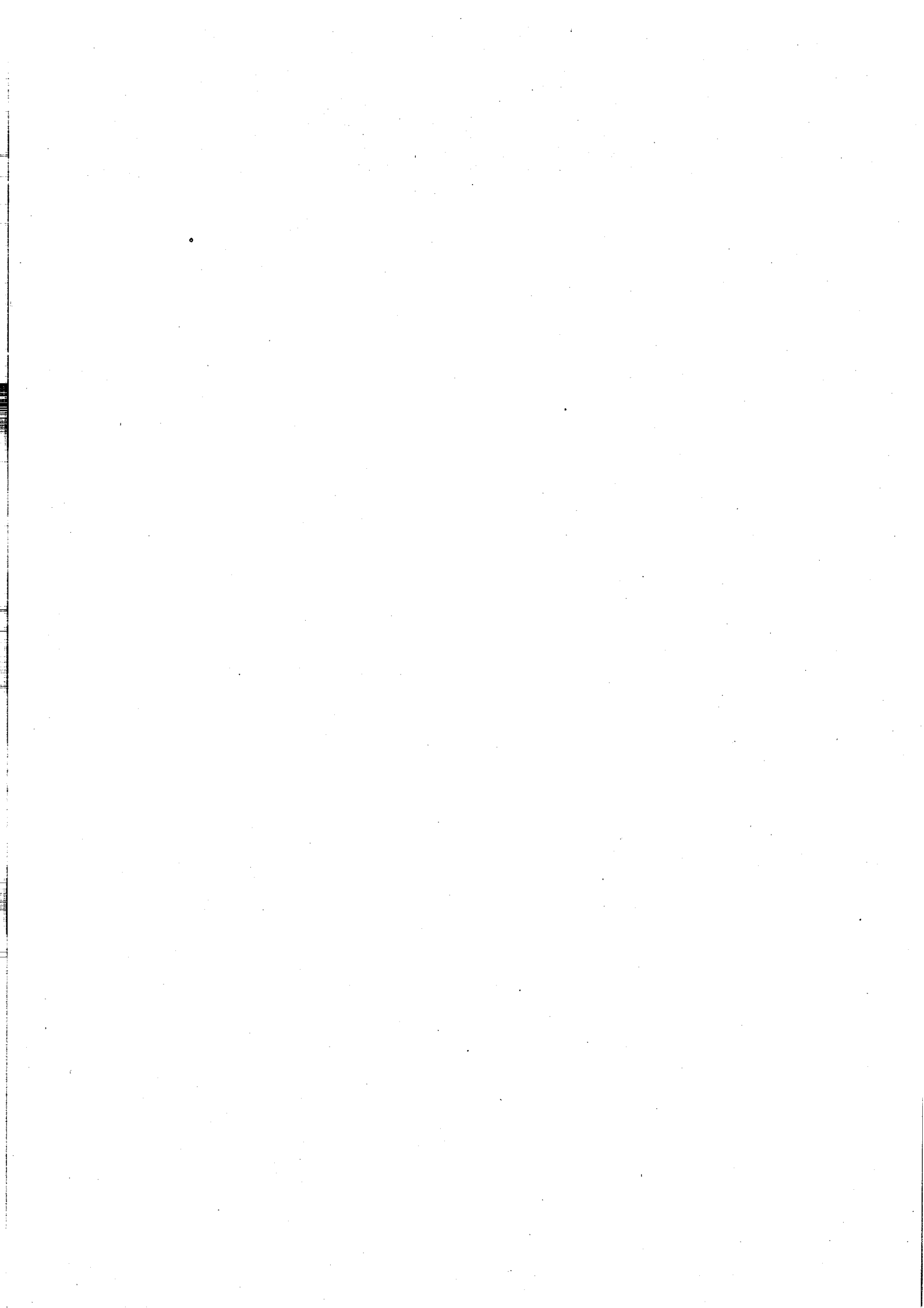




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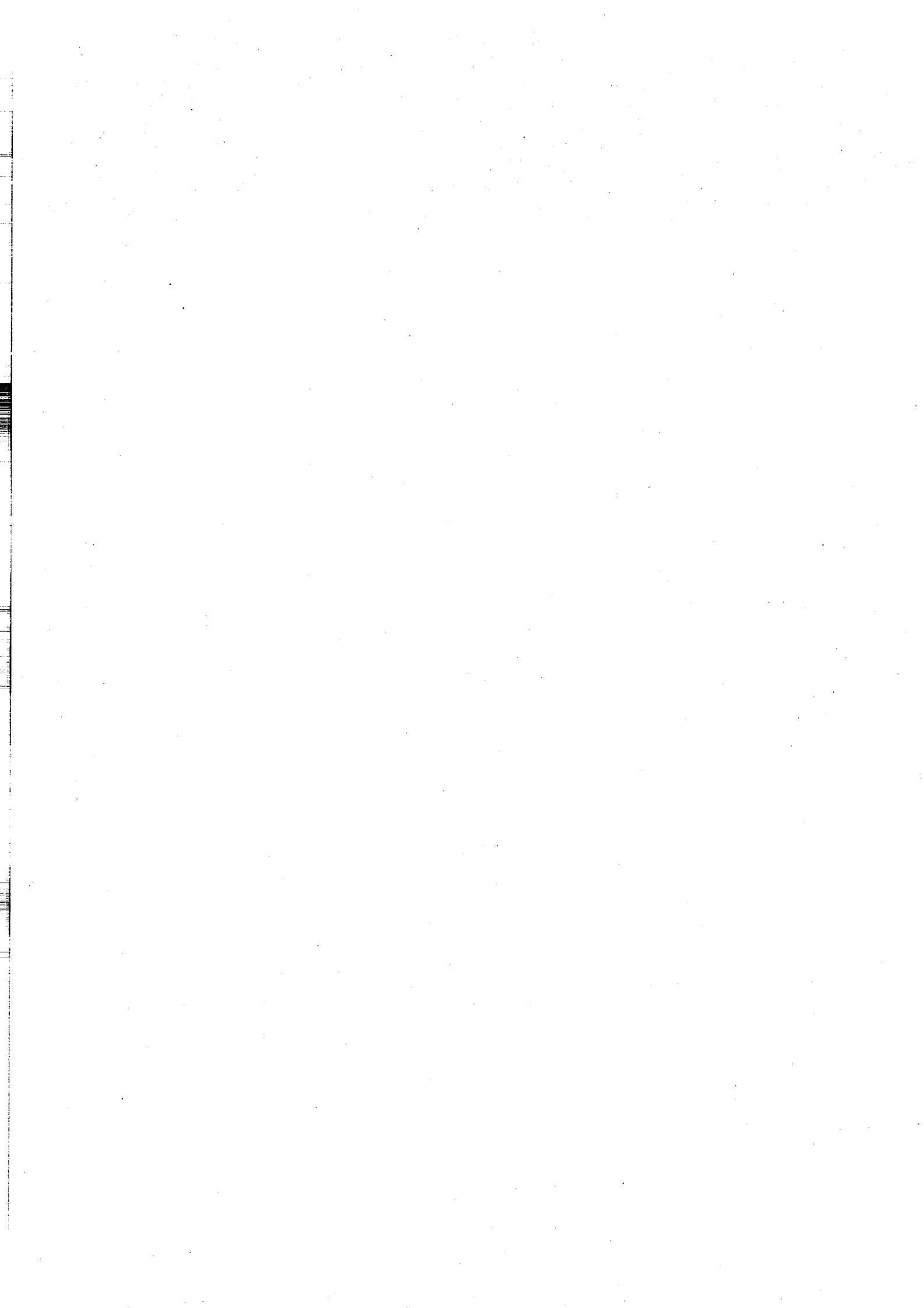
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Institute of Advanced Studies  
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## THE EVE OF PARK'S MILITARY RULE: THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE ON NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION, 1960-61

✍ *Kim Hyung-A*

Again, let's have another revolution. Revolution is the only way. If someone is suffering with an internal disease ... the only way [to cure it] is to open his stomach and fix it, even though he might die in the middle of the operation ...

— Ham Sökhön<sup>1</sup>

... while there were undoubtedly many intellectuals who mourned democracy's passing, the coup was accepted with resignation by most of the populace, including the students. How did it happen that the obliteration of the whole apparatus of democratic government in one stroke elicited hardly a murmur when the rigging of a vice-presidential election under Rhee had led to a massive convulsion?

