

IB HL History IA

**To what extent did Park Chung Hee's  
'*Saemaul Undong*' in 1971 - 1979 have a positive  
impact on Korean society?**

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## Identification and Evaluation of Sources

My research question is ‘To what extent did Park Chung Hee’s policy of ‘Saemaul Undong’ in 1971 - 1979 have a positive impact on Korean society?’. The first source is a paper (*The Korean Miracle (1962 - 1980) Revisited: Myths and Realities in Strategy Development*) written by Kwan S. Kim, a professor of economics at the University of Notre Dame. It is relevant to the question as it presents a comprehensive review of the economic impact of Park’s Saemaul policies. The second source is a 30 year recount (*A 30 years’ History of Korean Economic Policy: Recollections of Kim Chung Ryum*) of South Korea’s economic ‘miracle’ written by Kim Chung Ryum, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Strategy and Finance, Minister of Industry and Commerce, and Secretary General of South Korea during Park’s nine years of presidency. This source is relevant as it provides a first-person extremist right-wing perspective that sympathises and praises Park’s policies.

As Kwan S. Kim is a professor of economics of the Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame and has published several books on South Korean economics, he has a comprehensive view and provides as a knowledgeable source of information. Additionally, as he teaches outside of Korea, he is useful in providing a more broad and extensive analysis into the different ways a policy can impact an economy. A possible limitation to his report is that it’s purpose is to analyse the overall economic impact of Park Chung Hee, and thus is heavily based on economics. As a result, he has not taken into account the other effects of Park’s *Saemaul* policy.

As for Kim Chung Ryum, his views are biased towards Park, and judges Park in a more positive light than other sources do. Kim is a useful source to consider as he provides a first person perspective into not only the economic situation of the time, but also the social and political motives and strategies planned into the different economic policies that were implemented. As the recount encompasses 30 years of South Korean economy, it provides opinions on the long-term impact of Park's Saemaul Policy and analyses the positive consequences that occurred much later in time, as well as how the Saemaul Policy worked with Park's other policies to create an economic miracle. However, a limitation would be his extreme bias favouring Park and his inability to view Park's administration objectively, as he may not be able to identify flaws readily. Additionally, this recount was written not only as an informative resource, but also as a bibliography of sorts. As such, Kim may exaggerate some of the positive impacts of Park's policies in order to elevate Park's and his own legacy on the ROK's economy.

Word Count: 442 words.

## Introduction

Park Chung Hee's *Saemaul Undong* is an economic movement disputed between many historians, but remains between South Koreans as one of Park Chung Hee's most popular policies<sup>1</sup>. The *Saemaul Undong* was a policy that focused on developing the rural economy of South Korea to follow the rapidly growing industrial sector<sup>2</sup>, and sought to unite farmers in order to mass-produce agricultural goods. As one of Park's most advocated efforts, the basic outline of its impact on the economy of the Republic of Korea (ROK) is known widely even today. However, some revisionist historians have stirred some debate on the extent to which the positive socio-economic changes in the 1970s can be accredited to the movement. The perspectives in this essay include first person recounts of the Park administration, revisionist views on the values and limitations of the *Saemaul Undong*, quotes from ex-president Park Chung Hee himself, as well as statistical analysis from various economic historians. Through the contrast different historical perspectives, this essay will evaluate the extent to which Park's Saemaul Undong had a positive socio-economic impact on ROK's society.

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<sup>1</sup> "Park Chung-hee Reforms Greatest Historic Achievement: Gallup Poll." *조선일보*, Chosunilbo, March 5, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Chung Ryum, *한국 경제정책 30년사: 김정렴 회고록* (Hankuk Kyungjaejeongchek 30 Nyunsa: Kim Chung Ryum Hoikorok (A 30 years' History of Korean Economic Policy: Recollections of Kim Chung Ryum)) (Seoul: The Chong Ang Daily, 1990)

## Economic Impact

The success of Park's *Saemaul Undong* is largely controversial as the introduction of the *Saemaul Undong* coincided with the sudden and rapid economic improvement in the ROK's rural areas during the 1970s. Before the introduction of Park's Saemaul Undong, the ROK's economy had been ravaged by various factors ranging from the Japanese occupation to the Korean civil war. This was in addition to the desperate lack of natural resources, as only approximately 30% of the land was cultivable<sup>3</sup>. With the introduction of the *Saemaul Undong*, statistics show that rural household income in 1976 was 3.25 times what was the rural household income in 1971, and that in 1981, the rural household income was 10.35 times larger than it was in 1971<sup>4</sup>. Average rice yields increased from 3.1 metric tons per hectare during 1965 - 71 to 4.0 tons during 1972 - 1978<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the payment the farmers received for their produce also increased<sup>6</sup> to encourage diligence. In fact, rice farming in Korea was so successful that by the end of the 1970s, Korea was close to being self-sufficient in rice<sup>7</sup>. In fact, economists such as Kim Chung Ryum claim the ROK was not only completely self-sufficient in rice<sup>8</sup>, but that the Saemaul Undong was crucial to "[improving] standards of living in rural areas"<sup>9</sup>.

