for his purposes. He praised the groups in the late *Joseon* period that fought for modernization. He argued that the *Kaehwa Tongip* Party of 1884 were "progressive young patriots . . . [who] correctly grasped the need for modernization."⁴⁸ Park also argued that the *Tonghak* Rebellion of 1894 was the first "democratic revolution" and the starting point of modernization, noting the "[p]rinciples for the construction of a new society and the Revolution included the popular *Tonghak* philosophy 'Man is God' which was the beginning of the Koreanization of democracy. The principles were not directly imported from any Western philosophy."⁴⁹ He even praised the anti-Japanese fighters of the colonial era as heroes deserving of praise.⁵⁰

Park was able to find the positive figures he needed to inspire nationalism in his people, which he thought was required for fast development. At times he seemed to invoke Korean history as inspiration for his own revolutionary goals, an interesting contrast with his usually unreserved assaults on the *Joseon* elites. For example, he praised the coup of Chung-Jong in 1506, noting that "In protest against the notoriously undisciplined, immoral life and tyranny of Prince Yon-San, a coup took place . . . Chung-Jong wanted to eliminate the former corruption . . . and his followers advocated revolutionary reform."⁵¹ It's hard not to see the trajectory of Park's rise reflected in this story from four hundred years in the past.

Park found other historical figures and events that inspired him, but it was the

⁴⁸ Park, *To Build a Nation*, 41.

⁴⁹ Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 104

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵¹ Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 62.

negative parts of his country's history that seemed to absorb Park's attention more often. A strong sense of shame radiates from his writing, shame in the weakness and perhaps "backwardness" of his country. It is not hard to imagine that the man could have been adamant about not repeating the mistakes of the past. Park surely did not want to be a source of shame for future generations by failing to fight the typical corruption and factionalism of his country, or failing to strengthen the country vis-à-vis foreign powers. This had direct implications in his promotion of self-reliance, hard work, and security of the state over full freedom. It also showed his keen sense of world history and politics.

Views on Korea's Relations with the World

Park Chung-Hee was well aware of Korea's precarious global position. Its geographic location placed it directly between the competing imperial powers of Asia, China and Japan, and made it an important strategic location for both Asian and Western powers. As has been shown above, Park was disgusted by the Yi Dynasty's close relation to China, which he saw as a "legacy of subservience."⁵² And he specifically blamed Japan for breaking the peace with its own imperial expansion. The abuse Korea suffered was something that happened repeatedly throughout history. Park argued "Making our life more miserable were our bigger neighbors, who seldom gave us peace. Whenever a new power rose on the continent to the north, or from the ocean to the south, Korea was invariably fixed as their first target of aggression, causing us unspeakable hardship."⁵³ Park understood that Korea's problems with the world were as much a result of internal

⁵² Park, *Korea Reborn*, 12.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 14.

weakness as of external forces. Park ultimately blamed Korean leaders for this:

Had the leaders and the led been firmly united, concentrating their efforts to strengthen the nation's power, the tragedy of Japan's occupation of Korea might have been averted. By failing to perceive the nature of changes in the international situation and indulging themselves in the schisms and blatant dependence of foreigners, our leaders could not but leave behind for us a legacy of excruciating sorrow.⁵⁴

Park not only understood Korea's past vulnerability, that of a small country lying in the shadow of its larger neighbors, but he thought it could be overcome by economic and military strength.

Korea's economic immaturity and lack of modernization made it a target for nineteenth century European imperialists looking for new markets to dominate. Park viewed the opening of Korea to European trade in highly negative terms, primarily because he saw the incoming Westerners as strong and Korea as weak. He suggested that "[a]fter the Korean-American Friendship Agreement of 1882, various European nations concluded friendship agreements with Korea, and the situation of Korea at that time was similar to a piece of meat eyed by a pack of hungry dogs."⁵⁵ Moreover, Park viewed any friendship offered by foreign powers as being fickle at best. Park argued that "[i]t is a conventional method adopted by strong powers, both today and in the past, to sacrifice powerless third nations in order to conclude an alliance or avoid war in international

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23. – Another interesting contradiction is seen here between Park's late and early works. In one of his first books, regarding the international pressure on Korea, Park suggested "Since aggressive powers were attempting to invade us, we should have sought help from other nations" (*Our Nation's Path*, 135). Though, on the same page he does end up laying the blame on Koreans for the country's failure to resist imperialism. This contradiction of ideas seems to reflect the contemporary global and political position of Korea at the time of writing. The context of the early work was that Korea was fully reliant on the United States and others for economic survival. Reliance on other nations was a necessity. But the context of the later work was a much stronger Korea with a real possibility of economic independence.

⁵⁵ Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 134.

politics.”⁵⁶ He even cited a specific example of this when he noted “it was natural at that time for Japan to demand control of Korea and for Britain to offer Korea as a sacrificial victim to Japan in an attempt to utilize the growing power of Japan in its counter-Russian policy.”⁵⁷ Here again we can see Park’s strong understanding of global politics as well as his revulsion of Korea’s past weakness.

Park’s view of Japan as a shadowy threat, actively affecting Korea politics, can be seen in his early writings. Park often blamed the previous regimes and their elites for pro-Japanese stances and behavior. He argued that during the Rhee regime “[t]he influence of Japan became strong, showing its tempting face in politics, economy, culture and society.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, these comments were published around the same time the junta started secret negotiations to restore formal ties with Japan, something that the Rhee government wanted but failed to do. Despite his personal ties to Japan, growing up during the peak of colonialism and having served with the Japanese military, Park seemed to be wary of the country politically. This awareness of past foreign aggression suggests how Park could have become determined to make his country strong and independent at almost any cost.

During Park’s time that issue became urgent. Not only was the contest of foreign power seen clearly in the Korean War, the Cold War afterwards had similar implications. He noted that “indications began to appear that Northeast Asia, including Korea, was once again turning into a focus for Big Power rivalry. By 1971, with the withdrawal from Korea of one U.S. infantry division in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, the United

⁵⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁸ Park, *The Country, the Revolution and I*, 53.

States commitment to Northeast Asia in general appeared greatly reduced.”⁵⁹ Not only do we see here Park’s concern of Korea falling victim to foreign competition, but also of the fickleness of the support of foreign powers.

Park feared that the United States would fully abandon its ally if such a move became necessary or beneficial. Indeed, the threat of U.S. abandonment comes up often in Park’s writing. For example, he emphasized a U.S. preference for Japan over Korea when he stated “the United States considered Japan, then under occupation, as the dyke [sic] for democracy in the Far East, while regarding Korea and Manchuria as if secondary importance.”⁶⁰ Park also suggested that “the U.S. policy toward Korea . . . was ‘military’ as far as its basic nature was concerned.”⁶¹ He even suggested that U.S. aid policies were a hindrance to growth, observing that the U.S. had “adopted a mode of thinking which was at variance with our real needs.”⁶² Park was clearly wary of his country’s chief ally, whose support for Korea seemed less than what it offered to Japan, whose policies focused on U.S. needs at the expense of Korean needs, and whose agenda differed from its Korean counterpart. For a devout nationalist, this was a clear threat.

Park’s response to this threat was self-reliance. He wrote “we could not allow the tragedy of our past to repeat itself in Korea by letting our complacent attitude, political quarrels and psychology of dependence reassert themselves. . . . our generation bears the responsibility for strengthening the nation’s power by ourselves.”⁶³ In light of real threats from foreign powers, and the apparent unreliability of its allies, he believed that he and

⁵⁹ Park, *Korea Reborn*, 48.

⁶⁰ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 148.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶² Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 49.

his countrymen were duty-bound to strengthen the nation, regardless of the cost. Failure to do so would mean the return of "Big Power" imperialism—a much more significant threat than Communism or North Korea. It is not hard to imagine that Park was doubly worried about this happening during his watch, and his reputation thus falling to the level of his despised ancestors. Moreover, he suggested the situation had implications beyond the fate of Korea alone. "History," he warned, "proves that whenever Korea becomes a battlefield for the powerful, the peace and security of East Asia are at stake. In this sense, Korea holds the key to peace in East Asia."⁶⁴

Not that Park favored returning to Korean being a political hermit. He appreciated the positive support of foreign allies, often praising the UN member states that rescued his country during the Korean War. Indeed, he was convinced that "[t]he devotion of UN member nations, which rendered both moral and material assistance to Korea to defend this nation and fought against the Communist aggression was unswerving and heroic."⁶⁵ Regarding Korea's closest ally and biggest supporter Park said "We like America. We like their system of liberal democracy. They liberated us, they protected us from Communist invasion, they aided us economically. Above all, we like Americans because they have not tried to enslave us, nor make unreasonable demands of us."⁶⁶

In addition to understanding the value of his allies, Park's international perspective also saw value in other cultures and other nations' history. Park championed what he called the "German work ethic" as something for his people to emulate:

the Germans believe that one can serve God best by being faithful to one's mundane *Beruf* [occupation]. In other words, they think that worldly jobs,

⁶⁴Park, *To Build a Nation*, 136.

⁶⁵Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 156.

⁶⁶ Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 153.

commerce and money earning are tasks conferred on individuals by God, that they are not a means to an end but life itself, life's aim itself. Thus they feel loyal to their jobs and responsible for their duties. The West Germans, who achieved the "Miracle on the Rhine" after the Second World War, have been diligent and hardworking, inspired by this healthy concept of occupation.⁶⁷

While many scholars declare that Park was influenced by the Japanese Meiji development, which is true to some extent, it is much too simple to suggest this was his only point of international reference or influence. While Park's attendance at Japanese colonial schools, service in the Japanese imperial military, and praise of the Meiji reforms have led some to believe that Japan was all he knew or cared about, the above passage proves otherwise. It not hard to attribute the term "Miracle on the Han," commonly used to describe the rapid Korean economic growth, to German origins. Park also praised Germany for its ability to become economically independent of the United States, an example he saw as "a cause for envy."⁶⁸

While it is true that Park was inspired from the story of the Meiji reforms, this was only one of many international examples Park used as inspiration for his revolution. Park also praised Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionary attempts in China, noting Sun's philosophy "maintained that the only way to save China was to destroy the *Ching* court and make a new start as a modern, democratic nation."⁶⁹ Park had set out on a similar path, to destroy his country's government and rebuild it as a new nation. Park did also commend Japan, noting that it "became, within ten years after the Meiji Reform, the most potent power of the Far East. This was indeed a surprise to Asia, a miracle!"⁷⁰

But Park's inspiration from the world was not limited to East Asia, he also cited

⁶⁷ Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 74.

⁶⁸ Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 146.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Pasha⁷¹ who he described as "the father of Turkey. Whenever we think of Turkey, we cannot forget this hero of the revolution."⁷² Park seems to have particularly like Kemal since he was a military leader. Regarding the revolution in Turkey, Park suggested, "This splendid history of revolution was edited with blood for the sake of world peace and national independence. This valuable lesson is not the property of the Turkish people alone."⁷³ Park also commended Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser for his overthrow of the monarchy there. In particular he praised Nasser for his popular support, industrial drive, and his belief that Egypt needed to define itself rather than simply adopting Western ideas. Park quoted Nasser as having said: "We are neither capitalistic, nor communistic. We are just building our own society."⁷⁴ It is not hard to imagine Park uttering these very words himself. As can be seen, there were certainly many more global influences on Park than just Meiji Japan.

Park was clearly concerned about the world and Korea's place in it. He was inspired by revolutionary movements in other parts of the world, and wary of what he called the "Big Powers" who had left a sordid legacy in Korea. He feared renewed aggression from these powers and also abandonment by his allies. All of this should not be ignored when analyzing this period of Korean history. It certainly had a strong impact on the behavior of Park and his contemporaries. The reality of Korea's world position, its history of weakness and victimization, and the light from the successes of other

⁷¹ This is one place where Park's authorship comes into question. Donald Gregg claimed in recent interviews that during a conversation he had with Park in the mid-70s, well after the passage in question was published, Park said he didn't know much about Kemal Pasha. Though, in the conversation Park did compare his political goals in Korea to that of Turkey.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

revolutions abroad seemed to have had an influence on Park and his peers, and their move towards revolution in their own country.

Views on the Necessity of Revolution

Park's understanding of Korea's history and global position fused with the weakness and corruption of the Chang Myon government to create an impetus towards revolution. First and foremost, Park blamed poverty for necessitating revolution. He stated, "Poverty should be blamed for the two revolutions we have experienced. Revolution was an explosion of absolute will of the people to improve their economic circumstances."⁷⁵ The first revolution Park cites here was the April Student Movement in 1960 which forced Rhee Syngman from power, the second was his own. Park laid the blame for Korea's poverty at the feet of the two previous regimes, those of Rhee and Chang. Writing soon after the junta took power, Park argued that

thoughtless former governments, knowing no day of peace, turned their face from agriculture, devoted their energy to tertiary consumer industry, and indulged in corruption and political strife. . . . They did some heap [sic] service only to industries with which they had direct connections and played arbitrarily with agricultural policy matters. As a consequence, the rural communities became impoverished and farmers had to desert their farms to flock to the cities. The resultant discouragement of productive will and scattering of the labor force has brought about the explosive food crisis of today. Whatever else we may consider at this point, the most urgent and fundamental need is that the rural communities should have precedence over everything else. . . . Whoever may take over power, national reconstruction will be in vain without the reconstruction of the perplexed farming villages.⁷⁶

Supporting farmers was not simply a political move for Park and his fellow junta leaders, since as Park acknowledged, farmers accounted for "75% of the total population" at that

⁷⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 36.

time.⁷⁷

In addition to blaming former leaders for not supporting the rural poor, Park also criticized their economic policies. He argued, “The Korean economy under the previous regimes suppressed agriculture and stultified manufacturing, fattening the process only in tertiary industry. . . . The rulers, at the time, should have devised a policy to promote import-replacing industries. But for ten consecutive years they acted indifferent.”⁷⁸ He cited the lack of development in natural resource industries, such as coal and tungsten, as a specific failure of previous regimes that hindered economic growth. Park also blamed the Rhee regime for, on the one hand, relying too heavily on foreign aid, and on the other, failing to use it properly. Park argued that in spite of an apparent decrease in U.S. financial support for Korea, the Rhee government “continued its desperate attempts to obtain more aid from foreign countries—completely overlooking the changing trends in world affairs.”⁷⁹ Park added to this the critique that “[l]ittle successful effort was made to make wise use of this aid, or to actuate an effective policy aimed at making self-reliant economic development possible.”⁸⁰ Park apparently thought that Rhee and Chang Myon had failed at their basic tasks of governance, and continued poverty was the direct result.

Though Park and his comrades cited the elimination of poverty as a key purpose of the revolution, their most overt target was corruption. Eliminating corruption was one of the original public pledges of the coup-makers. As has been mentioned Park viewed

⁷⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁹ Park, *To Build a Nation*, 91-92. – As noted previously, Park feared a withdrawal of U.S. support and this fear was indeed warranted. Park noted that “more than half of the national budget” came from U.S. aid and he questioned “What would we do if U.S. aid were cut off tomorrow?” (*The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 27-29). Park was motivated to launch a coup, in part, to prevent his country’s utter collapse in the event of a full U.S. withdrawal.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

factionalism, power-mongering, and corruption as legacies from the *Joseon* era. He also thought corruption was reinforced by the devastation of the Korean War. Regarding the aftermath of the war, Park argued that “[a] sort of nihilism grew from the horrible experiences of war. The extravagant greed for material gains, stimulated by the influx of foreign aid goods, turned the people of Korea in the wrong direction.”⁸¹ Interestingly his commentary often skips over the effects of the colonial period, which are now recognized as having been significant. This may be due to the fact that Korean leaders were not in control during this period, and Park’s ire is usually directed at domestic Korean leadership.

Park saw both the Rhee and Chang regimes as being equally bad, arguing that “both were corrupt as they were possible to be.”⁸² Specific grievances Park had against these regimes included illegal profiteering and dispensing special favors to supporters, going so far as to say that “[t]he Assemblymen were merely a special, privileged class of employment agents carrying sackfuls [sic] of job applications, and promoters in the pay of private business interests.”⁸³ He suggested that “[t]hose in power, with their underdeveloped sense of responsibility, fell apart from the people, abused their power and authority, and amassed large fortunes in collusion with corrupt elements.”⁸⁴ On a whole, Park suggested that “[t]he economy was faced with collapse. . . . People fatalistically took poverty and reliance on foreign aid as unavoidable facts of life. Businessmen and industrialists failed to fulfill their important role in economic development. Many corrupt government officials and parvenus worked together to amass

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸² Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 174.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 175, 10.

⁸⁴ Park, *Leadership*, 5.

illegal fortunes.”⁸⁵ Taken at face value, it is easy to assume that this was the 1961 coup's principal cause.

Certainly this rhetoric is oft repeated outside of the official publications as well. It is impossible to be certain though the bulk of the primary evidence, including the official government publications, the recollections of witnesses like Kim Jong-Pil and Kim Chong-Shin, contemporary news reports, and the diplomatic assessments of junta leaders by the U.S. Government, indicate that these men wanted to fight corruption early on. Park later recalled, “I was overwhelmed with sorrow that I had been born in this land at such a time. I stayed awake nights, planning how I might save the nation from its crisis, by whatever means were available to me.”⁸⁶ It is difficult to prove whether the man’s sole concern was to gain power, and it certainly requires substantial primary support. In regards to Park’s story, it ignores a large component of the historical record that suggests otherwise. Again, this is not to argue with any certainty against the idea that Park was concerned with his own power, but that the current scholarship lacks the evidence required to make such an assertion in absolute terms, as is often the case.

