***Cornerstone of the Nation: The Defense Industry and the Building of Modern Korea under Park Chung Hee*** by Peter Banseok Kwon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2024. xxi, 422 pp.

South Korea's defense industry has recently garnered significant international attention with its rapid growth in arms exports. This industry had its beginnings decades earlier during the rule of Park Chung Hee (1961–1979), as Peter Banseok Kwon demonstrates in his book. Kwon's narrative, however, is not just about tracing the origins of the defense industry. As the subtitle indicates, Kwon is fundamentally concerned with explaining how central national defense is to understanding South Korea's much-vaunted rapid industrialization and even the Park regime itself.

Kwon adds to the burgeoning literature on Korean militarism, including the pioneering work of Seungsook Moon (2005) and Carter Eckert (2016), and how it has defined political ideology, approaches to governance, and even notions of modernity in Korea.[1] Kwon's major contribution is to illustrate the economic and technological dimensions of Park-era militarism, characterizing Korea's economic development as a form of "militarized industrialization" (21). He shows how two of the defining aspects of the Park government in the 1970s, namely the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization (HCI) drive and the harshly authoritarian Yusin regime, were both intimately tied to defense considerations and initiatives.

In five detailed chapters, Kwon lays out in clear prose how the push for "self-reliant national defense" (*jaju gukbang*) shaped South Korea's economic development, accelerated technological advancement, and enhanced solidarity between the regime and society. Chapter 1 explores the "total security system" (*chongnyeok anbo cheje*) established in the late 1960s amid an unprecedented sense of crisis within South Korea arising due to violent tensions with North Korea and the Americans' growing ambivalence over maintaining their security commitments in East Asia, which made the push for *jaju gukbang* a top priority for Park. Chapter 2 delves into the policymaking behind HCI, which Park personally micromanaged, and its intertwinement with defense concerns to produce Korea's military-industrial complex. Kwon argues that the "main motive" behind HCI was "to establish an independent defense industry based on civilian infrastructure," linking "civilian industrialization and militarization"

1. Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism, 1866–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

(84). Chapter 3 focuses on the "militarization" of the chaebol, which were instrumental in defense industrialization, with Hanwha as the representative case study. Most major chaebol invested heavily in the defense industry, which carried over into civilian manufacturing operations, as technology transfers and precise standards for quality control subsequently allowed for the rapid diversification of industries. Militarization also manifested in strict, hierarchical, and disciplined work culture and management styles, whether in corporate offices or on the factory floor. Chapter 4 covers the pursuit of "national scientization," producing a new corps of skilled "industrial warriors," including scientists, technicians, and engineers, while also creating the infrastructure for scientific and technological research and development, all of which also benefited civilian industries. Finally, chapter 5 examines the efforts to mobilize the populace to fund the clandestine Yulgok Operation for military modernization in the mid-1970s. The core campaigns were the National Defense Donation (NDD) drive and the National Defense Tax (NDT), which exhorted the general populace to financially contribute to national defense.

Through this study of militarized industrialization, Kwon also significantly contributes to other important topics in modern Korean history. One key argument is about the Yusin system inaugurated in 1972, through which the Park regime heightened its oppressive policies. Historians have debated the character of this regime. Was it the outcome of HCI or vice-versa? Was it just a Machiavellian political maneuver to seize more power? While acknowledging that colonial-era ideational influences and immediate political concerns likely contributed to Park's decision to implement Yusin, Kwon ultimately asserts that its purpose was "primarily to support a new defense industry" (101), given the necessity of concentrated state power to push through the policies necessary for HCI. While he offers persuasive evidence for this contention, the draconian nature of Yusin, particularly its infamous Emergency Decrees, at least raises the question of whether the Park regime soon confused means and ends, shaping Yusin into a mechanism of intensive political and societal control to prolong Park's stay in power.

On the topic of state-society relations, Kwon wades into heated discussions about the degree of societal consent behind the Park regime, specifically citing the NDD and NDT as examples of mass public participation in state initiatives. With this line of inquiry, Kwon's book joins the literature on "mass dictatorship" founded by historian Jie-Hyun Lim and inspired by Gramsci, which argues for the need to recognize how modern dictatorships rely as much on societal consensus as violent coercion, if not more, to maintain themselves. The debate remains unsettled regarding where the line between coercion and

consent lies, and how thin it is. But it is difficult to deny that many Koreans did voluntarily and enthusiastically participate in these and other mass campaigns. Moreover, the NDD and NDT campaigns cannot help but remind the reader of the gold donation drives during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which seems to support an argument for the development of an internalized, nation-oriented "civic duty," as Aram Hur has discussed in her recent book.[2]

This argument about societal consent is linked to Kwon's methodology. The book is founded on his meticulous and exhaustive archival research, but a true highlight is the hundreds of interviews he conducted, with subjects including government officials, managers, engineers, factory workers, and ordinary civilians. The sheer number of voices that he incorporates in the narrative reflects, first, the mammoth scale of the defense industry project and, second, how it was simultaneously a top-down and bottom-up effort that mobilized large swaths of Korean society. However, since most interviewees were those directly and indirectly involved in this project, one absent set of voices is that of critics of militarized industrialization. Readers may wonder whether any dissidents against the Park regime questioned the militaristic basis of its economic development or were generally unaware of it.

Another of the book's contributions is its reconceptualization of Korea-US relations. This relationship has frequently been characterized in terms of inequality, variously framed as a case of patron-client relations or even neocolonialism. While not denying this dimension, Kwon also emphasizes Korean agency. This included aggressively seeking out novel technologies and technical knowledge—often engaging in industrial espionage and theft—and forcing the United States to reassess its assistance to South Korea. Moreover, South Korea's demonstration of its advanced defense capabilities by the 1970s convinced the American government not to abandon it like it did South Vietnam. This is not to deny the vast imbalances of power that existed in this relationship, but Kwon's account also shows numerous instances of the tail wagging the dog.

Finally, Kwon shows how the term *juche* should be studied as a concept that animated Koreans on both sides of the DMZ. In its original meaning, it denotes the "subject," and in its political uses in Korea, it can be interpreted as signifying the pursuit of autonomous subjectivity for the Korean nation-state. Despite their mutual enmity, the two Koreas shared this common goal. While well-documented in North Korea, the terms *juche* and *jucheseong* were also common parlance in South Korean political discourse. The idea of *jaju gukbang* further reflects South

2. Aram Hur, *Narratives of Civic Duty: How National Stories Shape Democracy in Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

Koreans' obsession with preserving and enhancing their own autonomy and subjectivity, something that has carried over to the present day.

Overall, *Cornerstone of the Nation* is a pathbreaking work and will surely itself become a cornerstone of the growing scholarship on the Park Chung Hee era and modern Korean history as a whole.

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