However, as Kim was the secretary general of Park's administration, his view on Park's policies can be seen as exaggerated or as overly positive, as other historians and economists still debate the extent of the influence of Park's *Saemaul Undong* on the ROK's overall economy. Some claim that

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Public Administration and Security for the Republic of Korea (MOPAS), The Successful Cases of Korea's Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement), by HAN Do Hyun, , accessed January 9, 2017,

<sup>4</sup> Han Do Hyun

<sup>5</sup> Reed

<sup>6</sup> Reed

<sup>7</sup> Douglass, Mike. The Saemaul Undong: Korea's Rural Development Miracle in Historical Perspective. Working paper no. 197. Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore. Asia Research Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Chung Ryum

<sup>9</sup> Kim Chung Ryum

Park Chung Hee's other policies such as the *HCI Drive*, his *Five Year Plans*, and his focus on *Chaebol* companies such as *Samsung*, *Hyundai*, *LG*, etc may have triggered economic growth before the introduction of the *Saemaul Undong*<sup>10</sup>. Economist Edward P. Reed<sup>11</sup> claims that the positive statistics and outward success of the *Saemaul Undong* should be understood as the belated impact of Park Chung Hee's previous economic plans<sup>12</sup>, stating that the "transformation of rural Korea"<sup>13</sup> merely "coincided with the launching and implementation of the *Saemaul Undong*"<sup>14</sup>. According to Reed, the aforementioned policies that focused on industrialisation were more beneficial to the economy than the mobilisation of the rural community<sup>15</sup>. As an economist, Reed views the *Saemaul Undong's* impact on Korea in accordance with the impact of Park's other policies. This allows his analysis of the economic situation to be more comprehensive, and therefore more accurate in terms of the *Saemaul Undong's* overall impact on Korea's economy.

Furthermore, historian Park Sooyoung<sup>16</sup> argues that "the impact [of the Saemaul Undong] was not sustained... and was therefore not successful"<sup>17</sup>. Reed<sup>18</sup> agrees with this statement, claiming that farmers were flocking to factories to find work due to the industrialisation efforts introduced late in the 1960s, which in turn temporarily increased statistics based on rural household income<sup>19</sup>.

Supporting this reasoning, historian Mike Douglass<sup>20</sup> argues that the "depopulation of rural regions"

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<sup>10</sup> The Miracle with a Dark Side. Publication. Institute for International Economics. Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2003. 11-50.

<sup>11</sup> Reed

<sup>12</sup> Reed

<sup>13</sup> Reed.

<sup>14</sup> Reed.

<sup>15</sup> Reed.

<sup>16</sup> Park, Sooyoung. "Analysis of Saemaul Undong: A Korean Rural Development Programme in the 1970s." Asia-Pacific Development Journal 16, no. 2 (December 2009). UNESCAP.

<sup>17</sup> Park

<sup>18</sup> Reed.

<sup>19</sup> Reed

<sup>20</sup> Douglass

was one of the most significant reasons for why the *Saemaul Undong* seemed like a success<sup>21</sup>. In addition to this, historian Han claims that the high-rice policy inflated rice prices to create the illusion of a better economy, an unsustainable plan on the government's part<sup>22</sup>. These arguments against the significance of the *Saemaul Undong* leaves doubts as to whether the *Saemaul Undong* was as successful as official government sources and official statistics claim.

Historians Reed, Park, and Douglass' arguments are convincing in that they all consider the alternative factors that may have impacted the facts that were set forth short-sightedly during the 1970s. Nevertheless, their arguments do not take into account the definite increase in farm produce according to the statistics, which allows the conclusion that despite the economic shortcomings and hasty conclusions of the impact of the Saemaaul Undong, the undeniable reality is that it increased agricultural produce to a good extent. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Saemaul Undong brought some positive impact to Korean society.

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<sup>21</sup> Douglass

<sup>22</sup> Han, Seung-Mi. "The New Community Movement: Park Chung Hee and the Making of State Populism in Korea." *Pacific Affairs* 77, no. 1 (2004): 69-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40022275>.

## Social Impact

The *Saemaul Undong* is also known to have encouraged ideals of nationalism and self-reliance as well as personal traits such as cooperation and diligence<sup>23</sup>, ultimately altering the mindset of farmers to become more positive, optimistic, and loyal towards the government. According to historians such as Moon Hyun Jin<sup>24</sup>, the *Saemaul Undong* “rebuilt Korea’s national identity” and instilled in the Korean community a newfound pride to be part of the extensive plan to improve Korea’s economic situation<sup>25</sup>. Park Chung Hee supported this ideology<sup>26</sup>, stating that “laziness, despair, and intemperance”<sup>27</sup> were the root causes of Korea’s destitution. In addition to this forward-looking attitude, the new structure of villages allowed for villagers to vote for their own ‘Saemaul Undong leaders’. Since this was a democratic process, it gave villagers the opportunity to pick someone to voice their thoughts or challenge village officials<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, according to Brandt<sup>29</sup> and Han<sup>30</sup>, Park’s efforts to mobilise the countryside allowed women were more opportunities to work<sup>31</sup>. This meant women could be more than mere homemakers in society, allowing for conservative views on women to be less dogmatic, and equality for both genders improved slightly<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Park

<sup>24</sup> Moon, Hyunjin Preston. "The Saemaul, New Village, Movement was Mindset Change." Hyun Jin Preston Moon (web log), February 14, 2014. Accessed January 22, 2017. <http://www.hyunjinmoon.com>.