Park saw achieving “economic development and [improving] the living standard of the people as a prerequisite to building democracy” but Korea had started on the opposite path, with democratic-like politics before economics.⁸⁷ “The aim of our revolution,” Park declared, “was not to ignore the value of democracy but to lay a solid foundation for rebuilding true democracy.”⁸⁸ He was adamant about his cause, arguing

⁸⁵ Park, *To Build a Nation*, 104.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁸⁷ Park, *Our Nation’s Path*, 207.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

that “without the revolution the country would have fallen!”⁸⁹ This view came not from an external assessment, but from within, after he took over what he described as “a burnt, robbed house.”⁹⁰

More frequently, he compared his nation to a sick patient whose only doctors were the revolutionaries. In defending the restriction of freedoms imposed by the junta, Park suggested, “The doctor may temporarily restrict the physical activities of the patient for the sake of complete cure and recovery, and even force him to submit to painful surgery, when necessary. . . . Surgical operations are not pleasant, but they can be accepted as a necessary evil—as a small sacrifice to save the whole.”⁹¹ Early on, Park seemed to have clear ideas about how the situation in his country could be fixed. He suggested “Korean politics will not be reformed unless the standards of the people are raised, a change of generations (to replace the former politicians) is promoted, the contents of elections are studied, and an open system for the procurement of political funds is worked out by means of consistent policies through social enlightenment.”⁹²

This passage, like others in Park's early writings, sees revolution as a route to better political conditions for posterity; “a national, common people’s revolution of national consciousness, and a turnover of generations.”⁹³ The goal was a democratic welfare state and the agents were “new generations composed of soldiers, students and intellectuals.”⁹⁴

Park wrote, “Just as a father toils, not only for his own pleasure but for the sake

⁸⁹Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 26.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 50.

⁹¹ Park, *Leadership*, 10-11.

⁹² Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 56.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 106.

⁹⁴Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 117.

of his beloved posterity, a revolution too seeks more the happiness of tomorrow than security of the present. Therefore, the generation in which a revolution occurs must suffer. Can any parent say that he would rather live well himself than make his posterity live well?"⁹⁵ Park did not expect to reap the benefits of his own revolution, so it is understandable that he would expect others to be willing to sacrifice in the same way, and that conflict would occur with those unwilling to suffer it. Certainly, Park did not have the right to decide which sacrifices each citizen had to make. Perhaps some of the conflict between Park and his opponents came from such differing expectations.

Park ultimately saw his revolution as a starting point in a long period of progress and modernization. He stated,

The May 16 Military Revolution must be understood as the real starting point of our national task in our modern history—a democratic revolution for the achievement of an independent economy, which began with the Liberation in 1945 and was re-emphasized by the April 19 Students' Uprising. It was also the newest link in the strong chain of our social history, consistently flowing through the *Tonghak* Peasant's Revolution, the March 1, 1919 National Independence Movement and the founding ideologies of the Republic of Korea.⁹⁶

In light of such statements, and the man's thorough grasp of the flow of world history, it does seem risky to argue that he was solely focused on maintaining his own power. It is possible that he was willing to stay in power for the remainder of his life because he never felt his task, the original foundations of his revolution, had been completed. The rise of an arguably worse dictatorship, in the form of the Chun Doo-Hwan regime, seems to attest to the incompleteness of Park's revolution, as per the ideals expressed in his books. The egalitarian dreams of his writing have become even more distant in recent years. Ironically, this has much to do with the economic policies of Park's own

⁹⁵ Park, *The Country, the Revolution, and I*, 141.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

government.

It is easy to assume that his staying in power was a result of a distinct desire for power, that such an idea is the simplest and thus most accurate conclusion. However, it ignores the scores of other agents who had motive to keep Park at the top, and also the necessity of public support in the form of numerous elections and referendums. Even blatant election fraud has its limits under the international eye, and even then other agents are needed who are committed to the cause for their own reasons. We can certainly say without reservation that the government during Park's presidency was authoritarian, but what is not clear and well-evidenced is just how much was specifically Park's will.⁹⁷

Ultimately, Park's views were much more complex than "rich nation, strong army," the simplified slogan often repeated in the modern literature.⁹⁸ As has been shown here, Park professed a diverse range of views that probably influenced his political thinking. He had a very pessimistic view of Korean history, in which he attacked the past leaders for their weakness. Park also had a keen sense of world history which he applied to his own country's politics. Beyond simply wanting to emulate Meiji Japan, he was influenced by the German work ethic, revolutions in Turkey and Egypt, and the Chinese democratic movement, amongst other things. Park suggested that he respected democracy, in a certain form, and sincerely wanted to implement it in Korea. However, he placed stability and development higher in priority, arguing that democracy would not function without a sufficient economic base. He also argued that there was a real security threat to

⁹⁷ The controversial power dynamic between George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the early 2000s seems to dispute the assumption that the man on top must certainly be the man responsible.

⁹⁸ The term is repeated 15 times by the various authors of *The Park Chung Hee Era*. Only two such cases offer citations; these sources are not Park's writings, and are actually secondary sources on Japan, rather than Korea. Thus what is a common-thread argument in the book regarding Park's views lacks much needed support.

the country and that the limitation of individual rights could be justified if deemed necessary for the welfare of the state.

All of these ideas, as well as the pattern of their evolution over time, should be a part of any full analysis of the politics during the period of Park's rule. It certainly offers a means to help us understand how Park and his peers could feel justified in their authoritarian practices. To ascribe it to a mere lust for power is too simple an answer if only because no man has ever stayed in power merely on the force of his own will. There are always other self-motivated agents and political contexts that help it come to pass. The contradiction between the ideals Park professed in his writing and the actions of his government hints at something more complicated.

CHAPTER III

THE MAY 16 COUP – A GENERAL NARRATIVE

At around 3:00 a.m. on May 16, 1961, Republic of Korea (ROK) revolutionary forces led by Major General Park Chung-Hee entered the capital, Seoul, and took over the government in a successful and relatively quiet coup d'état. In so doing, Park and his followers deposed the elected government of Prime Minister Chang Myon and President Yun Po-Sun (Yun Po-Seon). As is typical for coups, this one was accomplished with a tiny number of participants, less than one percent of the ROK's standing army of near 600,000 soldiers. Despite massively outnumbering the revolutionaries, the ROK military did not take any significant action against them. With the exception of a brief exchange of fire between revolutionary ROK Marines and opposing ROK Military Police, the entire event was bloodless and received little reaction from the public.⁹⁹ The United States, which had tens of thousands of its own troops station in the country and whose highest ranking officer also held military authority over the ROK military, was equally silent. With the exception of one statement by Commander-in-Chief of UN Forces General Magruder and another by the U.S. Embassy's chargé d'affaires Marshall Green

⁹⁹ Kim Jong-Pil claims that Park was present at the bridge and was shot at by the opposing MPs, though he does not specifically note if there were any casualties during the firefight. (*Kim Jong-Pil Remembers*, Vol. 10). Regarding the weak public reaction to the coup, Kim noted "The people were wholeheartedly cooperating with our new set of rules and principles. I was moved just watching them" (*Kim Jong-Pil Remembers*, Vol. 12).

declaring support for the Chang government—both of which the State Department later distanced themselves from—the United States forces in Korea did little to actively prevent or influence the coup. This was in spite of the fact that CIA had uncovered details of the coup plans in the previous month.

By 5:00 a.m., coup forces took control of the Korea Broadcasting System (KBS) radio station and broadcasted a declaration of the success of the coup and that all branches of government had been taken over. A ruling junta was quickly formed and declared an intention to build up the economic and social well-being of the nation, and root out corruption and greed in government and business, with an end goal of returning to civilian rule once significant progress had been made. Though Park Chung-Hee was the apparent leader of the coup, he ended up as the junta's second in command, under Lieutenant General Chang Do-Young (Jang Do-Yeong) the former Army Chief of Staff for the toppled regime. Through a series of factional conflicts that saw many junta members removed from their positions, or even jailed, Park Chung-Hee rose to the top and became the de facto ruler of the nation. When President Yun Po-Sun resigned in protest of some of the junta's policies and actions, Park Chung-Hee became acting president. He was publicly elected president in 1963, and would continue as president until his assassination in 1979.

Despite being a critical point in Korean history, and despite Park Chung-Hee's popularity as a historical topic in other areas, the coup is rarely detailed in the English literature. The most focused and significant work is the essay by Yong-Sup Han (Han Yong-Seop) entitled "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," which was published in the collection of essays *The Park Chung Hee Era*. Han's analysis is largely conventional, and

primarily relies on a single main source: Cho Gap-Je's multi-volume biography of Park entitled *Spit on My Grave*. Unfortunately, Han does not reference the primary record in support of the narrative he describes. His essay can be viewed as representative of conventional and long-standing views on this period. This conventional view holds that Park was almost solely responsible for planning and launching the coup, that he used others to achieve his ends, that ultimate power was fully in his sight from the beginning, and that he manipulated factions in the junta and the people of the nation to lift himself there. For example, Han argues that the issues of the coup were "Park's political tasks, ranging from those of coup planning, to the actual launching of military intervention, to the post-coup consolidation of power."¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Han ultimately lays the coup and its aftereffects at the feet of "Park's ambition."¹⁰¹ However, ascribing everything to Park and his will obscures the influence and agency of the other historical actors involved. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that Park may have not been the architect of the coup after all, and that his rise was not self-actuated. It is dubious to suggest that one person could ever be so completely in control of every facet of a ruling faction, or worse, competing factions. An analysis of the historical record, both newly available documents and others like the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series that have previously been available, raises several questions that need to be reexamined in relation to Park's coup and ultimate rise to power.

¹⁰⁰ Han, Yong-Sup, "The May Sixteenth Military Coup," *The Park Chung Hee Era [Kindle Edition]* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011): Kindle Locations 464-465.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Location 462.

Background and Lead-up to the Coup

The seeds for Park's revolution were sown many years before his group took action. The government in Korea was largely dysfunctional since the country's liberation from Japan more than 15 years earlier. Much of that was a legacy of colonialism. Additionally, the Rhee regime had become notorious for corruption and using force against its opponents. A rigged election in 1960 led to what is known as the "April 19 Student Movement" or the "April Student Revolution," a popular uprising led by students and labor groups that eventually forced Rhee to resign. As noted in previous chapters, Park claimed to have seen the corruption of the Rhee regime as an extension of the corruption and factionalism prevalent in pre-modern Korea, particularly the *Joseon* Dynasty.

Kim Jong-Pil, Park's chief co-conspirator in the coup, was particularly focused on corruption in the military at this time. In recent interviews, Kim remembered that "many agreed that ranking military officials responsible for the rigged March 15 general elections in 1960, which angered so many and led to nationwide street protests, should resign from their positions."¹⁰² Eventually Kim, along with 15 of his peers, led an open campaign demanding the dismissal of these officials. The result was that "for 11 days between Feb. 4 and Feb. 15, [Kim] was locked up in a military prison on charges of mutiny." Kim wanted to bring his case to trial as a means to present the issue publicly, but was forced to resign when then Army Chief of Staff Song Yo-Chan threatened to

¹⁰² Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Election Fixing Provoked 'Revolution,'" Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 5, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 13, 2015.

attack Park Chung-Hee for being a Communist.¹⁰³ Park, who shared Kim's desire to remove corrupt officials from the military, became an enemy of Song when he sent the man a letter suggesting Song should "resign to take responsibility for the military's intervention in the March 15 election."¹⁰⁴

Park's conflict with Song Yo-Chan is further detailed by an incident that journalist Kim Chong-Shin recalled in his book, *Seven Years with Korea's Park Chung Hee*. The book was published in 1967, only a few years after the events in question. At the time, Park was a two-star general and the commander of the logistics command in Busan. Song made an official visit to the city, in reality a thinly-veiled operation to "win or force the loyalties of his subordinate generals and officers in the port city to pave the way for the re-election of President Syngman Rhee." Park arranged a dinner party for Song, the man's entourage, and the press, at a Japanese-style restaurant downtown. During the dinner, the election rigging operation was discussed, referred to as "the great event." Kim Chong-Shin recalled that "[i]t was at the mention of 'the great event' that I overheard General Park blurt out: 'You Rascal!' What an unexpected thing to hear from a man like him."¹⁰⁵ Song returned to Busan five days before the election to push what Kim referred to as "Operation Pigeon," a CIC [Counter-Intelligence Command] plan "designed to insure 90 percent of the military votes for the pro-government candidates."¹⁰⁶ Park "refused to cooperate" with the plans, but besides arguing with some other officers about it and refusing to actively encourage his own subordinates to get

¹⁰³ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Planning a 'Revolution' in Only 90 Days," Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 4, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 11, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Chun and Kang, "Election Fixing Provoked 'Revolution.'"

¹⁰⁵ Kim, Chong-Shin, *Seven Years with Korea's Park Chung Hee* (Seoul: HollyM Corporation, 1967):21-25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

involved, Park did nothing in direct opposition.¹⁰⁷ But his stubborn refusal to participate in the military leadership's plans ended up making Park an enemy of Song and other senior officers. It is in this context of professional animosity that Park eventually sent the letter to Song.

The Rhee regime was replaced with a new form of parliamentary government that weakened the power of the president and established a prime minister as the dominant executive. The man elected to be prime minister was Chang Myon. In *Our Nation's Path*, Park recalls that there was a wait-and-see approach amongst some of his peers to this new government. He wrote that “sensible young officers had hoped, after the Student Revolution of April 1960, that a competent government would be established and democracy in Korea would be genuinely reconstructed.”¹⁰⁸ Park suggested that “immediately following the April Revolution, the Democrats [Chang's party] should have launched a new life movement on a national scale and should have wiped out corruption and old evils.”¹⁰⁹ But Park did not think the Chang government succeeded at this in the least bit. He suggested,

On the contrary, however, the Party disengaged itself from the people and stood isolated from the very moment of its assumption of power. Some Democrats themselves had been part of the former rotten ruling class—pre-modern relics

¹⁰⁷ Kim Chong-Shin had a relatively close relationship with Park, following the man's career in Busan and being present in official capacity during many incidents. Kim describes an argument he witnessed between Park and a certain Colonel P as follows: “General Park lifted his face resolutely to the insolent colonel. ‘Don't ask me anymore,’ he said. ‘How on earth can I do such a thing? It is my duty to tell my officers and men to do the right things. Then how should I encourage them to be involved in the rigged election?’ Then he looked straight into the eyes of the colonel. Colonel P straightened his position to attention, perhaps because he was intimidated by the stern gaze of General Park. ‘What is the use of holding the election? I don't care whatever you do about it!’ The general's voice became even colder and graver. It was not loud, but it was fierce enough, I thought, to crush even a rock. General Park's gaze remained for a moment on the colonel's face. Then suddenly he went to his table to grasp a bundle of ballot papers. He tore them into pieces and threw them into the oil stove” (Kim, 29).

¹⁰⁸ Park, Chung Hee, *Our Nation's Path* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing Company, 1964): 197.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

drunk with idleness and surfeited with ill-gotten gains. Blinded by the minor politics of begging and buying votes, they were too stupid and indifferent to understand the pressing need to enlighten the people and open a nation-wide movement to reconstruct society . . . It was impossible for us to tolerate the Democrats' prolongation of the Liberals' [Rhee's party] corruption. A brief alteration of the façade of democracy was preferable to the total demolition of the shattered framework of democracy itself.¹¹⁰

Even before the end of the Rhee regime, Park and his peers had become discontent. The lack of results from the Chang regime seems to have pushed them over the edge.

From its beginning, the Chang government was plagued with problems. As noted in a United States Special National Intelligence Estimate, Chang became Prime Minister “only after Kim To-Yon (Gim Do-Yeon), a fellow Democrat, had been nominated but rejected by a very narrow margin. The faction led by Kim finally broke away completely, formed the New Democratic Party, and [was] the major opposition.”¹¹¹ Additionally, there were splits in Chang's own party, as a significant group of “25-30 younger men” believed “Chang's leadership [was] not sufficiently imaginative or vigorous.”¹¹² This seemed to be, for Park, evidence of the same kind of factionalism he saw as the bane to Korean democracy in the past.

In addition to factionalism, the same document noted that “police terrorism and press censorship have been eliminated, but little real progress has been made in the past year on the basic social and economic problems with confront the ROK government and people.”¹¹³ The report also noted “the opposition in Parliament is backed by a substantial segment of the press which has taken advantage of the new freedom from censorship to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 195, 197.

¹¹¹ “Special National Intelligence Estimate,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 206, March 21, 1961.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

indulge in generally antigovernment, often irresponsible journalism.”¹¹⁴ Factionalism, lack of economic progress, irresponsible journalism—these were all fundamental problems in Park’s eyes, at least according to his writings.

A report by Hugh D. Farley of the International Cooperation Administration went even further. Farley suggested that “the whole fabric of Korean life was shot through with graft, corruption and fraud” in part because of an “absence of a U.S. posture on integrity.” He suggested that the “economic and social phase of the April 1960 unfinished revolution [was] still to be initiated [and that] the Government [was] increasingly powerless to take the necessary actions because of its involvement in corruption.” Ultimately, he prophesized “an explosion of popular discontent on April 19,” which would be the first anniversary of the movement that toppled Rhee.¹¹⁵ In a telegram to the Embassy in Korea, the U.S. Department of State was of the opinion that it was “very dubious” for Korea to remain free

so long as ROK lacks forceful leadership, exhibits serious weakness in moral fiber, and permits graft and corruption on a scale equaling if not excelling that during the moral nadir of Rhee regime. Evidence is clear that youth and intelligentsia [of] most Asian countries are in no mood in [the] latter 20th Century to continue stomaching “typically Asian” accommodation to graft, nepotism and apathy of past centuries; and history has shown that they are more ready to accept the high costs in human values exacted by Communism (even when these are understood fully, and all the more when they are not) than we tend to find credible before the fact. When sufficiently revolted by apathetic drifting and by illegal gains for the elite, the totalitarian aspects of Communism appear less fearsome and its austerity and determined purposes may become positively attractive, in the hunger for national material progress leading, they hope, to national dignity at last.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Report by Hugh D. Farley of the International Cooperation Administration to the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 202, March 06, 1961.

¹¹⁶ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 207, April 1, 1961.

In the months leading up to the coup, some elements in the U.S. Government, including the CIA and State Department, seemed to have seen it coming. They saw the public discontent with the corrupt government, and they saw a reality where people were willing to accept totalitarianism as a means to national development. Indeed, democracy was not an ingrained, essential institution in this or many other countries recovering from colonialism.

