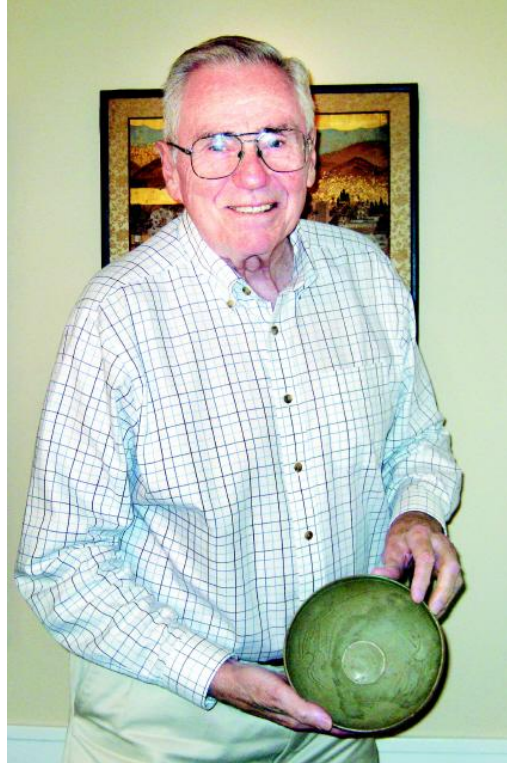


Former Ambassador Donald Gregg Discusses Park Chung-hee's Legacy

Interview with Donald P. Gregg, Former Chairman of the Board of The Korea Society, Ambassador to South Korea and CIA Korea Chapter director



Former Ambassador to South Korea Donald Gregg displays Joseon-era pottery he purchased in Seoul's Insa-dong in 1968. (Photo by Kwon Tae-ho)

By Kwon Tae-ho
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Hankyoreh: *I'd like to ask you about the Coup. Before 1961, the U.S. didn't capture any sign of a military coup?*

Donald Gregg: "I remember that Chang Myun was a Prime Minister, after Seung-Man Rhee. And the U.S. was very hopeful about him. I was in Japan at that time, and there was a lot of optimism about Chang Myun. He was going to be very different from Seung-Man Rhee. He was going to move South Korea toward democracy. we were very optimistic. Here was a new chapter in Korean history. But he was not particularly effective in dealing with the situation. And I think it was not too much of a surprise when the prime minister.. when Park Chung-hee overthrew him."

Did you know Park Chung-hee before?

“No, I never met him. First time I met him was 1973. But I was in Japan and we were very interested in what’s happening in Korea and so on. So.. I think they were having mixed feelings about Park Chung-hee coming in. He’d been trained by the Japanese; he was fluent in Japanese; there were some who worried that he might even be a leftist; there was confusion about what he was. But it soon became clear that he was a very strong leader; that he had a vision of what he wanted Korea to become; and he began to push development in Korea, economic development, the Saemaoul movement trying to reform agriculture. So we soon saw him as a very powerful leader with, as you pointed out, a dictatorial side, but also a very entrepreneurial side. And so we were very interested to watch his development.

And I first visited Korea in 1968, and was just there for 3 or 4 days. And I was very impressed with what I saw; the economic development was just just beginning. They were just beginning to make hot water boilers, faucets, sort of low tech thing. But the sense of energy and the sense of drive was very clear. And so for the only time in my CIA career, I asked to be sent to Korea. And I was sent there five years later in 1973. When I arrived there in 1973, the president Park was firmly in control; the industrial development was beginning; Hyundai was building its first dry dock, its first ship at the same time; Posco steel was beginning to build steel; Lucky Goldstar was beginning to build television sets.”

1973 was very, very different from 1968, even though only five years passed.

“Completely. Completely different. And people he selected, Park Taejun at Posco, Jung Jooyoung at Hyundai, Samsung’s Lee Byungchul, and Nam Dukwoo at Finance, brilliant wonderful man. So he chose his people really well. And he gave them support, he got them land, he got them financing, he got them all kinds of elbow room so that they could really drive these projects forward. And it was very impressive.”

But some say that even though in 1960s Park pushed the economic development, over 1970s the speed was very high because he had to prove the validity of the October Yushin in the economic development.

“Well. I was talking about his good side, the people, particularly, Nam Dukwoo, Park Taejun, and Jung Jooyoung, I didn’t know Lee Byungchul, but a friend of mine worked for him and said he was a terrific leader. That was a good side. On a down side, he had Lee Hoorak, and people like Dongsun Park. That was the symbol of the Korean Yin-Yang. Dongsun Park. He was sent to the U.S with a lot of money, tried to buy American support in Congress, Dongsun Park.”

Korea-gate occurred in 1977, I think.

“Yeah, Korea-gate came later. But it was already started. So, I arrived in July of 1973, as the chief of station of CIA. And Philip Habib was Ambassador. A wonderful ambassador, very tough, very smart. He said, ‘there’s only one rule I have for you. You will not meet ever with Dongsun Park, ever, never. Don’t have anything to do with him.’ He said he’s corrupt, he’s

trying to corrupt us, he's gonna try to influence you. Just have nothing to do with him. That's the only rule."

At that time, wasn't he in the U.S., Dongsun Park?

"No, he was .. well I think he was going back and forth.

So then, I went to see Lee Hoorak, and he had a huge office. It was on top of the building right across the Embassy."

Was it a secret office of KCIA?

"No, I don't know. Nothing secret about it. And anyway, I went to see him. Somebody was taking picture when I came in, 5 or 6 guys were sitting around. I felt I was meeting with a Prime Minister."

Bigger than the President's office?

"Yes! And so.. I didn't like him. And I didn't like what the KCIA was at that time. I thought it was a very dangerous organization. I know about Intelligence work, and if an intelligence agency thinks its chief job is to keep down the public opposition."

They focused on the domestic issues only?

