

연구논문

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**The Construction of Nationalism  
under Park Chung Hee\***

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**【국문초록】**

한국의 민족주의는 크게 두 가지 개념으로 대별된다. 국가적 민족주의와 종족적 민족주의이다. 한국의 민족주의는 근대와 밀접하였다. 특히 일제의 강점기는 한국인의 정체성을 형성하는 데 중요하였다. 본고에서는 이와 같은 한국의 민족 개념이 박정희 정부에서 재차 형성되었다는 점에 주목하였다. 박정희는 경제발전과 정권유지를 위해 민족

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주의를 활용하였다. 현재의 민족주의는 박정희 정부의 민족주의와 다르지만, 영향력은 여전하다.

주제어 : 민족주의, 단일민족, 국가 민족주의, 민족 민족주의

## I . Introduction

Korean people have believed that they are a "single nation" during the twentieth century. Koreans invoke the notion of nation/nationalism, and they accept as true that their nation is a single Korean nation. When did the notion of a single Korean nation develop? Historically, Korean people have considered themselves different than Chinese and Japanese people. But the notion of the modern nation is related to the Japanese colonial period. That time was the most important time for making the Korean nation's identity. After 1945, the Korean nation's major challenge was overcoming colonialism. Syngman Rhee's government seized upon nationalism and anticommunism as their slogan for building South Korea.

However, who established the firm faith of the Korean nation? The answer can be found from Park Chung Hee period during the 1960s - 1970s. What was Park's historical view of the nation? How did he establish historical people as the national heroes? How did he and his government create the Korean nation for the modernization of the fatherland? How did he propagate this new ideology of the Korean nation to Korean public rapidly and deeply? If we can answer those questions, we can understand why Korean

people obsess about the Korean nation. This paper explores the creation of nationalism in the 1970s and did President Park Chung Hee use that notion for his governance.

## II. When Did Korean People Recognize Their Nation?

The concept of Korea nation is still significant for understanding Korean people. Traditionally, Koreans have been called the "white-clad race" (백의민족) and "Arirang nation," which mean that Korean nation is a "single nation" (단일민족). When was the concept of nation created? Where did it come from? Stefan Tanaka discussed the changes and the transformation of time in the Japan. Tanaka said, "[h]istorical understanding is necessary to give meaning to the past while the past proves a historical understanding"<sup>1)</sup> His work is helpful for thinking about Korean's true identity. Historically and presently in Korea, it is still very significant issue.

Andre Schmid's *Korea between Empires, 1895-1919* (2002), Schmid argues that Korea was influenced by changes at the end of the Choson Dynasty. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Japanese deeply emphasized *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) shared similarity with Korea's *munmyōng kaehwa*. This perspective became the approach toward supposedly the highest level of civilization and allowed brevity to the Korean political spectrum made in Japan.<sup>2)</sup> Japanese colonialism suggested the

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1) Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 30.

definition of the nation. "The power of colonialism was not simply the ability to coerce submission but, perhaps more deeply and longer last, to shape the very knowledge about their own nation that Koreans developed in these years".<sup>3)</sup> As a result, Japanese colonialism became a guide of modernity to the Korean in the early 20th century.

Korean elite reformers welcomed the West as a reform model and wanted to turn away from Asia. These reformers also criticized the Eastern civilization and feudalism but still maintained Eastern cooperation.<sup>4)</sup> After the Sino-Japanese War, the Korean reformers turned to Japanese expansion in Asia in order to build regional peace and denouncing China as the center power. Both the Korea and the Japan began to collaborate to change the East Asian order. These two counties' slogans are different, Japanese move towards "pan-Asianism," but Korea focused on "Anti-Feudalism," for Korean "pan-Asianism" was a side issue.

### III. The Reason Korean People Cannot Stay out of Nationalism

Korean nationalism is a tool of getting over the trauma of the

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2) Andre Schmid, "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem' in the Historiography of Modern Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4, (2000): 108.

3) Schmid, "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem,'" 105.

4) Yumi Moon, *Populist Collaborators: The Ilchinhoe and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1896-1910* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 67.

