

The Theory of Mass Dictatorship: A Re-examination of the Park Chung Hee Period

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The theory of mass dictatorship, informed by and in critical dialogue with the recent European scholarship of fascist and dictatorial regimes, allows new insights into the Park Chung Hee regime and its relationship with the people of Korea, focusing on the structure of consent of the people for the regime. Challenging both nationalist and *minjung* narratives as well as commonly held views on the authoritarianism and the democratization movements, the theory of mass dictatorship argues for a multifaceted approach to the Park period, shifting the focus away from the previous domains of institutions and the political to the domain of the cultural—the everyday lives of ordinary people in all of their multiple, variegated, and often conflicting dimensions.

Keywords: mass dictatorship, Park Chung Hee, Yusin, democracy, workers, Ulsan Hyundai Shipbuilding, youth, university students, urban lower classes, Saemaoul undong, women

Introduction

Twentieth-century Korean history encompasses widely divergent trajectories and experiences, and the Park Chung Hee period alone encompasses the state's brutal suppression of human and civil rights, people's vehement and persistent demands for democracy, and the rapid economic development of the time. The seeming incommensurability of these divergent paths in one's lifetime, with all of their contradictory images and implications, presents historians with enormous challenges as to how to think about this past and how to reflect upon it. The challenge—the intense political, emotional, and intellectual stakes of interpreting the past—is perhaps one of the reasons why there is currently a

relative lack of historical analyses of the Park Chung Hee period in South Korea.

South Korean society is also increasingly dominated by the proliferation of memory culture, where professional historians have a limited impact on the public in terms of historical knowledge or even how to think about certain historical issues or periods. The phenomenon known as the “Park Chung Hee syndrome,” whereby a large number of Koreans reconstruct the social memory of the former authoritarian leader as a nationalist hero and are nostalgic for the time of his regime, suggests, among other things, that “real” histories of the Park Chung Hee period existed outside academia.

Historians have also developed different ways of telling the story of Korea’s past, selecting alternative incidents, emphasizing or downplaying specific issues, and delineating divergent conclusions and lessons from them. The previously dominant nationalist narrative, deeply embedded in the construction and legitimization of the nation state and in the Cold War anticommunism, has gradually lost its intellectual credibility as well as its moral authority. *Minjung* historiography, the politically progressive offspring of the nationalist narrative, has also been closely associated with the successive “democratic” regimes, giving rise to contentious debates in Korean society about the nature and role of history in shaping the present and future of society. Yet few eras in Korean history have seen more divisive and fractured representations in both historiography and popular memory than the Park Chung Hee period.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the recent scholarly debate on the Park Chung Hee regime was initiated and carried out mainly by a group of scholars specializing in European history.¹ Inspired by and in critical dialogue with the scholarship of fascism in Europe and authoritarianism in post-1956 Eastern Europe, these scholars sparked a series of debates by asking questions that are politically and morally uncomfortable to many—and difficult to answer—such as whether ordinary Koreans supported or resisted the Park Chung Hee regime. Arguably, one of the most important intellectual projects in recent Korean history, the debate and the scholarship centered around the concept of mass dictatorship, is known as *daejung dokjeron*, which translates into English variously as thesis, theory, paradigm, or study of mass dictatorship.

1. This group of scholars has since formed the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture (RICH), which is directed by Lim Jie-Hyun and located at Hanyang University, Seoul. Since its foundation, RICH has organized six international conferences on mass dictatorship and has published a number of conference volumes on the same theme.

This paper introduces *daejung dokjeron*, focusing on some of its major intellectual and historiographical issues. The study of mass dictatorship by no means exhausts all of the intellectual and historiographical issues concerning the Park Chung Hee period, but rather limits itself to the consideration of the relationship between the regime and the Korean people, the “structure of consent” given to the regime by the people. The purpose of this paper is limited to introducing the theory and to discussing a few recent scholarly works that directly engage with the problematic issues that prompt debate.

Mass Dictatorship: Theoretical Issues

According to Jie-Hyun Lim, a scholar who specializes in East European history and the main intellectual force behind the scholarship of mass dictatorship, the term “mass dictatorship” is “a working hypothesis” that starts from a simple question: What is the difference between pre-modern despotism and a modern dictatorship? The answer he found is dubiously simple (2005:325): “despotism does not need massive backing from below, but a dictatorship presupposes the support of the masses.” With this distinction, Lim started a multi-year project on mass dictatorship, with an aim to both initiate and situate “Korean debates about coming to terms with its dictatorial past in the context of other countries’ experiences with dictatorship” (Lim 2004a:249).

Lim’s hypothesis of mass dictatorship stems from his long-standing interest in and examination of the massive state mobilization of the masses and “voluntary” ones of Germany, Italy, and Japan during the early twentieth century, as well as the post-World War II experiences of socialism in Eastern Europe. One of the more important intellectual impetuses for the formulation of this idea is the recent studies that critically reexamine histories of fascism, in particular, the studies that probe into what historians Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer refer to as “prevarications of historiography” in Germany (2003:12), that is, various attempts at downplaying or shifting the blame about the evils of Nazism to others. Vaclav Havel’s discussion of the “mass psychology of public complicity or shared guilt” in the case of Eastern Europe in the post-1956 period (1985; Lim 2005:326), as well as the “everyday-life” school of Germany, with its focus on “third space” between institutional and structural analysis, and its efforts to come to terms with the impact of Nazism (see Lüdtke 1995) also informed both theoretical and methodological concerns of the thesis.

There is much to be said about the detailed intellectual and theoretical arguments of the thesis, of which I present only the barest contour. Simply put, the thesis counters the received view of a dictatorial regime in which violence, coercion, and other means of repression by the state were to be instrumental for the regime, with a view that individual conformity to the regime was more widespread and more “efficient and cost effective from the regime’s perspective” (Lim 2005:326). Lim contends that through creating a “structure of thought and feeling,” the state produced “internal coercion”:

When coercion is successfully internalized by the oppressed, it soon develops into an inner belief concealing oppression from the oppressed. The success of a mass dictatorship would depend on its ability to involve people in the ritual of legitimacy and make them surrender their own identity and subjectivity in favor of conformity to the model of a subject manufactured by the regime. A modern subject, whether in totalitarian or in democratic regimes, stood not on the individual autonomous will but on the process of controlled and guided massification. (Lim 2005:326)

Lim criticizes the conventional views of dictatorial society, whether from the right or left, stating that their dualist approach divides the society into the “few perpetrators (the dictator and his cronies) and many victims (the people),” which fails to capture the complex and multiple dimensions of the relationship between the people and the regime, one of which was the “broad” popular support for the regime (2005:325).