"That's right. Then, it's what I called 'polemical' intelligence agency. It wasn't interested in the facts. It was interested in keeping political border. So in my first meeting with Lee Hoorak, I said, 'well, how did you feel when you went to Pyongyang and met with your life-long enemy Kim Ilsung?' I think it was 1972 (before October Yooshin). And he said, he broke into English, suddenly, 'oh, very strong, one man rule, quite a guy, quite a guy.' So I thought, instead of, I thought he would say 'I wanted to pull out a pistol and shoot him.' Not at all. It was admiration for the amount of control he had. And so I have always thought that the roots of Yooshin came through his interpretation, Lee Hoorak's interpretation of what he had seen in Pyongyang. And he had said to president Park 'if we are going to open up a dialogue with them, we have to be as strongly in control in South Korea as he is in North Korea.' And I think that led to Yushin.

They were also afraid of Kim Dae-jung. Because in the presidential election of 1971, they just beat Kim Dae-jung by very few percentage points."

There was even the possibility that DJ had in fact won. It is a possibility, I think.

"Well, but it was very close. And I had heard before I came to Korea, Kim Dae-jung was in the U.S. and he was protesting Yushin, and he was saying it's wrong, it's undemocratic, it keeps fair elections from being held. And there were already some signs at the meetings Kim Dae-jung was having at the U.S. that there were protests, sort of you know. So I had already in my mind that Kim Daejung was a cause of worry to Park Junghee and to Lee Hoorak, because the election was

very close; he was regarded as much too liberal; and they were worried about it. So that was my introduction to Lee Hoorak. And then in August of that year, 1973.”

The abduction.

“The abduction. Habib called me into his office and said ‘Kim Dae-jung has been kidnapped from his hotel room in Tokyo’ and he said ‘I know how things work around here, they’re going to kill him, but they may wait until they see what I have to say; so if you can tell me by tomorrow morning where he is and who has him, maybe we can keep him alive.’

And so I was able to tell him the next morning where he was; he was in a boat, tied hand and foot, with weights around his legs, he’d been pushed around and treated very roughly, and he knew he was going to be thrown into sea.”

How did Habib know about the abduction of DJ?

“I think he heard from Japanese police.”

The Japanese police sent the information to Habib?

“Yes, and he then called me.”

And did the Japanese police know that the abduction was by Koreans?

“They didn’t know who it was. I think they suspected, but they didn’t know.”

Just speculation. Probably by Korean.

“Probably, but he didn’t tell me... He just said ‘He’s been kidnapped.’ He could have been kidnapped by the Korean government, but all the information we have now is that he’s been kidnapped, and other parts of the situation you should investigate. We should know until tomorrow morning.

So.. when I think Habib suspected that it had been by the KCIA. And so I was able to tell him the next day that KCIA had kidnapped him and that he was on a boat, on the straits of Tsushima. That’s where he was. So I told Habib that, and then he said ‘Good, thank you.’ And that was all. And he said ‘I will take care of that.’ And so for years, I thought he had jumped in his car and gone to Blue House with this information, but he didn’t do that.”

Habib probably met with President Park.

“He did not.”

Some reports were published saying Habib met Park.

“That’s wrong. He sent a letter. I often talked to college students who are interested in becoming diplomats, and I say ‘You are Habib, and you have this information and you need to get it to the president, how do you do it?’ And almost all of them say ‘Oh, I jump in the car and go see the president’ but Habib was smarter than that. Because he realized that there was tremendous problem of face involved in this. If he went to Blue House, the blue house didn’t exist at that point, but anyway, and he was to say ‘President Park, your Korean CIA has kidnapped Kim Daejung, and you must not kill him’ then suddenly what would Park do?”

Probably he would said he didn’t know.

“Yeah, that’s probably what Park would say. But by sending a letter, he gave Park a chance to think through what he was going to do. He knew Park well. And he sent, he signaled Blue House that there is an important letter I have for President Park and he must see it. So the letter was sent.”

Was it because Habib thought that Park had ordered it?

“I don’t know about that. But he knew that the only way to keep Kim Daejung from being killed was to get President Park become involved. That was the surest way to keep Kim Daejung alive. To go to the KCIA would... you know... nothing... would have worked out.”

Then who ordered the abduction? Lee Hoorak or Park Chung-hee?

“Well, I will get to that later. I thought that Park and Lee Hoorak used to go out drinking together, and I thought that one night Park got drunk and said ‘That son of bitch Kim Daejung, I wish somebody would take care of him’ something like that and that Hoorak Lee said ‘A-ha, I think I know what he wants.’ So he did it on his more or less on his own. I asked Kim Dae-jung a year before he died. I saw quite a lot of him. I said ‘What happened? Was this Lee Hoorak’s decision?’ and he said, ‘No, Park Chung-hee ordered my kidnapping.’ That was what Kim Daejung told me.

That was just my idea. The reason why I say that is that in my country, the Kennedys, the Kennedy president hated Fidel Castro. And Dick Helms was the head of American CIA. In his book, he wrote going in to see Kennedy. And Kennedy did not say in so many ways ‘kill Castro’ But as Helms said, ‘I felt he put an arrow in my quiver, and I knew what he wanted.’ So I thought that kind of thing may have happened in Korea. But Kim Daejung told me he believed that Park Chung-hee had ordered the KCIA to kidnap him and kill him. But you know, that was Kim Daejung’s opinion. So by sending the letter, Habib gave Park a chance to decide how to handle this. So his decision was you know some rogue elements in KCIA without orders had done this and very glad that Kim Daejung is alive. And you know his face is saved. And Lee Hoorak’s face was saved. And so... things went on a little time until riots broke out in college campuses when a word got out that KCIA had kidnapped Kim Daejung. I will tell you about that. So the KCIA arrested an American-trained Professor Choi.”

Yeah, Jongkil Choi.