It was in this context that Park and his peers began considering what they called a “revolution.” The common scholarship has Park leading a coalition as early as the final months of 1960. The best model of this argument is in Yong-Sup Han’s essay. Han has so far provided the most detailed narrative of the lead-up and execution of the coup in the English literature. However, Han’s account seems to make many unsupported assumptions and is severely lacking in evidence, with almost no references to the primary record. Regarding the pre-coup timeline, Han suggests,

From November 1960 until May 1961, Park focused on persuading more generals in command of combat and noncombat troops on the front lines with North Korea as well as in the rear area to join the coup coalition. . . . With the goal of preventing a crackdown on the organization of the coup, which by then had become an open secret, Park tried to persuade officers at the Counter-Intelligence Command to sign on. To equip his coup coalition with guns and tanks, Park also tried to win over the army's Ninth Division, the major armored division located in the vicinity of Seoul. Both efforts failed, however. But to the relief of the coup makers, neither the Counter-Intelligence Command nor the Ninth Division reported the conspiracy to higher authorities. Toward the end of 1960, Park began other talks parallel to the ongoing meetings with the core group, in order to broaden his support base among younger officers. He purposely put himself in the position of coordinating activities of the different segments of the coalition. The participants communicated and coordinated only through Park, making him the de facto leader. The loose network gave Park freedom to maneuver and flexibility to adjust swiftly to changes in the political environment. Once the coup succeeded in May 1961, the same structure—with a built-in system of checks and balances among the mid-ranking core members and between the colonels and the generals and with the hub occupied by Park—would be of great assistance to Park in

consolidating power around him.¹¹⁷

None of the above passage is supported by any evidence or citation, nor does the author cite primary sources for any of the other claims made in the surrounding pages. It is therefore not clear how Han knows exactly what Park “focused on”, what his “goal” was in his supposed recruitment drives, or what actions he “purposefully” took in such cases. It is not clear where this narrative is ultimately derived from.

Moreover, this narrative runs contrary to common sense in several places. Why wouldn't the CIC report Park's coup plans at this point? They did, in fact, report him in response to a later leak. The Korean military at the time was quite competitive and even predatory. It is hard to accept without evidence that other officers would not use this information to their advantage by knocking Park down to raise themselves up. Indeed, by mid-1960 Park had made enemies of several senior generals. And how would Park know what sort of post-coup command and control structure he would need if he had no prior experience in politics or revolution? The assumptions made here appear to have been extrapolated retroactively from details of Park's later leadership as evidence of his skill at setting up the junta, his first major political act. Supporting evidence is quite dangerously lacking. In another section Han goes so far as to argue that the planning, with Park in the lead, started as early as May of 1960.¹¹⁸ All of this contradicts Kim Jong-Pil's recent statements, which are supported by evidence in the primary record. The copious evidence of Park's unimpressive background and lack of clear power during in the early days of the junta calls Han's account into question.

¹¹⁷ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Kindle Location 632-641.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Locations 604-605.— For this Han cites a 1991 book by Kang Chang-Song, but provides no primary support.

According to Kim Jong-Pil, in May of 1960 Park was still working within the system to attack corruption, which was when he sent the letter to Chief of Staff Song asking for the man's resignation.¹¹⁹ Kim claims that in 1960 Park was still focused on reformation of the military and was waiting to see "who would be appointed by the Chang Myon administration to take the military's highest position."¹²⁰ He had a conversation with Park on June 9th to discuss this issue in which he claims to have whispered to Park, "If we can't make that happen, then we should resort to revolution."¹²¹ This corroborates the wait-and-see attitude Park mentioned in his own writing. If the military appointments mentioned by Kim didn't come until after that conversation with Park, and if we take his narrative as genuine, planning could not have begun in May 1960.

Yong-Sup Han's timeline, based primarily on Cho Gap-Je's biography of Park and representative of the conventional narrative, seems to be incorrect, whereas the timeline described by Kim Jong-Pil seems to be much more accurate. In an environment where each military officer or government official was leveraging every corrupt advantage to get ahead, a secret as significant as coup plans could not have been concealed for long. "It was on April 7, 1961," remembers Kim, "that Park appeared before the officers and declared that he would lead the coup."¹²² This is contrary to Han's narrative, which has Park himself leading secret meetings with officers, many months in advance of the coup. Han even references Cho Gap-Je's account to suggest that "Park may have thought of the coup when he was under General Yi Yong-Mun as early as

¹¹⁹ Chun and Kang, "Election Fixing Provoked 'Revolution.'"

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Plans for Revolution Take Place Quietly," Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 6, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 16, 2015.

1952.”¹²³ This is exceedingly unlikely. The Korean War was still being fought, so Park would not have contemplated a coup at the time. Not only was his military career set on a fast track because of the war, but the conditions of post-war corruption and economic failure that motivated the coup were absent.

Citing the same source, Han also suggests “[w]hen Park Chung-Hee was assigned to the post of commander of logistics in [B]usan, he discussed the coup with his colleagues . . . after observing the government’s illegal election campaign on March 15, 1960.”¹²⁴ This is also unlikely given that Park’s reluctance to endorse the military leadership’s rigging of the election had made him several high-ranking enemies; enemies that were not only monitoring him, but looking for any way to take him down. Kim Chong-Shin noted,

The military leaders of the interim government employed every imaginable means to win General Park’s loyalty, with only frustrating results. They met almost every day to find an effective solution to the ticklish problem, yet they could neither leave the question unanswered nor invent a plausible excuse to downgrade the general. Their final conclusion was to bury him in obscurity step by step.¹²⁵

It is evident from the many conflicts with the primary record that a serious analysis of Cho Gap-Je’s work, his sources, and evidence is needed, although that lies beyond the scope of this paper. Regardless, basing one’s arguments solely on such a seemingly flawed secondary source is risky. These arguments for an extended coup planning timeline don’t seem to fit the available primary evidence.

Kim Jong-Pil’s new account aligns better with the primary record. The CIA had detected the plan in April and even the ROK military and government were aware of it.

¹²³*The Park Chung Hee Era*, Chapter 2, Endnote 7

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Endnote 8.

¹²⁵ Kim, Chong Shin, 81.

Various CIA reports from April 1961 noted details of the plan:

One of two existing coups to overthrow ROK Government is led by Major General [Park Chung-Hee], Deputy Commanding General, Second ROK Army. . . . Plans discussed throughout ROK Army down to and including division commanders. . . . on possibility of a military coup. Definite threat exists The plot is supported by ROK Army, student groups and reformists. Leader believed to be General [Park Chung-Hee], . . . Chang [Do-Young, Army Chief of Staff] desires arrest [Park Chung-Hee] but has lack of evidence. Believes arrest might trigger coup. . . .ROK Army CIC is investigating the coup. . . . had one-hour meeting with ROK Army Chief of Staff Chang Do-Young on 24 April . . . Chang mentioned that [Park] had talked to him one week earlier. Chang states that he believes no action imminent. . . . Prime Minister Chang Myon is aware of rumors circulating to the effect that a group of malcontents within the Army may be plotting some kind of coup. He attaches little importance to these stories and believes that the situation is by no means dangerous.¹²⁶

The CIA's report not only fits the leaky political climate of the time, but also aligns with Kim Jong-Pil's recollections. Kim stated that on April 10 he handed documents containing the coup plan to Park Chung-Hee, and the latter decided to show them to then Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Chang Do-Young. Kim resisted the idea but noted

Park had deep trust in Chang after years of friendship. . . . It was Chang who reinstated Park as a major in 1950 and helped Park have a smooth ride in his military career. . . . In my judgment, it wasn't clear whether Chang would stand with us. He could simply turn our plans over to the authority and get us all busted. . . . That day, Park visited Chang and gave him the plan.¹²⁷

This aligns with the time given for the meeting between Chang and Park in the CIA reports. Kim's suspicion of Chang proved accurate, since Chang was not only motivated to arrest Park, but also openly opposed the coup at its onset, requesting military aid from

¹²⁶ Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Dulles to President Kennedy," FRUS Vol. 22, Document 217, May 16, 1961

¹²⁷ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "The Promise that Park Didn't Keep," Kim Jong-Pil Remembers Vol. 9, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 24, 2015.

General Magruder and the UN Command to put it down.¹²⁸ Chang may have even ordered his men to fire on Park specifically.¹²⁹

In fact, Park was quite open about his plans. Not only did he talk to Chang Do-Young about it, he revealed it to several others. Kim Chong-Shin notes that a week before the coup, Park talked to Hwang Yong-Ju, who was then the Editor-in-Chief of the *Busan Ilbo*. Park was looking for people to provide operational funds, and sought the advice of Hwang, his old classmate. The pair then revealed the plan to a flour mill owner, who offered financial backing for the plan. According to Kim, the plan was then leaked to Prime Minister Chang Myon by an unidentified person. Chang ordered his Prosecutor General to execute an arrest on the day before the coup.¹³⁰

This wasn't even first time that someone involved in the coup plan had revealed the plot. Kim Jong-Pil recalled that in late April or early May another leak "was made inadvertently by Col. Lee Jong-Tae, who was part of our group, when he spilled some details of the plan on a bus to a military officer sitting next to him in a bid to win him over. The officer tipped off the top chain of command."¹³¹ Park and his peers proved time and again to be blatantly ignorant of what we would today call operational security.¹³² Park also proved at times to be a poor judge of whom he could trust and how wide he

¹²⁸ "Telegram from the Commander in Chief, US Forces Korea (Macgruder) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff," FRUS Vol. 22, Document 213, May 16, 1961

¹²⁹ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "The Night the Coup Began and Park Got Shot At," Kim Jong-Pil Remembers Vol. 10, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 26, 2015.

¹³⁰ Kim, Chong-Shin, 95-98.

¹³¹ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Complacent Top Brass Allowed Coup to Proceed," Kim Jong-Pil Remembers Vol. 8, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 20, 2015.

¹³² Kim Chong-Shin recalled "I often saw [Park] approve military recommendations or hear classified reports from his staff officers. On many of these occasions I suggested that I should leave, but he would usually insist on my company" (p. 18). It is hard to fathom how a reporter could ever have been allowed into classified meetings, especially in a country with deadly-serious security issues like the ROK at the time. No modern, well-trained military would ever allow such a breach of operational security.

could safely spread his plans. It was perhaps only for Chang Do-Young's complacency that the coup ever came to pass. It is difficult to imagine that any plot could have been kept secret for a year in such an environment, as the conventional narrative argues.¹³³

Kim Jong-Pil's new account simply seems more plausible.

All of this significantly differs from the common view; one that credits Park with planning and leading the coup as far as a year in advance, using his name and powers of manipulation to draft fellow officers directly into the fold. In fact, Kim Jong-Pil suggests that he did most of the recruiting, particularly among the younger colonels. More strikingly, Kim also suggests that it was he who approached Park with the final decision to start; Kim was the initiator, not Park.¹³⁴ At any rate, it is clear that the both the CIA and ROK Army knew about Park's coup plans almost a month before they were initiated.¹³⁵ The coup plan had gained much momentum in the month prior to its execution. Part of this could be due to two failed launches that occurred around this time. According to Kim, the first plan was to launch the coup on April 19th, the anniversary of the Student Revolution, using the expected mass protests as a smokescreen. Unfortunately, there was little protest action on that day. The second plan was to begin on May 12th, but was cancelled when the plan was leaked to ROK Army command. Kim noted that both of these failures "turned out to help us come to a better plan."¹³⁶ And so, with two false starts the stage was set for the now well-telegraphed coup.

¹³³ As a prime example of how wide-spread and dominant this particular aspect of the narrative is, the entry for "Military Revolution of 16 May 1961" in James E. Hoare's *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Korea* states "As early as February 1960, young army officers under the leadership of Major General Park Chung-Hee, then logistic base commander in Pusan, formulated a plan to carry out a coup d'état against the government of President Rhee Syngman" (324).

¹³⁴ Chun and Kang, "Planning a 'Revolution' in Only 90 Days"

¹³⁵ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 217.

¹³⁶ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Complacent Top Brass Allowed Coup to Proceed," Kim Jong-Pil Remembers Vol. 8, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 20, 2015.

Execution of the Coup and the Immediate Aftermath

According to the new interviews with Kim Jong-Pil, he and Park left the latter's house at around 11:30 p.m. on the 15th of May in order to commence their operation. Not only had the coup plan been leaked twice before, but it had gotten out again that very night. Two counterintelligence jeeps were following Park, due to a leak from the 30th Reserve Division, the result of a small power struggle amongst coup supporters. The information passed from the division commander Lee Sang-Guk to Army Chief of Staff Chang Do-Young. Chang promptly ordered Park's arrest. Thus the stage was set; it was impossible to delay again.¹³⁷

At around 3 a.m., 40 trucks carrying men from the ROK Sixth Artillery Corps approached Changgyeong Palace in Seoul. These trucks would have had to pass U.S. Military checkpoints on their way into the city, and seemingly did so without incident. The ROK Marine 1st Brigade was not as lucky. The progress of the 1,500 marines was briefly interrupted when they were stopped by Korean military police on the Han River Bridge. There was a brief exchange of fire between the two groups, but the sizable marine force "easily outnumbered them and broke through the defense line on the bridge."¹³⁸ Simultaneously, forces from the 6th Artillery Corps surrounded ROK Army Headquarters, with Chief of Staff Chang Do-Young still inside, and the captured KBS radio station to begin broadcasting the news of the coup. The purpose of these actions seems to have been to coerce Chang into joining the coup, after it had already started. At 9 a.m., the coup makers broadcasted a martial law decree from the KBS station in the

¹³⁷ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "The Night the Coup Began and Park Got Shot At."

¹³⁸ Ibid.

name of General Chang, even though he had yet to agree to join the coup. Chang refused to make the decision without first consulting President Yun Bo-Sun.¹³⁹ The president, for his part, told General Chang that “he [did] not desire any firm action to eliminate the revolutionary movement.”¹⁴⁰ This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that Yun was a rival of ruling Prime Minister Chang Myon. Around this time Yun stated that “Chang Myon had proven incapable of providing” the strong leadership needed in the ROK.¹⁴¹ Likewise, the Minister of National Defense said “he [did] not desire that FROKA [First ROK Army] troops be used to put down the revolutionary movement.”¹⁴²

So it was with relative ease that the coup makers moved into power. On the day of the coup, they issued several decrees which had restrictive effects including “ordering martial law throughout the ROK, night curfew, full censorship, restricted use of airports and seaports, ban on travel out of Korea by Koreans, ban on public meetings, dissolution of the National Assembly and local councils, arrest of Cabinet Ministers and Vice Ministers, [and] freezing of all banking activities.”¹⁴³ Many of these restrictions were eased in the days and weeks to follow, but not entirely. The group also broadcasted their political pledges, which included anti-Communism first and foremost, which may have been more of a political necessity to ensure continued U.S. support and to distance the group from rumors of Park Chung-Hee’s past than anything else. The other pledges included adherence to the United Nations Charter, eliminating corruption, improving the

¹³⁹ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “Coup Pivots on a Tense Standoff at Military HQ,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 11, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 27, 2015 and “Telegram from the Department of State to Secretary of State Rusk at Geneva,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 215, May 16, 1961

¹⁴⁰ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 213

¹⁴¹ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 215.

¹⁴² FRUS Vol. 22, Document 213.

¹⁴³ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 215.

livelihood of the poor and starving, and improving military effectiveness.¹⁴⁴

A military government was formally constituted on May 21st with General Chang Do-Young at its head and Yun Po-Sun returning as President.¹⁴⁵ It had not been immediately clear whether Yun would return to his post as president. Both Yun and General Chang reacted lightly to the coup makers taking power. Yun had originally resigned in response to the coup, but not in an oppositional way. During his resignation announcement, Yun said “I believe members of the military junta will make every possible effort with faith and loyalty to the nation in the interest of developing the country and to save the people from poverty and misery.”¹⁴⁶ For the U.S. Government, Yun’s return was critical to “confer on the successor government to maximum attainable extent and aura of legality, continuity and legitimate constitutional succession.”¹⁴⁷ This was important for preserving the ROK’s “diplomatic relations with the United States and other countries.”¹⁴⁸ It is significant that the U.S. Government quickly shifted its stance from demanding the reinstatement of the entire former government to merely having the Korean president, the weaker of the two ROK executives, stay on for the sake of formalities. The strong response from Magruder and the Embassy was never fully embraced by the State Department, but neither was the coup. In the end, neither Chang nor Yun held any significant power in the junta, the latter a mere figurehead and the former over-powered by rival factions. As early as May 24th, the U.S. Embassy was

¹⁴⁴ “Letter, Channing Liem to Dag Hammarskjold Containing Letter from Do Young Chang,” May 19, 1961. Accessed at Wilson Center Digital Archive, and Kalb, Bernard. “Korea President Returns to Post; Cabinet Sworn In,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 1961.

¹⁴⁵ Kalb, “Korea President Returns”

¹⁴⁶ Balb, Bernard, “Ousted Ministers Jailed in Korea; President Quits,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 1961.

¹⁴⁷ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 219, May 17, 1961.

¹⁴⁸ Kalb, “Korea President Returns”.

“more convinced than ever that President Yun Po-Sun was able to exercise little influence and almost no authority.”¹⁴⁹ Chang was also removed from his position in the junta in little more than a month, pushing Park Chung-Hee to the top.

The U.S. assessment of the junta, as described by Robert H. Johnson of the National Security Council in June, was that “[i]n the case of the old Chang Myon regime we were more confident about its good intentions than about its political capabilities. In the case of the new military regime we are somewhat more confident about capabilities, at least to initiate reform measures, and less confident of intentions.” More specifically, Johnson suggested that “we are faced by a tough, authoritarian, nationalistic regime which may be capable of overriding the political obstacles to action on Korean problems, but which is inexperienced, likely to be plagued by continual factionalism, and clearly less amenable to U.S. influence.”¹⁵⁰

The junta acted quickly in exercising its power. Following the emergency decrees on the day of the coup, the junta ordered the arrests of former military and government officials throughout the last weeks of May, to include “930 alleged Communists and 2,500 ‘hoodlums.’” They also imposed strict censorship on the press and banned political activities.¹⁵¹ The junta also passed an order that people had to work weekends and holidays while martial law was in effect.¹⁵² In the first courts-martial imposed by the junta, “jail terms of up to one year for forty-seven men and women accused of having

¹⁴⁹ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 222, May 24, 1961.

