

**Park Tae Gyun 박태균, Wŏnhyŏng kwa pyŏnyŏng: hanguk kyŏngje kaebal kyehoek ui kiwon 원형과 변용: 한국 경제개발계획의 기원 (*Archetype and Metamorphosis: The Origin of Korea's Economic Development Plans*). Seoul: Seoul Taehakkyo Chulpanbu, 2007. ISBN. 978-89-521-0816-6 pp. 418**

**Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8078-3120-5. xii + 311 pp.**

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## **1 From South Korea to Minnesota?**

In January 2004, I traveled to Minneapolis to visit the special collections at the University of Minnesota's main campus, where the majority of the papers associated with the vast American aid project between that university and Seoul National University (1954–1962) are housed, an effort administered through the International Cooperation Administration, one of the predecessors to USAID. One of the archivists informed me that the papers had gone untouched for nearly a decade, the previous party of researchers having consisted of a group of South Korean graduate students assembling materials in the mid-1990s, just prior to their university's fiftieth anniversary celebration. Although it would be several years before I learned that one of these students was Park Tae Gyun, now a professor of international studies at Seoul National University, I might have expected as much, as this kind of relentless quest for research materials, particularly new documents involving the diverse international actors who helped to transform the peninsula after 1945, characterizes both of the projects under review here.

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Indeed, Park Tae Gyun and Gregg Brazinsky begin their projects by placing the Korean–American relationship itself under investigation, using this device as a means to address two of the most influential works on modern Korean history, respectively, Carter Eckert’s *Offspring of Empire* (1991) and Bruce Cumings’s *Origins of the Korean War* (1981). Such an approach highlights the audacious scope of the inquiry, and both works draw upon a wealth of documents from a range of Korean and American archives. The “special relationship” between the two countries, with the United States replacing imperial Japan as the senior partner after 1945, thereby becomes the key to a re-examination of the process of liberation and division (1945–1948)—as well as rebuilding, which began nearly simultaneously. If neither of the works belongs to science and technology studies, together they remain valuable for scholars in the field by establishing the tentative outlines for a new economic and cultural history of Cold War East Asia.

Park’s book was clearly inspired by a need to take another look at a well-established theory. For all of its persuasive force, Eckert’s work cannot account for the dramatic growth of the entire postwar period, nor should it. After all, the building of an independent polity required not only intensive work and assistance from numerous partner nations but also careful planning, something more typically associated with the government of Park Chung Hee. Park Tae Gyun does not take up a project of recovery for the government of Rhee Syngman, but he certainly hopes to offer a more nuanced picture of Rhee’s period of rule (1948–1960) than is generally presented. When we read of the state’s role in sifting through economic plans and establishing new long-term priorities, we are not witnessing a vindication of the Rhee state, but we must set aside the stock portrait of a senior figure simply waiting for the April Revolution of 1960 so that he can hasten from the stage.

Like Park, Brazinsky begins with the assumption that only a diverse set of actors can convey the story of modern Korea, while he never casts any doubts on the central role played by Koreans in the making of their own state. Brazinsky is a historian of American foreign relations, not a historian of Korea per se, and this critical distinction determines which sources he prioritizes, as well as the type of argument he ultimately makes. If history often dwells on continuities, it also has to interpret radical discontinuities; the latter interests both of our authors, particularly for its potential to disrupt and challenge canonical works, including those of Eckert and Cumings. Since Brazinsky recognizes South Korea as a new state, he regards its status and its subsequent development as worthy of study independent of events before 1948. And if his conclusions ultimately favor a conservative stance, arguing that South Korea legitimated its policies by moving towards democracy—his new reading of the American role is unquestionably valuable.

## 2 “Nation-building” After 1945: Emerging Social Sciences and New Actors

In much of his work on the Cold War, Odd Arne Westad has reminded readers of the exceptional character of successful postcolonial and developmental states. The ideological character of the American aid distributed between 1945 and 1989, which left deep marks on the social formations and political character of the recipients, has meant that for the majority of the recipients little has changed in the last half century.