There are three main characteristics to the concept of mass dictatorship: consent or consensus, penetration of the state’s power into the private sphere/individuals, and popular sovereignty. Central to the conceptualization of mass dictatorship is Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, which, according to Lim, rather than being limited to the analyses of liberal democratic regimes, goes a long way to explain the popular consensus experienced in fascist countries, as indicated by his analogy of fascism as a “war of position.” Simply put, popular consensus was not just a product of state terror and all-pervasive propaganda. Mussolini’s complaint about “unstable consent” reveals the workings of a dictatorial state which takes considerable measures to build “a capillary network of associations with vast powers of social and cultural persuasion” (Lim 2005:327). In Germany, Nazis wooed the workers with social and welfare concessions. As Lim put it, “[M]ass dictatorship is not only a hard

power utterly dominating the political sphere, but also a soft power, returning the civil society to its own normative key” (2005:327). Accordingly, dictatorship of consent or “consensus dictatorship” is one of the critical constituents of mass dictatorship.

In post-1956 Eastern Europe, Vaclav Havel shows that the people’s enthusiasm for the revolutionary fervor of the earlier period was replaced by the shared guilt or public complicity in the post-Stalinist regimes. There was widespread cynicism, passivity, and indifference on the part of the people, who, while performing various acts of compliance required of them, tried also to adapt themselves to the system. This passivity was rewarded with or exchanged for material goods (Havel 1985; Lim 2005:326).

The state penetration into the private sphere of individuals, another characteristic of mass dictatorship, is achieved through utilizing “multiple arrays of medical, legal, administrative, and juridical instruments” that infiltrate into the everyday lives of people and create what Lim calls “fascist habitus” (Lim 2005:327). In fact, this “capacity to penetrate into the extreme level of the private” distinguishes mass dictatorship from other modern regimes (Lim 2005:327). The fascist habitus also makes it possible for the state to construct the image of a people with unitary will and action and to have them behave according to this image. The Nazis’ slogan of *Volksgemeinschaft*—the national and racial community—is for Lim a good example of the process of both integration and “otherization” at work; it represents “the organic integration which transcended class and political divisions achieved by making ‘Others’ through anti-Semitism, anti-Bolshevism and anti-Westernism outwardly, and by inventing a new ethnic unity of the Aryan race inwardly” (2005:327).

The third characteristic of the mass dictatorship is the idea of popular sovereignty, or “participation dictatorship.” As Lim explains, people are transformed from passive subjects into active citizens through the process of projecting the general will of the people as the will of the nation. The logic of representation in this scheme follows that “the people represent the multitude, the nation represent[s] the people, and the state represent[s] the nation” (Hardt and Negri 2000:87, 134; Lim 2005:328). Carl Schmitt’s defense of Nazism as “an anti-liberal but not necessarily anti-democratic regime” points to the workings of popular sovereignty in relation to the general will as the constituent power. A sovereign dictatorship often enjoys unlimited constitutional power without any legitimacy complex, as its power is based on the general will (Lim 2005:328).

The idea of popular sovereignty is also closely related to George Mosse’s

idea of “the nationalization of the masses” (1975), which counters the liberal image of an autonomous modern subject. Through the process of internalizing norms and disciplines in everyday life, the disenchanting mass is remade as the nation’s will. In short, nationalism enchants people by transforming politics into what Emilio Gentile calls “political religion,” or the “sacralisation of politics,” through the process by which “what was no longer without myth and without enchantment were conferred a sacred status, such as nation, state, history, and race, and rendered them into absolute principles of collective identity” (2000; quoted in Lim 2005:329). Lim writes: “The national narrative of a collective life flowing from the immemorial past into an infinite future could turn the moral life of the individual into the eternal life of the collective, and thus fill the vacuum caused by the extinction of the mythic” (2005:329).

Lim wishes to make it clear that the emphasis on consensus and hegemonic effects in mass dictatorship does not deny the violence, terror, repression, and coercion exercised under dictatorial regimes. But “it raises the question as to why a large part of the population ignores or even endorses the horrors of extreme coercion employed by repressive regimes such as the Nazis in Germany” (Lim 2005:329). Lim argues that while terror was an indispensable means of creating consent, it was used selectively, and people responded differently according to their perceived status with respect to the regime. The coercion may have given a sense of relief to those who considered themselves to be insiders, while for those who were outsiders, it created chaos and unmitigated fear. It was, therefore, a “radical strategy of negative integration,” effectively integrating heterogeneous masses into a “national community” whose sense of and desire for belonging made them capable of provoking violence against the “others.” Lim concludes: “[C]oercion and consent should be seen not as polar opposites, but as intimately interwoven integral parts of mass dictatorship” (2005:329).

The mass dictatorship formulated by Lim is by no means devoid of dissent or resistance. Nor is it only about antinomy between consent and resistance. Rather it emphasizes the multi-layered ambiguities and contradictions of both consent and resistance, each of which arises from various sources and has varying gradations. Ultimately, scholars would have to be careful in using such terms, distinguishing and “crossing the line between perceived reality and objective reality” (Lim 2005:329). Lim writes: “Ordinary people’s reception of mass dictatorship is bound up with a transformation not only of objective, but also of perceived reality. Very often, it is not the reality itself, but the interpreted reality

that shapes the thoughts and practice of people in their everyday lives. Once entrenched in the people's perceived reality, consensus and legitimacy go beyond an elaborate hoax, and mass dictatorship becomes a reality" (2005:329).

The theory of mass dictatorship should also be placed in the larger intellectual context that has critically questioned the premises of western modernity, both in and out of Korea. In an article titled "'Modern' Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy," Lim makes his critique of the intellectual and epistemological framework of modernity more explicit, challenging the binary thinking that sees democracy and dictatorship in the same binary structure of modern and pre-modern, normal and deviation, democracy and dictatorship, and so on (Lim 2006). The title itself is a parody of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966; Jang 2006:19), which Lim charges establishes Western historical experiences of bourgeois revolutions and democracy as the normative modern developmental path and sees late developers' fascism and/or authoritarianism as a deviational response to that Western path to modernization. Challenging Moore's Eurocentric notions, Lim argues that the possibilities of a Holocaust and ethnic cleansing were immanent in western modernity itself. The binary framework of modernity ignores individual differences and puts all individuals into categories of race or nation, providing an epistemological ground for committing "categorical murder." Lim argues, in concert with many scholars of fascism, that the historically unprecedented crimes committed by Nazi Germany against humanity should be seen not as a deviation and pre-modern, but rather as a variant of western modernity (Lim 2006; Jang 2006:19).

Debate of Mass Dictatorship

From the above discussion, which presents necessarily an oversimplified version of mass dictatorship theory, it would not be difficult to imagine that its many ramifications would unsettle many of the accepted notions about Korea's experiences with Japanese colonialism and Park Chung Hee's authoritarianism. Indeed, the debate about mass dictatorship has dealt a tremendous jolt to the intellectual community and beyond. It has challenged the deeply held beliefs and common sense approaches to and the accepted wisdoms about not only the Park Chung Hee regime, but also the oppositional democratization movement as well as the Korean people's collaboration with the Japanese colonial power.