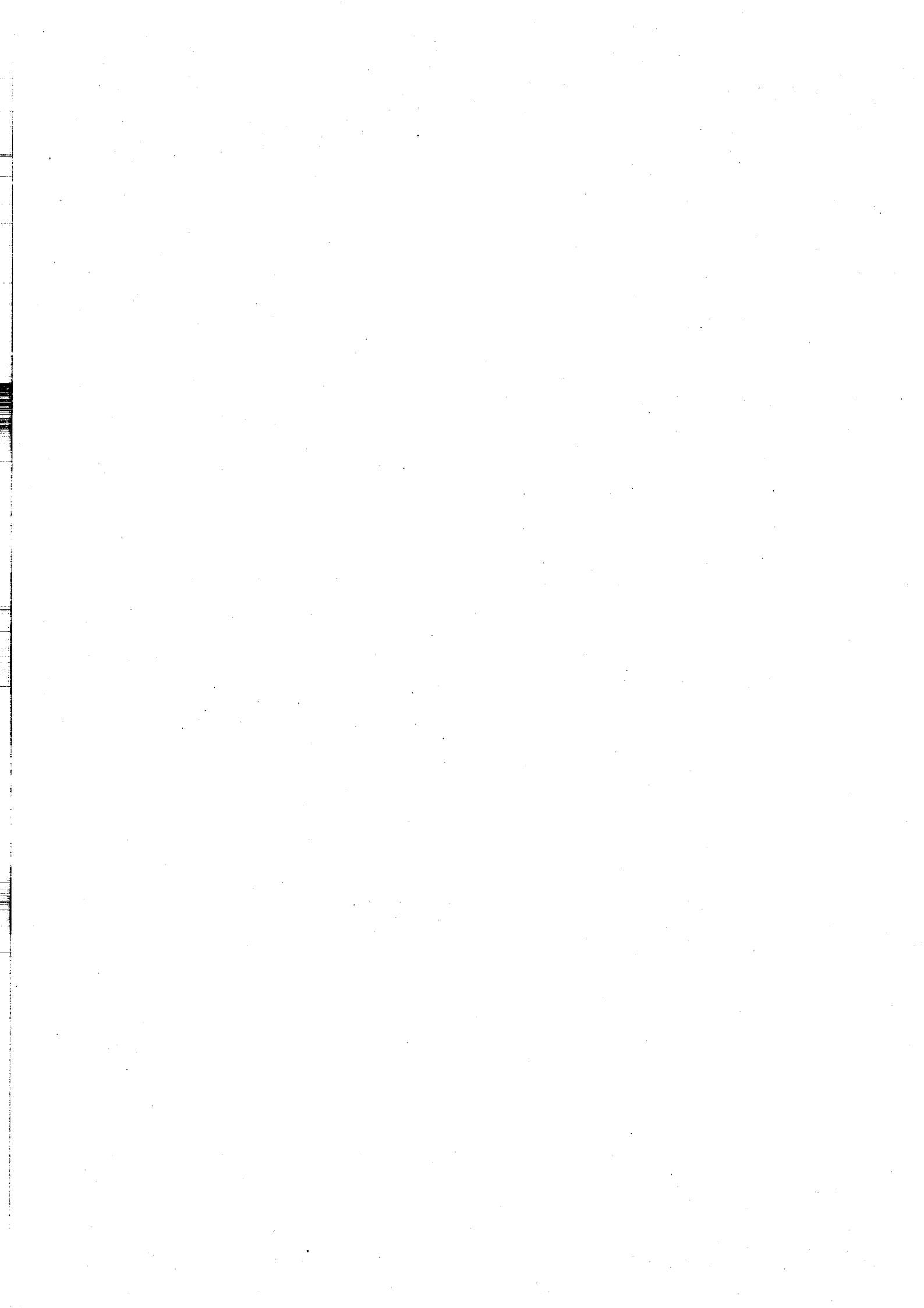
— James B Palais<sup>2</sup>

### The Pre-1961 Period: an Overview

The change in Korea's identity, from international beggar in the early 1960s to one of Asia's industrial giants today, can only be described as spectacular. This phenomenal change is reflected in Korea's rapid recovery of economic momentum following the financial crisis of 1997. By August 2001, Korea had completed the repayment of the \$58 billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In December the same year, Korea became the thirteenth largest trading nation with a per capita GDP of \$9,628 and a literacy rate of over 98 per cent. Korea's economic transformation

This paper was written whilst I was an Associate Visiting Fellow in the Division of Pacific and Asian History, Australian National University, 1998-99. Without the Division's support it could not have been written.

<sup>1</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Kung'min kamjông kwa hyöngmyöng wansu" [The people's emotion and completion of revolution], *Sasanggye* (January 1961): 31.



<sup>2</sup> James B. Palais, "Democracy in South Korea, 1948–72," in *Without parallel: the American–Korean relationship since 1945*, ed. Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p.328.

<sup>3</sup> James Cotton and Kim Hyung-A van Leest, "The new rich and the new middle class in South Korea: the rise and fall of the golf-republic," in *The new rich in Asia*, ed. Richard Robinson and David S. G. Goodman (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.183–202.

<sup>4</sup> Shim Jae Hoon, "South Korea rose-tinted glasses: a troubled nation revives its former military leader," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 July 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Newsreview*, 19 April 1997, pp.32–3.

<sup>7</sup> *Tonga Ilbo*, 19 July 2001.

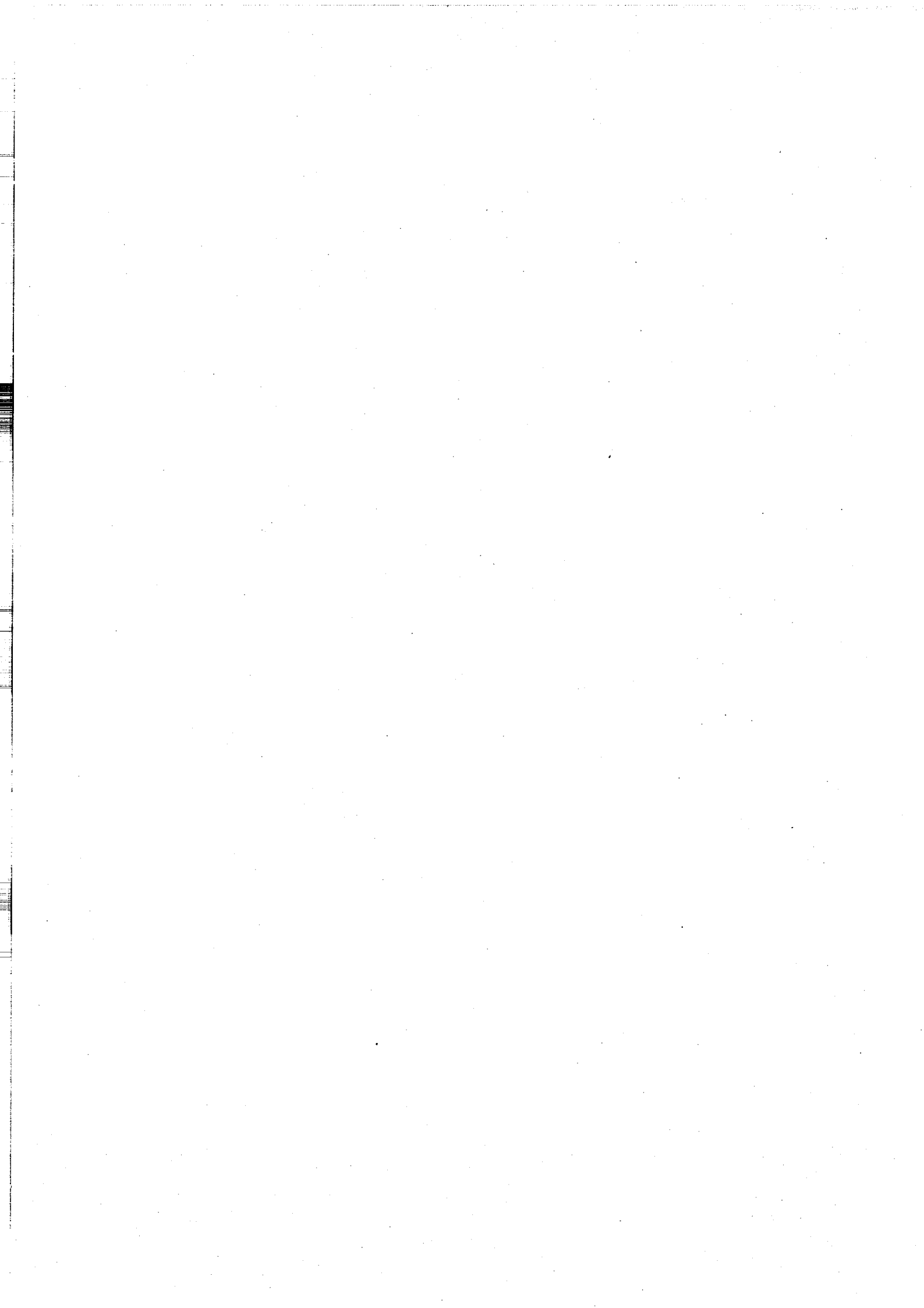
has been matched by massive societal transformation. Socially, Korea now bustles with new white-collar workers—more widely known as the middle class—characterised by high education and skill levels which have enabled this group to become an increasingly assertive political force.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Korea has undergone a noticeable political transformation which, in 2003, brought another dramatic change at the grass-roots of Korea's democracy when the Korean populace elected Roh Moo-hyun (No Muhyön), a human rights lawyer and relatively unknown politician, as President.

The modern identity of Korea, however, is a new creation largely initiated during the era of President Park Chung Hee (1961–79) who rose to power through a military coup in May 1961. It is ironic that despite the abundance of literature in the past about Park's military coup and his eighteen-year rule until his assassination on 26 October 1979, not much information is available about Park's concept of economic growth-oriented modernization, a concept he militantly pursued from the beginning of his junta leadership. Many slogans such as "Modernization of the Fatherland" (*choguk kündaebwa*) in the 1960s and "National Restoration" (*minjok chungbüng*) in the 1970s reflect Park's reformist and nationalist approach. This is not to say, however, that Park was the originator of these slogans or the plans for modernization. It is important to know where Park got these slogans from, what these slogans initially meant, and how Park adapted them for his national reconstruction program.

Park's reputation began to soar in early 1997 when Koreans became "fed up with President Kim Young Sam's ineffective and scandal-plagued government ..."<sup>4</sup> A survey conducted by the prominent daily newspaper, *Tonga Ilbo* (Tonga Daily), in April that year showed the 79.9 per cent of respondents considered Park to have been the "most effective president ever."<sup>5</sup> Another survey carried out at Korea University found that students held Park to be the third most preferred person in the world for "cloning" for posterity, after Kim Ku, the nationalist leader assassinated in June 1949, and Mother Teresa.<sup>6</sup> A later survey, conducted in July 2001 by the monthly journal *Sindonga* (New Far East), showed that 58 per cent of respondents—out of 3,644 university professors—chose Park as "the president who played his role the best" followed by Kim Dae Jung with 22 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

Many critics dismissed this phenomenon as a temporary "syndrome" which, they argued, held very little significance in regard to the long-term view of the Korean public. This criticism may well be valid. Yet, it is equally undeniable that the people's perception of Park had changed remarkably, especially concerning his achievements in leading Korea's modernization. In this respect, Park's vision of modernization immediately following the coup was both timely and representative of popular aspirations, even though Park's national development program itself may have done much to reshape those popular aspirations.