This critique, implicit to many narratives of nation building, is reinforced by recent political developments, in which American diplomatic and military interventions have again raised doubts about motives. Both of these points—that is, the lack of change and the critique of nation building—deserve mention here, as neither Park nor Brazinsky celebrates this type of activity, but recognize its historical role in shaping the Eisenhower and Kennedy aid policies vis-à-vis an emerging South Korea. If neither of the authors challenges the epistemological status of these emerging forms of knowledge, especially the use of new social science models by self-interested parties, this does not prove a major flaw.

Indeed, American social science began its ascendancy in South Korea even as diverse fields such as education, engineering, and medicine remained beholden to Japanese influence through at least the mid-1960s. For Park, the critical element is the infusion of economic thinking derived from two major sources: American advisers and policy makers and other developing countries comparable to South Korea. This second element became particularly valuable to Korean bureaucrats and policy makers as they sought to come up with some leverage within a broader Korean–American relationship.

What proves fascinating in Park's account is the sheer diversity of nascent economic thought in early South Korea. Intellectuals staked out a range of positions, and few embraced anything like the export-oriented policy that would become famous with the advent of Park Chung Hee. According to this version of events, the policies of the next decade were negotiated incrementally over the course of roughly a decade and a half (1950–1965), with actors from both sides contributing to a debate that only gradually abandoned the original terms set by balanced growth theory. Certainly traces of this conversation appear in Park's own prior publications, as well as in the work of Michael Kim, who has covered the reception of Walt Rostow in 1960s intellectual journals, but this is one of the most thorough treatments of the formation of a specifically *South Korean* social science, and the author grapples with the implications of this hybrid for new approaches toward developmental politics.

Similarly, the breadth of coverage for the American side of this conversation is ambitious, and the materials Park provides capture the fascination and concern of the American patron, without scanting on the evidence that the United States was mostly determined to protect its own interests. No doubt some of these sources may already be familiar to readers (there is a good deal about the Minnesota Project, for instance, an effort by the International Cooperation Administration that ended up promoting the growth of Seoul National University), but others are less widely known. The many economic missions and planning sessions described here end up demonstrating that Park's research in Seoul coincided nicely with the growth of the postwar American research university and the expansion of federal funding for research. The American actors in this story are not simply devoted academics: they often come from large land-grant institutions, so their activities in South Korea were often carried out on a trial or experimental basis, conceived as research inquiries, rather than as fully developed plans.

If Brazinsky's focus proves somewhat less discursive than Park's—his approach relies much more upon institution building—and depends on constructing new constituencies within South Korea, the subject matter is quite similar: political,

intellectual, and university life from the late 1950s onward. The rapid development of higher education, which Michael Seth (2002) has previously outlined, figures prominently in the background, as students and intellectuals grew more determined to have their say. Although he recognizes the role of American soft power in much of this activity, Brazinsky locates his Korean actors at the center of the story, documenting the reconstruction of civil and military institutions with funding from any number of aid programs.

During this period, civil and military life overlapped to a significant degree, a by-product of Cold War security concerns following the devastation of the Korean War (1950–1953). Military service became a nearly universal experience for Korean males, and they carried its residue into their education and work following demobilization. Rather than document the large-scale effects of this security state, a topic familiar to historians of Korea, Brazinsky provides an in-depth examination of the training of Republic of Korea soldiers, including reactions to visits they made to American bases and training centers. This approach provides an intimate portrait of the officer corps, fleshed out with passages from diaries and letters.

### 3 Shifting Identities: the Making of “South” Koreans

By providing us with this type of material, Brazinsky touches upon the ongoing process of identity formation in South Korea, a polity continuous with and yet distinct from its pre-1945 predecessor, invoking a blend of nationalism and pragmatism. Many readers may be familiar with Park Chung Hee’s military training during the colonial period, but few could say much about his interactions with his American military counterparts. In Brazinsky’s account, we encounter a Park who visits Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in 1954 for artillery training, only to succumb to homesickness and the disorientation that can come from a sudden lack of seasonal markers. Such fascinating details produce a fine-grained portrait of Park as an individual even as they capture the ambivalence with which South Korean officers met their American patrons.