The mass dictatorship debate took off at a time when South Korea was still reeling from the whirlwind of the previously mentioned Park Chung Hee syndrome, and the debate put to the Korean intellectual community—and by extension the Korean society at large, as it was widely covered by mass media—questions that many found provocative and disturbing, if not in the way they were posed, then in their implications. “Does the Park Chung Hee syndrome imply that there was widespread public consent for his regime? How widespread was public support for the Park regime’s developmentalism and anticommunism? Were those who acquiesced to the Park regime complicit with his regime? Is it right to analyze the Park Chung Hee period as a time of extreme oppression and militant resistance? What are the relationships between coercion and consent, between the violence of the authoritarian regime and public consent?” (Jo 2005:401).

As with any major intellectual movement with a wide array of academic concerns as well as broader cultural and political contexts and ramifications, the debate required intellectual audacity and courage as well as a willingness to face possible disapproval, if not condemnation, from not only the scholars on the other side of the debate, but also the public at large. A majority of the historians of Korea, either out of indifference or offense to the presumed allegation of the Korean people’s “complicity” with the dictatorship, did not participate in the debate. It took a few years before some historians took up the challenge of probing into the Park Chung Hee period to explore the questions posed by the theory and the various implications for present-day South Korea.

Through a series of conferences and the publication of conference proceedings over the years, the scholars of the mass dictatorship paradigm have documented an impressive array of case studies of Europe (including Germany, Italy, Spain, and Austria), Soviet Russia, Eastern Europe (including Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany), and Japan (Lim and Kim 2004; Lim and Kim 2005). In the 2006 conference, the organizers tried a more comprehensive attempt at applying the concept of mass dictatorship to the Park Chung Hee system, which resulted in *Reading Dictatorship at the Margin of Modernity* (Jang and Lee 2006).

Until the onset of the debate, the Yusin system was generally characterized as oppressive and violent, without any political legitimacy and, therefore, with no public support or consent, or that the loss of the people’s support drove Park to “naked violence and undemocratic means” (Lee 2006b:337). In one of the earliest studies on the Park Chung Hee period informed by the mass dictatorship

paradigm, Hwang Byeong-ju (2004) counters this view by arguing that there was widespread support for the Park system on the part of the Korean people. Through an extensive study of the New Village Movement (*Saemaoul undong*) and interviews with the farmers who participated in the movement, Hwang shows that the regime's discourse of modernization greatly appealed to the egalitarian desires of the people, whose fervent and widespread wish to get rid of poverty and to live a better life was answered by the modernization project. Poor farmers responded enthusiastically to the call for modernization embedded in the New Village Movement. Korean workers, who mostly hailed from farming villages, preferred to think of themselves as "industrial warrior-citizens" as opposed to the "working class"—their identity as a citizen came before their identity as a worker. The state's dominant discourse of nationalism, national security, and developmentalism was hugely successful in rallying the masses behind the dictatorship (Hwang 2004).

Until the 2006 publication of the conference proceedings, the debate on mass dictatorship had mostly concerned responses to Lim Jie-Hyun's theoretical considerations and Hwang's study. Jo Hui-yeon, a sociologist with extensive research on modern Korea, countered Lim and Hwang by arguing that although the public's support for the Park regime had certainly existed in the 1960s, it disappeared quickly once the Yusin system was established in the early 1970s (2005). Jo is generally sympathetic to the approach of the mass dictatorship hypothesis and acknowledges its contributions; he notes that the theory reveals, among other things, the limitations of the one-sidedness observed in both nationalist and "progressive" *minjung* studies. The previous studies of colonial and fascist rule often dismissed from their analyses the "grey areas" that had existed between the polar opposites of consent and resistance, the realm of everyday life where the control of the state power had not reached, the positive experience of the masses that form the basis of their consent to the state, and the masses' conflicting and ambivalent attitudes toward colonial and fascist rule, among others (Jo 2005:403-4).

Despite these positive contributions, Jo is concerned that the mass dictatorship paradigm may end up generalizing as state hegemony the lack of resistance or passive obedience observed in people's everyday lives (Jo 2005:404-5). His larger concern is that such characterization as "active consent" of the masses through their internalization of coercion may render fascist hegemony a natural outcome or inevitable, that in the Korean context such generalizations might be appropriated by the conservative forces for their

political purposes. This concern leads him to argue that Lim Jie-Hyun's critique of the nationalist and progressive forces as engaged in "binary moralist argument" (the rightist accolade for the Park Chung Hee regime and leftist criticisms of it) does not differentiate enough the different political positions of the conservatives and the progressives, thereby conflating and leveling both positions as equally problematic and politically compromised (Jo 2005:406-7).

Jo Hui-yeon has proffered by far the most extensive and thorough counterclaims to the mass dictatorship paradigm, including extensive historical and comparative analyses of the fascism of Hitler and the authoritarianism of Park Chung Hee, which I will not be able to even begin to summarize adequately here. Ultimately, Jo questions whether it is at all justifiable to charge, however implicitly, that the Korean people's responsibility as "accomplices" (*gongbeumja*) during the Park period would be of the same magnitude as that of the Germans during the Hitler period (Jo 2005:469). Lim Jie-Hyun and Lee Sang-rok's rebuttal (2005) focuses on the political implications of Jo Hui-yeon's criticisms, which they see as a variation of the earlier mentioned "moralist argument." Despite the vigorous exchanges between these scholars, which many scholars agreed has moved the discussion on the theoretical issues of democracy and dictatorship to another level (Yun 2006:231), there seems to be a general consensus that so far there is no study that shows conclusively and definitively the relationship between the public and the Yusin system, with its contradictions and multi-layered meanings of resistance or support fully explored.

All four authors, whose works were published in *Reading Dictatorship at the Margin of Modernity*, which I discuss below, deal with aspects of the Park Chung Hee period, thereby providing a perspective on whether the concept of mass dictatorship can be applied to the 1970s Yusin period.² By doing so, each also responds to the main criticisms of the theory as posed by Jo Hui-yeon and discussed above. All the authors also share their critical views of the theory, its focus so far on the antinomic structure of consent or resistance, and the rather facile generalizations and conclusions. They argue for a more nuanced approach

2. According to Lee Sang-rok, one of the editors of the volume, the authors who contributed to the volume are not full-fledged practitioners of the theory of mass dictatorship. With the exception of Lee Sang-rok who has worked closely with Lim Jie-Hyun and has published articles defending the study of mass dictatorship, the rest of the authors (Yun Hae-dong, Kim Jun, and Kim Won) have varying degrees of affinity with the theory. The organizers asked these scholars to conduct their research not from the perspective of the theory of mass dictatorship but rather to engage in conversations with the core issues presented by the theory (Lee 2006a:221).

to the complexity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of the public and of their consent or resistance (Lee 2006a:222).