Japanese colonial period. During the Japanese colonial period, Koreans were indoctrinated with Japanese colonial views, which were: theory of stagnation, heteronomy, and Japan and Choson sharing the same ancestry (日鮮同祖論). Japanese colonial rulers used these concepts for controlling Korean people. Through this education, Koreans lost their self-respect and their national identity. At the same time, Korean people used the ideas of "nation" for their independence from Japanese. After independence, Koreans wanted to get over colonialism and one tool was nationalism. According to Ted Hughes, "coloniality in Korea did not end with the Japanese defeat in 1945."<sup>5)</sup> The prospect of overcoming colonialism was the great Korean task throughout the society at large. The Korean people were tasked with finding good qualities of Korean nation.

In Korean academic world, scholars sought the Korean nation's "own modern model." Korean scholar explained Silhak as a type of modern model of national movement, encouraging the study of science and advocating technology exchange with foreign countries since the seventeenth century. In this way, Korean people could explain their national identity and show the power of the "Korean nation." Then, after 1945, how did Korean people turn to the notion of nation and nationalism? When was the most important time for building the Korean nation after 1945?

#### IV. The Creation of the National Hero

In 1950, the ChinTan Society (진단학회) published a collection of

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5) Ted Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korean: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1.

Yi Sunsin studies for celebrating the 350th anniversary of Yi's birthday.<sup>6)</sup> Yi Sunsin is a representative historical national hero in South Korea. This issue relates to the writer Lee Eunsang and requires attention. The writer Lee Eunsang wrote mainly about Yi Sunsin. Lee also translated Yi's diary into the Korean language in 1960. In his book's preface Lee states "[w]e, [Korean people] have a fine leader during our long long history. His spirit of leading is the glorious coordinates of our nation so that I called him as 'the sun of nation, and the crown of history.'"<sup>7)</sup> Lee deified Yi Sunsin as a national hero. Lee made Yi as the anchor of the Korean nation in order to revive South Korea right after the colonial period and the Korean War. This concept of Yi was used by Park Chun Hee's rule.<sup>8)</sup>

Park Chung Hee (1917-1979) is a Korean former president best known for developing the Korean country's economy and establishing a national industrial base during the 1960s - 1970s. That period was the age of the country and nation. Those ideas were emphasized strongly in order to build the strong modernized Korean state. How would it possible? How could the Korean public cooperate with their country fully? In fact, Korea as a country was not very peaceful during Park's period. The Korean society was in a state of disorder after the Korean War (1950-1953). When Park came into political power by the May 16 coup, the Park government needed a device in order to make the appropriateness of his authority. Park stressed nationalism in order to overcome these circumstances and make the Korean nation, stating that "[w]e

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6) ChinTan Society, Yi Chongmugong, Dongyeonsa, 1950.

7) Lee Eun Sang, The Annotation of Yi's Diary, 1960.

8) Chung DooHee, "History and Historicization of Memories of Admiral Yi Sunshin," Korean Historiography 14, (2006): 33-35.

should concentrate all our energy on eliminating old evils, thereby promoting 'national morality' and national spirit, improving national life in social, economic, and all other fields, thereby blocking Communist attempts at aggression and constructing a genuine welfare state."<sup>9)</sup>

Park Chung Hee wrote several books about the nation, for example, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing Company, 1962), *The Country, the Revolution and I* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, second ed. 1970, originally published in 1962), and so on. In those books, Park produced and explained his notion of nationalism.

Particularly, Park found out the important figures who were the martial leaders in Korean history. In his writing "the road of leader," he mentioned Eulji Mundeok, Kim Yushin, Yi Sunshin, and so on.

"Our nation was not stupid or recreant people. We have many historic figures as the proud men, for example, Eilji Mundeok was a valiant general in the Koguryeo era, Kim Yushin was a wise and brave general in Silla era, and Yi Sunsin was a faithful and devoted general in Choson Dynasty. In this regard, Korea can stand comparison with other countries."<sup>10)</sup> [Translated from Korean]

Park Chung Hee picked the model of good leaders as the martial generals. It is related to his experience and background. He was

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9) Park Chung Hee, "Retirement from Active Service Ceremony and Address," August 30, 1963.

10) Park Chung Hee, "The road of leader" (1963), 36.

born into a military nobility family and served with Manchukuo Imperial Army. When he was young, he read books about Yi Sunsin written by Yi Kwangsu.<sup>11)</sup> Park Chung Hee had a negative historical view about Korean history, but he liked King Sejong and Yi Sunsin. Particularly he accentuated Yi Sunsin in order to justify himself as a superior director. The Korean public needed a leader to invent the wheel. This historical hero's image would meet the requirements of that period.