In these early chapters on institution building, Brazinsky provides broad coverage of the rapid civil and military transformation taking place through the late 1950s, emphasizing that the process was not dictated solely by American concerns. The military received a boost from Cold War security concerns, which in turn opened doors for bureaucrats to seize a disproportionate amount of power as soldiers returned to civilian life, becoming government officials, businessmen, and workers following their service. Previous scholars, such as Seungsook Moon (2005), have suggested how this development may have affected civilian life. For Brazinsky, however, this is only part of a bigger story, a prelude to the upcoming conflict with a civil society itself undergoing enormous change. The emergence of a fully formed student culture and a middle class threw military domination of the state into question, and the power of the army decreased over the next several decades.

If a criticism can be lodged against the two works under review, it involves these dynamics of change with both Park and Brazinsky focusing almost exclusively upon the activities of elites: economists, policy makers, and student leaders. To be fair, this approach meets a conspicuous need in the literature, as many accounts skim over the

period from 1945 to 1961, offering little beyond a recapitulation of the Korean War. Still, a more complicated social portrait is possible, not least because the dynamics of the reception and dissemination of new ideas tends to be driven by top-down assumptions, a potential weakness that many will fault. Some compensation for this implicit bias appears in the form of rich portrayals of intellectual and cultural life among emerging elites: these actors struggled to set a new nation on the best possible track, even as many expressed doubts and misgivings about building a wholly new state.

Moreover, the sheer number of Koreans with a Japanese imperial education or military training who subsequently underwent American training challenges the standard periodization of prewar and postwar, as well as the very foundations of South Korean national institutions. Rejecting as simplistic talk of mere collaboration, Park and Brazinsky have shown that South Korean elites often adopted multiple identities. It was entirely possible, for example, for a Korean physician of this period to hold a Japanese degree, to undergo further training with American doctors, and still later to augment his or her clinical experience in Europe. This transitional generation sometimes changed names when they changed residences or jobs, and to simply label them as “Korean” elides a critical, if highly unstable, politics of identity.

#### **4 “Koreanizing” Objects, Ideas, and Practices: Regional and Comparative Issues**

In contrast to celebratory accounts of the Miracle on the Han—a term derived from West Germany’s Miracle on the Rhine—both Park and Brazinsky show just how costly state building could be in the crucible of the early Cold War. For Park, the focus on economic planning missions begins much earlier (especially 1954–1960) than in prior accounts, and he describes the tensions among different groups of actors. Acknowledging the colonial origins of many Korean institutions, Park nonetheless provides a powerful counterargument, chronicling the debates that reshaped state policies from the early 1950s.

Like Park, Brazinsky avoids the story of material transformation, but his political narrative makes clear just how high the stakes were for the nation. In chapters on development and on youth culture, Brazinsky is at his best, providing engrossing details that add up to a visceral recreation of the South Korean experience. Here, we encounter many of the expected actors—among them the powerful Christian denominations—but we also follow the activities of 4-H and scouting groups determined to improve the values of future generations. As Brazinsky observes, “Many rural young people were eager for the material improvements in their living conditions that the [4-H] clubs promised” (214), but he also indicates that few accepted all of the gifts that came with 4-H membership.

Adding to a body of literature that includes the work of J. Meghan Greene on the role of the Guomindang in shaping science policy, Park and Brazinsky each present a valuable contribution to the thesis that 1945 cannot simply be taken as a dividing line. Rather, the transformation from Japanese imperial influence to American Cold War interests involved a series of negotiated compromises, with Korean actors redefining themselves according to circumstances and with existing institutions adapting to new purposes. Ultimately, the South Korea that emerges here is a fragile

democracy with a considerable investment in state planning and bureaucracy, one in which Korean elites prominently displayed their own interests and foibles. Again, the approach is fairly conventional, as one could easily compare the South Korean project to similar plans drawn up in the colonial era—but these criticisms aside, the two works do much to counteract the recent neonationalist trend in studies of modern Korea.

Finally, any reconceptualization of the emergence of a distinctively South Korean state and society must include a discussion of the transformation of Japan—and the entire region—over the course of the ensuing decades. Accounts driven by economic and political considerations often elide the uncomfortable politics of postwar reinvention, focusing instead upon those quantitative measures that stand for success. What we have here, instead, is the basis for a rich historical account that places Korean actors at its center without neglecting the role of American hegemony complicated by ongoing Japanese influence. Together, Park and Brazinsky provide the basis for a South Korean story that is neither celebratory nor strictly teleological, a narrative capturing the tangible messiness and breakages associated with the formation of a fragile Cold War state.