<sup>25</sup> Moon

<sup>26</sup> Han

<sup>27</sup> Han

<sup>28</sup> Park

<sup>29</sup> Brandt

<sup>30</sup> Han

<sup>31</sup> Reed

<sup>32</sup> Park

However, as labour conflicts gradually increased with the sudden surge in the labour force, opposition and disputes inevitably grew too<sup>33</sup>. The self-reliance encouraged by the government proved somewhat contradictory, as the changes to the structure of traditional farming to commercial farming brought required technological development and additional guidance from the government<sup>34</sup>. Additionally, Brandt states<sup>35</sup> that ideals of ‘cooperation’ were damaged as the focus on commercialisation introduced by the *Saemaul Undong* caused more farmers to rely less on each other, but rather on technology and machines<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, even though historians such as Kim state that historically, Koreans were not as bothered with working conditions and wages<sup>37</sup>, Park still worked to suppress and quieten any possible oppositional voices. In fact, in an interview<sup>38</sup> in 1999, the 1978 general secretary of the *Catholic Association of Peasants* revealed that it was only in 1974 that she found out about the peasant movements, and that until then, she “thought that the government was really for the people”<sup>39</sup>. As a first person source from a person living during the Park administration, the ex-general secretary’s obliviousness is a statement to how powerful Park’s oppression was.

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<sup>33</sup> Park

<sup>34</sup> Brandt

<sup>35</sup> Brandt

<sup>36</sup> Brandt

<sup>37</sup> Kim, Kwan S. *The Korean Miracle (1962 - 1980) Revisited: Myths and Realities in Strategy Development*. Working paper no. 166. Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame.

<sup>38</sup> Kim, Kwan S

<sup>39</sup> Kim, Kwan S

## Conclusion

Park Chung Hee's *Saemaul Undong* was both an economic plan as well as a political strategy. Despite its main aim of encouraging and boosting economic growth, the ways in which Park used it to attempt to improve and alleviate social disorder but also quieten and oppress any criticism highlights it as a political move as well. Although there is debate on whether the *Saemaul Undong* was able to single-handedly improve South Korea's rural sector during the 1970s, there is enough statistical evidence to support that it was able to improve the efficiency of the agricultural sector and increase the output of produce. Additionally, the initial social satisfaction it brought claimed by those such as Moon can be agreed upon, despite the later contradictions of the ideals of self-sustainability and cooperation argued by historians such as Douglass. In this way, different elements of the dynamic historical perspectives can be brought together to present a more even and exhaustive view on the *Saemaul Undong*, allowing the conclusion that the *Saemaul Undong* brought many changes to the social and economic scene in the 1970s, but that the changes were positive towards society to some extent, and negative to an extent as well.

## Reflection

The role of the historian in defining history is certainly a challenging one. Whilst writing the investigation, I realised that history is not formed simply by the mere facts of a certain event in a point in time, but rather, is formed through the amalgamation of both fact and opinion of various individuals. Thus, it is incredibly important to observe the purpose and origin of different pieces of evidence and historiography that is found, as it can lead to a more thorough understanding of the past. Without analysing how different historians have chosen to present the facts, it is impossible to gain a comprehensive interpretation of history.

An example can be taken from the investigation I carried out above on Park Chung Hee's *Saemaul Undong* economic policy. Had I only referred to one Historian, I would only have grasped a sliver of the overall extent of positive effect the *Saemaul Undong* had. Depending on who the historian was, when their papers were written, or even what their political stance was, they held completely differing opinions the *Saemaul Undong*. Had I only read writings by Kim Chung Ryum, I would have finished my investigation with an incredibly right-wing conclusion favouring Park. On the other hand, had I only referred to Reed, I would have concluded that Park's *Saemaul Undong* was more theoretical than practical.

Sometimes, nonetheless, bias was a useful tool during my investigation. Kim Chung Ryum is a good example of a biased source, as he worked alongside Park during his entire administration. Through Kim, I was able to analyse and comprehend why and how Park carried out his economic policies. This provided further information for the me to collate and helped me form a more comprehensive understanding of the past. By asking the question "To what extent did Park Chung

Hee's Saemaul Undong in 1971-1979 have a positive impact on Korean society?", I was able to approach the different historians views as sources of evidence, and critically assess their value in my inquiry.

Word Count: 328 words.

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