

1 American Image of President Park Chung-Hee of the Republic of  
2 Korea: Park Chung-Hee's Death and American Newspapers

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7 **Abstract**

8 South Korea's President Park Chung-hee was still a controversial figure in Korean history. He  
9 was a man who achieved the economic miracle of South Korea while adopting repressive  
10 measures to suspend the democracy and human Korea. The nostalgia of Park's era also  
11 remains. Park receives fairly good evaluations from the world. American newspapers at the  
12 death of Park Chung-hee provided the objective views on Park Chung-hee. Throughout the  
13 newspapers editorials Park was the man who brought the economic miracle of South Korea  
14 and a good ally for the U.S. at the time of Cold War. On the other hand, he was another  
15 dictator who enjoyed autocratic rule under the U.S. protection. The American views provide  
16 the foundation to evaluate Park Chung-hee of today.

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18 *Index terms*— Park Chung - hee, South Korea, Assassination, U.S. Foreign Policy, Jimmy Carter,  
19 Democracy, Human Rights, Newspapers, Public Opinions.

20 **1 INTRODUCTION**

21 resident Park Chung-hee of Republic of Korea was assassinated on October 26, 1979. The new government  
22 imposed Martial law over the entire country. It was the major crisis near panic that South Korea faced for the  
23 first time since Park Chung-hee took over the power by the military coup 18 years ago.

24 The news reached the U.S. and American newspapers had a chance to evaluate President Park Chung-hee  
25 and South Korea. The editorials of many American newspapers dealt with the incident as the chance to reveal  
26 the South Korea and its significances to the U.S. foreign policy. It was a turning point to see the economic  
27 development of South Korea under Park Chung-hee's dictatorship. Eventually, they evaluated the image of Park  
28 Chung-hee.

29 The newspapers revealed the U.S. early military reaction for the security of South Korea and the role of  
30 Washington for the future of South Korea. For the involvement of Washington in the internal political transition  
31 in the South Korea mostly determined by the Washington not to involve in South Korea because South Korea  
32 did fairly well and they were capable of taking care of themselves. On the other hand, some that considered Park  
33 as an authoritarian dictator Author : Soonchunhyang University. E-mail : youngg59@sch.ac.kr strongly insisted  
34 the active involvement for the democratization of South Korea. That is, American image of Park Chung-hee was  
35 important to justify the U.S. policy toward South Korea.

36 The nostalgia of Park Chung-hee era prevails in South Korea even today. After the economic crisis of 1997,  
37 Park Chung-hee syndrome was created. He was a man who provided the hope and better future for Koreans.  
38 Many foreign leaders considered him as one of the best leaders in Asia.

39 The American views on Park Chung-hee at the time of his death can provide the foundation for the evaluation  
40 of Park and the nostalgia as well as the syndrome existing today in Korea. The image created by American  
41 public opinions through the newspapers at the time of his death could provide more objective views. Also, there  
42 was enough information on him since the U.S. was the closest ally of the Republic of Korea at that time.

## 7 IV. AMERICAN VIEWS ON PRESIDENT PARK CHUNG-HEE AND SOUTH KOREA

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### 2 II.

### 3 BACKGROUND OF PARK CHUNG-HEE

Park Chung-hee was born in a small town in Gyeongsangbukdo, on November 14, 1917. He was educated under the Japanese colonial education system and graduated from Daegu Normal School and became a teacher. After serving 3 years as a teacher he decided to go to Manchu Military School to become a military official. He transferred to Japanese Army Cadet School. He became a Japanese officer in 8th Infantry Division in Manchuria after graduation.

After the liberation in 1945, he joined the Korean Independence Army since it suffered from the lack of experienced military officers.

Park became a high ranking military officer as he returned to Korea but he was dismissed from the Army because of his ideological background. He once joined the Labor Party of South that was the Communist Party in South Korea after the division of peninsula. He returned to military service when the Korean War broke out in 1950.

Park Chung-hee carried out the military coup on May 16, 1961. He controlled the country through the Supreme National Reconstruction Committee as the chairman. In December 1963, he was elected as the 5th President of Republic of Korea and he dominated the power for 18 years.

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The legacy of Park Chung-hee still prevails in South evaluation of Park's era. Some of them urged For the 18 years, Park emphasized the economic development and successfully achieved the goals. The 'Miracle of Han River' was the result of his policy carried out under the 5-Year Economic Development Projects. He also pursued the policy for the development of agricultural rural areas under the slogan of Saemaeul Movement (New Village Movement).

It was considered as another major achievement of Park with industrialization.

Meanwhile, President Park believed that the democratization needed to be postponed until South He wanted to see rich Korea before free Korea. He also believed that it was the best way to win the competition against North Korea. As a result, Park Chung-hee was considered as a great leader who brought South Korea from one of the poorest countries in the world to an industrialized and a model for the developing country in the shortest time ever.