Korean-Style Democracy: Mass Dictatorship and Sovereign Dictatorship

Yun Hae-dong, in his article, “Mass Dictatorship and South Korea’s Democracy,” points out that the concept of mass dictatorship is still vague and ambiguous (2006). Yun is particularly critical of the notion of consensus dictatorship (*habui dokje*), one of the main characteristics of mass dictatorship: “If dictatorship has reached a point of mutual consent, can it still be a dictatorship?” (2006:232). In addition to theoretical vagueness, the mass dictatorship hypothesis is often arbitrary in its theoretical considerations and selection of historical cases and has yet to become generally applicable across space and time (Yun 2006:231).

Despite his misgivings, Yun does not completely abandon the paradigm, seeing its theoretical potential for explaining the relationship between consent and dictatorship, and thus adopts it as a useful working hypothesis. Yun’s particular emphasis is on the notion of “sovereign dictatorship.” Yun argues that the existing analyses of Park Chung Hee’s Yusin system saw Park’s notion of Korean-style democracy simply as a negation, antithetical to democracy and an elaborate prop to formalize his dictatorship. However, as Lim Jie-Hyun has argued and many others have pointed out, the distance between democracy and dictatorship—in its intellectual premises and in actual practices—is closer than one would expect, and both democracy and dictatorship contain the possibility of sovereign dictatorship.

By analyzing recently discovered unpublished writings of Park Chung Hee titled “Korean Democracy,” and a number of Park’s published writings on democracy, Yun suggests that the regime was consistent in exercising its power in the name of “the people,” the process which, for Yun, constituted the formation of consent. The Yusin constitution, which is believed to have been conceived by Park Chung Hee himself, was to embody and represent the will of the people, through which the power of the state is constituted. Legally adopted in national referendums in 1972 and 1975, the case exemplifies the notion of “popular sovereignty” giving rise to “sovereign dictatorship,” what Yun calls “dictatorship of referendum” (*gunghmin tupyō dokje*): Referendum as a legal and public expression of the general will of the people, which delegates the power to

the state, with which it then exercises its power in creating supra-legal apparatuses (Yun 2006:239). Yun shows how Park himself relied on the idea of popular sovereignty when he wrote of the Yusin as a reform that carried out the will of the people: “The quiet reform is taking place orderly at a speed that is just right for our steps. We will confront any attempt that tries to put the grand march of our nation in a reverse course. We will meet with any challenges from outside. We also know that any internal resistance and obstructions to our path will soon disappear” (quoted in Yun 2006:240). The national march toward meeting the challenges from the inside and outside of Korea is a historical mission, and this kind of historical mission can only be achieved through supra-legal apparatuses (Yun 2006:240). To achieve the goals of nation and state is also to join together the force of the nation in unity. For the grand mission of reforming the system that represents the rights of all people, there is no room available for private or individual interests (Yun 2006:240).

During the Yusin era, the general rights of citizens were delegated to the National Congress for Reunification (*Tongil juche gungmin hoeui*), which was given the rights to elect the president of the country as well as one-third of the national assembly representatives, who were nominated by the president. The National Congress also voted on bills proposed by the national assembly, making it the most important constitutional body during the Yusin period. Park Chung Hee’s exercise of unlimited power stemmed from this “constitutional body”; in other words, the process through which “sovereign dictatorship” was obtained was constitutional (Yun 2006:242). Park’s Yusin government was a “crisis” government, so as the president who led the government in crisis, Park was given virtually unlimited rights to do as he pleased, to declare emergency decrees and referendums and to dissolve the national assembly at will, among others. In other words, these emergency rights given to the president, who had incapacitated the division of powers, were the same as the right that justified the creation of the National Congress, which was rationalized as mandated by the sovereign power of the people (Yun 2006:242).

Yun argues that contrary to common understanding, Park Chung Hee’s “Korean-style democracy” was, therefore, based on the concept of the sovereign rights of the people. Park’s notion of democracy was not all that different from western liberal democracy in that, just as in western liberal democracy, “voluntary and creative participation” of the Korean people constituted the Korean-style democracy (Yun 2006:242). At the same time, for Park, democracy was a kind of “national philosophy,” an ideal and unchanging

concept, “not a reality but an ideal that the reality aspires to” (quoted in Yun 2006:243). For Park, Korean-style democracy was also a “political ideology that would establish unity and harmony in order to carry out most effectively the national task of facing the reality” (quoted in Yun 2006:244). Under Korean-style democracy, popular elections and representative democratic institutions were necessary only for national unity. Anything that fell outside of that mission was superfluous (Yun 2006:244). Korean-style democracy was, therefore, not only “il-liberal democracy” but also served as a medium to supplement the sovereign dictatorship. Yun concludes that democracy and dictatorship during the Park regime were, therefore, not mutually exclusive (2006:245).

Unorganized Male Workers: Everyday Acquiescence and the Sudden Eruption of Resistance

Kim Jun’s “Labor during the Park Chung Hee Period: Focusing on the Workers of the Ulsan Hyundai Shipbuilding” (2006) is based on interviews with former workers of the Hyundai Shipbuilding of the 1970s. While the existing literature on Korean workers usually focuses on the organized resistance of workers defined as a “democratic labor movement,” Kim’s study examines workers who did not show organized resistance despite the oppressive working conditions and severe discrimination.

What Kim finds in the process of interviewing the former workers is their widely shared sense of nostalgia: “Despite the suffering from the hard labor, they had seen the prospect of their lives improving year by year, and for that reason, remembered the period as relatively stable. The workers suppressed or sidelined, and described only rarely, the memories of brutal labor control and the deprivation of civil and political rights. Even though they now live in a more prosperous and democratized, and more free environment, they pined for the past” (2006:262).

Kim argues that the workers’ nostalgia is partly a product of the company’s mythologization of itself. In the 1970s, the Hyundai Shipbuilding company had all of the conditions necessary to become the showcase of the state’s industrialization development, and, in fact, has since functioned as such. As the first Korean shipbuilding company to have produced two super oil tankers without having had any prior experience in shipbuilding, the company’s history has been full of “myths” and “tall tales” (2006:278). The company has utilized

consciously and consistently the self-laudatory fables surrounding its foundation and success to promote loyalty to and pride in the company, which was extended to the nation and state (2006:278). The company incessantly “attacked” the workers with its discourse (*damnon gongse*) that tried to instill a sense of connection between the workers and the company, and between the company and the larger entity of state and nation. One of the numerous messages that the company tried to convey to the workers was: “to work diligently for the company is to love one’s country in a greater sense, and to take care of oneself and one’s family in a smaller sense” (Kim Jun 2006:281).

By the late 1970s, the company was highly successful in stoking the workers’ pride as “Hyundai employees” and their patriotic sentiment as Koreans, even as the labor regime and discipline became more intense and severe, and the emphasis on productivity decreased the workers’ income relative to the hours of work, as the company carried out wage differentiation according to output (*neungyul geubyeoje*). Throughout this process, the workers were called “economic warriors” in the “economic war” engaged in for a greater share of the world market (Kim Jun 2006:280).