“Yeah, from Seoul National University and accused him of having stirred up these riots on the SNU campus. And they took him to their special awful dwelling, I forgot where it was, where they conducted their interrogation. They may have tortured him to try to make him confess. And we don’t know whether they tortured him to death and threw his body out of the window or whether he jumped out the window to try to escape from further torture. We don’t know. But we know he was tortured and that his body went out of the window.”

How did you know Choi was tortured? Did the CIA check his body?

“No. But that is the job of... an intelligence organization doesn’t trust another intelligence organization. You try to find out what they are doing, to keep them from doing terrible stupid things. So I wouldn’t say more than that. But we knew what happened.”

You believe Professor Choi died from the torture.

“Yes.”

By the KCIA?

“Yes. Then I reported this to my headquarters and I sent another message. I said ‘I want to protest this, because I am completely against torture, and I do not want to have dealings with an organization that does that to its own people. I want to protest.’ So I got a message back from my boss, in CIA in Washington, he’s now dead, but he said ‘Stop trying to save Koreans from themselves; your job is just report the facts.’ So I was told not to protest.”

I heard that you remonstrated the guard Park Jongkyu, and Lee Hoorak.

“Yes.”

And I heard that you said ‘I wouldn’t work with Lee as long as Lee is in his position, the head of KCIA. Was it voluntary or ordered by the CIA?’

“No, I disobeyed orders. I like Park Jongkyu. Do you speak Japanese at all? He’s sort of Samurai type of guy. And I liked him. And I know he hated Lee Hoorak.”

Often times, the president’s security team and the KCIA were not on good terms.

“That’s right. We have the same thing in the U.S. The FBI and CIA don’t get along well. So, I went to him. And I said ‘I do not have any authorization to say what I am going to say to you. This is just my gi-bun, feeling. And I have a very bad feeling about what happened to Professor Choi.’ And I said ‘I know what happened to him, you know what happened to him, and that kind of thing should not happen. That’s not KCIA’s job, I am here to help KCIA deal with North Korea. That’s what we have in common, and here I am to find that KCIA is more interested in keeping down opposition to Park Junghee than it is working against North Korea. And I am very uncomfortable with this relationship.’ And that’s all I said. Park Jongkyu took notes and he

looked very sober. And I went back to my office and waited. And about a week later, Lee Hoorak was fired.”

Oh, after a week? It was power of the KCIA then.

“He fled Korea and I think they found him hiding in Caribbean. They brought him back and put in jail. Anyways.”

Probably president Park did something about it?

“Of course! Of course! So then, most importantly, I was called in by Shin Chiksoo, who was new KCIA director, and he was the former Justice Minister. And he said to me, ‘Mr. Gregg, I am going to be as hard on people who break the law in support of this government as I am going to be hard on those who break the law against this government.’ And then we heard that his next official internal order is to stop torture.”

After Lee Hoorak, 1975, anybody could oppose the October Yushin, which meant a more powerful dictatorship. In 1973, the dictatorship was strong. But in 1975, so many people were arrested because they were pro-democracy.

“I think that’s right. I think things got worse because the desire of Korean people to have democracy became stronger. That’s what happened. But at least when Hoorak Lee went, Shin Chiksoo followed him, and he was a much better director. He brought in people like Hyun Hongjoo, who was one of the leading lawyers in Korea, of Kim & Chang. He was educated in Columbia University. And he’s completely different person. And so at least for the time, the change from Lee Hoorak to Shin Chiksoo was a positive thing.”

The direction of KCIA after Lee Hoorak has changed?

“Completely.”

Even though the protests became more severe?

“Later on. Yes.”

Let’s come back to coup in 1961. Park called the coup a military revolution to protect South Korea because South Korea was vulnerable to the North’s invasion in 1961. How did the U.S. assess that part, in terms of the relationship with North Korea? The Chang Myun regime was so optimistic, you said. But the public education that I got emphasized the insecurity of the society in 1961, so many demonstrations and labor unions and university students wanted to do something for reunion. And teachers in public education system resonated the point saying ‘the military revolution was necessary.’ I didn’t know the details of the coup very well, because they were not taught in schools. Then, what was the U.S. assessment of the situation of the moment? What would have happened, you thought, if there had not been Park’s coup?

“I think what we tend to forget was that when the Korean peninsula was divided by the United States, mi an hab ni da, I am sorry, but North Korea was much more powerful than South Korea, in the 1950s.”

Militarily? Or Economically?

“Both. I mean the Italian peninsula and Korean peninsula are about the same. In the north, there are mountains, water power, mineral resources, manufacturing...”

Industrialized.

“Industrialized. But the south is a breadbasket. So the fear in South Korea of North Korean invasion was very, very strong. And because there is still fear of that invasion, Kim Il-sung was well established as leader, he had strong support still from the Soviet Union, and so the fear of the North Korea was very powerful in 1960s. And still in 1970s when tunnels were dug under the DMZ, and the Blue House raid in 1968, and the seizure of the Pueblo in 1968. So in the early 1960s.”

Do you think Kim Il-sung tried to invade again in 1960s?

“I don’t think there was an actual plan. But the fear of it was there. And so I think that Chang Myun was very optimistic, open and democratic. And so the fear was that he was much too liberal, he’s not tough enough, the North will take advantage of this, and it’ll lead to subversion and the South will lose. And I think it motivated Park Jung-hee. And I think a lot of people felt that Chang Myun was too nice a guy, was ineffective, too liberal. And I think that’s what motivated Park Chung-hee.”

Too nice and ineffective. You mean naive?

“Yes, that’s how he felt I think. And right along, we had to go back. You know, you don’t know. That’s a job for scholars to say ‘If we learn more about North Korea at that time, what would have happened?’ We don’t know. The fear was there. I sensed that when I visited in 1968. The fear was there in 1973. There was a curfew every night at 12 o’clock. In golf courses, they put long poles in fairways to keep the North Korean airplanes from secretly landing with infiltrators. So the fear of the North was very strong. Very strong. And I think that’s what motivated Park Chung-hee, who was a very tough guy.