At the same time, he was considered as a dictator who suppressed the democracy and human rights. During his regime, he changed the Constitution 3 times to enhance his power and reelection. Finally, with Yusin Constitution, he suspended most of basic rights of the people and created the foundation for the life-long presidency for himself. He faced the resists of political oppositions and students.

### 5 III. VARIOUS IMAGES OF PARK CHUNG-HEE

For a while, it was a kind of taboo mentioning about Park Chung-hee in South Korea although shapely divided views on him prevailed. His role for the history of Korea received the public attention again after the collapse of South Korean economy in 1997. Global economic crisis reached to South Korea and foreign currency crisis was resulted South Korea to request the assistance from International Monetary Fund (IMF).

South Korea had to accept the requirements of IMF and the government had to carry out the painful reconstructing processes of its economic system. It was the time that Koreans developed nostalgia of the good old time economically under the President Park Chung-hee. This popular nostalgia became the Park Chung-hee syndrome. Park Chung-hee became a national hero.

For the 30 years after the assassination, many public polls carried out.

### 6 Professor Ezra Vogel of Harvard University

Chung hee in a interview with a Korean newspaper. He used to be the one who openly criticized Park as a dictator who made Korean people suffer. (Chosun Daily News, Nov. 11, 2006) Park Chung-hee is one of the most important persons in the history of Republic of Korea and 5,000 years of Korean history for some. Many Korea people believe that he was the one who make the foundation of Korea today. Although there are some reservation for his role in the political development of South Korea, majority of people believed that he was the one to make South Korea one of the economically strong nations in the world. Also many Korean people had Park Chunghee nostalgia because he was the one who gave hope.

## 7 IV. AMERICAN VIEWS ON PRESIDENT PARK CHUNG-HEE AND SOUTH KOREA

It is important to examine what was the public image of American people on Park Chung-hee at the time of his death. It is significant because it may provide more objective views on him. At the same time, the U.S. was the closest ally and the leader of the free world at the time of Cold War. Since initial success of South

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98 Korean economic development was possible by the U.S. aid, they had great interests on South Korea and Park  
99 Chung-hee.

100 Most of American newspapers agreed on that South Korea achieved great economic development while they  
101 share the similar views that President Park was an undemocratic dictator. The Milwaukee Journal considered  
102 that South Korea became one of the economic giants of East Asia. According to this editorial, South Korea  
103 was on the verge of becoming a modern industrialized nation. It added that South Korea was one of the major  
104 success stories of American economic and technical assistance. Its economic ties to the U.S. and the West were  
105 considerable. (The Milwaukee Journal, Oct. 29)

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107 Korea become a country with economic independence.

108 Former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew considered that there are three leaders in Asia who save  
109 the nations from crisis. He believed that Park Chung-hee was one with Yoshida Sigeryu of Japan and Deng  
110 Xiaping of China. Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen of Cambodia considered that the Park Chungdevelopment  
111 model is the best for the Cambodia. (MK News, Oct. 2009) hee's believed that there was no Korea of today  
112 without Park Asia in the 20th Century' (Time, Aug, 1999). It said that

113 The Providence Journal of Rode Island pointed out that the 18 years of Park's regime recorded as a time  
114 of unprecedented growth, in which South Korea surged from a struggling, backward nation into the ranks of  
115 important industrial powers. (The Providence Journal, Oct. 30) The Cincinnati Post also mentioned that Park  
116 Chung-hee had performed great services for his country. According to this editorial, since seizing power in 1961  
117 coup, Park directed South Korea's transformation from a poor, peasant society to a prospering industrial power.  
118 It continued, "Its average economic growth rate of more than 10 percent a year under Park has been the height  
119 in the developing world." (The Cincinnati Post, Oct. 30) For this reason, it considered that President Park did  
120 not deserve end his life by the assassination.

121 The Daily Oklahoman of Oklahoma City highly praised the Park's role in the South Korea's development.  
122 According to this editorial, Park's policy was to assure true independence for Korea. Park wanted to achieve  
123 economic independence that would make political independence possible. (The Daily Oklahoman, Oct. 31) Since  
124 Korea was under Japanese colonization, this newspaper made Park Chung-hee a national hero. It continued that  
125 visitors had a hard time to comprehend the transformation of South Korea. South Korea had as little as \$100  
126 per capita income and it racketed up to \$1,500 during Park's regime. It concluded that South Korea surpassed  
127 the capacity of North Korea that made South Korea as one of the best model to compete against Communist  
128 countries at the time of Cold War. It continued that Park's trouble with the U.S. administration began with the  
129 President Carter's human rights campaign.

130 It continued to emphasize that those who criticized Park's stern measures did not live with Communist armies  
131 a few miles away.