This paper examines Korean liberal intellectuals' thinking in regard to Korea's path towards national reconstruction during the pivotal period prior





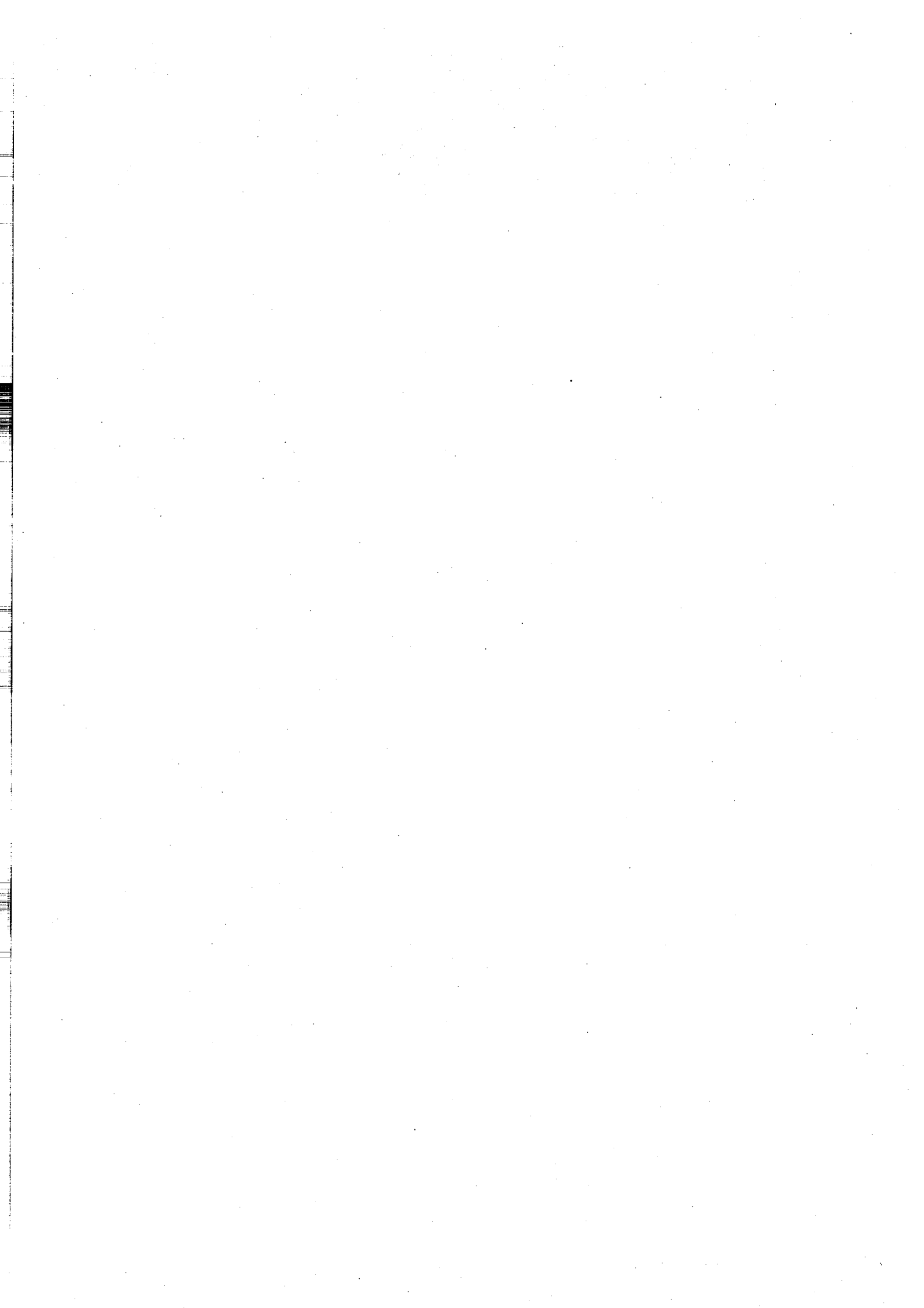
to Park's military revolution of 1961. It focuses on the debate which blossomed for eleven months when freedom and democracy followed the Student Revolution of 19 April 1960, but which was foreclosed by Park's coup of 16 May the following year. Understanding this intellectual debate, especially among liberal intellectuals, is an important aspect of the unravelling of Park's modernization program, which focused especially on economic growth and the establishment of a new national ethos. Moreover, the debate during that brief period of Korea's history reveals an unambiguous insistence by liberal intellectuals on the necessity of strong leadership to achieve economic growth, suggesting that Park's coup in 1961 was not merely a response based on his own reform agenda and ambition, but also a response to a widespread need felt by many Koreans.

The eve of Park's military rule, from April 1960 to May 1961, was marked by two revolutionary failures. One was the failure of the April Student Revolution to bring about change in the national leadership élite, despite bringing down the Syngman Rhee regime (1948–60). The other was the failure of the new government (April 1960–May 1961) and ruling Democratic Party leadership to build public confidence in the government's reform program focused on uprooting corruption and building the economy. In response, there emerged three notable developments: the rise of progressive reformist forces; the liberal intellectuals' debate on national reconstruction; and the military reformists' "Clean-up the Military" campaign which ultimately led to Park's military coup of 16 May 1961.

A careful consideration of these phenomena, as well as of the legacy of the Rhee regime, especially regarding the continuance of conservative politics in a Cold War context, is important to understanding Park's military coup and his management of national development. Despite the different priorities held by interest groups, the pre-1961 debate on national reconstruction by liberal intellectuals, progressive reformists, leading academics, media commentators and other politically active groups such as students—reflected popular views about national priorities, especially those that had prompted the April Student Revolution. The pre-1961 debate, particularly among liberal intellectuals, articulated the public need for another "nationalist" revolution. The deliberations of the liberal intellectuals provided the basis for an ideology that Park would exploit for his military coup and subsequently in his approach to national development.

Recent studies suggest that Park had been conspiring for a long time, waiting for the right opportunity to join with other disaffected military officers.<sup>8</sup> He and his military reformist clique were fortunate in that the intellectual and political ferment that followed the April Student Revolution provided a convenient pretext for continuing his reform campaign in the military, and then the coup. Although initially second-in-charge of the coup, by offering strong leadership with economic development as the key national priority among others, Park was able to project himself as the appropriate leader. He was undoubtedly opportunistic, but also had a genuine capacity to harness the people's revolutionary expectations.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Hyung-A, *Korea's development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid industrialization, 1961–1979* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).



<sup>9</sup> *Sasanggye* was founded in March 1953 by Chang Chunha, a leading intellectual, a staunch nationalist and a pro-democracy dissident especially opposed to Park Chung Hee. In the late 1960s, *Sasanggye* is believed to have had more than 100,000 subscribers, but it was closed down by the Park government in September 1970. Chang died in mysterious circumstances while mountain climbing on 17 August 1975. His death raised much suspicion, especially in the leading media including *Tonga Ilbo*. Chang's mysterious death was raised again in March 1993 by the Korean television station SBS, which was then challenged by the investigation team of the monthly journal *Wŏlgan chosŏn* [Korea monthly]. *Wŏlgan chosŏn* argued that Chang's death was an "accident." See Yi Chŏnghun, Kim Yonkwang and U Pyŏngghyŏn, "SBS ūi wihŏm ch'ŏnman han obo" [An extremely dangerous false report of SBS], *Wŏlgan chosŏn* (May 1993): 162-97.

<sup>10</sup> Park Chung Hee, *Minjok ūi chŏryŏk* [The nation's intrinsic energy] (Seoul: Kwangmyŏng Ch'ulp'ansa, 1971), p.112.

This paper explores the relevance of the pre-1961 intellectual debate to the revolutionary environment and the subsequent military coup, by analyzing its content and implications based upon materials published in *Sasanggye* (World of Thought), the highly-regarded contemporary monthly journal read by politically-conscious Koreans, including liberal-thinking intellectuals.<sup>9</sup> Although the thinking of the liberal intellectuals published in *Sasanggye* may have achieved only a limited dissemination, the journal remains a valuable record of the intellectual discussion which influenced, and articulated, public expectations of a "nationalist" revolution. Park later reflected:

Intellectual activity at that time [pre-1961] was in fact exceptional, especially that of media commentators who put themselves on the line with the same patriotic sense of duty as that prevalent during the Japanese occupation. During this period they unearthed all forms of corruption and injustice while at the same time impeaching political degeneration, and they implanted in the hearts of the people hatred and antipathy towards the Syngman Rhee government.<sup>10</sup>

### *Post-April-Revolution Critique of Government*

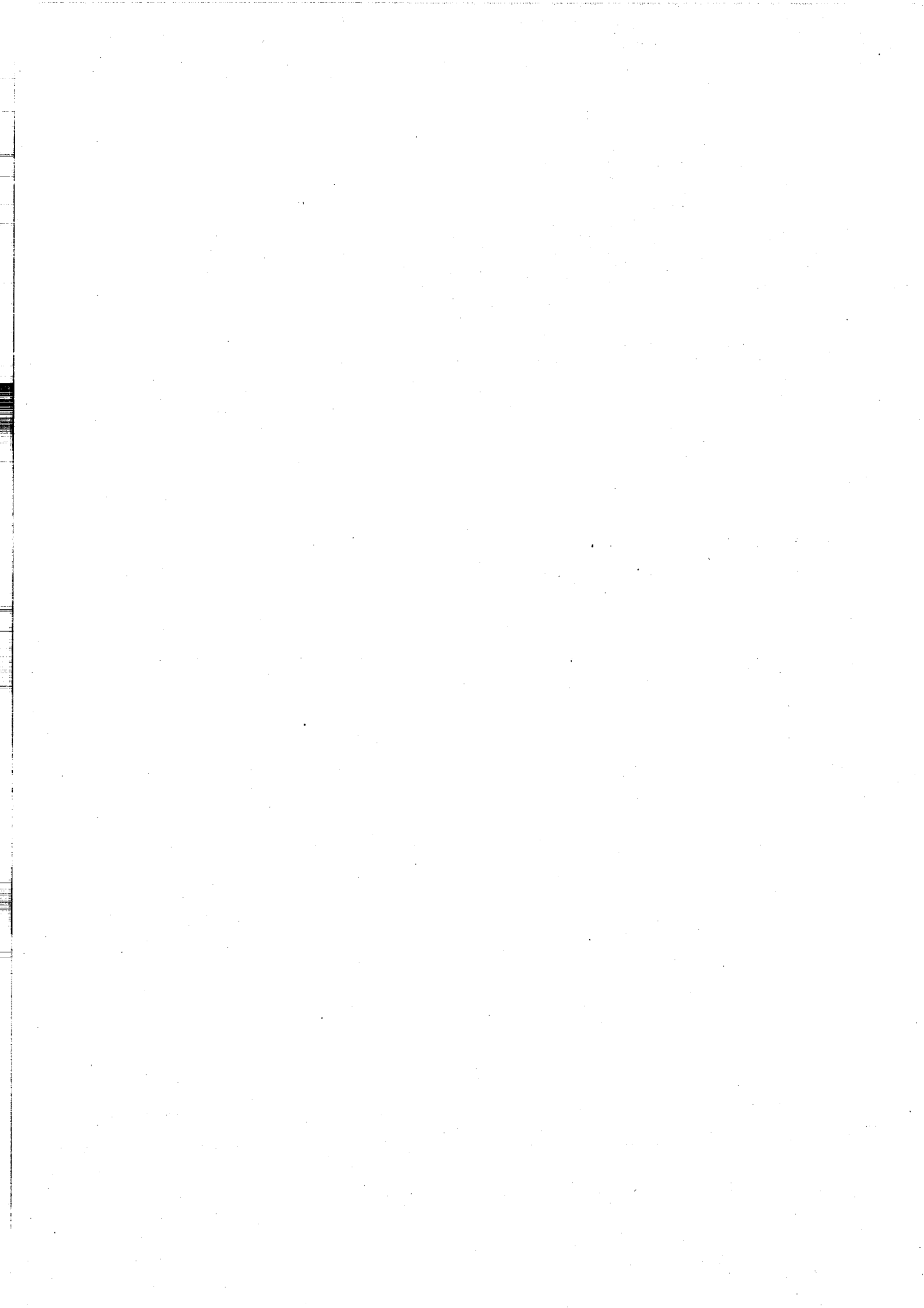
#### *The April Revolution*

The anti-government student protests, known as the April Revolution, or simply *sa-il-gu* (4.19), came to a head on 19 April 1960. On that day, some 20,000 university and high school students, as well as citizens, marched on the presidential mansion, Kyŏngmudae (the old name of the Ch'ŏngwadae), demanding the censure of sitting politicians and a new election. A riot broke out in response to two main public concerns: first, the Rhee government's