That in the 1970s the general condition of the workers improved is not in doubt; the unemployment rate dropped and the consumption in workers’ households increased. Especially the lives of the workers at large corporations such as Hyundai, relative to the workers at small or medium-sized companies, became greatly improved, which the workers felt immediately. Yet, the company’s control of labor was authoritarian and oppressive, and the workers in the production line faced discrimination similar to the status system in the society at large (Kim Jun 2006:285). Kim’s account shows that, to a certain degree, the company’s hegemonic discourse operated successfully among the workers, who did not complain or express their discontent outwardly. In their interviews with Kim, the workers most often cited the oppressive labor control and discrimination as their chief source of discontent, yet they had not shown much resistance beyond “mere individual gestures of resistance or verbal expressions of complaints” (Kim Jun 2006:286). Workers had their own networks of recreation activities or solidarity based on production unit, age, or where they lived, but these were dispersed and did not function as a venue through which to produce or circulate resistance discourse or organize resistance itself (Kim Jun 2006:286).

But Kim cautions that their acquiescence should not be reduced simply to “consent.” He points out that the workers’ resentment and discontent that had

been dormant discharged in an instant, as shown in the workers' protest of 1974. On September 18, 1974, the situation at Hyundai Shipbuilding suddenly erupted and the workers carried out the largest labor protest of the 1970s. The immediate cause was the company's decision to change the status of two thousand full-time workers to that of subcontractors. Starting from early in the morning, several hundred workers refused to start work and demanded an explanation for the company's decision. Soon after, thousands of workers joined them, transforming what was a work stoppage into a massive strike in a few hours. Some excited workers assaulted foremen and managerial staff, threw stones at the windows, and threw merchandise from the company store out onto the street. What started as a spontaneous strike eventually developed into a "riot" by the evening. The workers confronted the police, started a fire at the front gate security office, damaged the arriving fire truck by throwing stones at it, and burned three cars. They also destroyed some expensive machinery. Rumor had it that some workers even tried to attack the ship that they were building. The protest was finally suppressed early the next morning. Hundreds were arrested and sixteen workers were indicted (Kim Jun 2006:287).

Kim acknowledges that this "violent" protest is difficult to reconcile with the common image of the docile and resigned workers at large corporations: the seeming seamless routine of the workers' lives marked by no visible expression of resentment or frustration is cracked wide open in an instant and the dormant pent-up energy is released all at once. Kim argues that in the absence of any efforts to organize the workers (especially given the absence of union organizing at Hyundai), they did not have a proper venue through which to release their accumulated energy in a sustained and organized manner; the abrupt eruption of their pent-up energy lasted only a day (2006:288).

This incident does not make it easy to render judgment as to whether the workers gave "widespread support and consent" to the Park regime, as the mass dictatorship paradigm would have it. It does provide one corrective, albeit only partially, to the criticism that in the study of mass dictatorship people are often portrayed as powerless and easily manipulated by the ruling regime. The workers in Kim Jun's study seemed to have been easily won over by the company and capital, but at the same time they possessed the potent and explosive capacity for resistance, if only to have it discharged all at once as a momentary flash, without much thought to its impact in the future.

While Kim's study of the 1974 Hyundai workers does not offer a definitive answer to the questions posed by the mass dictatorship theory, Kim warns

scholars to be wary in making a hasty decision in judging the people's attitude toward the dominant system. The existence of language—the expressions of consent and adulation—and even an act of resistance need to be analyzed in their entirety, fully taking into account their “antagonistic coexistence,” which tend to mutually penetrate each other, as Lim Jie-Hyun put it (2005; Kim Jun 2006:291). In the case of South Korea in the 1970s, Kim points out, at the center of this antagonistic coexistence was the ethos of extremely competitive “economy first-ism” (*gyeongje jeil juui*)—as shown in the widely circulated and popular slogans of “let us live well” and “let us escape from poverty and hunger”—and the state discourse of public welfare (2006:292). This discourse, as well as the actual improvement of their lives, has inscribed in the memory of the public a positive image of Park Chung Hee and his regime, which partly explains the Park Chung Hee syndrome (Kim Jun 2006:292).

Urban Lower Classes: Disparate and Heterogeneous

Kim Won's “The Urban Lower Classes of the Park Chung Hee Period: Focusing on the Busan-Masan Uprising” (2006) offers a new interpretation of a series of protests that took place in the Busan and Masan areas from October 14-19, 1979. His study also presents, by far, the most trenchant critique of the mass dictatorship paradigm.

For Kim, there are two reasons why the uprising deserves due attention. First, with the possible exception of the April 19th Uprising of 1960, scholars have treated most urban protests that were centered around or led by urban lower classes as fleeting episodes, happening either at critical moments of political change and upheaval, or at the margins of the democratization movement (2006:296-297). Second, the analysis of the Busan-Masan case reveals the limitations of the theoretical framework of the mass dictatorship paradigm and its critiques; that is, the approach that centers around consent and oppression creates another binary framework that encloses itself in the modernist epistemology (2006:297).

Kim rearticulates the Busan-Masan uprising as an urban insurrection (*dosi bonggi*) led by the people at the bottom of the society, the “urban lower classes” (*dosi hacheungmin*), exposing the various contradictions of the capitalistic development of the late 1970s. Defined by Kim as those who live in urban areas, marginalized, and otherized, the urban lower classes include factory workers,

those employed in low-paying service industries, and the unemployed. They routinely experience social discrimination and exclusion, and spatial segregation as well (Kim Won 2006:295). They also embody contradictions and multiplicity that cannot be reduced to any set of characteristics; they cannot be reduced to any single unitary group such as *minjung* or mass. Their attitudes toward the dominant system are also multifarious and contradictory; they may have been subjected to routine submission by the system and may have consented to the system, but they also challenged, as shown in the cases of the Gwangju Settlers and the Busan-Masan Uprising, the nefarious outcomes of developmentalism, such as economic crisis, urbanization, and marginalization of the lower classes (Kim Won 2006:296).

Previous scholars have attributed the cause of the uprising to political instability of the time, such as increasing conflict between the United States and South Korea, the victory of the opposition political party in the general election of 1978, and the growing democratization movement (Kim Won 2006:298). For Kim, however, these explanations do not answer the question of critical importance: “Why did the leadership of the protest pass from university students to urban lower classes from the evening of the first day and why did students disappear from the scene soon after?” (2006:299).

In Busan, the students at the Busan University initially led the protest. Their demands amounted to asking for stabilizing or normalizing liberal democracy, as their slogans called for the Yusin regime to step down, to abolish the Yusin constitution, and to change the economic policy that exploits the lower wage workers and depends on foreign powers (Kim Won 2006:305). But from the evening of the first day and most of the second day, as the protest became violent and as police and military got involved, students started to desert the scene and the make-up of the participants changed dramatically: street gang members, restaurant boys, cafe and bar hostesses and servers, delivery boys from Chinese restaurants, shoe-shine boys, teenage auto repair shop apprentices, small shopkeepers, day laborers, and the unemployed became the main participants (Kim Won 2006:306-308). What was also shocking was the protestors’ unveiled animosity toward the privileged in the society and their indiscriminate target of attack; newspaper buildings, police stations, and local revenue offices as well as private cars became the targets of their attack (Kim Won 2006:303-10).