¹⁵⁰ “Memorandum by Robert H. Johnson of the National Security Council Staff,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 225, June 6, 1961.

¹⁵¹ Balb, “Ousted Ministers Jailed.”

¹⁵² Balb, “Korea President Returns.”

danced in an unlicensed dance hall” were imposed.¹⁵³ In spite of such measures, there was little reaction on the street as “the people of the capital went calmly about their business.”¹⁵⁴ In later months the restrictions were refined and codified, such as a security law which targeted Communist sympathizers and people who traveled to North Korea. These laws were passed in conjunction with the arrest of former Prime Minister Chang Myon for alleged Communist collaboration. Somewhat ironically, “the Communist sympathizers law was almost identical with measures that Dr. Chang [Chang Myon] supported while he was Premier but the National Assembly failed to approve after strong opposition from students.”¹⁵⁵

But not all the policies of the junta were restrictive. Just days after coming to power, “the junta earmarked for relief more than \$1,500,000 that was to have been used for expenses of the now-dissolved National Assembly” to distribute to the poor.¹⁵⁶ The junta also “appointed seventy-two college professors to five advisory committees.”¹⁵⁷ Goodwill missions were dispatched as early as June 23rd to the Americas, South East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.¹⁵⁸ In July, the junta set a limit of 0.2 percent on “the number of military officers permitted to serve in government posts.”¹⁵⁹ In the same month the junta released 1,217 of 3,098 persons arrested as Communist supporters, four of six arrested journalists, and announced a pledge to return to civilian rule. The plan was announced in detail on August 12th, “promising general elections in May of 1963, and a

¹⁵³ Balb, Bernard, “Junta Persists in Defying UN Command in Korea,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1961.

¹⁵⁴ Balb, “Ousted Ministers Jailed.”

¹⁵⁵ “Korea Junta Says Deposed Premier Aided Communists,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 1961.

¹⁵⁶ Balb, “Korea President Returns.”

¹⁵⁷ Balb, Junta Persists in Defying.”

¹⁵⁸ “Telegram from Embassy in Korea to Embassy in Tokyo, Reference: Embassy Telegram 1853,” June 22, 1961,

¹⁵⁹ Blab, Bernard, “Gen. Chang Quits Top Korea Posts; Pak Heads Junta,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1961.

return to civilian government that summer.” Park Chung-Hee, at that time chairman of the junta, said that “two years was the minimum time needed to carry out the pledges announced by the army when it seized power in its coup last May 16.”¹⁶⁰

Early assessment of the junta was that “it consist[ed] of a good proportion of honest and dedicated men” who believed that “to survive, South Korea now need[ed] a period of authoritarian control.” These men were devoted “for the most part, but they [were] not above the struggle for power.” Compared to the Rhee regime in certain lights, and to Communist regimes in other countries, “the authoritarianism of the junta [was] fairly relaxed.”¹⁶¹ Additionally, it was noted with the Korean junta “there [was] no ‘personality cult’, no great propaganda hoopla” and they were “not bound to a dogma.” But authoritarianism had its limits as “the junta system of government [was] cumbersome: too many officers have too many fingers in too many pies.”¹⁶² In short, outsiders, Americans in particular, were unsure of the junta but not completely put off, despite the authoritarian measures it imposed.

The junta missed its self-proposed deadline for civilian elections. This was the result of many factors, including factionalism within the ruling collective and their political party, as well as demands from the military to extend military rule. The presidential election was held on October 15, 1963, and the results did not favor the junta. Park only managed to secure 47 percent of the vote compared to 45 per cent for his new political rival, Yun Po-Sun. At first glance it seems support for the junta, in the form of its political party, may have weakened substantially. Writing at the time, C.I. Eugene

¹⁶⁰ “Seoul Civil Rule is Set for 1963,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 1961.

¹⁶¹ Rosenthal, A.M., “Again Korea is Being Tested,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1961.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Kim suggested, “The junta's popularity had steadily declined, primarily because of the failure of the financial reform program, its inability to cope with the worsening economic situation, and the termination of a short-lived honeymoon between the military and the intellectuals.”¹⁶³

However, it may be more likely that the dissatisfaction in early 1963 was with Park himself, who was seen as not providing the strong and clear leadership he we now associate with him. C.I.E. Kim argued after the official launch of the junta’s new political party, the Democratic Republican Party, that “[a] serious power struggle ensued within the junta itself. During this crisis, General Park demonstrated a tendency towards vacillation which often irritated even his supporters.”¹⁶⁴ Further evidence supporting such a conclusion was that in the elections for the national assembly that followed, Park’s party won 110 seats, of a total 175, in the National Assembly.¹⁶⁵ If the vote was clean, which it seems to have been, at least in comparison to previous elections, then the party representing the junta appears to have had much more general support than Park himself. But regardless, Park ended up as president and stayed there for eighteen more years.

¹⁶³ Kim, C.I. Eugene, “Significance of the 1963 Korean Elections,” *Asian Survey* 4, No. 3 (March 1964): 765.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 766.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 769.

CHAPTER IV

KEY QUESTIONS REGARDING PARK'S POWER AND AGENCY

It is largely for granted that Park Chung-Hee was ultimately responsible for planning and executing the coup, for developing and leading the military junta that followed, and for directly acting to keep himself in power.¹⁶⁶ Park is the sole powerholder, his invisible hand ultimately controlling everything. Such a view is probably too simple to be accurate, particularly in reference to the coup and junta period. It seems instead that Park's power and control increased over time, particularly after he was elected president. During the coup and junta period, power was very much in flux. There is evidence that suggests that Park may have not been behind most of the major moves during this period. This chapter will examine the limits of Park's power during the junta period and confront the "absolute power" narrative by examining four key questions: 1) Is Park's pre-junta biography consistent with the idea of him as an independent and dominating leader? 2) Was Park the main architect of the coup? 3) What were the limits of Park's power and influence during the junta period? 4) Did Park plan to stay in power

¹⁶⁶ There are times when scholars hint at some sort of outside agency, for example when Eun-Mee Kim (Gim Eun-Mi) and Gil-Sung Park (Pak Gil-Seong) suggest, "Many of the innovative ideas that later became his trademark were of chaebol origin" (*The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 3883-3885). Though Kim and Park do break with convention by arguing "Even during Park's rule, [the chaebol's] relationship with the state was more complex than those images of unidirectional power flow that the proponents of Korea, Inc., and crony capitalism portray," their argument never substantially moves away from the Park-chaebol binary. Park is still the primary agent in their account.

after the junta period?

Is Park's pre-junta biography consistent with the idea of him as an independent and dominating leader?

A critical new piece of scholarship, released in recent years, casts doubt on the premise that Park was always an assertive leader and that his success was the result primarily of his own skill and willpower. In 2012, Chong-Sik Lee published a new biography of Park that focuses on his life before the coup. Lee supports his work with substantial primary and secondary evidence and shows, perhaps inadvertently, that there were several periods where Park's path in life and success were influenced by others.

Park's views of Korean history and politics were influenced, at least in part, from his father. According to Lee, Park's father "may have been a *yangban* (Korean aristocratic class), but he was marginalized, frustrated, and indignant at the corruption and injustice that surrounded him."¹⁶⁷ Park's father was involved in the failed *Tonghak* Rebellion and was arrested. Lee notes that though Park's grandfather had inherited enough land to care for his family, his father's failure to find a place in *Joseon* society, due to rampant factionalism and corruption, and the man's failed political actions, brought the family into poverty.¹⁶⁸ He also states that "Park Chung-Hee once said that poverty was both his teacher and his benefactor."¹⁶⁹ It should be noted that Park's later political trajectory mirrored his father's—being "marginalized" in the Army, "frustrated" by corruption, and ultimately resolved towards revolution. It is also not a coincidence that

¹⁶⁷ Lee, Chong-sik, *Park Chung-Hee: From Poverty to Power [Kindle Edition]* (Palos Verdes: The KHU Press, 2012): Kindle Locations 385-386.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 223-249.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Location 223.

Park prioritized fighting poverty as the key to his revolution.

Despite coming from an impoverished background, with no guarantee to receive formal schooling, Park graduated from Kumi Elementary at the top of his class and “enrolled as fifty-first among the 1,070 applicants” to Taegu Normal School, which trained elementary school teachers.¹⁷⁰ However, unlike his success at elementary school, Park’s performance at Taegu Normal School got progressively worse over the years. Lee attributes this to his family’s poverty; these issues included not having money to pay for food to share with classmates according to custom, to pay for field trips, or even to pay for the train to go to school. Lee notes that “Park Chung-Hee’s class ranking at Taegu Normal School being sixty-nine out of seventy, it was unlikely that the authorities would assign him [as a teacher] to a top elementary school. He was lucky that he got a teaching post at all.”¹⁷¹ At this point, Park’s success was out of largely out his hands and was left up to the authorities over him. He certainly did not demonstrate the knack for overcoming difficulties he is now known for.

It was likewise through the aid of others that Park was able to enroll at the Manchukuo Military Academy and begin his military career. At first his application was rejected because he was three years past the maximum age. Yet some outside influence forced the academy to change its mind and accept Park. Lee attributes this to a recommendation from Lieutenant Colonel Arikawa Kazuichi, who was “the officer in charge of military education at [Taegu Normal School].” Lee notes that the two had “developed a close relationship” while Park was at the school.¹⁷² Lee’s argument for

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Location 1040.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Locations 1299-1301.

¹⁷² Ibid., Locations 976-978.

Arikawa's involvement is well evidenced and sound.

One of the biggest issues in Park's past that influenced not only his own political career, but also the later scholarship on Park, was his supposed Communist ties in the late 1940s. Much of the scholarship still describes Park as a faithful and active Communist during this period. It is well known that Park joined the South Korean Workers Party after the death of his brother Sang-Hee (Sang-Hui), who was killed while leading a protest. However, Lee notes that "All accounts suggest that a Reverend Yi Chae-Bok (I Chae-Bok), a friend of Park Sang-Hee, persuaded Park Chung-Hee to join the *Namnodang*, the South Korean Workers' Party."¹⁷³ Certainly, Park was the one who made the decision to join the *Namnodang*, but without the active recruitment of Yi, Park likely would not have joined. This seems to be a common occurrence in Park's career, that his progression was as much the result of other people's recruitment, as of his own determination. Lee suggests,

It was *Namnodang's* resistance against American forces and its call for progressive reforms that Park found attractive, rather than its underlying ideology. It is also likely that Park Chung-Hee treated the matter of joining *Namnodang* akin to his brother's joining the People's Party. Yi Chae-Bok could very well have presented *Namnodang* as a successor to the People's Party, so that Park would essentially be following in his brother's footsteps. *Namnodang* did not exist while Park Sang-Hee was alive; it came into being twelve days after he was killed. I am inclined to believe Park Chung-Hee consented to become a *Namnodang* member without attaching much importance to what Yi Chae-Bok so eagerly sought.¹⁷⁴

Lee argues that Park was not emotionally or personally attached to the Worker Party's ideology, but rather allied with them based on vague common ideals and the legacy of his brother. And such detachment is evidenced by how easily Park informed on party

¹⁷³ Ibid., 3391-3392.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Locations 3465-3471.

members when he was arrested by the Army. During an investigation into Worker Party members within the ROK Army, Park “provided the investigators with a detailed list of *Namnodang* members among army officers” in order to secure his own pardon.¹⁷⁵

Likewise, Park’s recovery from this potentially career ending event and his further rise in the Army mostly out of his direct control. If not for the Korean War and the severe lack of good officers, Park may have never made it back into the army.¹⁷⁶ It was then Colonel Chang Do-Young who “restored Park Chung-Hee to the army.”¹⁷⁷ Moreover, Lee notes that “General James A. Van Fleet’s program to strengthen the ROK army’s combat effectiveness also contributed to Park’s promotion” as did the glowing evaluation of General Cornelius Ryan, allowing Park to receive extra officer training in the United States.

Despite a history of relying on the thrust others for his advancement, such possibilities are rarely considered after Park begins his coup. Even Lee Chong-Sik falls into this rut of suggesting that Park was solely in control during his rise to power, suggesting he manipulated Chang Do-Young and influenced Yun Po-Sun to remain as president with the junta.¹⁷⁸ It seems just as possible that Park’s rise to power was the result of the influence and agency of others pushing him up, as was often the case in Park’s past.

Even after Park became a general in the Korean Army, he was more reserved and

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 3795.

¹⁷⁶ Regarding the war’s effect on Park’s career, Yong-Sup Han argued “Once returned to the military, Park-like many others in his age group-was rapidly promoted up the ranks from major to colonel in the spring of 1951. . . . Park’s career was also helped by the shortage of qualified officers in the South Korean army, which went through a massive organizational expansion during the war. After he became brigadier general [in 1953 during the war] his promotions slowed” (*The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 502-506).

¹⁷⁷ Lee, Chong-sik, locations 4112-4114. – For further details of how Chang recruited Park, see Bong Lee, *The Unfinished War*, pg. 78.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Locations 4385-4386 and 4456.

apolitical than many of his peers. And despite coming into ideological conflict with his peers at times, his reactions were far from radical. A good example was Park's response to the protests in Busan when he was martial law commander, during the student movement of 1960. Kim Chong-Shin wrote,

The demonstrations on April 19 were so well-organized and massive that even the well-trained police and political hoodlums of the Liberal regime proved helpless. The only resort left for them was to proclaim nation-wide martial law that very afternoon. Army Chief of Staff Song Yo-Chan was appointed Commanding General of the Forces Enforcing the Martial Law, while General Park was assigned as local chief of the Enforcement Headquarters in the Busan area. But this turned out to be a fatal mistake by the government and Army leaders in the capital, who probably counted on General Park's outspoken honesty and patriotism to carry out their wishes: indiscriminate suppression of demonstrators, students or adult citizens. General Park had no intention whatsoever to cooperate with the corrupt government leaders. Instead he believed that it was not right for him to suppress the "justifiable grievances" of the honest students and citizens. Following the proclamation of martial law, he secluded himself in the Headquarters of the Logistics Command and remained silent.¹⁷⁹

Throughout the book, Kim does not hide his conservative political views. Even so, what is important here is not the accusation of corruption, but rather Park's response to his orders. Park clearly disagreed with what his superiors demanded, and he even acted disobediently. Park shared the opinions of the demonstrators. In fact, in a more overt act days later, Park addressed a group of protesters by standing on the hood of a jeep and saying "I can assure you that the officers and men, including myself, who have assembled here are on your side."¹⁸⁰ Even so, his immediate reaction to his orders was to seclude himself, and even when he took action it was limited to his immediate sphere of influence and did not do anything significant to affect the problem as a whole. He also didn't make any direct insubordinate moves against his superiors like Kim Jong-Pil did on several

¹⁷⁹ Kim, 35-36.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 37.

occasions.

The point here is not to suggest that Park had no ambition, indeed he did. What is important is that he was not as successful as seems to be assumed. Park is commonly painted as a masterful leader, and a man capable of striving during hard times. Park's early life doesn't seem to support this. In fact, it seems Park was very poor at dealing with turmoil. His work at school suffered during the rough times his family endured. After the death of his brother, Park moved in and out of association with socialist groups for little apparent reason. Even as a general, Park's response to opposition seems to have been quite weak. This image of Park stands in stark contrast to the idea of a master-manipulator who flourished in the chaos of factionalism and political opposition.

Was Park the architect of the coup?

Established scholarship takes for granted that Park Chung-Hee developed the coup plan and was the absolute leader of the revolutionaries. This assumption rests on the results of the coup—specifically Park's eventual rise to power—but lacks evidence showing Park's actual leadership prior to that event. Nevertheless, it is so accepted that it rarely attracts detailed analysis even though evidence exists in the primary record that paints a contrary picture.

As noted previously, Kim Jong-Pil, Park's in-law and co-conspirator, claimed in recent interviews to have been the true architect of the coup. He claims to have had to convince Park to join the revolution, after having built a trusting relationship with Park since the Korean War, and being in need of someone of high rank to formally lead to

coup.¹⁸¹ Moreover, Kim claims to have been responsible for writing the original revolutionary declaration, the junta's pledge to the people. Kim said,

It was a set of promises declaring the demise of old rules and the establishment of new ones. . . . I was known as a good writer by many at that time. But it took me two days to finish the fateful declaration. . . . When Park first read the declaration of promises before it was printed for distribution, he read the No. 1 Priority [for anti-Communism] and said, "You wrote this because of me."¹⁸²

Kim did not suggest that any approval from Park was necessary; he only noted that he wrote the pledges and prepared them for broadcast. Showing them to Park appears to have been a courtesy.

The idea of Kim being the heart and mind behind the revolution finds support elsewhere in the primary record. A New York Times article released the day after the coup noted that "Korean sources said it was their impression that the organizing force behind the move to remove Premier Chang was a group of younger officers. They said General Park and Lieut. Gen. Chang Do-Young, Army Chief of Staff and ostensible head of the military junta, were 'front men' for the younger officers."¹⁸³

The leader of the young officers mentioned here was Kim Jong-Pil. It should be noted that later reports in the New York Times began suggesting that Park was the mastermind of the coup, but these came after the junta clamped down on the press and established enough control to start their own messaging and propagandizing. One such report stated, "When the Government of Premier John M. Chang fell Tuesday, the forces

¹⁸¹ Writing at the time, C.I. Eugene Kim describes their relationship thusly: "Park and Kim needed each other; Park was important because of his seniority in the army and his moderating role within the junta, and Kim was essential because of his dynamic leadership" (Kim, *Significance of the 1963 Korean Elections*, 766).