Park attended Yi's birthday anniversary events twelve times in his eighteen years in power.<sup>12)</sup> It means that Park had a special affection for Yi. Park underlined that Yi was not only a simple war hero but also a national hero. He mentioned that Yi overcame the war with his unparalleled bravery. In addition, Park highlighted that the condition of Yi's era and the similarity to Park's situation in the 1960s - 1970s. Park used the image of Yi as the symbol of national unity.

Park Chung hee's second hero in Korean history is King Sejong. King Sejong was the fourth King in the Choson Dynasty and Korean language, Hangeul was created by King Sejong in 1433. Park said to the Korean people at the anniversary of Hangeul in 1961, "Keep in mind the King Sejong's great achievement, and let us live in hope. Let us shake ourselves together. The hope is waiting for us." The ambition of Park was to reproduce the golden age of King Sejong's period. Particularly, Park stressed the creativity and identity of the Korean language, and Park made King

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11) Park Chung Hee, "My Childhood," originally Park wrote on April 26, 1970. (JungJaekyung, The great man, Park Chung Hee, Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1992, 23).

12) Yi's birthday anniversary event is on April 28. Park attended in 1962-1971, 1973, and 1977.

Sejong a symbol of the renaissance of Korean national culture. At the anniversary of Hangeul in 1964, Park said,

"We could find the definite independent spirit from creating our own language. Hangeul is the scientific and practical language. We should be proud of our own language. Each people should have a new thoughts and behavior, and use our language in order to make a new culture. Based on our healthy culture, we should concentrate our decision and desire in order to found a rich and powerful country."<sup>13</sup>[Translate form Korean]

Park started to focus on King Sejong's creation of the Korean language. Park called for a joining of the national restoration based on the pride of Korean national culture.

## V. State Nationalism

As Ernest Gellner states in *Nations and Nationalism*: "which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."<sup>14</sup> Korean people naturally believed the harmony of the political and national unit. Furthermore, in the early twentieth century, Korean people lost their country and they fell under Japanese imperialism.

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13) Park ChungHee's Speeches Collection, vol. 1, (The presidential secretariat ed. 1965-1979), 327-328.

14) Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

This history is a stigmatic memory and it is the reason for making a strong sense of nationalism. Park and his government used those historical factors in order to build his nationalism and strong nation state.

Park Chung Hee emphasized the stable combination of the people and the country. Korean people were not individualized, but they were called members of the Korean nation by the country. This combination made state nationalism. The state nationalism group is not concerned with personal agendas, and the group in itself represents the public. Those conditions were the tools of overcoming the nation's complex. Thus, Korean nationalism stresses that the one single nation is descended from Dangun. Korean people believed that Dangun is founder of Korean's first kingdom and he is the ancestor of the Korean single nation.

Park also emphasize that Korean nation is a single nation, "one single nation is the permanent organism."<sup>15)</sup> The spirit of nation was an important belief for Korean people and they tried to recover national spirit. Those concepts formed that Korean people's viewpoint of the nation as single organism. The Korean people have a communality as a single nation and country.

Park Chung Hee emphasized the Korean national heroes seriously to build the national modernization under his control. Park's first goal is to build the rich and powerful country, but at the same time, the Korean nation need to enlighten his fellow countrymen in order to overcome the defeated historical consciousness. Park proposed to build a national culture center in 1966. The year of 1966 was the next year of the Korea-Japan Treaty in 1965. He was

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15) Park Chung Hee, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-A publishing Company, 1962).

to build the national culture center in an attempt to minimize negative publicity over the treaty between Korea and Japan.

"We should establish our national identity and make the bright and cheerful social environment in order to make the modernization of the fatherland. In particular, we should consider the international participation such as the diplomatic relations between Korean and Japan. Thus, we should reconfirm the Korean national culture and tradition to set up national identity and create a national social atmosphere. Based on them, we should form a new Korean culture.··· The government will begin to construct the national culture center for the promotion of the national culture in this year. We will recover, arrange, preserve, and promote our own national culture. And we will establish a new national culture, and inherit and develop cultural traditions. We will contribute to arouse national consciousness."<sup>16)</sup> [Translate from Korean]

In this address, Park tried to arouse public opinion from the political problem to non-political agenda for the social stability. Park thought that the national culture was a good tool to mobilize people for national modernization. In other word, Park used Korean national culture and history in a way that served his ends.