The most immediate concern of the urban lower classes in the 1970s was unemployment and poverty (Kim Won 2006:322). In the late 1970s, South

Korea's economy nosedived, caused by the second oil shock and the overinvestment in heavy chemical industries, among other things, leading South Korea to adopt a retrenchment policy known as the "April 1979 Economy Stabilization Policy"—South Korea's first "neoliberal policy" (Kim Won 2006:299). Much of the burden of the restructuring fell on small and medium-sized companies, white-collar salary workers, factory workers, and farmers. The number of bankruptcies of small companies and the number of closings of factories and stores soared as did the price of goods and the number of the unemployed. Busan and Masan, where heavy labor-intensive manufacturing industries were concentrated, had been sidelined by the state focus on heavy chemical industries and were directly hit by the economic downturn (Kim Won 2006:299-300).

Starting from the late 1970s, both organized labor and unorganized workers began to mount a vigorous resistance to the system as their frustration surged with the rising economic crisis and polarization of society. Kim argues that the Busan-Masan case was the first urban insurrection that rose up to protest against neoliberalism (2006:296). The protest was not temporary or accidental, nor can it be integrated into the larger democratization movement, as characterized by historians until now. Rather, Kim argues, the uprising should be seen as the extension of a series of urban insurrections that had occurred since the late 1960s (2006:320-321).

The urban lower classes were a product of urbanization that was a part of the industrialization and economic development. Nevertheless, they were seen as deviant, dangerous, violent, unethical, and corrupted, and as an object whose various vices needed to be exposed and corrected from the perspective of urban hygiene. They were also thought to be a prerequisite of social unrest that destabilizes the life of "normal" urbanites (Kim Won 2006:324-325). In the studies of the Busan-Masan protest, the urban lower class participants were often described as amoral and violent, and compared unfavorably to students, workers, and "ordinary" citizens. A representative case of this reads: "Among those who burned the police station were hoodlums and gangsters....But the majority of the protesters were factory workers from the export-free industrial zone, white-collar workers wearing neckties, and university students...who are virtuous (*seolryanghan*) civilians who oppose dictatorship" (quoted in Kim Won 2006:320).

Kim argues that this kind of representation not only displays the society's general prejudice against the lower classes, but also represents a political project

on the part of the *minjung* practitioners, who are the elites of society. Both scholars and the *minjung* practitioners were “obsessed” that the marginalized and the otherized, whom they saw as different from themselves, needing either to be integrated as a cohesive collective subject or to acquire meaning (only) in the context of their relation to the elite intellectuals or as a part of the general democratization movement (Kim Won 2006:332). Kim sees in the discourse of *minjung* the desire of intellectuals both to integrate and further marginalize the already marginalized: “I think it is wrong to even name the disparate groups as mass or *minjung*....To unify and integrate the heterogeneous and disparate individuals into a coherent subjectivity called either mass or *minjung* is a product of the same desire of the intellectuals who wish to have the urban lower classes who led the Busan and Masan Uprising remain as ‘the other’” (2006:333).

Kim’s critical perspective on the *minjung* project leads him to offer a vigorous critique of the theory of mass dictatorship, that its emphasis on the “consenting mass” and the emphasis of its critique on the “resisting mass” share the same epistemological terrain in that both share the same modernist framework of subjectivity formation. Kim takes particular issue with the notion of the mass (*daejung*) that is central to the theory of mass dictatorship, particularly its presumed cohesiveness and homogeneity. In reality, Kim argues, the masses or *minjung* are heterogeneous, disparate individuals who are overdetermined by the categories of region, gender, and class (2006:332). This group is capable of articulating demands that are far more radical than procedural democracy—unlike the students at the Busan-Masan protest—and of violent insurrections; they can be amoral or unethical and unleash their resentment against the society indiscriminately. Kim argues that only when scholars of the mass dictatorship paradigm are ready to criticize the Korean historiography that has grouped all heterogeneous individuals into either mass or *minjung*, can their own scholarship acquire legitimacy (2006:332).

Kim proposes to overhaul the existing categories, language, and concepts, and to rethink the questions that have been posed by using these categories. A way to overcome the modernist framework is to investigate on their own terms the various social others, marginalized groups, and subjectivities who are “impossible to be reduced” to any particular group. More specifically, he suggests that scholars pay attention and investigate the lived experiences of the historically marginalized individuals as well as those who currently face discrimination in South Korea, such as war widows, women working in and

around the military camp bases, bus conductresses, panhandlers (*aengbeori*), shoe-shine boys, prostitutes, biracial children, and ethnic Chinese, among others (2006:333).

Youth and University Students: Social Purification as a Process of Nationalization

Lee Sang-rok, in “Discourse of ‘Social Purification’ and Youth Culture of the Park Chung Hee Period” (2006b), examines the Park regime’s various attempts to regulate and monitor seemingly private matters such as hairstyle and skirt length of youth. Lee contends that the studies of the Yusin system until now have discussed such regulations mainly to highlight its oppressive nature and paid little attention to their social context. What was the rationale for justifying such regulation and what relationship did it have with maintaining, or bolstering, the system? How did the society respond to this routine violence? In addition to exploring these questions, Lee examines youth and student cultures of the 1970s: how they were formed, what meanings and significance they had, and whether they could be considered counter-culture or sub-culture (2006b:338). By exploring these questions, Lee hopes to bring out the “multiplicity embedded in cultural practices” of the state and the people during the period (2006b:337).

In Korea, the term “social purification” (*sahoe jeonghwa*) has appeared in social discourse from the colonial period, but in the 1960s it was reappropriated as a state project by the junta leaders who came into power after the military coup of May 16th, 1961. Initially, the state-organized purification campaigns were aimed at regulating mass media, cleaning up “abuse of power and corruption” (*bujeong bupae*), and getting rid of gangsters and other “socially undesirable elements.” Through taming the “private” violence of gangsters with the violence of the state, the coup leaders demonstrated that the new state was ready to exercise its power in the name of protecting citizens (2006b:342). Coup leaders also initiated and carried out various citizens’ movements, such as “Reconstruction Citizens Movement” (*Jaegon gungmin undong*), which Park Chung Hee called “a human revolution, life revolution, and social revolution.” These revolutions aimed at “getting rid of poverty as soon as we can, developing an economically strong country, and establishing a solid foundation for liberal democratic politics, so that we can display superiority of our nation” (quoted in Lee 2006b:343-344).