And there was a tremendous fear, even more there. Because the fear around the DMZ and infiltrators and spies and sabotage and those kinds of things. A great fear. And he felt he had to take over or things could get worse.”

Some scholars insisted that democracy and economic development would have come into being anyways, even if Park hadn’t carried the coup out. However, because of his coup, the Korean society took a different route, a strange one: the economy only developed, while democracy was squashed. Would that mean a balanced development in economy and democracy could have been expected without his coup?

“That’s a scholarly debate. And that’ll be debated for a long time.”

So... what did the U.S. think?

“I can’t really answer that. In 1961, I was in Japan and I wasn’t really working. I just heard indirectly about Korea. I think there was a disappointment that Chang Myun hadn’t worked out. I think that Park Junghee was seen as a fact that we had to deal with. But I wasn’t really working on Korea at that point. I just can’t give you any more than that about what they were thinking. I am just saying ‘Why I think that Park Chung-hee was motivated to make that coup; because he felt the turmoil would continue and the North would take advantage of it. Maybe the forces of democracy would have emerged and Korea would have emerged. I don’t know. That’s something that scholars will debate and it’s a very interesting thing. But I am not a scholar, and I am telling you just what I remember.”

Would it be plausible that the U.S. approved Park’s coup in a way, maybe because the Park regime would be pro-U.S. and anti-communism?

“I think there were probably two reactions within the U.S. One is disappointment that Chang Myun wasn’t effective, the disappointment by scholars and intellectuals. And the recognition by the Pentagon that a lot of benefits will come from Park Junghee that is anti-communist military leader, who would be more of a bullwork against subversion from the North Korea. I think there were both reactions.”

Was President Kennedy concerned about the situation in Korea?

“I think his main concern was Cuba, because in the beginning of his presidency, the Bay of Pigs was a disaster. And then in the fall of 1962 came the Cuban missile crisis, which was the world’s most dangerous moment. And so I don’t think he paid much attention to Korea.

I think the general reaction was that Park Junghee is a tough general and anti-communist, he is a fact, he’s taken power, and we’re not going to oppose it.”

The U.S. might have not cared as far as the regime is anti-communist. The U.S. liked Park?

“Well, I don’t know whether they liked him but I think they just accepted him that he is a fact and that it’s be counter-productive to have for him. I think the reaction in Korea and reaction in a number of countries at that time was to see the domestic situation in terms of the Cold War. Is the government pro-communist or anti-communist? So I think when he particularly took over, the decision as ok. Chang Myun, too bad, he was a head of this time, wasn’t strong enough, he’s been replaced now by somebody who is very strongly anti-communist, let’s... you know, there’s no use of fighting with him, let’s support him and see what he can do to develop the economy.”

The viewpoint of the U.S. between 1960s and 1970s changed?

“Yeah, I do remember how Seungman Rhee had run his course. And we were very grateful that somebody as democratically inclined as Chang Myun arrived in the scene. And there was disappointment that he didn’t succeed. So that was... Support for him psychologically, disappointment when he already failed, skepticism toward Park Chung-hee, then recognition that he’s a fact of life that we might as well work with him. That’s the best that I can say.”

You said Park had given a notice before the October Yushin to North Korea, before he did to the U.S., according to the U.S. State of Department. Can that mean the North had approved it, if passively?

“I don’t know. I can tell you that we felt that Yushin was a step in a wrong direction. We were encouraged by the decision to send Lee Hoorak to North Korea. We felt this was a start of perhaps a dialogue between the South and the North, which we were very interested in. and that’s what I have said earlier, one of the reasons why I didn’t like Lee Hoorak was that when he came back, instead of saying ‘that’s a dictatorship up there, we are much stronger because we are not a dictatorship.’ His idea was we have to become more like North Korea in order to keep control, if we are going to talk to them.”

They used the dialogue between the North and South as a dictatorship.

“Right. The strength of Philip Habib’s reaction to Kim Dae-jung’s kidnapping was an indication to me how strongly we value what Kim Dae-jung stood for, because we knew he exemplified what Chang Myun had exemplified that this was... the side of Korea was pushing toward a greater democracy and that if he were killed by Park Chung-hee this would set back the evolution of democracy in the U.S. And we didn’t want to have a close relationship with a government that killed all its opponents. So we were very anxious to keep Kim Daejung alive because he represented what Chang Myun had represented.”

Could that mean that the U.S. thought Kim would be an alternative to Park, maybe after Park?

“Yes! Sure!”

Did Park know that?

“I think he probably feared it. I think he... the reason why he went to Yushin was that he feared if there’s another election, he might lose to Kim Daejung.”

So President Park wanted to kill Kim.

“Well, that’s what Kim Daejung told me just a year before he died.”

Maybe he felt some kind of threat.

“Yes, he certainly had felt a threat on the boat. He thought he was going to be killed right there, DJ did.”

So... in saving Kim's life, Habib's role was big, but not the U.S.'s role necessarily.

“No, no, no, that's not right. That's absolutely not right. There was a great concern about Kim Daejung.”

Oh, my question is if Habib sent the letter on his own or if it was ordered by the U.S.

“Oh, no. Habib was in charge. He knew he had to move quickly. That's why I named the Ambassador's House as Habib House. You had to move quickly, 'cause otherwise, Kim Daejung would be dead. And then not only it would have been the loss of Kim Daejung, but then what would we do in dealing with Park Chung-hee when we know that he killed him? What kind of... that would have made the relations with Park Chung-hee much more difficult. So by keeping Kim Daejung alive, we made it easier to continue our relationship with Park Chung-hee.”

DJ might have been killed without your and Habib's efforts?

“Absolutely.”

Some argue it was just a threat.

