

***Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea.* By Charles R. Kim. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. xi + 264 pp. [ISBN: 9780824855949]**

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Charles R. Kim's *Youth for Nation* represents an impressive effort to trace the evolution of South Korean ideology from 1953 to 1964. As the author informs the reader in the beginning of his study, South Korea's state-backed ideology was but a "version of public discourse supported by power" (p. 14). That is, both the state's ideology and public discourse shared a common discursive territory, enabling individuals to contest the hegemonial claims of the state in the same language as was employed by the state. In his pursuit of these discursive struggles, Kim isolates two especially poignant manifestations of South Korea's discourse: "wholesome modernization" and "the student vanguard." The South Korean state promoted both, paying particular attention to the inculcation of the young generation. Kim thus shows that protesters' self-rationalization during the 4.19 Revolution in 1960 grew organically out of the state-sponsored discourse that the youth had internalized. Put differently, student protest in the April of 1960 was the specter conjured up by the very regime against which it eventually turned.

The author unfolds his argument in a series of six chapters (discussed

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below), with the first four serving as a background for and buildup to the final two chapters on 4.19 and Park Chung Hee's military takeover. While some might lament the fact that only two chapters (plus an epilogue) deal with the tumultuous 1960-64 period, Kim's approach works well in the overall scheme of the book, introducing the reader to the complexities of South Korea's discourse before moving on to its unleashing during the 4.19 Revolution. Throughout the book, Kim relies on a wide gamut of source material, ranging from movies to magazines (e.g., *Sasanggye*, *Yŏwŏn*, *Sint'aeyang*) to school textbooks. Overall, considering the author's argument, these are effective in conveying a sense of the contemporary discourse.

While chapter 1 features an account of South Korean poverty in the aftermath of the Korean War and intellectual responses to this situation, in the second chapter Kim covers the discourse surrounding wholesome modernization, which in many ways represented a reaction to the bleak economic prospects at the time. Here Korean intellectuals attempted to carefully update Korean culture in accordance with the exigencies of the modern present, without losing Korea's national essence to the modernity of the West. The author frames this attitude in terms of a "postcolonial traditionalism" that manifested itself in the advocacy of anti-consumption, anticommunism, and modernization theory. Kim's use of film is particularly effective in helping the reader visualize the fusion of a constructed tradition with Western notions. *The Love Marriage* represents a case in point, as the author uses the film to illustrate the emergence of a new conception of marriage, the "arranged love marriage," which amalgamated old values with liberal ones (p. 61).

Chapter 3 sets up the second chief component of the discourse examined by the book, student vanguardism. Refreshingly, rather than viewing the notion of a morally conscious student vanguard as primarily a Confucian legacy, Kim suggests that we should look at more recent history, particularly the colonial period, for influences. The South Korean state and intellectuals portrayed the student vanguard—which according to the author constituted a gendered concept centered on young men—as "a

mass protagonist that was to serve as the hope, the exemplar, and the representative of the Korean ethnos,” in contrast to the limited elitism endemic to Chosŏn period Confucianism (p. 76). This is a welcome observation and helps overcome the facile and sometimes Orientalizing parallels drawn between Korea’s Confucian past and postliberation developments. Indeed, those interested in the continuities between the colonial period and Korean nation-building will discover plenty of food for thought, particularly in Kim’s analysis of the Japanese legacy as found in South Korean school textbooks on morality. Nevertheless, these textbooks additionally supported liberal democratic values and students’ obligation to resist democratic injustice, helping to prepare the discursive foundations of counterhegemonic student protest.

In chapter 4, Kim discusses yet another way in which individuals worked within the dominant discourse. As reflected in contemporary publications, to avoid repercussions, critical authors often wrote in an intentionally vague style and were careful not to step outside the sanctioned discourse when formulating their critiques. For the most part, this chapter provides nothing truly surprising as one would expect such methods of writing. Yet one cannot really fault Kim for this. After all, the chapter’s purpose, in the grand scheme of the book, is not to evidence Korean writers’ agency but to demonstrate another “crucial condition of possibility for 4.19” (p. 136). Unfortunately, however, this chapter does not attempt to explain the precise ways in which published criticisms conditioned the 4.19 Revolution. Was it the fact that criticisms were publishable within discursive boundaries or the actual contents of these criticisms that conditioned the 4.19 Revolution, or both? I suppose the reader can draw his or her own conclusions based on the subsequent chapter, but a more thorough treatment of this conditioning process would raise the gravity of chapter 4.

Arguably, chapters 5 and 6 constitute the book’s most fascinating chapters and finally bring the book’s core argument to fruition. Kim convincingly shows that the protests surrounding the April 19 Revolution represented a continuation of the state-sanctioned discourse of the Rhee regime,

drawing on student vanguardism, ethnic nationalism, democratic values, postcolonial narratives, and even anticommunism. It is this continuity scheme that makes the book truly shine. As Kim explains, the Park Chung Hee era also saw the endurance of preexisting legacies. For example, the Park regime built on the elation many Koreans felt after 4.19, coopting their hopes for economic development by making it a programmatic aspect of the state's ideology. Because the fledgling regime did not simply impose an ideology, instead embedding itself in the discourse of the time, it could strengthen its grip on power and make discursive challenges to its rule more difficult.

Given its successful tracing of a continuous discourse in South Korea's early years, *Youth for Nation* is now an indispensable read for those seeking to understand the continuities in the history of South Korean ideology and student protest. If studying the pre-1987 period, one should read it alongside works such as Bruce Cumings' *Origins of the Korean War*, Paul Chang's *Protest Dialectics*, and Namhee Lee's *The Making of Minjung*. It is somewhat unfortunate that the author fails to provide an extensive analysis of the historiography and his innovation in relation to this body of writing, which for the uninitiated may reduce the book's significance. While decades ago scholars such as Sungjoo Han conceived of the 4.19 Revolution as "a clear breach on a major scale between the power structure of the Rhee government and the value system of the political public," recent scholarship has assumed a more nuanced position and turned its attention to the *longue durée* by framing the history of South Korea's protest culture and movement toward democratization as a continuous process.¹ Charles Kim consciously places his book within this newer trend, demonstrating the historical endurance of discursive schemes, such as wholesome modernization. Moreover, in contrast to Han's bifurcation of the state and the public, Kim highlights their common discursive territory and the struggles that were fought within its

1 Sungjoo Han, *The Failure of Democracy in South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 32.

boundaries. As the book clearly shows, one cannot simply set up a dichotomy between the state and student protestors. Ultimately, however, *Youth for Nation* is especially useful because it examines the frequently sidelined 1953-1960 period, or, in the words of the author, because it fills a historiographical gap “through a focused exploration of the eleven years after the end of Korean War combat” (p. 4). Besides anyone interested in South Korea, those whose research focuses on North Korea can find sources of inspiration in *Youth for Nation* as well, since many of the themes in South Korea’s discourse also appeared in its North Korean counterpart, most prominently the talk about wholesome modernization, the important role of youth, “creativity,” and historical “agency” (p. 189). Although, admittedly, the author marginalizes the North Korea connection, I am loath to nitpick here, because with this book Charles Kim already contributes plenty to his field.