In the mid-1960s, the purification campaign targeted the “abuse of power and corruption” as the main hindrance to the progress of the nation in its steady march toward modernization (Lee 2006b:345). Corrupt politicians, public officials, and teachers, as well as prostitutes and owners of unlicensed bars and restaurants, became the target of the purification campaigns (Lee 2006b:346). At the same time the campaign was to educate Koreans in how to become a good proper citizen; some of the campaigns included learning “a correct way to hoist the Korean flag,” “clean up the front of one’s house,” “to be the first to stand in line” and “to throw out substandard comic books” (Lee 2006b:346). A nationwide “voluntary” citizens’ organization, with the state’s material and bureaucratic support, carried out many of these campaigns.

In the 1970s, the object of the state purification campaign included young men (*cheongnyeon*), adolescents (*cheongsonyeon*) and the “social others” who were considered to be outside of the social norm and a threat to male-oriented society, such as “women who offend public morals,” sex traffickers, hoodlums, orphans, youth with discipline problems, followers of “new religions,” makers of substandard foodstuff (*bulryang sikipum*), and unscrupulous bureaucrats (Lee 2006b:348).

Youth has always been considered a leading force for the nation and society and, therefore, the object of state monitoring and regulation; the youth in Korea of the 1970s was doubly burdened with the responsibility to modernize the motherland and lead the society into a bright future (Lee 2006b:352). The emergence of youth culture in South Korea was also a product of the modernization drive that began in the 1960s. A project to catch up with the west, the modernization drive was not limited to building factories and producing modern industrial products; it also encompassed cultural adoption and cultural changes that “imitated the culture and mental world (*jeongsin segye*) of the West” (Lee 2006b:358). With the flow of “condensed forms” of western culture, the intense competitive structure of high speed growth society, and the oppressive control of the Yusin system, the youth felt alternatively lonely, alienated, and resistant. In the 1970s, Western Europe’s countercultural movement of the 1960s was embraced in South Korea mainly as a cultural symbol of the West rather than as a form of resistance, and blue jeans, acoustic guitars, draft beer, and long hair became popular among youth as icons of Western culture (Lee 2006b:358). Many expressed their discontent with the system and the older generation by enjoying, individually and privately, their own generation’s cultural symbols (Lee 2006b:358).

In 1970, police began to regulate the length of hair and skirts of young people, castigating those who wore long hair and short mini-skirts as emblematic of an “indiscriminate dissoluteness that corrupts social order and causes decadence (Lee 2006b:352). But the youth of Korea, as elsewhere, continuously eluded the boundary set by the state (Lee 2006b:375). From the Yusin system’s perspective, those who organized anti-government protests could be branded as “communists” and therefore rendered as “non-citizens” and easily subjected to discipline, but those who resisted and crossed the boundary of cultural norms were more difficult to control. Despite the disciplinary strategies based on the fear of otherization, many went on to enjoy “deviation” on the down low, by keeping their hair long and continuing to frequent go-go dance halls, away from the watchful eyes of police and ignoring the older generation’s disdain (Lee 2006b:357).

Lee’s account shows that in the South Korea of the Yusin era two widely disparate worlds coexisted side by side. A blatantly repressive state mechanism operated at full force outside the boundary of normality drawn by the Yusin system, as the numerous cases of anti-state or pro-communist organizations—many of them state-manufactured—have shown. But inside the boundary, the state made strenuous efforts to reconstruct a community with discursive strategies of persuasion and identification. Park Chung Hee’s discourse of building national community based on “total union” (*chonghwa dangyeol*) and “national unity” (*gunghminjeok ilchegam*) emphasized unity as the main task facing the Korean people, for both the project of modernization and economic development (Lee 2006b:355).

Park Chung Hee desired a strong and prosperous nation (*ganghan minjok*, *jalsaneun minjok*) and projected this desire onto the public through powerful state apparatuses. Park’s scorn for the history of the Joseon period (1492-1910) as blemished by foreign invasions and factionalism of Confucian elite, itself was an expression of a strong desire to be reborn as a strong people and nation. For Park, nation was “everlasting” (*yeonggu bulmyeol*) and a “supreme community of fate” (*jeoldaejeok unmyeong gongdongche*), and should be placed above democracy and all other concepts that comprise a modern value system. His hope for creating a prosperous future for the nation developed into efforts to reconstruct “citizen” (*gunghmin*) as a subject who can lead the “modernization of motherland” (Lee 2006b:374).

Lee argues that social purification was, therefore, a concomitant process of identification and discipline—transforming the masses into “citizens” and then disciplining them to remain inside the boundary of social norm. As one can

imagine, this project faced serious obstacles. One was the rampant “abuse of power and corruption” (*bujeong bupae*) within the bureaucracy, and the other was the indifference or resistance of the public. Lee argues that the Yusin Constitution and the Emergency Decrees were more radicalized forms of social purification. These measures were aimed at sealing off any and all resistance. With these draconian measures, the society became realigned as a space of control and discipline, as in military barracks or a prison (Lee 2006b:374).

The discourse of social purification was also an attempt to forge an organic bond between the individual, family, and state. In numerous campaigns, the family was projected as a site where the individual is educated and disciplined, where the individual’s discontent is absorbed and mediated, and where the individual’s connection with the state is made visible. The state’s emphasis of women’s role as caretaker of the family made young women a focused target of the campaign; the young women as future homemakers were to be monitored closely to ensure that they did not inadvertently wander into “bars and red light districts” (Lee 2006b:348-349).

Despite the students’ ardent demand for restoration of freedom and democracy in the 1970s, Lee argues that the majority of the Koreans believed at the time that freedom and democracy can be delayed for “economic and state development,” and this sentiment had not abated until the end of the Yusin system. By aligning themselves with the factory workers and the urban lower classes—the direct victims of the modernization drive and an Achilles’ heel of the Park system—the student movement functioned to expand the fissures and contradictions that existed within the consent structure of the public (2006b: 376). But Lee wonders how successful the 1970s students were in overcoming the authoritarian, militaristic, and patriarchal culture of society at large (2006b:375).

Lee believes that during the Yusin era there was a loose sense of consensus toward the state’s goal of economic development, as shown in the widely circulated phrases such as “let us live well” and “let us overcome poverty,” and that this structure of consent can be said to have lasted until the end of the era. While the state was constantly evoking the fear of North Korea and engaged in military build-up, it also created a fantasy that “once one endures the efforts for modernization, a sweet welfare state and bright national prosperity will be ensured.” Lee suggests that the majority of the people aspired to middle class happiness and did not disavow the project of modernization led by the state, despite the dark shade it cast and the brute violence of the state (2006b:348).

But what Lee considers important is that this consent structure was maintained through a continuous process of “purification” and discipline against those who disrupted or opposed it, and that the structure became increasingly unstable towards the end of the Park regime (2006b:356). Lee also warns us about making a hasty judgment about the support of the public; the “ardent ardor” of the public was also a product of constant prodding from the state and society, whose “incantation of the subjectivity as citizens denoted their incompleteness as citizens,” and their very incompleteness provided a rationale and meaning for the state project (2006b:350-51).