“No, DJ told me that. He said ‘I have prayed and I was ready to die when I was on that boat.’ And then a plane flew over, he said, ‘it was a CIA plane’. ‘No,’ I said, ‘CIA didn't have airplanes.’ I said ‘I think it's one of two things: either a Japanese plane looking for you or a South Korean plane sending a signal to the boat ‘don't kill him,’ because shortly after the plane flew over, he was untied, given something to... you know That's why he thought it was a CIA plane. But it wasn't. The point I want to make here is... I have great respect for Park Chung-hee. He was really smart. Now I want to go to what I was just talking about. When I protest to Park Jongkyu about KCIA, Park Jongkyu goes to Park Chung-hee. He says ‘Greg doesn't like the KCIA. And he doesn't like Lee Hoorak. And he doesn't like what KCIA is doing.’ And there's Park Chung-hee. What does he do about that? Would he fire Lee Hoorak?”

It shows how smart he was, because he knew by doing that, this would be evidence to the U.S. that he was willing to cooperate more closely with us to move Korea forward, both economically and politically.

I mean Lee Hoorak was the 2nd most powerful man in Korea. And... there's another interesting side to this story. And that's the CIA side because I had been ordered not to say anything about the torturing to death of the professor Choi. ‘Stop trying to save Koreans from themselves.’ That's what my boss told me. So I disobeyed him directly. And I went to Park Jongkyu and said ‘I don't like him. I don't like working with these guys.’”

I think my boss was a very smart guy, the CIA boss in the U.S. He was a very smart guy. I didn't like him. Very smart. Very tough. He never never said anything about this to me. Now, he was sitting there watching what's happening. He knows my gi bun, feeling, that I am unhappy. He told me ‘Don't say anything.’ And he's still watching. And suddenly he sees Lee Hoorak fired.

And he says ‘Uh-oh, Greg disobeyed orders.’ Then he continues to watch, and he sees a new head of KCIA, Shin Chiksoo, completely different, who passes the rule against torture and things get much better. So he never ever said anything to me about my disobeying orders, and I never admitted that I disobeyed orders at that time. Why? Because things had turned out so well. Lee Hoorak is gone. A much better director of KCIA was in place. Torture has been forbidden. All good things. If my boss had criticized me, I would have said, ‘yeah, I disobeyed orders, and if I had followed your orders, none of these good things would have happened.’ So he never never held me accountable. Later on, when I was talking to senior officers in KCIA, I always told them “disobeyed orders, and you should do the same if you are ordered to do something that you know is wrong. Either disobey orders or quit.” And that was my choice. And I disobeyed orders.

And I credit Park Junghee would be smart enough to realize in his long range of interest, to sacrifice Lee Hoorak for the sake of continuing good relations with the U.S.”

Even though Park tried to continue good relations with the U.S. and his regime was anti-communist, the U.S. and Park didn't get along so well.

“No, they did not. And particularly when I got there, this is another very interesting aspect, because Park Junghee had sent 312,000 soldiers to help us fight in Vietnam. Two full divisions were there for 10 years. Now, we had paid the soldiers very well and the money they brought back helped economic development even at the village level. you know, we paid a lot of money to those troops. And their money came back to their pockets and their villages...”

Right, it was something like seed money.

“Seed money. Absolutely. But he had supported us because he believed in the Domino theory. He believed that if we lost in Vietnam, Thailand would collapse, Malaysia would collapse. So he was fighting communism in Vietnam. And suddenly he saw he's losing. So when I arrived in 1973, we had pulled out of Vietnam. And when I was in... He, Park Junghee had begun to lose faith in us as an ally. And that's why he started the secret nuclear weapons program, because he lost faith in us.”

Was it a nuclear weapons plan that made the U.S.-South Korea relations suffer?

“Absolutely. Absolutely, because he thought ‘Jesus, I sent 300,000 Koreans to help these people in Vietnam and still they're losing. And so they can't be trusted. So I have to protect myself.’ I mean I started an article once saying ‘There is a country in 1970s in Northeast Asia that had a secret nuclear weapons program that was buying destabilizing weapons secretly and it's torturing its own people.’ And people would have said, ‘Oh, he's talking about North Korea.’ No, I was talking about South Korea. And all of the things were going on at that time. South Koreans were doing in the 1970s what North Koreans are doing today. That's why I think that the North Koreans aren't so different from South Koreans. Why do we keep talking to North Koreans? That's another long interview.”

The most important factor in U.S.'s disliking Park was the nuclear weapon program?

“No, I think... uh... I think we had mixed feelings toward him. We realized his terrific capacity, capabilities as a leader to push Korea’s economic development. We recognized that respectfully. We were grateful to him for having sent troops to Vietnam. But he, on his part, had lost faith in us.”

When did Park start developing nuclear weapons?

“Uh... I would say about 1972”

Did the U.S. know it right away?

“No.”

When did the U.S. come to know then?

“When I was there.”

In 1973?

“Yes.”

How did you know?

“Well, I am not going into that.”

What was your reaction?

“Well, we stopped it. I reported the information and the U.S. government very carefully figured out the ways to stop it.”

Some say Park’s secret nuclear weapon programs annoyed the U.S.

“Yeah, we .. it was more than annoying because we are worried about nuclear proliferation. We were worried about nuclear proliferation in 1970s, just as we are worried about nuclear proliferation in North Korea in 2011. The same thing.”

Why do you think Park tried to get nuclear weapons?

“Because he didn’t trust us. He felt this was.. the way North Koreans do things. You have nuclear weapons and nobody dares to attack you. North Koreans were already saying to me “look at the mistake Ghadafi made, giving up his nuclear weapons.”

Maybe Park didn’t trust the U.S. and wanted to protect South Korea.

“That’s right, because he saw us losing in Vietnam.”

How did the U.S. persuade Park?

“Um.. there was just reaffirmation to him that we were reliable, that we would protect from North Korea from any attack from anybody, and he did not need nuclear weapons.”