**Figure 1**

Protest (on 6 April) calling for the nullification of the March 15 Presidential election. From Sawŏl hyŏngmyŏng charyojip: Sailgu ūi minjungsa [The April Revolution data collection: a people's history of the April Revolution] (Seoul: Hangminsa, 1985), p.38



**Figure 2**

*Street protest against dictatorship and corruption, Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip: Sailgu ūi minjungsa, cover page*

rigging of the election of 15 March, and second, the discovery of the body of a sixteen-year-old high school student, Kim Chuyöl, offshore at Masan, South Kyöngsang Province. Kim's body had allegedly been thrown into the bay by police after he had been killed in a demonstration.<sup>11</sup> Public outrage intensified into a revolutionary situation when, on 18 April, after three days of nationwide student protests, a group of Korea University students was attacked, in the middle of their demonstration, by the Anti-Communist Youth Corps, an organized group of political gangsters.

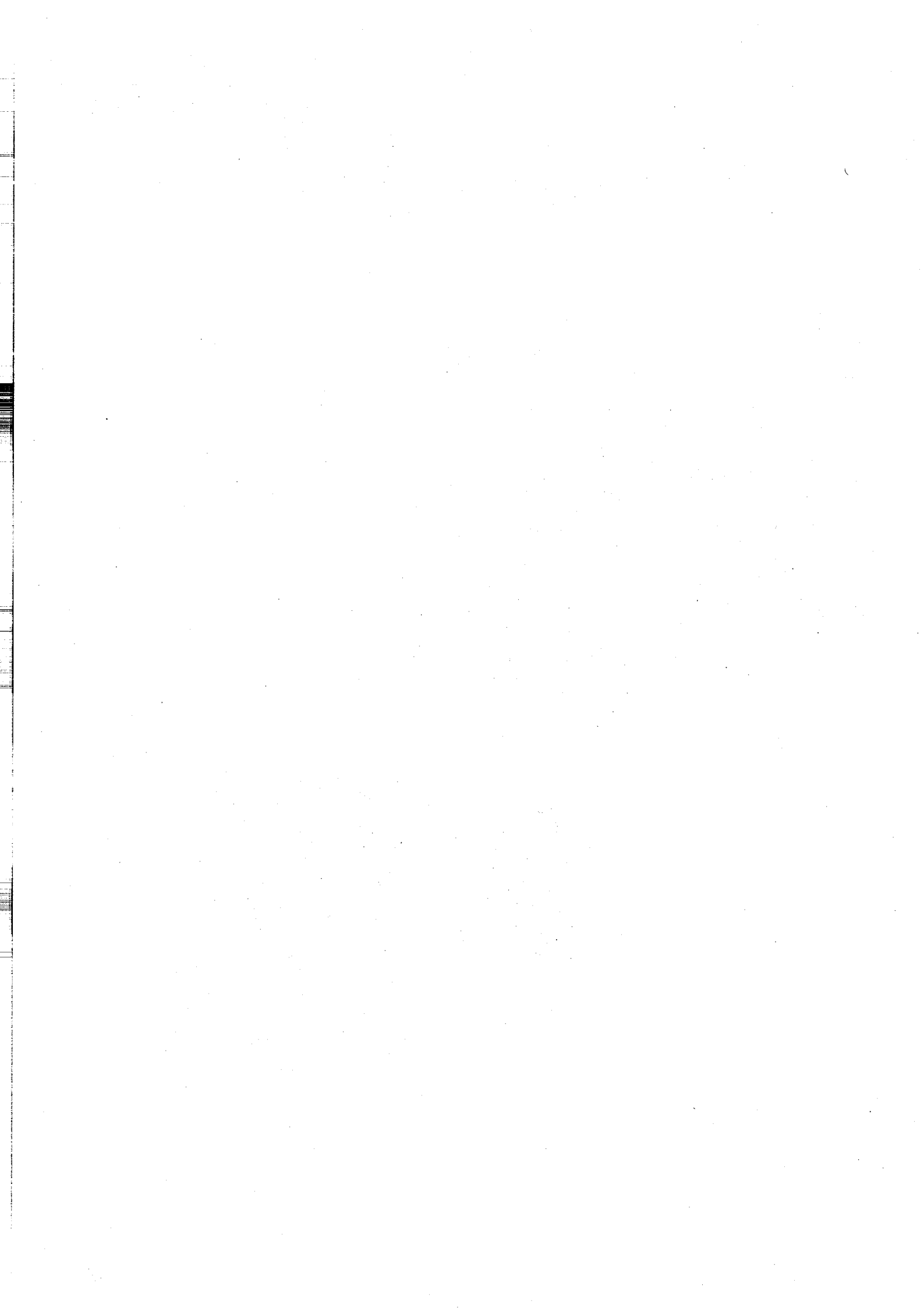
By midday of 19 April, more than 100,000 citizens had joined the demonstration, but were met by a hail of police bullets. Across the city, about 130 demonstrators were killed and more

**Figure 3**

*Floating corpse of Kim Chuyöl in the port of Masan, Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip: Sailgu ūi minjungsa, p.28*



<sup>11</sup> Kim had been missing since the March 15 demonstration which had resulted in heavy casualties: eight were killed and 72 were injured. See *Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip: Sailgu ūi minjungsa* [The April Revolution data collection: a people's history of the April Revolution] (Seoul: Hangminsä, 1985), p.28.



<sup>12</sup> Han'guk Yöksa Yön'guhoe [Society for the study of Korean history], *Han'guk yöksa* [Korean history] (Seoul: Yöksa Pip'yöngsa, 1992), p.381.

than 1,000 wounded.<sup>12</sup> The populace was outraged and horrified, and the United States was quick to express its concern over the Rhee government's actions. On 22 April, many eminent citizens began to demand President Rhee's resignation and, indeed, three days later, about 300 university professors marched in the streets of Seoul and met in front of the National Assembly to demand that Rhee resign. The US also officially demanded the President's resignation. Against this background, the Korean Martial Law Commander, Lieutenant-General Song Yoch'an, ordered his troops not to fire on anti-government demonstrators. On 26 April, Rhee resigned, placing government in the hands of his Foreign Minister, Ho Chöng.

### *The Rhee Legacy*

<sup>13</sup> Rhee (1875–1965) was the sixth-generation only-son of a ruined *yangban* family. For details of Rhee's background, see Richard C. Allen, *Korea's Syngman Rhee: an unauthorized portrait* (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1960); Yi Hanu, *Ködaeban saengae: Yi Süngman 90 nyön* [A great life: Syngman Rhee's ninety years] (Seoul: Chosön Ilbosa, 1995).

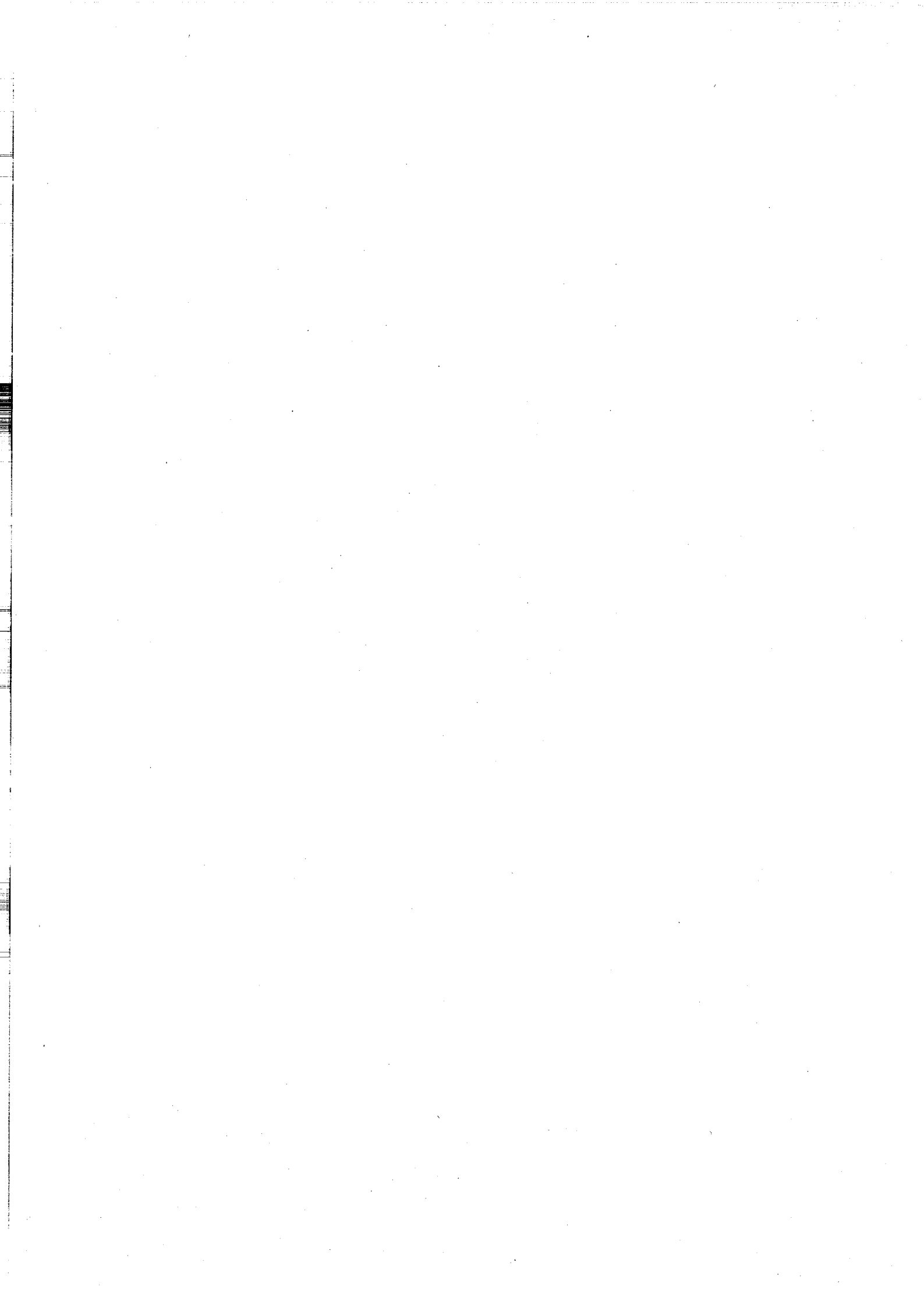
<sup>14</sup> Park used this phrase referring to three privileged groups in the post-liberation period: men who were initially landlords who became conservative politicians, new rich businessmen, or high-ranking bureaucrats.