Where is the Gender Perspective?

A review of the theory of mass dictatorship, even with as limited a scope as this one, would not be complete without discussing at least one scholar’s response that offers a critical perspective of gender. Feminist scholar Jeong Hui-jin (2006) is enthusiastic about the issues articulated by the theory of mass dictatorship, declaring that in terms of its intellectual and political significance, there has been no parallel among scholarly debates in recent history.

As important and compelling as these issues are, they are by no means wholly new, Jeong notes; the 1980s women’s movement and feminists have raised similar issues. But the lived experiences of women and the language of women’s resistance have never been able to create a big wave that stirred the whole society. In the absence of epistemological and political space for women to be able to articulate their thoughts and agendas, and in a society where even the intellectual community perceives the absence of this kind to be natural, women have been invisible, and heard only when they are voiced through the vector of orientalism: that is, what a Korean woman says can be and is ignored, but the same words spoken by a Western intellectual are acknowledged (2006:404). This has to do with the coloniality (*sikminseong*), which, according to Jeong, is deeply permeated in Korean society (2006:404).

For Jeong, one of the fundamental problems concerning the discourse of mass dictatorship is the relative absence of gender perspective. The (male) scholars participating in the study of mass dictatorship, as vigorously engaged as they are with one another, have reached an intellectual impasse because they have not challenged each other’s epistemological basis. This is because these scholars—on both the sides of the debate—fundamentally share the same

epistemology as males. They are, to borrow from Lim Jie-Hyun, “antagonistic accomplices” (*jeokdaejeok gongbeumja*) (quoted in Jeong 2006:408). In Jeong’s view, in South Korea, a greater epistemological gap exists between the individuals with gender differences than between those with political differences. The politics of gender operates in such a way that “male bonding” overrides any political differences among men (2006:408). The participating scholars’ different perspectives might seem rather an unbridgeable gulf, seen from the narrowly defined political arena, but the difference, according to Jeong, is rather insignificant when viewed from the outside of the existing political arena (2006:409).

Jeong opines that the lack of gender perspective in the debate is possibly due to the scholars’ preoccupation with nationalism; they are vehemently critical of nationalism and national culture, seeing them as the matrix for the process that George Moses described as “nationalization of the masses” (1975). Yet their point of view of society remains largely “male-oriented,” seeing it as relatively transparent and universal (Jeong 2006:412). Jeong argues that criticizing nationalism is not enough: “The ways women relate to state are different from the ways men relate to state; women in the existing sexualized nation state were not full-fledged citizens; therefore, it is important to differentiate women from the “mass.” This is not to deny that women cooperated with the nation state but rather to point out that the ways the masses relate to the state differ according to their sexual, racial, class, and regional locations (2006:413).

According to Jeong, few countries identify the individual with family and state as strongly as South Korea, where an individual is seen as a natural part of family and state. Scholars of the mass dictatorship paradigm mention the role of family ideology as operating in private and everyday realms, but so far there is very little scholarly work that deals with this issue in any depth. Jeong finds it difficult to understand: “Could there be any other way to explain this than to say that knowledge production is male-oriented?” (2006:413). From a gender perspective, “gender division of labor” is clearly operating in knowledge production. Jeong argues that in Korean society all of the social issues related to family, sexual discrimination, age, sexual orientation, and the physically challenged are considered to be “small issues” and concern mainly—and sometimes only—those who are directly affected by these issues (2006:413).

Jeong also maintains that gender ideology was at the center of the voluntary consent structure during the Park era. For example, the village women participated in the New Village Movement more actively than the state

demanded or anticipated. The participation in the movement gave women the opportunity to challenge sexual discrimination and the patriarchal order that were still prevalent in rural villages. The women leaders in the movement could resist the “private” patriarchal order, such as their husbands and the family system, through invoking the state discourse of developmentalism. Of course, women’s liberation met with the limitations set by the state, and women’s efforts were in many cases subsumed to the state developmentalism project, but gender was a central factor for success of the New Village Movement (2006:417-419).

***Minjung* and the Mass: In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The debate of mass dictatorship, occurring at a time when South Korean society is undergoing momentous changes that have affected the economic and political structures as well as the structures of everyday life, points to an accompanying intellectual (and political) paradigm shift such changes give rise to. These changes have compelled scholars to question some of the founding moments of modernity as well as the commonly held beliefs about and approaches to critical moments of contemporary Korea, including authoritarianism, economic development, and the *minjung* movement.

The scholars of the mass dictatorship debate rightly challenge the limits of the concept of *minjung*. The discursive construction of *minjung* as a unitary consciousness and subjectivity that opposed the existing divisional system, political oppression, and Western modernization, was a characteristically postcolonial phenomenon, as I argue elsewhere (2007). *Minjung* as homogeneous and cohesive subjectivity was conceived at a time when South Korea was under the grip of an authoritarian regime and capitalism was still developing. Discourse of *minjung* was also complicit with the state-oriented collective ideology in that both, in their parallel pursuit of collective aspirations, subsumed the individual into the larger collective—albeit for different political projects.

South Korea is presently a country of procedural democracy and advanced capitalism with the resulting differentiation in class structure, and proliferations of multiple subjectivities and desires. It is also a society of consumer capitalism and popular culture, where much of public discourse is initiated and mediated by the mass media. With the public’s increasing demand for the “instant historicization of anything and everything,” historians can no longer (and do not wish to) claim any authority over historical matters or privileged access to truth.

The past is increasingly becoming another commodity, and its mass consumption is becoming effectively “a means for reconstituting” the society (Geyer 1997:94).

In the realm of popular memory, the recollections of the oppressive authoritarian regime are increasingly reorganized by the teleology of modernization, and significance of the *minjung* movement reduced to an inconvenient but necessary detour in South Korea’s inexorable march toward capitalism and modernization. In this context, to insist on questioning whether the masses voluntarily consented to the Park regime, as the mass dictatorship paradigm does, is not to naturalize or legitimize the dictatorship—as some critics have alleged—but rather to argue that the forms of oppression that operated in making the masses into consenting subjectivity continue into the present, as pointed out by Jeong (2006:411), albeit in different ways and to varying degrees. In other words, the debate has functioned to critically reexamine the present state of democracy by exploring the still existing forms of oppression—the various power relations that include regionalism, academic cliquism (*hakbeol*), nationalism, aspiration for developmentalism, and patriarchy (Jeong 2006:411).

The mass dictatorship debate, at another level, is “historiographical self-questioning,” challenging the dominant nationalist and more “progressive” *minjung* narratives, as well as the existing agenda of social history, by shifting its mode of research and the problematic away from the prevailing fields of institutions or the political domain to the cultural domain—the everyday lives of ordinary people in all of their multiple, often conflicting, and variegated dimensions. The outcome of this debate will depend very much on the willingness on the part of the intellectual community to bring to light the repressed elements of the past and make possible their critical appropriation in contemporary South Korean society.

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