He gave up?

“Yes.”

When?

“Maybe a couple of years later?”

Before 1979?

“Oh, yeah. In 1977”

When Jimmy Carter came to Korea in 1979, though I was a young boy, I remember that Carter didn't like Park.

“That's right.”

Carter didn't stay in a Korean hotel, he stayed at the U.S. army base, which shocked Koreans.

“Well, Jimmy Carter wanted to withdraw the troops from South Korea. He ordered... There is a very great book about the Ambassador Glaistein. You'd want to read that book. That goes into that in exquisite details.”

Why do you think Carter disliked Park?

“I think he knew his background. He... you know, he was a dictator...”

But Park gave up nuclear weapon in 1977.

“But, Carter knew he tried to start a nuclear weapons program. I think he felt that this was a very strong dictatorial leader, so.. you know.. weren't very good feelings between them.”

When Jimmy Carter wanted to withdraw troops from Korea, all of the Koreans were afraid of that.

“Yeah, it was a mistake on Carter's play.”

In a book I read, there was a description of Carter's visit to the Blue House. He made clear that they'll make announcement of their withdrawal of troops, and Park tried to persuade Carter persistently, which made Carter dislike Park all the more.

“Yes.”

The rumor goes... Because Park tried to develop nuclear weapons again after that Blue House summit with Carter, the U.S. ordered Kim Jaekyu to assassinate him.

“Absolutely crazy. (laugh) No. I can’t get into that.”

Did you hear about that?

“No, I’ve never heard that before.”

It’s a very prevalent rumor, especially in 1980s.

“Bullshit. Just non-sense. The triggering factor was Cha Jeechul. Terrible.”

What about Kim Jaekyu?

“Uh.. I still don’t understand it. I knew him, I liked him. I played golf with him. I think what drove him to it was .. well.. we’re getting ahead of the story. Uh.. I want to tell you about the time I played golf with president Park. So let’s talk about that. Let’s move chronologically. OK? I think when the president Park’s wife was killed in 1974, he then withdrew as she was a wonderful woman. And he began to withdraw and went to a lot of drinking with Cha Jeechul.”

After her death, maybe he was lonely.

“Yes, and Cha Jeechul was very ambitious and I think Kim Jaekyu saw him as a dangerous influence. And the three of them were having dinner and there were uprisings in Southern region..”

Busan and Masan in 1979.

“Yes. So Cha Jeechul was saying to Park Jongkyu, to Park Junghee, that’s Kim Jaekyu’s fault. And Kim Jaekyu said, you know, ‘It’s not.’ According to the women there, he then told president Park ‘Why do you have such an insect as your close advisor?’ and pulled out his gun and killed him. And then the thing I never understand is why he pulled out a gun and shot Park.”

I don’t understand either. It was very simple, very stupid.

“Right. I think it was.. I didn’t realize he had such a temper. But Cha Jeechul is a miserable man. So I think he inflamed Kim Jaekyu and it means after Kim Jaekyu shot him, probably he went ‘oh my god.’”

Was it an accident?

“Crime of passion. That’s all I am going to explain.”

Kim didn't plan it out.

“No, I don't think he went to that meal intending to do it.”

Did the U.S. foresee the possibility of assassination of Park by an inner circle?

“No, absolutely no.”

I want to talk about your address in 1976 in Texas. When you said, even if Park wins reelection, he wouldn't finish his 2nd term. What did you mean?

“I felt that the South Korean people by that time had long tired of Park.”

With uprisings, assassination possibility, or another coup, military coup?

“Yeah, military coup, because I could sense already that people were getting tired of him. And that's why I wanted to get to the golf game I had with him. Anyway, in the fall of 1974, Park invited Ambassador Dick Sneider, General Steelwell, and me, to play golf. North of Seoul. Hanyang? I think that's the golf course north of Seoul. First and only time. And it followed the visit to Seoul of President Ford and Henry Kissinger. And that was a very important meeting, because it was reassuring to Park that the U.S. is still fully in support of him. They were on their way to Vladivostok for a meeting with the Soviet Union. And they stopped in Seoul. And I was in some of the meetings. And they went out of their way to say ‘The alliance is strong, we support you fully against North Korea, against the Soviet Union, don't worry about us as your ally.’ That was a message. And so Park was feeling much better. And so he invited us to play golf. And I was very surprised to be invited, because I think he knew that I had done certain things. He knew that I protested to Park Jongkyu about Lee Hoorak. He knew that I had told to Park Jongkyu, ‘President Park needs a Minister of bad news.’ He said he doesn't have anybody around him with the guts to tell him what he doesn't want to hear, but what he needs to hear. And I said ‘Every strong leader needs a minister of bad news.’ I said that several times to Park Jongkyu. So I am sure he passed that onto president Park.

So I was pleased to be included in this golf game. And I realized , while we were playing, I realized that Park Chung-hee had real sense of humor. And there was a chief Justice of Korea, who loved to play golf. But he had really funny-looking golf swing. And one time we were standing around one of the Ts, and president Park was saying ‘This is how the chief Justice swings his golf club.’ And he gave a very funny imitation of the chief Justice's golf swing. And everybody laughed at that. And Park was not a particularly good golfer. And neither was I. And so... one time we both had hit the balls to the rough in the same direction. I spoke to president Park in Japanese, and that surprised him, because he didn't know I spoke Japanese. And so we had a very friendly conversation in the rough as we were looking for our golf balls. So he was very friendly, very relaxed. And after the golf game we all had dinner. I just was amazed, because the Minister of Defense was there, and high ranking people were there. And they all sat sort of like this (gesturing) there, almost they looked like they were in a military academy drinking, you know.”

Except Park.