132 On the other hand, many newspaper editorials criticized the role of Park Chung-hee. Philadelphia's The  
133 Evening Bulletin pointed out that Park's economic success had been increasingly repressive on democratic  
134 freedom. (The Evening Bulletin, Oct. 29) Detroit Free Press also mentioned that sustained economic development  
135 under the Park's regime was foreshadowed by the growing student revolts and increasingly and open and  
136 widespread protests against the regime. (Detroit Free Press, Oct. 30) Boston's The Christian Science Monitor of  
137 October 29 believed that Park Chung-hee was a single-minded leader who took the route of personal dictatorship.  
138 It introduced the undemocratic measures that Park carried on. According to this editorial, his government became  
139 more autocratic and repressive recently. Park revised the constitution to permit the head of state to appoint one  
140 third of the National Assembly and to rule virtually On November 1, Post-Tribune of Gary, Indiana also pointed  
141 out that South Korea accomplished economic development within 10 year while other countries took generations  
142 to do. Still, the 'revolutionary' changes did not reach the political area. According to this, Park held an iron grip  
143 and blocked many dissenters from expressing their views. It concluded that Park's authoritarian rule was one  
144 of the reasons for the assassination. The Morning News of Wilmington, Delaware expressed that it was difficult  
145 not to welcome the assassination as the opportunity for a restoration of democratic government of Korea. The  
146 U.S. also needed to take advantage of this situation. According to the editorial, South Korea frustrated the  
147 U.S. because it was hard to pressure Park's regime to adopt more democratic measures since South Korea was  
148 achieving unprecedented economic development. ??The Morning News, Oct. 31) The Detroit News on October  
149 31 shared similar view that Park had been a "nagging problem" for the U.S. Park even ignored President Carter's  
150 appeals for human rights reforms. Park reacted with heavier repression.

151 The Washington Post defined Park Chung-hee's regime as "18 difficult years." It insisted that Park was  
152 not a popular man in the U.S. According to The Washington Post Park Chung-hee's granite features, a kind of  
153 stereotypical military manner and his authoritarian political style encouraged the suspicion that he exploited fears  
154 of Communist North Korea's hostility to win American tolerance for his own repressive rule. Still, it expressed  
155 that the assassination ended the repression, but the immediate successor would lack the popular mandate. ??The  
156 Washington Post, ??ct. 29) From these editorials, American views on Park Chung-hee were clear that he was  
157 an authoritarian dictator with repressive measures politically, but he was also a man who brought the economic  
158 success of South Korea.

159 Ironically, as The Commercial Appeal of Memphis, Tennessee on October 29 pointed out, Park's economic

## 10 CONCLUSION

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160 development brought the growing demands for democracy in South Korea. In one hand, Charleston Evening Post  
161 and some other editorials simplify the assassination as the continuous process of the collapse of pro-American  
162 dictators such as in Iran and Afghanistan, Nicaragua and El Salvador. (Charleston Evening Post, Oct 30) On the  
163 other hand, more objective views existed. St. Louis Globe-Democrat pointed out that Park could not be a good  
164 democratic political leader by Western European and American standards. (St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Oct.  
165 30) Still, Park's government was less oppressive than most in the region. Also, compared with the Communist  
166 regime in North Korea, the South Korean government had looked almost benign according to Tulsa World of  
167 October. 29.

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169 single-handedly. He jailed opponents and stifled dissent.  
170 V.

## 171 10 CONCLUSION

172 The assassination of South Korea's President Park Chung-hee was one of the most shocking incidents in the  
173 history of the Republic of Korea. Death of Park itself was the shocking news and it was more shocking that  
174 he was killed by the head of KCIA. Lately, South Korea and the United States developed diplomatic difficulties  
175 as President Carter demanded the guarantee of human rights and democracy to autocratic government of Park  
176 Chung-hee. Also, Jimmy Carter since the Presidential candidate of Democratic Party adopted a policy to  
177 withdraw American troops in South Korea. American newspapers reacted to the incident in South Korea and  
178 they became good sources to understand the American public opinion about Park Chung-hee. For Americans,  
179 Park Chung-hee was a controversial figure in the East Asia. He was a dictator who ruled the country with iron  
180 fist. At the same time he was the man who achieved economic miracle of South Korea. Park was the problem  
181 for America that supported democracy, but he was the one who created model of development by receiving  
182 American aid. Also, he was the strong anti-Communist leader who achieved economic development as the best  
183 model against Communists at the time of Cold War. Because of that the newspapers editorials reflected the  
184 mixed feeling of America to President Park well.

185 This study clearly demonstrates that Park Chung-hee was a significant person for Koreans and Americans,  
186 too. Although he failed to achieve American standard of democracy in South Korea, he was the one who at  
187 least provided the foundation of South Korea's affluence today. While Korean people reveal his significances  
emotionally, American image of him provided more objective views.<sup>1 2</sup>



Figure 1:

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