¹⁸² Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "On the Eve of a Coup That Would Transform Korea," Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 2, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 4, 2015.

¹⁸³ Jorden, William J., "Capital is Wary on Korea; Aid Program to Continue," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1961.

that really toppled it over were the dynamic energy and intelligence of General Park, it is now being reported.”¹⁸⁴ It is not clear in this article who was doing the reporting, since the press in Korea had been completely shut down. Nor does Park’s background hint that he was particularly “dynamic.” As has been shown, Park’s career from early schooling to being promoted to general was a series of booms and busts, rather than a steady rise. It was the war that fueled the most significant periods of Park’s advancement in the Army. After the war his career began to stagnate again, as his conflicts with peers and superiors kept him from the best posts.

More evidence supporting Kim in the lead over Park is the character and background of the two men in the years prior to the coup. Park was not well-known or active in politics at the time, and despite being ideologically opposed to many of his peers, Park kept much to himself. In fact, Kim Chong-Shin wrote of Park’s letter to Song Yo-Chan, in which he asked the latter to retire due to connections to the Rhee election rigging scheme, that the “recommendation must have been based on friendly advice and confidence and good wishes rather than malice . . . To [Song], General Park seemed perhaps the last person who should have ever recommended his resignation. On the contrary, he might have counted on the latter to take his side in any critical showdown.”¹⁸⁵ Park was seemingly so reserved that even such a courtesy letter, in the context of severe backlashes against Song from younger officers, came unexpectedly. Kim’s opinions about Park’s reputation with his peers and superiors hint at the man’s reserved character and apolitical behavior.

A New York Times article written in the days following the coup noted that “[f]or

¹⁸⁴ “Rising Power in Korea,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 1961.

¹⁸⁵ Kim Chong-Shin, 42.

the last ten years or so, General Park has not been much in the public eye.”¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, Kim Jong-Pil was very active politically, making significant pushes to remove corrupt officers from the military. In a telegram to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent days after the coup, General Magruder noted that “[Kim Jong-Pil] was the moving spirit that activated the group of sixteen officers who waited on Chief of Staff General Choi Young-Hi (Choe Yeoung-Hui) to demand his resignation. . . . He was perhaps the foremost of the agitators whose elimination from the ROK Army I have sought over the past year.”¹⁸⁷ Park Chung-Hee was barely on Magruder’s radar prior to the coup. A later telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Korea noted that “Park may be passing phenomenon [sic]” and that “Col. Kim, head of intelligence, and apparently second strongest man in junta.”¹⁸⁸ Park had certainly been motivated to push corrupt officers from the military along with Kim Jong-Pil. But whereas Park’s method was to write a letter “suggesting” the Army Chief of Staff should resign, Kim’s was to lead a group of sixteen men to forcibly enter a superior’s office and make demands.

But perhaps another important omission in the scholarship regarding the leadership of the coup is the writing of Park himself. Already the leader of the junta and following government when these books were published, Park certainly released them in part to support his authority. Thus, his attempts to cast off responsibility are difficult to explain as simply an act of political strategy. However his claims are supported by what Kim Jong-Pil has said in the new interviews. In describing the months of angry

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “Telegram From the Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (Magruder) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Lemnitzer), in Paris” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 223, May 25, 1961.

¹⁸⁸ “Telegram from the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 235, July 9, 1961.

discussion that led up to the revolution, Park claimed, “I risked my 40-year-old life and, not wasting a single minute, debated with worthy colleagues as to how the nation might be saved. It was towards the end of the Liberal government. . . . At last, I resolved to rise up, together with my revolutionary colleagues. I was not one bit excited.”¹⁸⁹ The use of the word “colleagues” here is important in that it conveys a sense of equality amongst this group. Also, the emphasis on “debate” suggests that the planning was a group effort.

Park also wrote, “As everyone knows, I am in a position in which my life, regardless of any volition on my part, is intimately intertwined with the country, the people and its history. I am under the weighty pressure of being leader of the revolution.”¹⁹⁰ Here he suggested his rise to power was not of his “volition,” again concurring with Kim’s suggestion that he had to persuade Park to take and stay in power. But perhaps the clearest declaration by Park was this:

From the very moment when I thought about the revolution, I did not want even to be the leader of the revolutionary government, let alone that of the Third Republic. After the completion of the revolution, therefore, I supported, though temporarily, a person who was higher than I in rank, as a leader of the government. I begged the man to stay on as the President, the head of state. As for rank, my position was only the third. I wished only to be an errand-boy in the rear. But, unexpected events took place in quick succession. This was really puzzling to me personally. Within the revolutionary government itself, an emergency in the form of a counter-revolution took place. And the man who was the President wanted to leave his post. Under such circumstances, I was obliged to assume my present position.¹⁹¹

It is certainly easy to dismiss Park’s writing and simply claim that he was lying about the situation, but that should require evidence and analysis, rather than mere presumptions about his character rooted in decades of political animosity. Interestingly, Park was

¹⁸⁹ Park, Chung Hee, *The Country, the Revolution, and I (Second Edition)* (Seoul: HollyM, 1970): 58.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

recognized as being honest and trustworthy; for example, an intelligence estimate by the CIA noted Park enjoyed “a reputation for effectiveness and honesty.”¹⁹² But neither should one simply take Park at his word, since skewing the truth would have been in his interest. In light of all this though, statements by Park and Kim, and documents describing their character, do constitute a useful body of evidence

There is not enough evidence here to declare in absolute terms that Kim Jong-Pil was the true leader of the coup, though the evidence is more supportive of that conclusion than the opposite. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that the conventional narrative is not as solid its adherents would suggest. Park’s early life shows that he was often pushed onto certain courses by the people around him. So, too, do U.S. Government records and interviews with Kim Jong-Pil show that Kim was more politically active than Park. And Park even claims in his own writing that his rise to power was not his personal choice. Less sure are the claims that Park had strong ambitions for power and acted to keep hold of it; there is little specific evidence of that. Perhaps Park was simply the right man for the job, a “moderating influence among the young enthusiasts who now lead the Republic,” as noted in a briefing book for President Kennedy, prepared for his meeting with Park.¹⁹³ Park was a high ranked, politically moderate leader under whom the more politically active younger colonels could rally. The influence of these younger officers, particularly that of Kim Jong-Pil, should not be ignored.

¹⁹² “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 52-2-61, Short-term Prospects in South Korea,” May 31, 1961.

¹⁹³ “Briefing Book, Park Visit,” November 14, 1961, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Online Archives.

What were the limits of Park's power during the junta period?

The shifting government structure and power fluctuations during the junta period (1961-1963) are an important and weakly covered aspect of the “Park era.” It was this period that saw Park Chung-Hee rise to the seat of power in final and absolute terms, affecting everything in the decades to follow. The coverage of this period is limited, particularly in terms of power-wielding, and especially in English publications. This period, like most of the “Park era,” is often viewed through a restricted lens of economics, looking at how the junta established its economic policies, first failures such as the flawed currency reform measures of 1962, then the successes that would lead to miraculous growth.¹⁹⁴ In the few cases where the period is given significant discussion, arguments rely on several flawed presuppositions.

First, the general narrative presupposes that from the very start of the coup, Park was in full control, manipulating people and factions to seize and keep power. According to Joo Hong-Kim, “Park knew that he had to use military factional rivalries to his personal advantage if he was to keep a tight rein on them. By doing so, he politicized the South Korean armed forces even more. He was a master of factional struggles and palace intrigues.”¹⁹⁵ It is not clear how this author could be certain what Park “knew” about these issues. Yong-Sup Han reiterates the sentiment when he suggests “the success of the

¹⁹⁴ There are a few works that address the issue of power such as Hyung-A Kim's “State Building: The Military Junta's Path to Modernity Through Administrative Reforms,” and Joo-Hong Kim's (Gim Ju-Hong) “The Armed Forces,” both featured in the essay collection *The Park Chung Hee Era*. Unfortunately, as these two sources demonstrate, the general form of such works of analysis is one fundamentally reliant on secondary sources and that seem to conflict with the some parts of primary record. These conflicts are not addressed in either work.

¹⁹⁵ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 2331-2332.

coup owed much to Park's ability to quell and control factionalism within the military.”¹⁹⁶ However, neither source provides sufficient evidence of specific intent to solidify power, Park’s agency in the factionalism, or a clear mechanism by which Park might control that factionalism as suggested. It seems taken for granted that since Park was the boss and since factionalism never spilled over, Park must have been responsible for containing it. Park’s hand at “purging” other members of the junta is assumed rather than proven.

A second flaw in the conventional narrative is that it automatically ascribes nefarious motives to every shift in power and position; scenarios in which a naïve ruling coalition struggles to root itself get no consideration. The claims of counter-revolutionary, anti-government actions used as justification for arresting junta members appear as little more than pretense for purges rather than legitimate judicial actions. Certainly history has provided examples of authoritarian governments acting as such, but precedent is not evidence. And even if nefarious motives ruled the day, how is it that only Park—and none of his junta rivals—harbored them? Likewise, there is little room allowed for the idea that purges could have simply stemmed from factions fighting amongst themselves, without Park's involvement.

This simplistic view of the power struggles in the junta is contradicted by evidence in the primary record. Park’s background doesn’t seem to show much apparent talent for manipulating and controlling people, beyond that of any other generic military officer. Certainly his time in power and his experience surviving the factionalism of the junta would have given him such skills to be applied later on, but they would not have been available during the period in question. It is worth questioning, why would someone

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., location 776.

like Park, who professed such strong views about how factionalism destroyed his country, want to inflame factionalism in his own government after taking power? Park claims to have taken to revolution in order to end factionalism, not reinforce it. The more radical members of the military were often at odds with the moderate stances of the junta and thus generated factionalist tendencies on their own. Finally, such arguments are flawed in accepting in certain terms and without real proof the idea Park planned to be in power rather than being thrust into it. Primary evidence indicates that Park's moderate politics and disconnection from the major factions made him the perfect candidate to rule the junta, whether he wanted to or not.

In order to address these issues in the conventional description of Park's power during the junta period, this section will reexamine the power fluctuations of the junta by analyzing the primary record. The aim is to show the limits of Park's power to manipulate the junta or to otherwise do as he pleased, as well as to highlight other actors whose agency was critical during this period. To do so, this section will examine several different aspects. First is an examination of two important relationships, between Park and Chang Do-Young, and between Park and Kim Jong-Pil. The conventional narrative suggests that these two were subordinated and controlled by Park for his own gain. The primary record suggests a much more complicated relationship between the three. Secondly, this section will examine several other cases which highlight the general limits of Park's power in the junta.

Park and Chang Do-Young

One relationship that seems to be portrayed incorrectly in the scholarship is that of Park and Chang Do-Young. Chang was the ROK Army Chief of Staff at the time of the coup, and a supporter of Chang Myon. It is true that the revolutionaries likely needed Chang's backing in order to gain support for their coup, specifically from the rest of the military. Chang was, after all, the top leader of the Army. But Chang is often portrayed as being simply manipulated by Park into joining the junta and being purged by Park months later only for the sake of strengthening the latter's hold on power. A strong example of this is when Yong-Sup Han suggests,

[Park] chose the strategy of reaching down into the ranks of colonels and lieutenant colonels as a support base and then working up the ladders of the hierarchy within the coalition in two steps, first recruiting Chang [Do-Young] and other senior generals to positions of top leadership to legitimize the coup, and then purging them, deeming them forces of counterrevolution, to clear the way to the top for himself.¹⁹⁷

This passage portrays Park as the sole agent, drawing in followers through his own will, then removing them as he pleased, for the sake of his own advancement. Such statements negate Chang's agency, and ignore the complex factional contexts in which the purges occurred. Evidence in the primary record suggests that Chang was a more active and powerful agent during these events than this type of scholarship suggests.

The adherents of the common narrative argue that Chang Do-Young implicitly approved the coup in collusion with Park Chung-Hee. For example, Yong-Sup Han asserts that during a meeting on April 10, when Park revealed his coup plan to Chang,

¹⁹⁷ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 472-475. – No citation or primary support provided for these details.

that

The army chief of staff turned down Park's request to head the coalition, but he did not report the conspiracy to Prime Minister Chang Myon. Nor did he move to preempt the coup by ordering the Counter-Intelligence Command and the Security Command to arrest the conspirators. Moreover, although Chang turned down the leadership position, Park came out of the meeting with the impression that Chang had given tacit support for the coup, through elusive gestures and equivocal expressions. Perhaps the two miscommunicated, but it is more likely that the army chief of staff could see that the coup planners had already developed too much momentum for him to stop them. Besides, he could later side with Park if the coup looked promising.¹⁹⁸

However, this narrative is not supported with any primary evidence, nor with proof that the author knew which “impressions” Park held at the time, and it holds many flaws that the primary record seems to directly contradict.

As was previously noted, Chang and the CIC did, in fact, oppose Park at the onset of the coup. Prior to that, a CIA report on April 24th noted that Chang wanted to arrest Park but did not have enough evidence to do so. Another report on April 25th noted that the Counter-Intelligence Command, or CIC, was indeed investigating the coup, anticipating an attempt on April 26th. Chang Do-Young stated to U.S. officials that he didn't believe any action was “imminent.” This is likely why he did not inform Prime Minister Chang Myon; he did not expect Park to take any real action. Chang Do-Young was trusted by Chang Myon. Their relationship was strong enough that the latter planned to retain the general as chief of staff for a further two years.¹⁹⁹ If Chang Do-Young cared about power, he had a much more stable position and potential for gain by staying loyal to the prime minister than by joining a risky coup attempt. This is why his failure to report the conspiracy to Chang Myon was more likely an honest mistake, a misjudgment

¹⁹⁸ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 647-652.

¹⁹⁹ “Memorandum from Director of Central Intelligence Dulles to President Kennedy,” FRUS Vol. 22, Document 217, May 16, 1961.

of the resolve of the coup makers.

The above episode is another that supports the idea that Park was not the leading force behind the coup, but rather it was Kim Jong-Pil. Park and Kim had differing opinions about Chang Do-Young. Kim did not trust Chang whereas Park not only trusted him, but had benefited from his acquaintance. As previously mentioned, Chang was the one who reinstated Park as a military officer during the Korean War. Park's arrest for suspected Communist activities had forced him out of the Army years prior. After getting him reinstated, Chang "helped Park have a smooth ride in his military career."²⁰⁰ It is likely that it was his trust and subordination to Chang that led Park to present the coup plan to the man on April 10th. It is also probable, for the same reason, that Chang didn't take him seriously or at least was reluctant to take immediate action against him.

The concept of subordination here seems important. Not only did this relationship exist in a cultural context that placed high emphasis on rank and position, but also one where Chang had been Park's trusted superior and patron for a long time. Park's background was that of a man who respected hierarchy and demanded respect for authority. Kim Chong-Shin later observed that "Park's insistence on undisputed obedience by his subordinates, government workers and party members alike, [had] been derived from his past career as a professional soldier."²⁰¹ This was probably not an attitude that Park adopted after coming to power, but as Kim suggests, one impressed upon him since his early days in the military. It is not unreasonable to expect that Park held himself to a similar standard when he was a junior officer, especially in light of the

²⁰⁰ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "The Promise That Park Didn't Keep," Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 9, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 24, 2015.

²⁰¹ Kim Chong-Shin, 300.

dearth of proof that he thought otherwise. What evidence we do have is his behavior, which even up to his final rise to power, evinces an adherence to hierarchy. Extremism and disregard for rank was clearly demonstrated by Kim Jong-Pil, not Park Chung-Hee. It is not clear whether Chang Do-Young was aware of Kim's involvement in the coup. Such lack of awareness would also help to explain his weak reaction.

More importantly, claims that Chang Do-Young willingly let the coup pass, gave it his approval, or believed that the coup had "too much momentum" to stop are problematic in light of the fact that Chang did try to stop the coup. On the onset of the coup, Chang asked General Magruder for American military support in the form of Military Police forces to confront the rebelling ROK marines.²⁰² Then, when Chang failed to get U.S. military aid, he dispatched his own MPs to stop the marines' advance at the Han River Bridge. He then supposedly ordered his men to open fire on the rebels, fully aware that Park Chung-Hee was present with them.²⁰³ Chang clearly had no intention of supporting the coup, or Park, at the beginning. It is not until enemy forces surrounded Chang and his command that he finally acquiesced, and only after significant conditions had been met. Chang demanded to consult with President Yun Po-Sun first. President Yun, a political rival of Chang Myon, eventually accepted the coup, as did Chang.²⁰⁴ It is more likely that Chang was coerced into joining the junta by the thousand troops that surrounded his headquarters than by his own personal acceptance of it. The day following the coup, as the threat of a counterattack by the First ROK Army led by

²⁰² "Telegram from the Commander in Chief, US Forces Korea (Macgruder) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff," FRUS Vol. 22, Document 213, May 16, 1961.

²⁰³ Chun and Kang, "The Night the Coup Began and Park Got Shot At."

²⁰⁴ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, "Coup Pivots on a Tense Standoff at Military HQ," Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 11, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 27, 2015.

Lee Han-Rim (I Han-Rim) grew, Chang Do-Young “remained ambivalent,” maintaining a “wait-and-see attitude.”²⁰⁵ But once Lee Han-Rim was arrested, President Yun was on board, Chang Myon and his cabinet were in hiding, and the coup makers had successfully taken Seoul and other cities, Chang Do-Young had little to gain by holding on to his loyalty to Chang Myon. Thus he finally “declared his support for the revolution.”²⁰⁶

While Park Chung-Hee clearly saw that Chang’s involvement as the leader of the junta was essential to the legitimacy of the revolution, much in the same way Kim Jong-pil viewed Park, Chang was no mere pawn. In joining the junta, he had indeed acted of his own accord. Chang obviously had his own ideas about what he was doing and why.