“Yeah, that’s right. He was very relaxed and so forth. And there was a long silence around the table that nobody was saying anything. I thought ‘What a waste of time!’ So I turned to Park, and said ‘Do you ever compare yourself to Kemal Ataturk in Turkey?’ And so he looked at me, ‘You’re very hard.. what’s this guy thinking this time anyway?’ and said, ‘I don’t know much about Kemal Pasha, but I’d like to do for Korea what he did for Turkey, and that is making it economically strong and militarily secure. But I am not going to stay in the presidency forever, and maybe I have already stayed too long and if I had not run for presidency last time, maybe my dear wife would be still alive.’ He said that. And we all thought ‘Ah! How interesting! That means he will not run for president again.’”

In 1978?

“Yes.”

So that term was his last term, he thought.

“Yes, but maybe Cha Jeechul had said ‘Oh, Mr. President, only you can save Korea!’ Cha Jeechul was thinking.”

In that time? In the golf meeting?

“No no no, later. You know, Cha Jeechul knew that once park Junghee is gone, he is gone. So that’s the oldest funkies, they always have to say ‘Oh, you have to stay, only you can save us!’ like Mubarak.”

By Cha Jeechul?

“Yes. all others around him. All persuaded him. And so Park ran again. And that was just too much.”

Park might have wanted to resign after 1978, and wanted to retire by handing the power over to other people?

“Yes, I think so.”

Maybe the president was tired too?

“Of course he was tired. And if he had retired and was still alive, then probably he would be South Korea’s most honored citizen.”

He might be respected, if he had resigned.

“Absolutely. That’s what I had in mind in my Texas talk. but he stayed too long.”

Park wanted to hand some power over Kim Jongpil?

“Yes. And... I think of the three Kims, Jongpil was the smartest.”

What about DJ?

“DJ had broader vision.”

You mean ‘smart politically’?

“Yes. I knew JP. And I had great respect for him. He was brilliant guy. And it’s too bad that... no... it would have been much better for Korea, if Park had retired in 1978 and made JP become president. He’d have been very smart very good president.”

You mean more democratic?

“Yes. Much better than Chun Doo-hwan. Much better. But he stayed too long.

Now I want to tell you another interesting story about Park. And this concerns Im Dongwon and Kim Jong-il. In 2011, one year after the summit, Im Dongwon was in Pyongyang, meeting with Kim Jong-il. And Kim Jungil said ‘I read the South Korean news everyday online, I’m also very interested in the Blue House website, and on the Blue House website you have biographic sketch of all of your presidents. And I’ve read them all and one that is most impressive to me is Park Chung-hee.’ And Im Dongwon was surprised because he knew they tried to kill Park Junghee in 1968, the Blue House Raid. They tried to kill him in 1974 and killed his wife.

So Im Dongwon said to Kim Jungil, ‘Oh that surprises me.’ And Kim says ‘We need somebody in North Korea to do Park did in South Korea in terms of stimulating economic development. And I very much admire the way he did that in South Korea. And I know there’s difficult history.’ But then he wound up saying that ‘his daughter is in politics, Park Keunhye, and I’d be very pleased if she would come to visit me in North Korea.’”

That’s what Kim Jungil said to Im Dongwon in 2001?

“Yes. Then Im Dongwon said ‘Well, I don’t know whether she will or not, but I will pass on your message to her.’ And he passed on his message to her and she went to North Korea as you know. And so at the opening of the World Cup in 2002, I was in Seoul for the opening game. And I saw Park Geun-hye at the stadium. And I had known her she was very young, I think, she was at Sogang University, a college student when I was there in the 1970s.”

At that time, did you meet her?

“Yes, not frequently, but you know. So anyway, I knew who she was, and I went up to her. And she knew who I was. And I said ‘I want to congratulate you for going to North Korea.’ I said ‘I think that was wonderful move. And her words I won’t forget. ‘We must look to the future with optimism, not to the past with bitterness.’ And I met her couple of times afterwards. She came to the U.S., she was invited by the Korea Society, and she gave a very good talk there. And then she went to Columbia University and she gave a good talk. And I am really impressed with Park

Geun-hye. Really impressed with her, because I think she has inherited her father's intelligence and her mother's softness."

Intelligence, you mean political viewpoint?

"Yes. But she also has the graciousness of her mother, who was just a lovely lovely person, very different from her father. So she's inherited good things from both of her parents. So she is part of Park Chung-hee's legacy to Korea today. And it's very interesting to me that Kim Jungil who is a very intelligent man would read all about South Korea's presidents and say to Lim Dong-won 'One that impressed me most was Park Chung-hee.' That to me is very interesting."

Park Geun-hye is one of the leading candidates for president. But it's also possible that her father will become a political trap for her. Anyone might say 'You should answer this question: was your father a dictator or not?'

"Yeah, that's why this article you're doing is so interesting, because if I were to be asked, who was the most important president in South Korea, the three in my mind: Park Chung-hee, Roh Tae-woo, and Kim Daejung. Yes, those three all did tremendous things for South Korea, in my view."

Roh Taewoo?

"He is so underrated. What he accomplished as president was huge."

Because of his character.

"Yes. And he also had a very smart advisor, Kim Jongwee, who was National Security Advisor. He kept him for 5 years. I worked very closely with him. And that made a huge difference because usually they change every year or so, but Kim Jongwee was for 5 years."

Some say that Park Geun-hye's becoming president could mean stepping backwards to the 1970s.

"No, I don't think so. I heard her speak, she attracts... she brings very strong support from people who hear her talk, and she's very different from her father."

You mean very different from her father, politically?

"Yes."

You mean maybe she recognizes that her father had a weakness of dictatorship?

"Who knows? But anyways, she's a very interesting, talented woman. And you know, I'd be very interested to watch her political future. I hope in your article about Park Chung-hee you can mention that he has left a very influential talented daughter who is playing, I think, a very constructive role in the political life of Korea today."

Do you think the Korean evaluation of Park Chung-hee might change if Park Geun-hye wins the presidential election?