<sup>15</sup> The KDP was established with substantial American sponsorship on 16 September 1945. One of the characteristics of the KDP was its close connection with *Tonga Ilbo*, owned by Kim Söngsu, one of the eight executives of the KDP and later its chairman.

<sup>16</sup> Sim Chiyön, "Hanmindang üi kujöjök punsök kwa tanjöng rosön" [Structural analysis and the unitary government line of the Korean Democratic Party], in *Han'guk minjokjuüi ron II* [A theory of Korean nationalism II], ed. Song Könhö with Kang Man'gil (Seoul: Ch'angjak Kwa Pip'yöngsa, 1983), pp.199–207.

Many of the problems faced by Koreans after the war (1950–53) were, in their eyes, attributable to the sheer incompetence of the Rhee government and its monopoly control over political power. With anti-Communist Western-style "democracy" as his political ideology, Syngman Rhee was one of the most prominent Korean political leaders since the Japanese colonial era.<sup>13</sup> He was inaugurated as the first President of South Korea on 15 August 1948. The problematic nature of Rhee's idea of anti-Communist democracy derived from its feeble imitation of some elements of American-style liberal democracy. At the same time, the American Military Government (AMG) in Korea (1945–48) had introduced a form of Western-style democracy under its strict occupation policy which, in effect, reduced Korea to the status of a colony of the US. This combination of democratic objectives, however, ran counter to Rhee's personal indigenous ambition to rule Korea in a typically East Asian tradition. Rhee's attempt at imitating American-style democracy, while pursuing an anti-Communist policy in the Cold War context, thus exposed the political reality of that time, namely, the monopolization of political power by the conservatives.

The conservatives at the time generally comprised representatives of the landlord class, or "liberation aristocrats,"<sup>14</sup> who formed political alliances such as the Korean Democratic Party (KDP) (Han'guk Minjudang) which, by the end of 1947, had almost 86,000 members, including Kim Söngsu, Cho Pyöngok, Hö Chöng, Yun Posön and many well-educated individuals.<sup>15</sup> The KDP was especially popular among conservative Korean capitalists, with a US Army intelligence pamphlet describing it as a group of successful businessmen. In short, the conservatives maintained political control after liberation as a coalition, irrespective of political party affiliation, and by Korean standards in the late 1940s many of them had been seen as "collaborators." Rhee's success in acquiring his first Presidency was due largely to his alliance with the KDP, which not only enjoyed a virtual monopoly of political power by holding key positions in the AMG in Korea, but also had secured Rhee as President to maintain its vested interests in Korean politics.<sup>16</sup> Having lived in the US for nearly four decades, Rhee had no particular base for his political





activities when he returned to Korea in October 1945.

Once he became President, however, Rhee effectively excluded the KDP from his cabinet by admitting just one KDP member, despite the KDP demand—as the largest elected group, having 80 of the National Assembly's 198 members, that they hold at least half of the ministries, including the post of Prime Minister.<sup>17</sup> The establishment of the Liberal Party in March 1952, during the Korean War, reflected Rhee's relentless efforts to maintain control over opposition conservatives. By the late 1950s, Rhee managed Korea's political system without any serious rivals. Even the Democratic Party, which emerged in September 1955 from the old KDP in an effort to compete against Rhee's Liberal Party, did not offer significantly different ideas or political vision from that proffered by the Liberals.

In any case, Rhee ruthlessly crushed any opposition to his anti-Communist conservatism, and focused on his unification policy known as "March north and unify Korea" or simply the *kugsi* (national policy). The execution of Cho Pongam for alleged violations of the National Security Law just eight months before the 1960 presidential election was the clearest example of Rhee's oppressive control over his potential rivals. As leader of the Progressive Party (Chinbodang), founded in November 1956, Cho had promoted peaceful unification in his 1956 presidential campaign and had surprised Rhee and his Liberals by obtaining more than 30 per cent of the total vote.<sup>18</sup>

Rhee thus had no real rivals. As the most prominent "Elder"<sup>19</sup> in Korean politics and society, he commanded unchallenged respect and obedience from his subordinates, just as a traditional Confucian father governed his family. This phenomenon arose partly because the conservatives, including many prominent opposition leaders, had served Rhee at one time or another, and partly because, in accordance with Korea's Confucian cultural and political tradition, the junior served the senior unconditionally. Pluralism in ideology and equality in human relationships were foreign concepts. Rhee's image as ruler in an autocracy, however, left him wide open to criticism. The influential US report by Conlon Associates in 1960, entitled "United States Foreign Policy – Asia," observed: "Korea, as the opposition is threatened and suppressed, is a one-and-a-half party system, rather than two political parties."<sup>20</sup> This report by Professor Robert Scalapino and his team was frequently cited by Park in an effort to justify his coup. A summary prepared in 1967 by Ch'a Kibyŏk, a prominent political scientist, on the characteristics of the conservatives is revealing:

The political power which has ruled this nation since liberation was the Conservatives, mainly the landlord class who were nurtured by the Japanese [colonial government]. Conservative power was the only one which has maintained its existence in the midst of national division devised by foreign powers and in the midst of the critical circumstances which resulted from the Leftists' and the Rightists' struggle to the extreme. ... In short, Dr Rhee made the privileged class his basis from which the Korean government echoed the voice of foreign powers, but was separated from the people. The April 19 [Revolution] and the May 16 [military coup] were revolts against

<sup>17</sup> Han T'aesu, *Han'guk chŏngdangsa* [A history of Korea's political parties] (Seoul: Sint'aeyangsa, 1961), p.113.

<sup>18</sup> For the background to Cho's execution and the shutdown of the Progressive Party shortly before Cho's execution in July 1956 see Kwŏn Taebok, ed., *Chinbodang* [The Progressive Party] (Seoul: Chiyangsa, 1985).

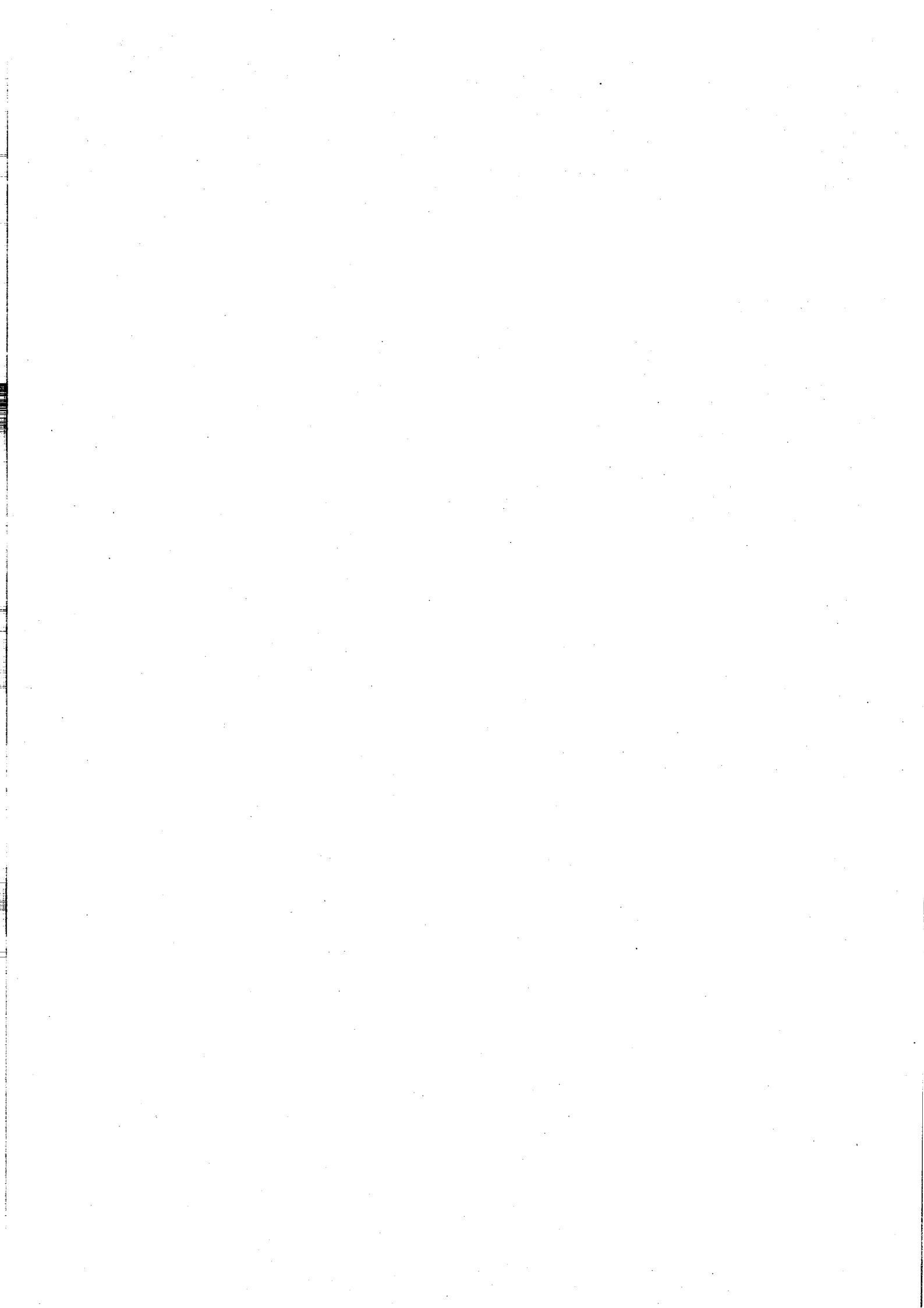
<sup>19</sup> President Rhee was 85 in 1960, and when he took his third oath of Presidency at the age of 81 in 1956 was the world's oldest head of state.