Chang had risen to the highest post in the Army, so he clearly had some sense of military politics, and of how to take power and keep it. A CIA report attributed Chang’s prior ambivalence during the first days of the coup to the possibility that he “may [have been] playing both sides of the fence in an effort to assure his position whatever the outcome.”²⁰⁷ Once in a position of power within the junta, Chang attempted to create a power base for himself. Within a week of the coup, a factional split appeared in the junta

between a moderate group led by Lieutenant General Chang Do-Young . . . and a larger group led by Park and Marine Corps Commandant Kim Yun-Kun (Gim Yun-Kun). . . . There are reports of dissatisfaction among army colonels who, along with General Park, planned and executed the coup but who were subsequently denied cabinet posts in favor of general officers who joined the revolt belatedly.²⁰⁸

By June 15th, voting patterns within the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (SCNR) seemed to “reveal three primary groupings, with most junior officers looking to

²⁰⁵ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “Military Coup Sees a Successful End,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 12, *Korea Joongang Daily*, March 31, 2015.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ “Central Intelligence Bulletin,” May 16, 1961.

²⁰⁸ “Central Intelligence Bulletin,” May 24, 1961.

Lt. Col. Kim Jong-Pil for leadership. . . . As SCNR members are presently identified, Park is supported by 15, Kim by 10, and the SCNR chairman Lt. Gen. Chang Do-Young by 5.”²⁰⁹ Not only does this suggest that Park and Kim represented different factions in the junta, but it shows that Chang had his own power base even though it was the smallest. It then makes sense that Chang would try expand this base. Under the June 6 Law Concerning Extraordinary Measures for National Reconstruction, the head of the cabinet was granted the power to appoint cabinet members with the approval of the SCNR.²¹⁰ This position was held by Chang until his resignation on July 3rd, after pressure from the colonels group became impossible to contain. It is possible that the exclusion of the colonels was Chang's power play, as “some government leaders privately had charged that General Chang manipulated the prevalent factionalism in running the government and sought to put his followers into key posts.”²¹¹

Chang resigned from all of his posts on July 3rd, likely forced out by the colonels faction in the junta—the primary agitators of the revolution whom Chang had excluded from power once it had succeeded. Thus, it is incorrect to assign Chang's ouster directly to Park. As noted earlier, it appears that Park was separate from the colonels group, not a part of it, despite his association with Kim Jong-Pil. An intelligence estimate released on July 18th noted,

The potential division which is most apparent at present lies in the differences between the general officers and the field grade officers. There is a group of 10 or 12 members of the junta—most of them colonels—who provided much of the coup's initial impetus and planning and who probably differ with Park on junta

²⁰⁹ “Central Intelligence Weekly Summary,” June 15, 1961.

²¹⁰ “Report of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea,” (UN General Assembly Sixteenth Session, 1961): 21.

²¹¹ “Gen. Chang Quits Top Korea Posts; Pak Heads Junta,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1961.

policies.”²¹²

There is strong evidence showing that Park was not, in fact, associated with Kim Jong-Pil’s colonel faction, as is often asserted in the general narrative of the coup. Suffice it to say that Park’s involvement in the ouster of his trusted mentor is unlikely. For one thing, the same report noted “the removal of [Chang] eliminated the most likely member of the coup group around whom anti-junta military elements might have gathered. Chang’s departure, however, did little to resolve the basic problem of control within the coup group.”²¹³

The purge of Chang and his supporters did little to soften factionalism in the junta, since his was the weakest and smallest faction. In fact, it increased tensions between the remaining two, to the point of posing a real threat to the junta and its revolution. As noted, Chang was seen as the most likely candidate to pursue counter-revolutionary actions; this is exactly what his former colleagues accused. On July 9th, it was announced that Chang was arrested for just such counter-revolutionary activities.²¹⁴ For this he received a death sentence. This action is explained by most scholars as a disingenuous attempt by Park to fully eliminate a political rival, which is certainly plausible but not well evidenced. For example, Yong-Sup Han argued

The purge started with Chang [Do-Young] on July 3. Park had used Chang as a protective shield during the early days of the junta to buy time, to prevent both South Koreans and the U.S. Government from probing into Park's past leftist activities, and to claim that the entire military establishment was behind the coup. Park, who had survived several difficult moments during his lifetime, knew not only how to win the trust of others but also when to betray them to consolidate his power. With the United States moving to build close ties with him, he knew he

²¹² “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 42-3-61,” July 18, 1961.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “Report of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea,” (UN General Assembly Seventeenth Session, 1962): 9.

could purge Chang [Do-Young] without risking his leadership.²¹⁵

Here again Han holds that Park “used” Chang, and this entire passage assumes Park’s sole agency. As I have argued in this thesis, Park’s background does not indicate a skill for consolidating power, nor was the ouster of Chang in any way risk-free. The betrayal mentioned here by Han was when Park divulged the identities of Labor Party members in the military to keep himself from being executed. It was act of survival where he offered up a group he held little loyalty or affinity to in exchange for his own freedom; it did nothing to “consolidate his power.” And for Park, his military career always seemed to override any political concerns. Moreover, Chang’s removal did in fact pose a significant threat to the junta in the several ways previously noted.

Another problematic example is a suggestion by Hyung-A Kim:

On July 3, Chang was arrested on the charge of conspiring to carry out a coup, along with a mixed group of forty-four generals, colonels, and other officers. The purge of Chang, generally seen as a power struggle between the Southern factions, which included primarily the provinces of Kyongsang and Ch'ungch'ong, and the Northern faction, mostly from P'yongan province, also led to the fall of the fifth graduating KMA class as a next-generation contender for the position of crown prince within the military junta against Kim [Jong-Pil] and his young colonels of the eighth KMA class.²¹⁶

Kim strongly implies that the 44 officers were all removed from their posts in relation with the Chang purge. This seems to be incorrect. It appears that three of the officers were removed from the supreme council for “loyalty” problems, but the remaining mass were general military “deadwood.”²¹⁷ This passage also implies that Chang planned to be “crown prince” or heir to Park, rather than the chief power holder himself, which is a questionable claim given Chang’s character and background. The suggestions in the

²¹⁵ *Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 733-737. – Again Han’s details lack any citation or primary support.

²¹⁶ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 1236-1239.

²¹⁷ CIA Weekly Summary July 6, 1961.

primary record that Chang was putting his supporters into power seem to strongly discount such a “crown prince” argument. Kim also implies here that Park was behind the move suggesting, “Park made himself the undisputed leader of the junta.”²¹⁸ This is another example of a commentator assigning too much agency to Park without clear evidence.

Ultimately, the idea that the accusations could have been true rarely inspires a second thought. But at least some of them were likely true, to some extent. First, Chang was convicted in a public trial, noted by the UN Commission in Korea. In its report, the UN Commission stated they “had every opportunity and co-operation from government authorities in making its observations, both in the capital and in the country-side. Within its mandate the Commission [had] observed political developments that have taken place.”²¹⁹ It would have been very difficult for the junta to put on a kangaroo court in public, without the UN, the CIA, or the foreign media suspecting anything. Certainly there could have been political aspects to the arrest and trial, but historians should not simply dismiss the whole case as Park’s power play without specific primary evidence. Any such evidence is absent in the general scholarship.

As this section has detailed, Chang Do-Young was an apt political leader who clearly intended to stay in power. He hedged his loyalty with Chang Myon and his support of the coup until the last moment, siding with the clear winner, and gaining the most powerful position in the process. Then, while leading the junta, he attempted to create a power base that would keep himself there. As the former Army Chief of Staff, he had the reputation and means to attempt a successful counter-coup even though it would

²¹⁸*The Park Chung Hee Era*, Kindle Location 1242.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

likely have been against Kim Jong-Pil and the radical colonels who had ousted him. Park Chung-Hee, who originally revealed the coup plans to Chang and asked him to join the revolution, is a far less likely target. Moreover, Park gave Chang a full pardon a year later.²²⁰ The colonels were the radical faction and it is far more probable that Chang's removal had been their power play.²²¹ With Chang gone, Park Chung-Hee became the moderating force in the junta, and increasingly opposed to the colonels who had started the revolution.²²²

Park and Kim Jong-Pil

Another relationship that deserves a fresh look is that of Park and Kim Jong-Pil. This is especially relevant because recent interviews with Kim have questioned the general narrative of the coup. Between these two men was a complex dynamic of power wielding that controlled the fate of the junta. It should be repeated that Kim was a political radical whom UN Forces Commander Macgruder had sought for as long as a year to remove.²²³ This is in contrast to Park, who was seen as the “coolest head and most

²²⁰Ibid, 9.

²²¹ There is some evidence in the primary record that supports the idea that Park was responsible for Chang's ouster. A CIA weekly report, dated July 6, 1961, stated “the ouster of Lt. Gen. Chang Do-Young from the South Korean military junta on 3 July was a major move by Maj. Gen. Park Chung Hee to establish his undisputed control of the present military regime.”

²²² One of the more inclusive descriptions of Chang's purge was when Hyung-A Kim stated “It was the overwhelming powers of the KCIA that allowed Kim [Jong-Pil] to remove Lieutenant General Chang [Do-Young] from the SCNR chairmanship to make way for Park's rise to the top. The carefully orchestrated purge of Chang and his followers less than fifty days after the coup showed Kim [Jong-Pil] at the height of his power” (*The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 1278-1280). Even though Kim Jong-Pil's agency is acknowledged here, the motivation is still centered on Park. Hyung-A Kim also seems to contradict herself somewhat since here she is arguing the purge was about securing Park's rise to power, whereas previously she argued it was a factional struggle to secure the position of crown prince.

²²³ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 223.

reliable and stable leaders.”²²⁴ Kim is regularly described in literature in one manner or another as Park’s “henchman,” suggesting complete control by Park and no significant agency of his own.²²⁵ His familial relationship to Park, being Park’s nephew-in-law, is often cited as evidence of Park’s influence over Kim. It is possible, though, that this familial relationship was Kim’s means for approaching Park. As already noted, Kim Jong-Pil stated in new interviews that he was the architect of the coup and that he had asked Park to join the coup, rather than vice versa.

In addition to being one of the coup planners, if not its chief, Kim Jong-Pil certainly held significant power within the junta. Contemporary documents often describe him as the second most powerful man in the junta, under Park.²²⁶ Far from being a henchman, he determined policies and initiated actions on his own. One incident indicative of Kim's greater power in the early junta than Park's was the negotiations between the junta and General Magruder, over the return of command and control of the units that participated in the coup back under UN Command. Disagreement dogged the process. At first, the junta simply ignored Magruder's demand to return the displaced units to their assigned positions. Eventually Park, (acting only as vice-chairman of the ruling revolutionary committee) met with Magruder and reached a formal agreement with him on May 24th, more than a week after the coup. But it was rejected by the junta council.²²⁷ When the SNCR rejected Park’s proposal to UN Command, Magruder implied

²²⁴ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 244.

²²⁵ *Park Chung Hee Era*, Location 932.

²²⁶ “Telegram From the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State,” July 9, 1961. FRUS Vol. 22, Document 235.

²²⁷ “Junta Defies UN on Troop Mutiny,” *The Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1961.

that Kim Jong-Pil could “use his influence to seek reconsideration of the disapproval.”²²⁸ And indeed, while Park’s agreement with Magruder was rejected by the junta, they accepted a later agreement secured by Kim Jong-Pil. This second agreement was finally passed two days later, after Magruder was forced negotiate with Kim.²²⁹ This contradicts the conventional idea that Park was de facto head of the junta and fully in power from the very beginning.

Kim influenced policies in many other ways. Evidence indicates that many of the early junta's policies and actions seem to have stemmed from Kim’s ideas and prerogative. Park and his peers had strongly voiced their opinion about business corruption in the past and the junta took action almost as soon as it came to power. However, when the junta began arresting key businessmen for corruption, Kim resisted. “I didn’t like the idea of blaming these businessmen for corruption because we needed to mobilize them to launch a strong economic drive for growth” he explained in one of the new interviews, “We needed their cooperation.”²³⁰ Park’s idealistic tendency was to attack corruption in whatever context.²³¹ Kim Jong-Pil was a realist who saw the necessity of pardoning some corrupt officials and businessmen in order to achieve the junta’s primary goals: economic development. Additionally, Kim claimed that the National Planning Committee for Reconstruction was founded on his “idea that we first need to drive hunger from Korea and spark an economic boom so that principles of

²²⁸ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 223.

²²⁹ “Korean Junta Told of US Friendly Ties,” *The Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1961.

²³⁰ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “How Revolution Discovered Its Need of Business,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 20, *Korea Joongang Daily*, April 23, 2015.

²³¹ Kim Chong-Shin suggested that “Park was then rather idealistic than practical, which I suppose was quite natural for a soldier who was yet to become the President” (61).—This idea, that Park’s leadership and perspective were fundamentally different before he became president, is ignored by the mainstream literature.

democracy could be set in place afterwards based on prosperity.” Kim further stated that he “had premediated long before the May 16 revolutions to set up a new set of rules that could bring major changes to every sector of society. I had a clear vision for post-revolution Korea.”²³²

Kim took the initiative with several other policies. Kim founded the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) modeled on its U.S. counterpart—he recruited many of the first key members, created its motto, and decided that the agency should have investigative authority. Only after putting it all together, did he brief Park on what he had done. Park simply replied that he “was satisfied.”²³³ The agency is now infamous for its rough tactics against the public, including arrests without due process and violent interrogations. Evidence suggests that the KCIA’s tactics were the result of Kim’s leadership, outside of Park’s control. For instance, a telegram from the embassy in Korea stated:

Further source of danger to stability of government . . . arises from activities of Kim Jong-Pil and ROKCIA. . . . Practice of midnight arrest and reports of strong-arm methods to extract confessions still occur with sufficient frequency to maintain atmosphere of insecurity and fear. . . . Park and Supreme Council have taken steps to deal with this fear. . . . Park is aware that Kim Jong-Pil is capable of excesses arising from his exuberance for power and his inexperience.²³⁴

The implication here is that the excesses of the KCIA were Kim’s doing, against Park’s desires, and that Park wanted to contain him. Kim's own recollection supports such an assertion. “I thought there had to be at least one government institution that should be

²³² Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “Getting a Grip on All Three Branches of Government,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 14, *Korea Joongang Daily*, April 3, 2015.

²³³ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “How the KCIA Was Born – In Deep Shadows,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 15, *Korea Joongang Daily*, April 7, 2015.

²³⁴ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 244.

feared by the public,” Kim confessed in recent interviews.²³⁵ Using his power as the head of the KCIA, Kim also took it upon himself to launch secret negotiations with the Japanese, pushing for a meeting with Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda. Political negotiations with Japan had become stalled in previous governments due to public anger. Kim only briefed Park about his moves when he “was in the final phase of reaching a deal.”²³⁶

Another potential flaw in extant scholarship is the repeated idea that Park Chung-Hee and Kim Jong-Pil were members of a shared faction.²³⁷ However as has been mentioned in previous sections, U.S. Government sources suggest that Park was not a member of any faction.²³⁸ Moreover, there were strong suggestions of a split between Park and the colonels faction under Kim. Regarding the colonels faction relationship with Park, a U.S. government report stated, “There is a group of some 10 or 12 members of the junta—most of them Colonels—who provided much of the coup’s initial impetus and planning and who probably differ with Park on junta policies. In general, these officers tend to favor drastic measures to achieve their objectives and to suppress opposition. Park has indicated he intends to curb [their] influence.”²³⁹ Another report, questioned Kim’s support of Park, suggesting

Lt. Col. Kim Jong-Pil is a leader of the impatient reform-minded younger element. As the head of the recently formed central intelligence agency, Kim has been moving to consolidate in police-state fashion all security affairs under his and presumably Park’s control. However, his loyalty to Park is uncertain. Inasmuch as some of Park’s strongest support has come from the younger officer group, an attempt to reduce their power could precipitate a bitter and possibly violent power

²³⁵Chun and Kang, “How the KCIA Was Born – In Deep Shadows.”

²³⁶ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “Aiming to Restore Diplomatic Ties With an Old Foe,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 25, *Korea Joongang Daily*, May 12, 2015.

²³⁷ Kim Hyung-A refers to it as the “Park-Kim Chong-p’il axis”²³⁷ (*Park Chung Hee Era*, Location 1543) , Kim Tae-hyun and Baik Chang-Jae call it the “Park-Kim mainstream.”²³⁷ (*Park Chung Hee Era*, Location 959).

²³⁸ “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 42-2-61,” May 31, 1961.

²³⁹ “Special National Intelligence Estimate, “ July 18, 1961. FRUS Vol. 22, Document 236

struggle within the junta.²⁴⁰

The idea that Kim could turn against Park is present in other primary records, such as a CIA intelligence estimate that stated Kim “could become a rival [of Park’s] . . . Park may be sufficiently adroit to accomplish [curbing the influence of the faction] without causing the colonels to turn against him. . . . [though if] such a break occurred, the outcome would depend on whether Kim chose to support Park” or the colonels.²⁴¹

Despite the common argument in the literature that Park manipulated factions to establish his own power,²⁴² the primary record seems to suggest that Kim Jong-Pil was the key agitator. In a telegram from the embassy in Korea, it was suggested that

There is evidence traditional propensity for factionalism is asserting itself inside the Supreme Council. Most serious case occurred during September and first week of October when bitter internal power struggle [sic] was initiated by Kim Jong-Pil, Director ROKCIA, and some young colonels, aimed at purging generals from Hamgyong province. But there is also evidence that Chairman Park and others are determined to prevent this.²⁴³

Being much more politically active and radical than Park, Kim Jong-Pil and his faction had previously used their power to curtail superiors. As early as May these men “weakened the authority of their own commanders by the organization of officers who are loyal to the coup group instead of their own commanders and who stay ready to act against their own commanders.”²⁴⁴ Kim and his faction had no qualms about directly

²⁴⁰ “Current Intelligence Weekly Summary,” July 6, 1961.

²⁴¹ “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 42-3-61,” July 18, 1961.