By his selection, he made the symbolized object. Yi Sunsin's birthday was appointed national anniversary in January 1967. In April 1968, the statue of Admiral Yi Sunsin established in

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16) Park ChungHee's Speeches Collection, vol. 3, (The presidential secretariat ed. 1965-1979), 42-43.

downtown Seoul. The play about Admiral Yi was enacted in Seoul citizen center and the song about General Yi was spread all over the country in 1968.<sup>17)</sup>

Park Chung Hee enhanced King Sejong's achievement. In May 1968, the statue of King Sejong established in front of the Junghwajeon, in the Deoksu Royal Palace. Park supported King Sejong Great Memorial society and their production such as the translation of the classic Korean literature and historical books. Park suggested the policy of exclusive using the Korean character/language in 1967. Finally, they opened the King Sejong Great memorial hall in November 1970.<sup>18)</sup>

The Saemaul Movement was a government-led movement launched by Park Chung Hee in 1970. The Korean public people were mobilized to create the national new modernized country during the Saemaul Movement. Park mobilized the Korean nation's loyalties to national ritual and symbols. A notable example is the pledge of allegiance to the national flag. In August 1972, the pledge was started in order to 'develop the national spirit' that assured loyalties to the Korean nation and the country.

Park Chung Hee gave full material and emotional support to the Korean national culture and history. In this situation, many scholars took part in government cultural policy under Park Chung Hee. The Korean Classics Research Institute was established in 1965 and the Academy of Korean Studies was established in 1978. Those institutes contributed to the results of research under Park's

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17) Cho HeeYeon, Park Chung Hee and Developmental Dictatorship (Seoul: Yukbi Press, 2007), 131.

18) ChoiYeonsik, "Park Chung Hee's the Invention of Nation and Mobilized National Integration,"The Journal of the Korean Political Science Association 28, no.2 (2007): 64.

government support.<sup>19)</sup> The nationalism paved the way for Park Chung Hee's successful governance and authority. However, the nationalism that Park Chung Hee created is still working today. Korean people have a mixture of ideas on nationalism.

## VI. Conclusion

Korean people have two concepts of "nationalism;" one is "state-nationalism," other is "ethnic-nationalism." Korean people believe that they are a "single nation" and the reasons are related to Korean history. The Japanese colonial period was an important time for making the Korean nation's identity. The Korean nation's big assignment was "to overcome colonialism" and the difficulty is that this "history problem" is still running though East Asia. Furthermore, under Park Chung Hee, the notion of the Korean nation was remade by Park. Park constructed Korean nationalism in order to make a rich and powerful country. The Korean public people mobilized to build the modernized state through the 1960s - 1970s.

Nationalism still affects Korean society strongly. But it is not the same as Park Chung Hee's nationalism. The Korean public reactions about the "nation" and "nationalism" are variable depending on issue these days. Although the "nation" and "nationalism" are difficult to explain, people make the notion of "nation"/ "nationalism" and they could well live in "delusion". Therefore, Korean people want to accept that their true nation is a

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19) ChoiYeonsik, "Park Chung Hee's the Invention of Nation and Mobilized National Integration," 67.

"single nation" in order to protect the Korean nation and the country.

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**【Abstract】**

Korean people have two concepts of "nationalism;" one is "state-nationalism," other is "ethnic-nationalism." Korean people believe that they are a "single nation" and the reasons are related to Korean history. The Japanese colonial period was an important time for making the Korean nation's identity. The Korean nation's big assignment was "to overcome colonialism" and the difficulty is that this "history problem" is still running though East Asia.

Furthermore, under Park Chung Hee, the notion of the Korean nation was remade by Park. Park constructed Korean nationalism in order to make a rich and powerful country. The Korean public people mobilized to build the modernized state through the 1960s - 1970s.

Nationalism still affects Korean society strongly. But it is not the same as Park Chung Hee's nationalism. The Korean public reactions about the "nation" and "nationalism" are variable depending on issue these days. Although the "nation" and "nationalism" are difficult to explain, people make the notion of "nation"/ "nationalism" and they could well live in "delusion". Therefore, Korean people want to accept that their true nation is a "single nation" in order to protect the Korean nation and the country.

**Keywords:** nationalism, single nation, state-nationalism,  
ethnic-nationalism