<sup>20</sup> See "K'onlon ŏssosieissŭ pogosŏ: Miguk ūi tae asea chŏngch'aek" [United States foreign policy—Asia: study prepared at the request of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November, 1959], translated in *Sasanggye* (January 1960): 122–9. This report appears to have been of such great concern to the Chang government that soon after its publication in *Sasanggye*, Professor Scalapino received a personal letter from Prime Minister Chang asking for a copy, which he requested be sent to a US soldier in the Eighth Army in Seoul. Author's interview with Professor Scalapino in Canberra, 13 December 1995.

Figure 4

President Syngman Rhee in 1960, aged 85





**Figure 5**

Professor Yu Chin-o, at the time President of Korea University, appealing to student demonstrators to break up their protest (19 April 1967), *Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip*: Sailgu üi minjungsa, p.25



<sup>21</sup> Ch'a Kibyök, "Sugu seryök kwa pansugu seryök'non" [A theory of "the conservative force" and "the anti-conservative force"], *Sasanggye* (June 1967): 20-1.

<sup>22</sup> Chang Chunha, "Kwönduön: Tto tasi uri üi hyangbang ul ch'önmjöng hamyönso" [Preface: we here again elucidate our position], *Sasanggye* (June 1960): 36. The term "*simin hyöngmyöng*" certainly suggests the particular meaning of bourgeois revolution as it does in Japanese and in certain Chinese contexts. However, I have translated this term literally because no source suggests that Korean intellectuals at that time used Marxist terms such as 'bourgeois revolution'.

this conservative power ... [and] saw the re-appearance of nationalism.<sup>21</sup>

In the aftermath of the April Student Revolution, many Koreans, particularly urban citizens and students, concluded that their sitting politicians were corrupt and incapable of rooting out corrupt politicians and business leaders who had acquired assets illegally. In this context, some liberal intellectuals, including Chang Chunha, the owner-editor of *Sasanggye* and a staunch nationalist, regarded the April Student Revolution as an expression of collective feeling on the part of the citizens, defining it as a "*simin hyöngmyöng*" (civilian revolution), as well as a "*chisöngin üi hyöngmyöng*" (intellectuals' revolution) for democracy,<sup>22</sup> a democratic revolution aimed especially at achieving political and economic freedom.

**Figure 6**

Police and army guarding the Presidential mansion against the student demonstrators (19 April 1967), *Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip*: Sailgu üi minjungsa, p.13

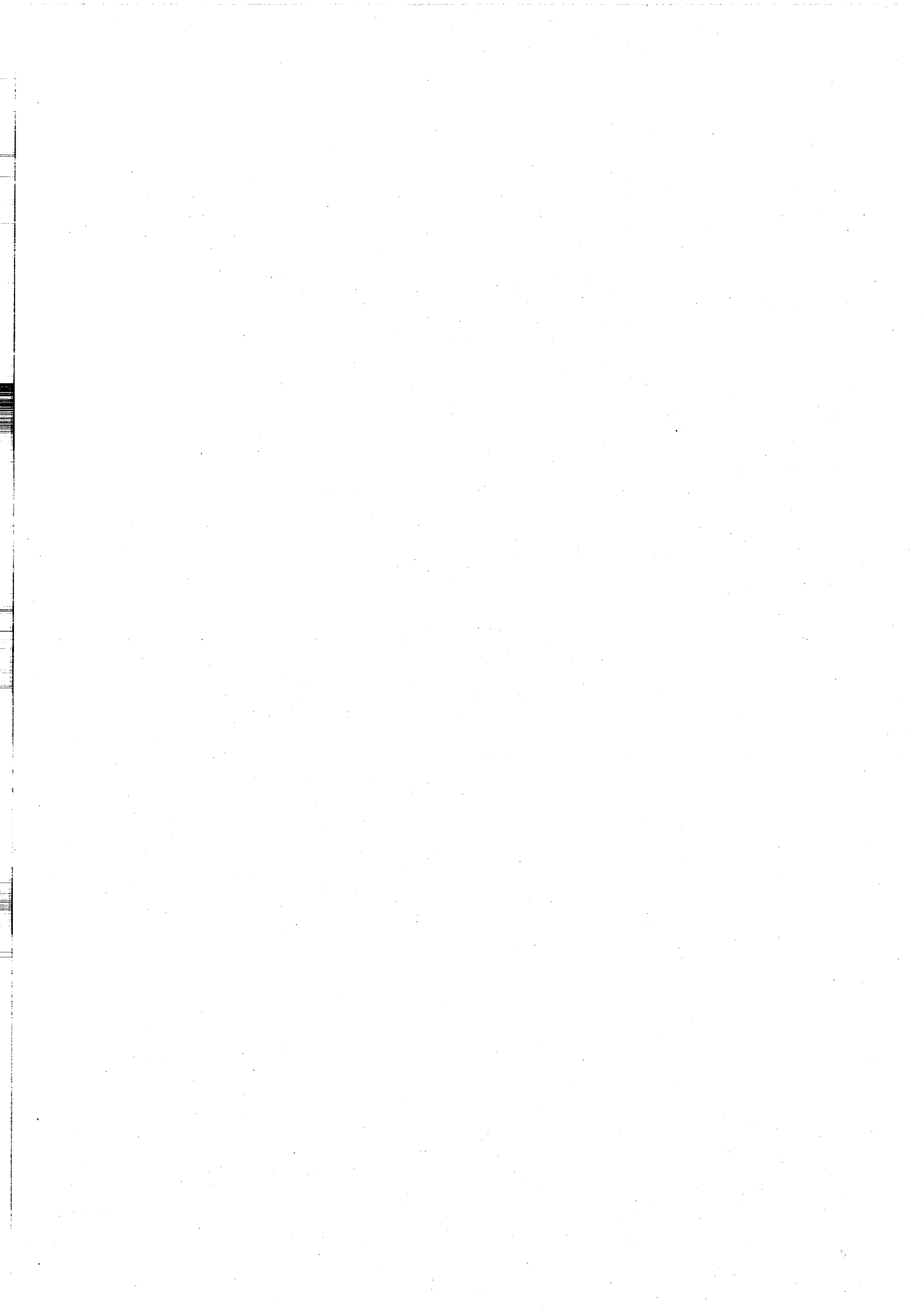




Figure 7

"Let's recover the election with blood"—  
a banner actually inscribed in blood,  
Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip: Sailgu üi  
minjungsa, p.38

Pak Chonghong, Professor of Philosophy at Seoul National University, stated:

It is indisputable that through the April Student Revolution there emerged genuine intellectual thought, which was as yet obscure and immature, because it was only a bud. As an ideology, this intellectual thought had not yet reached the level of theory with a systematic structure. Nevertheless, it was an invaluable guide, a new thought that we must not discard ...<sup>23</sup>

Pak argued that the April Student Revolution succeeded because of "creative intelligence" and "many objective conditions." According to him, the April Student Revolution was a genuine manifestation of Korean ideology, transforming into action the Korean people's sense of justice in regard to their "minjokchök chuch'esöng," that is, their national independence or national self-reliance. He therefore identified the emergence of this populist "Korean ideology" as "our ideology."<sup>24</sup> Its content was quick to find expression in the debate on national

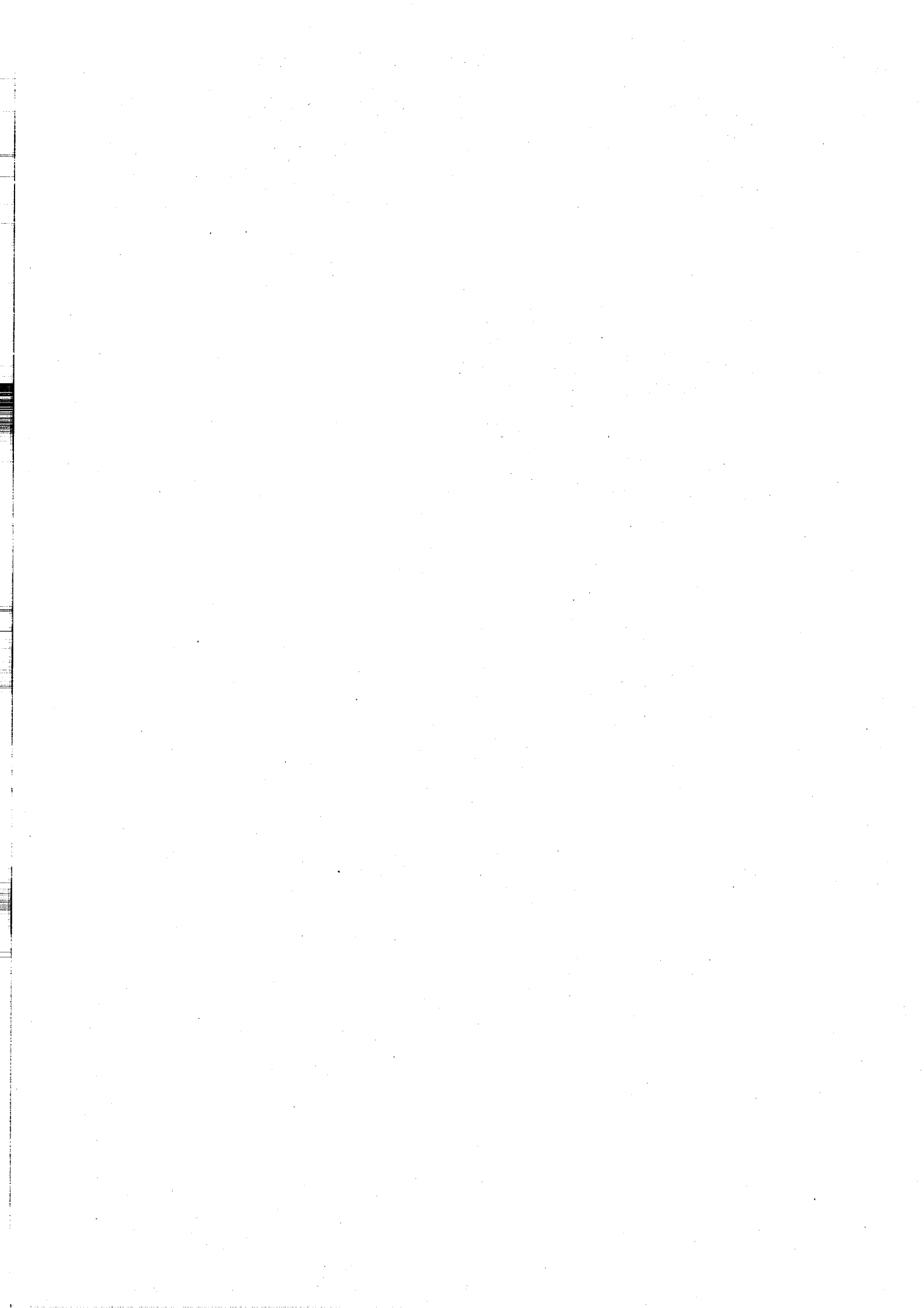


Figure 8

Professors from the various universities in Seoul calling for democracy, in front of Capital Hall (25 April 1967),  
Sawöl hyöngmyöng charyojip: Sailgu üi  
minjungsa, p.11

<sup>23</sup> Pak Chonghong, "Sasang kwa haengdong" [Ideology and action], *Sasanggye* (January 1961): 46-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



reconstruction that was to follow. The irony of the April Student Revolution, however, was that while the students were the victors, the spoils of victory went to the same conservatives, although this time to remnant conservatives who made up the Interim and Chang Myŏn Governments.