“I think it’s already changing. I think when he was killed, there was sadness, but a sense of regret that he stayed too long and I think the negatives of his regime were uppermost in Koreans’ minds. Now with the perspective of time, taking a look at everything he had accomplished, and the Korea’s rise economically is his legacy. You know I have a ... I think this is a funny story. I went through a parachute training at Fort Benning in Georgia in 1951, during the Korean War. I was in CIA and they didn’t have their own training base. But anyway, I was on jump training. And so there was a town nearby Phoenix city, where there were a lot of bars, I would go have a beer. And they a comedian there and he... this was September 1951. Korean War was going on. And a lot of GIs there were heading for Korea. And this comedian would get up and say ‘There are three dread diseases you don’t want to catch: syphilis, gonorrhea, and gone to Korea. And everybody laughed, because nobody wanted to go to Korea. Syphilis, terrible disease; gonorrhea is a terrible disease; gone to Korea is equally bad. So it’s a joke, but it’s a very bad thing to say about Korea.

Last year, 2010, I went back to Georgia to go to the opening of KIA factory in Westpoint GA. And there was dinner the night before, and the governor of GA was there, named Sonny Perdue, and Jung Monggu was there, from Hyundai. So the governor Perdue says to Chairman Jung, ‘I want to thank you for building this plant in my state, Westpoint GA. Your decision to do this is the single largest economic development plan in the history of the state of GA.’ So from 1951, you’ve gone from the bad disease that you don’t want to catch to the author of the biggest economic development plan in the history of the state of Georgia. That’s an extraordinary rise. Extraordinary. And Park Chung-hee deserved tremendous amount of credit for that.”

Because he did the foundational work?

“Absolutely. And the relationship between him and Jung Jooyoung, and the whole Hyundai empire. And anyways, his legacy is very powerful.”

Some scholars share that point with you: Professor Bogel at Harvard and Professor Amstein at MIT. They say the economic development and democratic progress can’t be made at the same time in developing countries. On that score, Park’s plan was right because he focused on one, economic development, even though that means the democratic progress was sacrificed.

“Yes. Well, I think there’re some truths to it. I don’t think it’s completely .. I think both can come along. And I think Korea has done a great job. I think the change in 1987 was very key decision, which allowed Roh Tae-woo be elected. Although he was a military man, he acted very democratic, in a very democratic way.

You had direct election for the president. And the two Kims ran against him. If neither stepped aside, if one of them stepped aside, there’d have been Kim instead of Roh, because he had under 40 percent or something like that in vote. So I don’t think the economic development and democracy are completely exclusive. And I think Korea’s plan was remarkably good in bringing both along. But economics led the way. That’s why I am interested in helping North Korea

develop economically, because if they develop economically they'll come out of their isolation. And they'll see it is in their interest to treat their people better, which has happened in South Korea.”

However, young folks in their 30s or 40s nowadays in Korea think of Park Chung-hee more as a dictator than as a developer of the country. Those in their 50s or over think the other way around. Park has two sides.

“Very much so. And my feeling is that .. I have a great respect for Park Chung-hee. I think I admire his intelligence, I admire his strategic sense of the way South Korea should develop economically, and I also evaluate his pragmatic side, where he made the choice to dump Lee Hoorak, in the interest of stronger relationship with the U.S. in 1973.”

Another question. In 1976, some say that CIA informed the coup against Park from the Korean government?

“I don't know about it. I don't think so. I've never heard about it. Don't know about it. I don't know anything about that.”

Thank you so much for this long, long interview. Last, do you have any comments or thoughts to share with Koreans?

“I think I have covered most of the.. most of them. I think that.. his intelligence, his pragmatism, I mean Park Chung-hee, the fact that he would sacrifice Lee Hoorak for the sake of better relations with us...”

What's his character like?

“As I said I was interested to see his sense of humor on the golf course. It was interesting to me that he invited me to play golf, because I think he knew that I had helped save Kim Daejung's life in 1973 and he knew that I had protested against Lee Hoorak, he knew that I thought he needed a minister of bad news, but still he invited me to play golf.”

Was it the only meeting?

“No, I saw him at several meetings in the Blue House but that was the only informal meeting. And it was interesting to me that he had sense of humor, how friendly he was when he discovered I could speak Japanese, because he was kind of.. didn't know that, and his English is not very good. But his Japanese was of course fluent, and mine was quite fluent those days also.”

I heard that Park is good at jokes.

“Yes, Yes. And that was funny. I used to play golf at Taeneung. And I was told that there was one hole there, where it was a long shot over water. And there's another hole where you have to hit over hill, and if you hit the ball over the hill you become Colonel. Anyway, Park, I was told, would go out sometimes and sit at the hole where you have to hit over the water, and he would

take note of who hit over the water and who didn't. And that he was suspicious of the guy who would always hit way over the water, because 'Ah! He's playing too much golf, not paying attention to his work; and the guy who hit it over the water, ah, this guy must be working hard.' So there was that kind of story about him."

It's a joke. But the officer must have been afraid.

"Oh, absolutely. People were scared to death. As I saw that at the golf, they sat like school boys. They didn't say anything. He's one of the most interesting Asians I've ever met. Really. And Korea was lucky to have him."

Thank you for this interview. My impression about you is that you are not tied too much to the ideological framework, if I may say so.

"Yeah, I try to be. You know, a lot of people think that CIA officers are always very right wing and I am not. I think CIA people are trying to get at what is true, the fact. And I studied philosophy in college, and intelligence officers are always trying to open the curtain and look at the reality behind the curtain. And when you do that, you have to be objective about what you see. And there are some people I met that I don't like at all. I didn't like Hoorak, I didn't like Cha Jeechul. But with most Koreans, I feel very comfortable. I feel that Japanese... I spent 10 years in Japan. And the Japanese... it's very hard for you to know what they think of you, whereas Koreans are always very direct."

Source: http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/477813.html