²⁴² Joo-hong Kim suggests that “Park knew that he had to use military factional rivalries to his personal advantage if he was to keep a tight rein on them. By doing so, he politicized the South Korean armed forces even more. He was a master of factional struggles and palace intrigues” (*The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 2331-2332). There is little evidence that Park was a “master” of factionalism, at least early on, nor did he demonstrate an intention to politicize the military. Park suggests in his writing a desire to keep the military from politics following the junta period. He wrote that “The Army does not want any part in politics. Neither can it have any!” (*The Country, The Revolution and I*, 57).

²⁴³ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 244.

²⁴⁴ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 223.

confronting their superiors. Their radicalism was a root cause of the factionalism in the junta, especially after Chang Do-Young and his supporters were removed, leaving only the fiery junior officers and the conservative generals.

The factionalism got so severe that the U.S. Government and others warned of possible violence. A U.S. intelligence estimate stated,

There will probably be efforts to compromise and settle differences, but if open conflict breaks out, we cannot exclude the possibility that the various faction leaders would call upon their supporters in the armed forces. This would in turn be likely to create an opening for action by ROK military commanders who disapprove of the junta. This could result in armed clashes and even civil war.²⁴⁵

Contrary to claims in the literature that Park was considering violence to quell factionalism, here U.S. intelligence suggested that forces outside of Park's control that were moving towards violence. In the view of Hyung-A Kim, "[t]he factional struggle was so serious that there was rampant speculation of an impending armed struggle among the military factions. Park contemplated the use of force to quell the division within his ranks."²⁴⁶ The primary record contains no clear evidence of Park considering the use of military force to quell factionalism—at least none that this author can find.

Moreover, it doesn't fit the context. Since Park held little tactical command of any military units of his own, he could not have mobilized a military action against dissenters. It was the colonels who held such direct command over military forces, and as has been shown, their relationship with Park was rocky. Thus, the presupposition that Park was part of the colonels faction—and was the driving force of factionalism—has led to some questionable conclusions in the scholarship. Additionally, Park's widespread

²⁴⁵ "Special National Intelligence Estimate," FRUS Vol. 22, Document 236, July 18, 1961.

²⁴⁶ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 960-961.—Here the author cites Cho Gap-Je's biography of Park instead of primary sources.

revolutionary support stemmed from his reputation as the most moderate element in the junta. He could not attempt violence against ROK military elements without destroying the support of the junta, and support for himself, within the military. It was simply not an option for him.

In 1964, Kim Jong-Pil was forced to retire from his political positions and go overseas. Many scholars suggest he was pushed out by Park, the latter being concerned about his own power. However, Kim claimed that he voluntarily retired in response to severe anti-Japan protests. At this point Kim was well known by the public as having led the renewed negotiations with Japan.²⁴⁷ “Sometimes those close to [Park] suggested that I be withdrawn from my position because of their struggle for power,” he recalled, “Park never relented. Even when I decided to go overseas in an effort to quell rising demonstrations against treaty negotiations in 1964, it was not as if he ordered me to leave the country as punishment.”²⁴⁸

The power dynamic between Park and Kim deserves a serious second look. In the currently available scholarship even the most inclusive accounts still center on Park. One such example is a suggestion by Hyung-A Kim:

The most critical part of this story was his complex relationship with Kim [Jong-Pil], his right-hand man. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how Park could have so quickly taken control of the government and carried out fundamental administrative reforms had he not secured the support of Kim. Kim was widely regarded as a "co-owner" of the military coup of 1961. Founder and first director of the KCIA, he became the crown prince, wielding power rivaling that of Park. Once Park consolidated power with the help of Kim in the politics of purges by early 1963, however, Kim had to be brought down from the position of crown prince, not only in the interest of Park's further consolidation of power, but also

²⁴⁷ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “Selling the Case for Relations With Japan,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 29, *Korea Joongang Daily*, May 27, 2015.

²⁴⁸ Chun, Young-gi and Jin-kyu Kang, “The Dire Need for Normalization,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers Vol. 30, *Korea Joongang Daily*, May 28, 2015.

for the sake of the transition to a more technocratic growth strategy. Park reduced Kim's dominance when his role became the single most explosive threat to the stability of the SCNR and to Park's power.²⁴⁹

Despite acknowledging Kim's agency and role in the coup, Hyung-A Kim centers her narrative on Park, and the man's ambition for sole power. She leaves Kim as little more than Park's "right-hand man," rather than an independent agent pursuing his own agenda. Much of this passage is refuted by Kim Jong-Pil himself. Kim claims to have been the architect of the coup, not simple a "co-owner" and especially not subordinate to Park. Also it was the idealistic and perhaps naïve Park who was a barrier to new growth strategies, not Kim; it was Kim who pushed for the pardon of key business leaders early on. Kim had always been an explosive threat to the junta's stability, due to his radicalism and factionalist tendencies, long before he was removed as party leader in 1963. Moreover, Kim was brought back into the top levels of government only a few years later, even becoming prime minister in 1971, which seems to contradict the idea of him as a threat to Park. Kim's power seems to have rivaled Park's even before the coup was launched. Kim was capable of pushing his people to take strong political actions. There is little clear evidence showing Park could do the same. While it is true that Kim did lose his positions of power in 1963 and was sent abroad, ultimately Hyung-A Kim fails to evidence specifically how Park was responsible for reducing Kim Jong-Pil's role rather than other agents and forces. This is important in light of Kim Jong-Pil's claims of support from Park at the time. Certainly Kim's role in leading the coup and influencing the junta deserves further primary analysis.

²⁴⁹ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 1207-1212. – No citations or support provided for this passage.

Other Limits to Park's Power and Agency

In addition to conflicts with the agency of other actors such as Chang Do-Young and Kim Jong-Pil, there were many other ways in which Park's power and agency were constrained during the junta period. As an individual, Park was noted as being a "moderating influence among the young enthusiasts who now lead the Republic," a reference to the colonels faction.²⁵⁰ The same source, JFK's briefing book for his meeting with Park in 1961, suggests that Park had "demonstrated considerable sophistication in political matters" but it also noted that many of the reform projects taken up by the junta were "talked about or were under consideration by previous administrations."²⁵¹ As is often noted in the literature, the junta borrowed many of its policies from previous regimes, a prime example being the first five-year plan. Despite their derivative nature, Park was accepting full responsibility for such projects by the end of the junta period. Writing in one of his first published books about the first five-year plan, Park promised that "whatever difficulties and whatever problems I may encounter, I will overcome them and march to success. I believe so, because it is my supreme responsibility as the person responsible for this project."²⁵² But we are left to question just how much individual power Park had at this time, and just how much his individual agency affected matters, as there were several limiting factors.

The first of these limiting factors was general factionalism. A U.S. Government

²⁵⁰ "Briefing Book, Park Visit," November 14, 1961, the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Online Archives.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Park, Chung Hee, *The Country, the Revolution, and I, Second Edition* (Seoul, HollyM Corporation, 1970): 69.

national intelligence estimate in May 1961, suggested that “[u]nless Park and his colleagues can generate and enforce a greater unity than appears likely, ROK politics will probably follow a pattern of constant factional maneuvering and periodic shifts in power within the ruling military group.”²⁵³

While each of the junta's three major factions centered on a leading personality, the colonels who rallied behind Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jong-Pil—the initiators of the revolution—probably had the strongest personal attachment to its ideals. The second faction—the higher ranking generals arrayed behind Brigadier General Kim Yun-Kun—were more conservative and resistant to the fundamental change advocated by the younger colonels. Lieutenant General Chang Do-Young, the former Army Chief of Staff under Chang Myon, led the smallest faction—a handful of generals who joined the revolution at the last moments in order to keep at least some of their former influence.²⁵⁴

Until now, scholars have placed Park within the colonels' camp, even though CIA analysis during the coup did not see Park was not a member of any specific faction.²⁵⁵

With the ouster of Chang Do-Young and his faction mere months after the coup, the intramural revolutionary struggles became more of a two way contest between the conservative generals and radical colonels, the latter pushing for more significant changes in the political and military systems. Some scholars posit that the most significant issue in determining factions was regional origin, but U.S. intelligence noted in July 1961, that the division “which is most apparent at present lies in the difference between the general

²⁵³ “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 42-2-61, Short-term Prospects in South Korea,” May 31, 1961.

²⁵⁴ “Current Intelligence Weekly Summary,” June 15, 1961.

²⁵⁵ “Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 42-2-61.”

officers and the field grade officers.”²⁵⁶ Though regionalism was certainly a reality in Korea at this time, and a long-standing one, ideology seems to have been a bigger factor. The generals who had gained their rank through the old system were hesitant to change the status quo, whereas the colonels were primarily concerned with corruption in the higher ranks and the retention of incompetent senior officers who blocked their promotions and stifled their careers. The colonels desired to be an active force in reshaping the country; they were idealists, and the generals were a barrier to their goals. Regional loyalties or military academy class bonds were peripheral issues, military class peerage being more of a coincidence tied to time in service, which ultimately determined rank. Officers of the same rank were simply more likely to have been in the same graduating class. Certainly the networking and bonds of loyalty between class peers are worth noting, but it is risky to weight them more. Common backgrounds put peers in similar situations which helped lead them to the same ideologies. Ideology seems to have been the major point of fracture.

In addition to political differences between the generals and colonels, a major point of friction between these groups was the dissatisfaction amongst the coup's younger officers, who did much of the planning and most of the execution only to be “subsequently denied cabinet posts in favor of general officers who joined the revolt belatedly.”²⁵⁷ As such, the colonels became more adamant about securing power for themselves, in order to further radicalize the political agenda of the junta. The colonels, who supported Park and lifted him into the seat of power, had become such a problem

²⁵⁶“Special National Intelligence Estimate,” July 18, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 236.

²⁵⁷“Central Intelligence Bulletin,” May 24, 1961.

that Park had to “curb their influence.”²⁵⁸

Factionalism was a real problem both for Park and the junta in general. Ambassador Berger noted in letter to U.S. Secretary of State Rusk in December, 1961 that factionalism “remains a latent threat to the stability of the [ROK] government.” He also suggested that “factionalism has been kept under control up to now is due largely to Park’s determination to fight those of his colleagues who are so motivated.”²⁵⁹ Losing factions posed a significant security threat in many ways. A memorandum from Robert H. Johnson of the U.S. National Security Council Staff in June suggested that “there was some possible danger, as a result of a power struggle within the SCNR, that a group losing out might attempt a unification maneuver in cooperation with the North as a means of salvaging its position.”²⁶⁰ This danger materialized in the form of counter-coups and assassination attempts on Park. One that has already been noted is the arrest of Chang Do-Young and three other officers for such behavior.²⁶¹ Ambassador Berger alluded to this danger in December, when he suggested Park would need to “escape an assassin’s bullet.”²⁶² Another assassination plot was confirmed in December, 1963. The plan, which was to attack Park during his first presidential inauguration, was “uncovered by the ROK CIA which [held] a recording of a conversation between two individuals in which the planned assassination was discussed.”²⁶³

Factionalism continued to be a significant problem through the end of the junta

²⁵⁸ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 236.

²⁵⁹“Letter from the Ambassador to Korea (Berger) to Secretary of State Rusk,” December 15, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 249.

²⁶⁰“Memorandum from Robert H. Johnson of the US National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow),” June 28, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 233.

²⁶¹“Korea Death Plot Laid to Ex-Chief,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 1961.

²⁶²FRUS Vol. 22, Document 249.

²⁶³ “Current SIGINT Readiness Status, OPSUM #2039,” December 13, 1963.

period, as evidenced by the split in the new Democratic Republican Party between Kim Jong-Pil and Lieutenant General Kim Dong-Ha. The latter had “participated in the preparatory planning for the party” and resigned from both the DRP and SCNR in opposition to Kim Jong-Pil’s party leadership.²⁶⁴

Appointing or removing other leaders or representatives was as problematic as factionalism, and another limitation of Park’s power and agency. There are arguments in the common literature that Park enjoyed full control and that he was able to purge whomever defied him. For example, Yong-Sup Han argues that shortly after the coup, “[t]he SCNR announced the appointment of General Kim Chong-O as the new army chief of staff and former army chief of staff Song [Yo-Chan] as the defense minister. These appointments were made by Park and his followers and not by Chang [Do-Young], who was rapidly reduced to a figurehead.”²⁶⁵ Here Han ignores details of Chang’s moves to put his people in power, and also the formal rules of the junta which gave the chairman, Chang, power of appointment. If Han did have evidence that disputed such details, he should have provided it. However, as is common in Han’s essay, the author provides no citations or evidence to support his claims. Similarly, passages asserting Park’s ultimate responsibility for the behavior and actions of individual appointees lack primary source support.

One basic example was the sudden recall of Yoo Yang-Soo (Yu Yang-Su), who had been sent the United States on a goodwill mission in July 1961. It was suggested that his recall was related to either comments Yoo made about Rhee Syngman being allowed

²⁶⁴ “Report of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea.” UN General Assembly Eighteenth Session, 1963: 9.

²⁶⁵ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 728-729.

to return to Korea²⁶⁶ or a “remark concerning maladministration of U.S. aid in [the] ROK.”²⁶⁷ The U.S. Foreign Office suggested that “Yoo’s removal is a part of power struggle in [the] ROK and [it] considers significant that Yoo was the last representative of the Pyongan faction.”²⁶⁸ The same telegram questioned “Park’s failure to send representative to the U.S. who enjoys his full trust.”²⁶⁹ However, in the month before his recall, the U.S. Embassy in Seoul described Yoo as an “influential advisor and confidant” of Park and “an able and moderate thinking General,” the same as Park.²⁷⁰ It seems that Yoo was an ally of Park, perhaps even appointed to his position by Park, and that his recall was forced by other members of the junta contrary to Park’s wishes. This also is supported by the fact that Yoo joined Park shortly after this incident, during Park’s visit to the United States to meet with President Kennedy.²⁷¹

Referenced previously, the rise of Lieutenant General Song Yo-Chan also sheds light on the limits of Park’s agency and power in emplacing or removing junta leaders. Song was the Army Chief of Staff during the end of the Rhee Administration and a target of both Park and Kim Jong-Pil for corruption. Given that animosity, one wonders why Park would allow Song to become a major leader in the SCNR. The most probable answer is that he didn’t. It is likely that Song became Defense Minister in June of 1961, and Prime Minister in August of the same year, in spite of his relationship with Park rather than because of it. The clash between Song and Park continued throughout the

²⁶⁶ “Korea Death Plot Laid to Ex-Chief,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 1961.

²⁶⁷ “Telegram from the Embassy in Tokyo to the Secretary of State,” July 12, 1961.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ “Telegram from the Embassy in Seoul to the Embassy in Tokyo, Reference: Embassy Telegram 1853,” June 23, 1961.

²⁷¹ “Briefing Book, Park Visit.”

junta period. As Prime Minister in 1961, Song tried to force the Supreme Council to discharge only “legislative functions and leave executive functions to the cabinet”—a direct assault on Park’s supposed power as chairman, as was Song’s determination to “stop ministers from by-passing the cabinet.”²⁷² At the same time Song was described as “tainted by service during the Rhee regime, and is suspected of harboring personal political ambitions.”²⁷³ In June of 1962, Song and his entire cabinet resigned “to protest General Park’s financial policies.”²⁷⁴ Mutual distrust came to a head when Song was arrested in August of 1962, charged with wrongfully “ordering the summary execution during the Korean war in 1950 of a Korean officer on the ground that he deserted his post.” The additional accusation that “when he was Army Chief of Staff, he was reportedly suspected of ordering troops to fire on student demonstrators during the 1960 April uprising” may be more significant, but either of these, if true, would have placed Song against Park.²⁷⁵ Rash military justice had almost brought about Park’s own execution, and Park’s writings show outspoken support for the student demonstrators of 1960, as well as opposition to the government at that time.

Further putting the men at odds, after his retirement as Prime Minister, Song had been “a critic of the military government” even issuing an open letter to that end, and opposed the possible extension of military rule.²⁷⁶ The idea that someone so antagonistic to Park could stay in power for more than a year and continue as an outspoken critic of

²⁷² “Telegram from the Embassy in Korea to the Department of State,” October 28, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 244.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ “General Park Named Korean Premier to End Crisis,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1962.

²⁷⁵ “Report of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea,” 1963, p. 12-13.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

the junta is rarely, if at all, questioned in the current scholarship. This case seems to be proof that junta membership and positions were not decided solely by Park's own hand, nor could Park simply wipe away any political rivals that caused him problems. Certainly in later years Park became much more capable of shaping the government as he wished. However, this evidence suggests that during the junta period, Park was still far from absolute power.

One more incident that highlights the complexity of agency within the junta and the competing factions and agendas was the arrest of the junta's own corruption investigation task force. The 15 officer team was arrested for "accepting bribes from Korean business men charged with having accumulated illegal fortunes during previous regimes," namely the people they were supposed to go after.²⁷⁷ Some of these men were close to junta leaders, and one in particular, Colonel Lee Chung-Soon (I Cheong-Sun), the chief of the team, had received a commendation from Park himself.²⁷⁸ The investigation against the team was pushed by Kim Jong-Pil and his KCIA, and was suggested to be part of the factional struggles between Kim's colonels faction and the generals faction, in this case Major General Lee Joo-II (I Ju-II). The latter was the former head of the SCNR's "subcommittee on punishment for corruption, under which the arrested investigation team operated."²⁷⁹ Lee Joo-II would later be promoted to Lieutenant General, made vice-chairman of the SCNR, and tapped to head the junta's Constitutional Study Committee. Thus, it appears the accusations made against Lee may have been false. If so, this incident shows the limits of Park's power, as this event seems

²⁷⁷ Rosenthal, A.M., "Korea Junta Seizes Graft Inquiry Team," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1961.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

to have spiraled well out of Park's control.

Despite Park's position as chairman of the SCNR and head of the junta, factionalism flared out far beyond his ability to control and significant decisions were made contrary to his apparent goals. Appointees often caved in to external pressures despite Park's support, and simultaneously remained under threat from rival factions within the SCNR. Park was far from the omnipotent and all-powerful ruler that the mythology would suggest, at least in the early 1960s.

Did Park plan to stay in power?