### *The Interim and Chang Myŏn Governments*

<sup>25</sup> Sin Sangch'o, "Yi Süngman p'okchŏng ūi chongŏn" [The end of Syngman Rhee's tyrannical government], *Sasanggye* (June 1960): 86.

<sup>26</sup> Song Kŏnho, "60.70 nyŏndae ūi t'ongil noni" [The unification debate of the 1960s and 1970s], in *Han'guk minjok juŭiron II*, p.162.

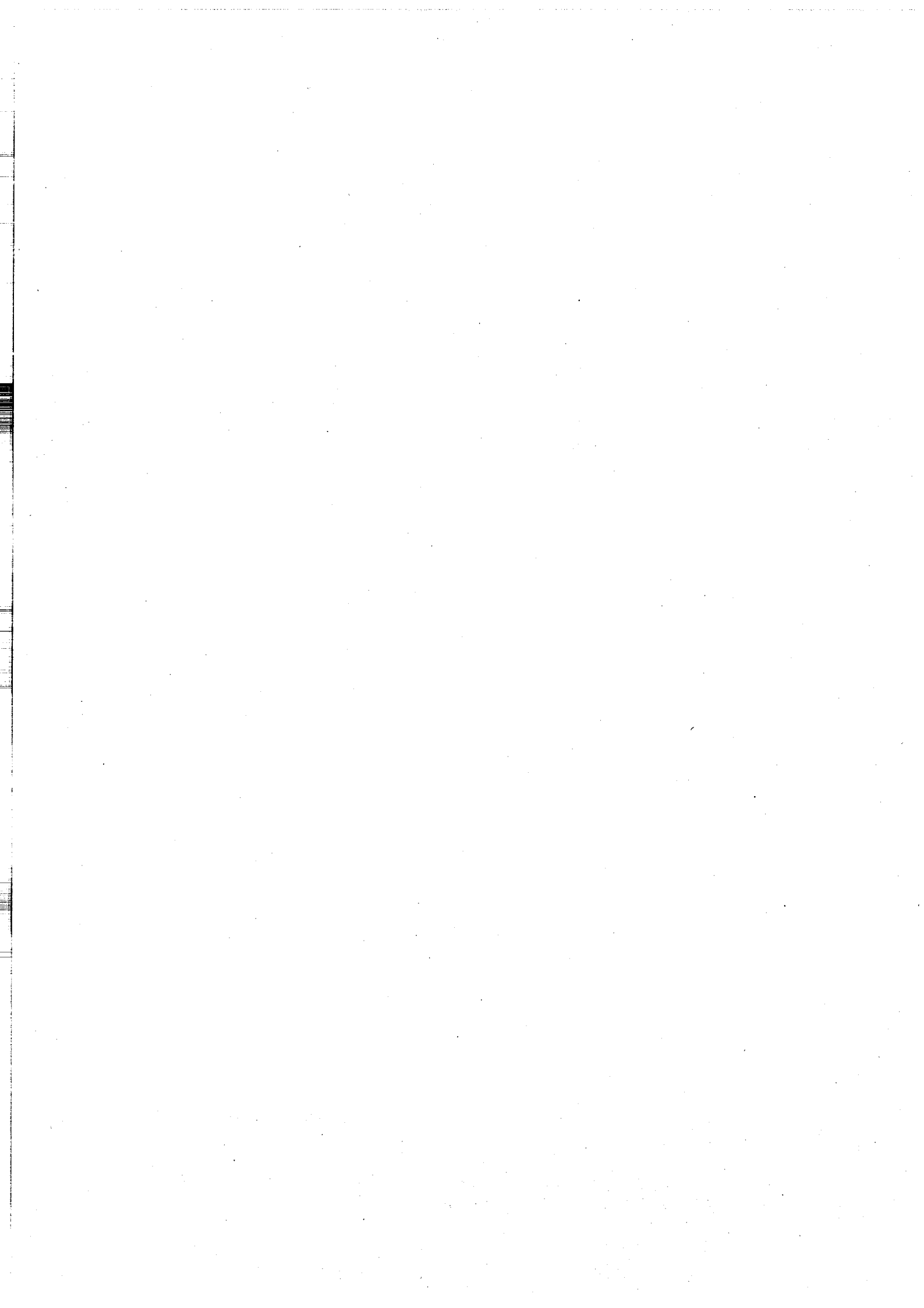
<sup>27</sup> Ham Sŏkhŏn, "Kung'min kamjŏng kwa hyŏ. 'myŏng wansu," p.31.

<sup>28</sup> Sin Sangch'o, "Yi Süngman p'okchŏng ūi chongŏn, p.87.

Sin Sangch'o, a prominent political analyst in the 1960s, suggested that the April student revolutionaries had four aims: to overthrow the dictator, President Rhee; to eradicate the old ruling power linked to Rhee; to establish a new economic order; and, to reorganize the societal system which had provided the supporting framework for the dictator.<sup>25</sup> Of the four, only the first aim was achieved. Ham Sŏkhŏn, a well-known Quaker and a writer who was regarded by many leading intellectuals as an "elder of the eminent persons out of office,"<sup>26</sup> argued that the April Student Revolution stopped with its first goal because both the interim and Chang governments were too weak to take resolute action against corrupt politicians while indulging in opportunism and factionalism.<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Sin Sangch'o observed that changing government from one headed by the Liberal Party to one headed by the Democratic Party would achieve nothing.<sup>28</sup>

For two main reasons, the Interim Government of Hŏ Chŏng had limited capacity to carry out the revolutionary tasks demanded by the people. In the first place, Hŏ Chŏng, an old friend of President Rhee and a member of the former ruling Liberal Party, retained primary loyalty to his party and, secondly, the new Democratic Party, soon to constitute the Chang Government, put the Interim Government under pressure as early as July 1960. Nevertheless, the interim government quickly drafted a new constitution in order to redress the imbalance between executive and legislative power. Yun Posŏn (1897-1990) was elected on 29 July as a figurehead president devoid of effective power, while genuine political power was vested in the State Council headed by the Prime Minister, Chang Myŏn (John M. Chang). What was assumed in this process was Korea's preparedness for liberal democracy or, at least, to adopt a democratic socio-political framework.

Despite this bold beginning, however, the Chang Myŏn Government was swamped with many challenges from within its own ruling Democratic Party as well as from the three major external reformist groups: the progressives, the Teachers' Union, which led the labor movement, and university students. Within the Party, the challenges arose entirely from factional strife that had reached an irreconcilable stage when Chang Myŏn, leader of the "New Faction," only succeeded by a margin of three votes in acquiring the prime ministership. Consequently, the government lacked the unity, political integrity and discipline necessary for exerting leadership. Members formed a divided and directionless legislature, which the media characterized as a body that, possessing no ideology, no integrity and no ability, behaved like a Don





Quixote without self-understanding.<sup>29</sup> Chang was not unaware of the task before him and, to his credit, his government introduced long-term economic planning for the first time, while also pursuing the decentralization of the political system. Despite these efforts, however, many critics, including Sin Sangch'o, argued that if the two factions of the Democratic Party had been united and exercised their revolutionary power, the people's enthusiasm would have been satisfied.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, in addition to political factionalism, the economy was far from healthy. Inflation was crippling: the price of rice increased by 60 per cent and coal and oil prices by 23 per cent in four months, from December 1960 to April 1961. Between November and February, national production fell more than 12 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the recorded crime rate more than doubled, while the felony arrest rate dropped from 90 per cent to 68 per cent. The rate of unemployment lingered at the unacceptably high levels of 23.4 per cent in 1959 and 23.7 per cent in 1960. At about the time of the April Student Revolution, the number of unemployed had reached two and a half million. The underemployed in rural areas numbered almost two million, with the rural economy in a perilous state.<sup>32</sup> Some historians state that over a million farming households suffered food shortages in the spring of 1960 and more than nine million children throughout the country regularly went without lunch.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, a vicious cycle of poverty had set in. This was exacerbated by low social morale which was not helped by the government's inability to take the strong action necessary to achieve the sweeping changes that the public demanded. They wanted a thorough and rapid purging of all individuals and groups who were closely connected to the Rhee Government's election rigging, illicit profiteering and other forms of official corruption at high levels. Prime Minister Chang and his party, however, repeatedly compromised their position in this regard by tampering with the list of suspects, especially those who were high-ranking military officers and leading businessmen. In disgust, Ham Sökhön wrote:

What is the achievement of the government of Chang Myön to date, not to mention the Interim Government of Hō Chōng? Winter is nearly here while [the politicians] are busy with factional strife. There is not a single production line which runs properly while the *minjung* [masses] cry out only for their plight. The rats [corrupt politicians] captured in the cabinet have all run away. Not to mention the fact that they are not capable of catching additional new rats while they lose those that were caught by others! ... Anyhow, why is the government so hesitant to deal with the trapped rats? Is it that the cat is too old or sated with stolen food?<sup>34</sup>

The contrast between the clarity of this insight and the lack of strong action in the government is stark and can be seen as an illustration of why the public demanded sweeping reforms. In fact, their demand for revolutionary change inspired urban citizens, including students, to accept the military coup

<sup>29</sup> Ōm Kihyōng, "Han'guk chōngch'iindul ūi chōngūndaesōng" [The pre-modern characteristics of Korean politicians], *Sasanggye* (March 1961): 131.