Another flawed presupposition on which writers of the junta period rely is the idea that Park wanted, or rather planned, to stay in power. In Hyung-A Kim's account of the 1963 presidential election, "Park believed he was ready to pursue his ultimate goal of becoming the president."²⁸⁰ Kim offers neither citations, nor evidence to prove what Park "believed" or what his "ultimate goal" was. Indeed it is quite common to read statements about what Park thought or believed that have no supporting evidence. While we can make assumptions about beliefs based on behavior, these fall well short of certainty. That Park eventually became president is not absolute proof of his determination to get there, especially in light of the many other agents who benefitted from his staying in power. And the primary record does suggest that Park did not plan—or even desire—to stay in power, and would not have, except for circumstances and the agency of others.²⁸¹

Consider how Park became prime minister during the junta. When Song Yo-Chan

²⁸⁰ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 1512-1513.

resigned as Prime Minister, in 1962, Park eventually took his place. This is generally viewed as a power grab by Park. However, contemporary reports noted that “General Park at first had selected Kim Hyun-Chul (Gim Hyeon-Cheol) as acting Premier.” It was Colonel Oh Chi-Sung (O Chi-Seong), chairman of the junta’s steering and planning committee who “proposed General Park as Premier” suggesting that Park take over the position temporarily to prevent a power vacuum.²⁸² Here we can clearly see Park being used as a pillar of support for an inherently fractious ruling coalition; anyone who had a vested interest in the stability of the junta benefitted from Park’s promotion.

Less significantly, there are also the pledges of Park and the junta to return to civilian government. Such a return was promised almost as soon as the junta took power. Chairman of the junta’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees, Yoo Sang-Yoo, reiterated this pledge to U.S. Secretary of State Rusk in July of 1961.²⁸³ The plan for returning to civilian rule was publicly announced in August of 1961, setting a timetable to elections in May of 1963.²⁸⁴ In December of 1962, a national referendum was conducted to approve a new constitution developed by the junta. A report from the United Nations Commission for the Unification Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) noted that 85.3% of registered voters cast ballots and the referendum was passed with 78.8% in favor. The same report noted “developments and the preparations for the return to civilian representative government.”²⁸⁵ The junta was moving towards civilian rule, not only in words but in actions as well.

One detail that scholars have cited as evidence of Park’s hidden plans to keep

²⁸² “General Park Named Korean Premier to End Crisis,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1962.

²⁸³ “Memorandum of Conversation,” July 7, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 234.

²⁸⁴ “Progress Report,” August 24, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 242.

²⁸⁵ “Report of United Nations Commission for the Unification Rehabilitation of Korea,” 1963.pg. 6..

power was the formation of the Democratic Republican Party. As early as September of 1961, the CIA had concluded that the junta might form its own political party. A national intelligence estimate stated the junta may attempt to “guarantee its control through such means as forming its own political party and running military or ex-military officers for political office.”²⁸⁶ However, at this point there was no indication of Park's involvement, let alone any intention take up the mantle of party leadership. Kim Jong-Pil was responsible for creating the party in 1962, utilizing his resources as KCIA director to do so. There were hints of the party system being used as an authoritarian tool, and I have already argued that Kim was the likely impetus of authoritarianism in the junta. However, since current scholarship generally recognizes Kim as Park's lackey, the leap to the idea that Park was fully responsible is quite easy. For example, Hyung-A Kim suggests that “everyone thought that Park knew of Kim's activities from the very beginning and was wholly supportive of the DRP project.”²⁸⁷ However, Kim does not actually explain who this “everyone” was or how she could be certain what they all thought. Kim Jong-Pil stated in recent interviews that his own subordinates had presented the idea for forming a party to him in August of 1961 in order to “prevent an old political group from seizing power.”²⁸⁸ Kim specifically stated that Park thought it was too early to form a party. Park did not attend a party meeting until a year later and even at that time simply wished them “good luck.”²⁸⁹

Regardless of Park's specific involvement with the formation of the DRP, the

²⁸⁶ “National Intelligence Estimate Number 14.2/42-61, *The Outlook for Korea*,” September 7, 1961.

²⁸⁷ *The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 1535-1536

²⁸⁸ Chung, Young-Gi and Jin-gyu Kang, “A Political Base to Back Park Chung Hee,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers 32, *The Korea Joongang Daily*, June 5, 2015.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

fundamental critique of this event by current scholarship is flawed. The general sentiment is that it was a distinctly illegal act, given the junta's prohibitions on political activity before 1963, and one designed specifically to help Park win the inevitable election. Hyung-A Kim evokes this sentiment when she states that "the organization of the DRP meant that Park got a head start on preparations for the upcoming electoral contest."²⁹⁰ Not only does this imply that the idea of Park running for president had already been established at that time, which the primary record refutes, but it also emphasizes a "head start" for the DRP which is not so readily apparent. Such arguments proceed from the assumption that the junta was actively preventing other groups from organizing behind the scenes. However, U.S. government documents show that, despite the ban, politicians were "meeting more or less secretly to plan their tactics and strategy."²⁹¹ While it was certainly true that opposition groups could not hold public rallies due to the prohibition on political activities, the DRP was under the same restriction. It is possible that the advantage of the DRP's early formation has been overstated. Certainly the party's early formation was intended to give the junta's party an advantage, but it is hard to estimate how much it actually achieved in light of other politicians also being able to meet in secret. It was not as one-sided as the common narrative suggests.

Another incident which scholars have used to allege Park's lust for power is the 1963 discussion about extending military rule. In March, Park informed Ambassador Berger of a plan to hold a referendum to extend military rule by four years.²⁹² However

²⁹⁰*The Park Chung Hee Era*, locations 1509-1510

²⁹¹"Letter From the Ambassador to Korea (Berger) to the Secretary of State Rusk," December 15, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 249.

²⁹²"Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea," March 16, 1963, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 294.

the circumstances that led to this event are not entirely clear. Two days later Michael V. Forrestal of the U.S. National Security Council Staff suggested two possible explanations for this. He stated “Two opposite views are conceivable: 1) that Park never intended to bow out of politics . . . or 2) that Park would like to carry through on his pledge, but is being used by Kim Jong-Pil’s followers to promote their own cause.”²⁹³

While the current Park scholarship usually argues the former case, there is significant primary evidence suggesting the latter case was more accurate. First, there were several early indications that Park was against long-term military rule. As early as May of 1961, Park was quoted as saying that even five years of military rule might lead to “adverse effects.”²⁹⁴ In August of that year, Park indicated that he would welcome help from the United States in promoting the return to civilian rule in the form of a private statement of support.²⁹⁵ In November, it was being reported that “[t]here [were] Americans in Seoul who [were] convinced that General Park particularly want[ed] to see military authoritarianism ended and [was] aware of the self-perpetuating danger of junta rule.”²⁹⁶ In July of 1962, a telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul to Secretary of State Rusk stated that Park had

declared that the people should choose a president from among politicians who were well acquainted with politics. Military men, he added, might temporarily be needed in time of crisis, but once normal conditions were achieved and order restored, it would not be advantageous to the nation for “men like us” to go into politics.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ “Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy,” March 17, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 295.

²⁹⁴ Kalb, Bernard, “Junta Persists in Defying UN Command in Korea,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1961.

²⁹⁵ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Korea,” August 5, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 239.

²⁹⁶ Rosenthal, A. M., “Again Korea is Being Tested,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1961.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

For his part, Park claimed a desire to “hand over power to fresh and conscientious politicians and return to my original duty of defending the country after completing the objectives of the revolution. . . . Our genuine determination was to go back to our posts when the crisis confronting the nation had been eliminated.”²⁹⁸ Park made many such claims in his writing. “I wanted to hold on to democratic principles, although making a revolution,” he wrote, “because I thought I could not possibly kill the democracy which our people had won for the first time in 5,000 years.”²⁹⁹ Such a convergence of evidence from various sources should certainly be considered.

The more likely explanation is that other members of the junta were pushing for this, rather than Park—particularly Kim Jong-Pil and his followers—as was suggested by Forrestal. As early as August of 1961, “the Embassy reported that it had indications that the younger members of the SCNR, Prime Minister Song, and KCIA Director Kim Jong-Pil were resisting the idea of relinquishing military rule during the next 2 years.”³⁰⁰ Kim confirmed this idea in recent interviews when he stated that it was Park who suggested adding the clause about the return to civilian rule in the original coup declaration. Kim’s response to this suggestion was wholly negative. He stated,

I thought once we succeeded in our plan there would be no way back but only forward—with us governing. . . . For many reasons, I did not like Park’s idea. But Park was insistent with his rather naïve idea. He wanted to convince me that he wasn’t overthrowing the government out of his greed for power but from a desire for a better country. . . . But I thought to myself that the clause would have no effect in reality.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Park, Chung Hee, *The Country, the Revolution and I Second Edition* (Seoul, HollyM Corporation, 1970): 180.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ FRUS Vol. 22, Document 239.

³⁰¹ Chung, Young-Gi and Jin-gyu Kang, “The Promise That Park Didn’t Keep,” Kim Jong-pil Remembers 9, *The Korea Joongang Daily*, March 24, 2015.

Kim Jong-Pil was adamant about the revolutionaries keeping power, with Park in the lead. As early as June of 1961, U.S. Government documents “expressed concern over the growing power of Lieutenant Colonel Kim Jong-Pil who, [they] feared, might be setting the state for ruthless one-man rule.”³⁰² The document does not make clear at the time whose rule this would be, nor does it connect the idea directly to Park. The important point of consideration here is that it was Kim pushing for continued authoritarian rule.

By 1963, there was significant conflict in the ruling collective: “unrest among the armed services” and even demonstrations by military officers demanding an extension of military rule.³⁰³ There was also an alleged counter-coup attempt against the military government, as noted previously. The KCIA arrested nineteen people on such charges, giving Park little choice. Rather than an attempt to maintain power for himself, the idea of having a public referendum on extending military rule may have been a plan to force the military hardliners’ hand. If the people voted publicly against extended military rule, which the circumstances of protest and opposition suggested would almost certainly happen, then the military would have no choice but to acquiesce or face significant domestic and international backlash. Ultimately, Park was able to appease both sides with a compromise that protected the military rulers from reprisals by a new government. “In return for assurances of no retaliation against members of the junta and revolutionary government officials,” Park promised that “he would abstain from political activity.”³⁰⁴

Which leads to the last major factor in the argument that Park planned all along to

³⁰² “Memorandum From Robert H. Johnson of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow),” June 28, 1961, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 233.

³⁰³ UNCURK Report, 1963, pg. 11.

³⁰⁴ “Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to Secretary of State Rusk,” February 18, 1963, FRUS Vol. 22, Document 291.

stay in power: his eventual run for president as the DRP's candidate. Kim Jong-Pil wanted Park to run for president and had setup the DRP for that very reason. The party intended to formally nominate Park as its candidate at its convention on February 25, 1963.³⁰⁵ However, on February 7th, Park told Kim Jong-Pil that he would not run.³⁰⁶ Under pressure from the military chiefs of staff for Park to return to the military, Park made the February 18 public announcement he would not run. In addition, Park's proposed candidacy and Kim Jong-Pil's power in the party had caused a split, when Kim Dong-Ha quit the party.³⁰⁷ In April, Park called for a merger of the DRP and the Liberal Democratic Party to form a "pan-national" party, which he hoped would appeal to several groups.³⁰⁸ Park seems to have been struggling to find a method to keep his revolution moving through the election. It wasn't until May 27th that Park formally accepted the DRP party nomination. It took a long time, through a series of backs-and-forths, to get to that point. It seems that Park's candidacy was the only method of appeasing the military hardliners and keeping the DRP together.

Ultimately, what the scholarship fails to recognize about Park's run for president is that he was not one man running for himself, but rather that he represented a collective and a political movement. Like any group seeking power in a democratic system, the DRP had to choose the representative that had the greatest chance of winning. This was

³⁰⁵ UNCURK Report, 1963, pg. 9.

³⁰⁶ Chung, Young-Gi and Jin-gyu Kang, "When Park Had Trouble Deciding Whether to Run," Kim Jong-pil Remembers 35, *The Korea Joongang Daily*, Jun 12, 2015.

³⁰⁷ Hyung-A Kim notes "The announcement of Park's candidacy and the revelation of the organization of the DRP provoked an intense power struggle within the SCNR between the young 'radical' colonels of the Kim Chong-p'il-led and KCIA-backed mainstream faction, on the one hand, and the 'moderate' senior generals of the nonmainstream faction, on the other" (*The Park Chung Hee Era*, Locations 1510-1516). What she fails to see is how this factionalism could have forced Park's hand rather than having been caused by it.

³⁰⁸ UNCURK Report, 1963, p. 10.

especially significant since they were facing a well-known figure at the head of their opposition, the former President Yun Bo-Sun. Park had been the public face for the junta, and the people had strong feelings about him. Moreover, factional struggles and public backlash had pushed the most viable secondary choice, Kim Jong-Pil, out of the party and even the country. Likely no other member of the DRP would have had a chance in a race against Yun, the closeness of the actual vote between Yun and Park attests to this. Certainly Park wanted to keep his group in power, to keep moving forward with their revolutionary agenda. That is not in question. What is questioned here is the idea that Park always wanted to be the leader of this movement and was determined to use all his power to stay there. For this, the primary record is not clear. There is substantial evidence that Park was ready to step aside but the potential collapse of his party forced him back. Park was a moderating influence that kept his ruling collective and its followers together. Lee Joo-Il and Kim Dong-Ha's splits from the party show just how fragile the group's cohesion was. C.I Eugene Kim, writing at the time, suggested,

Park and Kim [Jong-Pil] needed each other; Park was important because of his seniority in the army and his moderating role within the junta, and Kim was essential because of his dynamic leadership. Now, both of them, for the moment at least, were gone, but Kim's party organization was kept more or less intact under titular leadership. There was a strong implication that in due course, the party would press Park to take the leadership and run for the presidency. The discovery on March 11 of an attempted coup against the junta government . . . helped convince Park that he would have to reverse his decision to retire from politics.³⁰⁹

In the end, it was indeed Park's choice to become his party's candidate. But this was not really a choice at all. For the DRP, there was no choice but Park Chung-Hee. So they "pressed" him into service.

³⁰⁹ Kim, C.I. Eugene, "Significance of 1963 Korean Elections," *Asian Survey* 4, No. 3 (Mar 1964): 766.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Han Sung-Jo (Han Seong-Jo) declared in 1999, “We cannot overemphasize that it was Park Chung-Hee who forged the necessary conditions and motivations for [the transformation of Korea].”³¹⁰ Can we not? Indeed we can, as I have demonstrated. This is especially so when dealing with the early period, which includes the coup and the junta. The certainty applied to some analyses of Park’s ideology and agency is at a minimum questionable, if not severely flawed. An unwillingness to question much of the conventional narrative has prevailed over the past fifty years, as evidenced by an overreliance on the secondary record. Rather than repeat the mistake, I have returned to the primary sources and re-analyzed Park’s role in the events during the coup and junta period of 1960-1963. The evidence cited herein has shown that conventional narrative cannot be taken at face value; that to do so would be to confuse history with mythology. Be they politically slanted or neutral, most extant narratives have not taken a thorough and objective look at Park’s agency. In fact, Park’s role and power during this early period has been exaggerated.

³¹⁰ Han, Sung-jo, *Park Chung Hee Boom, Is This Accidental or Necessary?*, Seoul: Malkwach’angjosa, 1999. – Cited and translated by Seongsook Moon in “The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee,” *The Asia Pacific Journal* 7, No. 5 (May 2009).

Moving Forward

As I have argued, a thorough review of the “Park era” based on primary research is important today, especially if one considers the current political and social circumstances in South Korea. Park Chung-Hee’s daughter is the sitting president and she has been increasingly compared with her father’s perceived negative attributes. Moreover, every government and president that has followed Park has faced scandal and accusations of corruption. The details can be found in various reports by Freedom House, which describes itself as “an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world.”³¹¹ Amongst other things, the group shows that the Kim Young-Sam, Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun (No Mu-Hyeon) regimes all faced bribery or graft scandals. Their reports also note police torture accusations in 2010, and the “meddling in political affairs” and bribery charges against National Intelligence Service (successor to the KCIA) members in 2013 and 2014. The corruption that plagued the past is still occurring today. In 2011, a member of parliament set off a tear gas grenade in the house in opposition to the majority party, a sign of the still present factionalism that has continuously crippled governments here. The problems of Korean politics that Park supposed his revolution would fix are still very much alive and prominent, all of which shows that the “Park era” was not so long ago.

Mythology still pervades Park historiography even though Park Chung-Hee was certainly no Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, or even Kim Il-Sung. Before coming to power, Park was neither an established revolutionary leader with years of experience and support,

³¹¹“About Us,” Freedomhouse.org, Accessed March 2016.

nor a shining personality that could draw scores under his shadow. He was relatively unknown and unimpressive; liked and respected by some, but hated by others. An almost fatal dearth of good officers during the Korean War fast-tracked his career—during three years of war, he rose from major to brigadier general—but others were equally fortunate. Park's successes at school, in the military academies, and on active duty demonstrate his competence as an officer and scholar but little more.

Indeed, little in this period of Park's life suggests that he was extraordinary. We do know that after consolidating power, and learning from some initial mistakes, he was surprisingly successful. But scholars seem to have retroactively applied that later success to his early career without clear cause. The strong leadership Park demonstrated in later years is not as apparent during the coup and junta period. It is perhaps taken for granted that if Park was a good leader in the later years, he must have been so during his whole career. But the man's later success is not evidence of early ability. In fact, there are signs that his leadership in the early periods was relatively weak. The complex rivalries and factional politics of 1961-1963 hint at this, although we do not have enough primary evidence to make a clear judgment in either direction. But that gap has not stopped scholars and popular writers from advancing assumptions about Park's skill of manipulation and lust for rule. To the contrary, it seems to have encouraged such recklessness; a writing of mythology rather than history based on fact. With the analytical scrutiny of previously underused—and ignored—primary sources cited in this work comes a second chance.

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