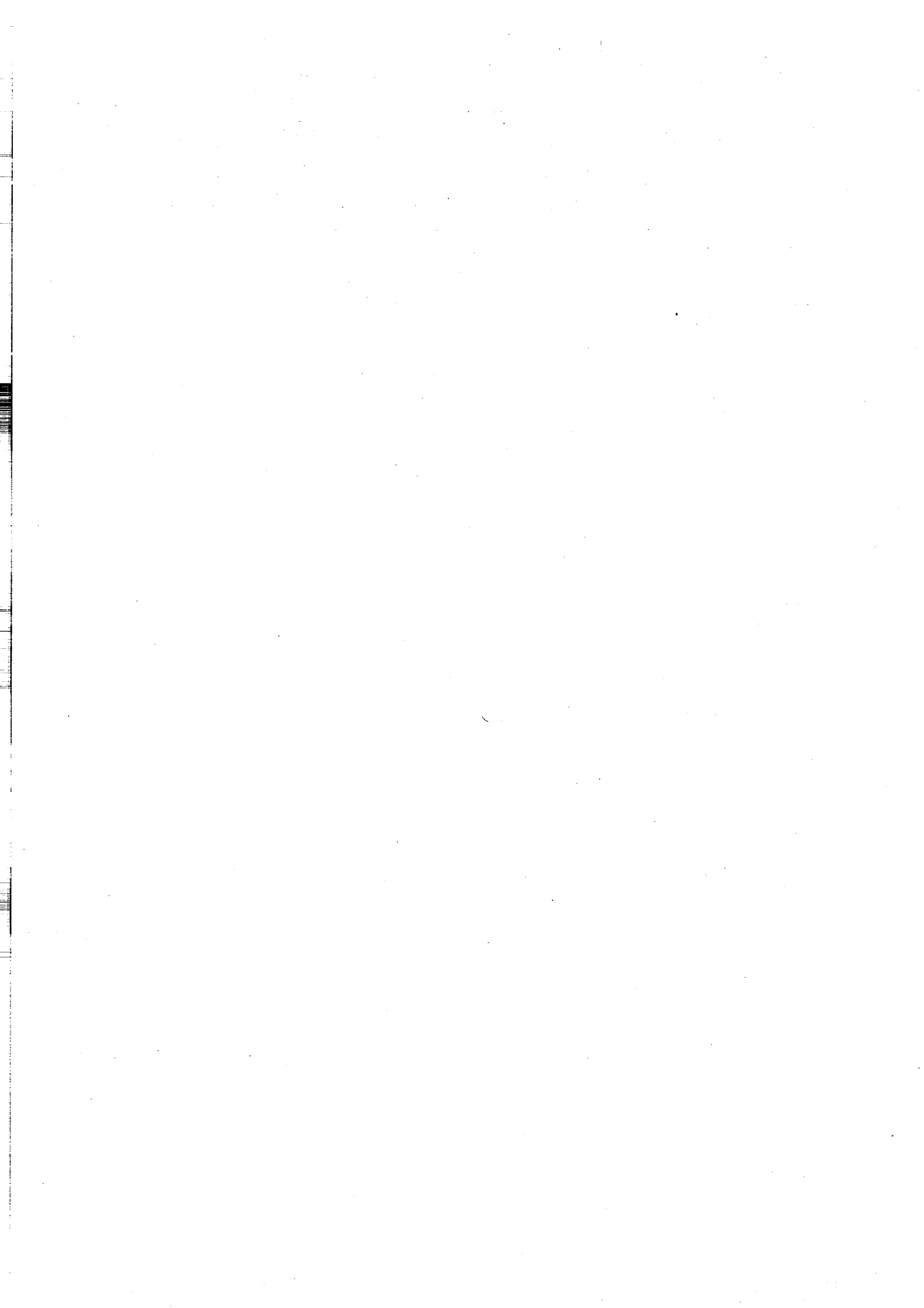
<sup>30</sup> Sin Sangch'o, "Chwadamhoe: Kisōng chōngch'iin ūi solchikhan parōn" [Discussion: frank expression of established politicians], *Sasanggye* (August 1961): 146.

<sup>31</sup> *Han'guk Ilbo*, 23 April 1961.

<sup>32</sup> Han Wansang, Yi Wujae, Sim Ūit'aek, et al., 4.19 *hyōngmyōngnon* [On the April Revolution] (Seoul: Ilwōlsōgak, 1983), pp.74-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Han'guk yōksa* [Korean history] (Seoul: Yoksa Pip'yōngsa, 1992), p.382.

<sup>34</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Kung'min kamjōng kwa hyōngmyōng wansu," p.31.



less than nine months after the inauguration of the Chang Government, with, in James B. Palais' words, "hardly a murmur."

### *Progressive Reformist Movements*

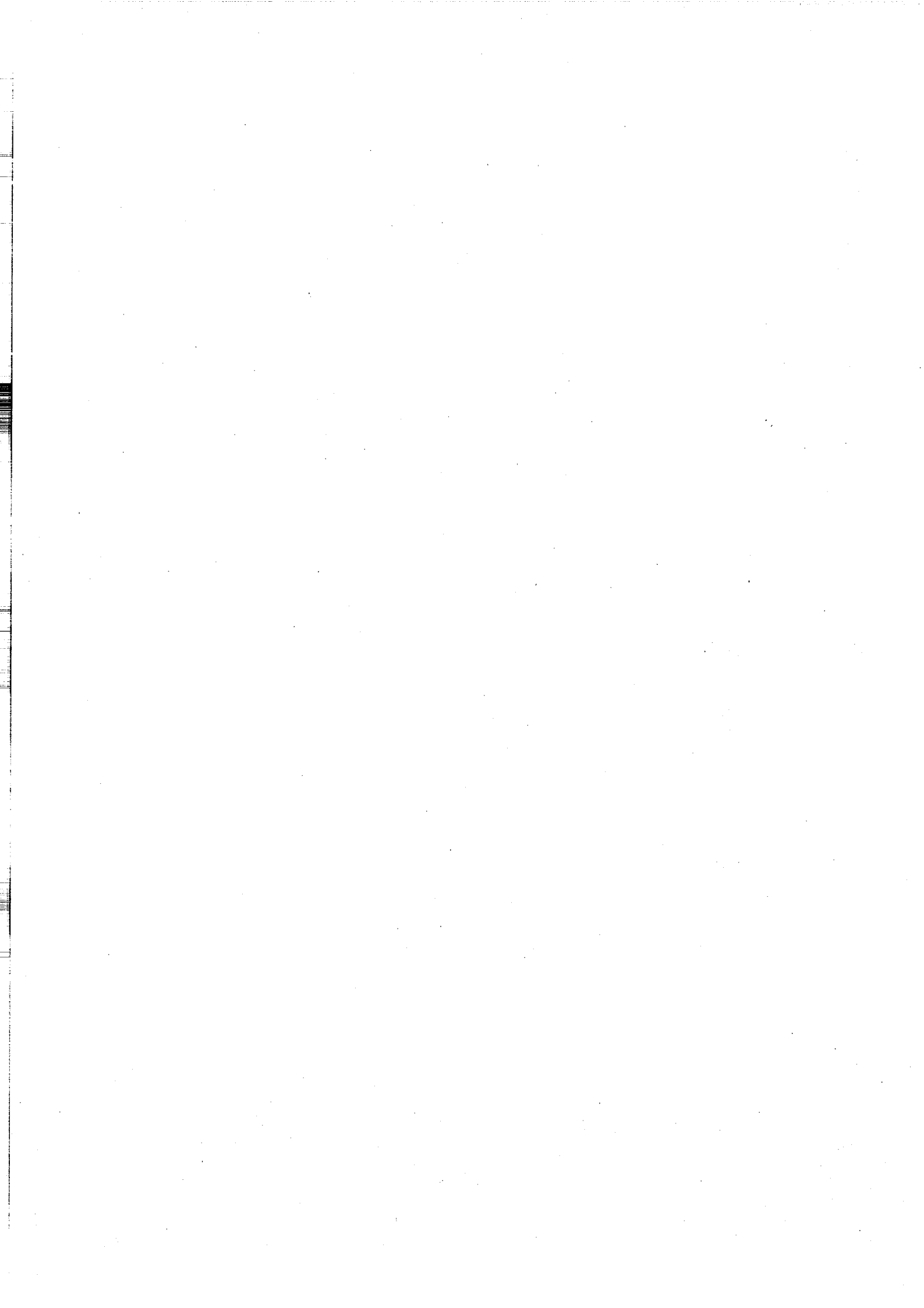
<sup>35</sup> Sŏng Yubo, "4wŏl hyŏngmyŏng kwa t'ongil noni" [A discussion on the April revolution and unification], in *Han'guk minjokjuŭi* ron II, p.141.

<sup>36</sup> Song Kŏnho, "60.70 nyŏndae ŭi t'ongil noni," p.150.

One of the hottest socio-political issues of the pre-1961 intellectual debate was the progressive reformists' campaign for the "peaceful unification" of North and South Korea. The left-inclined progressive reformists and non-political groups, including university students, exploited the openness of the Chang Government. As discussed above, peaceful unification as an alternative policy had been quashed when Cho Pongam, leader of the Progressive Party, was executed in July 1959 and the progressive forces were thereby muted. In the campaign prior to the national election in July 1960, however, the issue of peaceful unification was again promoted by both the ruling Democratic Party and the progressive political parties, such as the Socialist Mass Party (Sahoe taejungdang), the Socialist Reform Party (Sahoe hyŏksindang) and the Korea Socialist Party (Han'guk sahoedang).

A notable characteristic of these so-called "progressive political forces" was that, as one observer pointed out, they did not necessarily share the same ideological goals or background.<sup>35</sup> Members of the Socialist People's Party, for example, included former members of the Progressive Party. In contrast, the Korea Socialist Party led by Chŏn Chinhan included former members of the right-wing union movement after Liberation. Thus the progressive forces at the time represented nothing less than every political group that had been excluded from the political system under the Rhee government. While progressive reformists debated Korea's unification, university students campaigned even more vigorously for a similar cause. More than a dozen universities throughout the country, for example, formed the Society for the Study of National Unification (*Minjok t'ongil yŏn'guboe*) within a few months of the formation of the League of National Unification (*Minjok t'ongil yŏnmaeng* or simply *Mint'ongyŏn*) by Seoul National University students on 1 November 1960.

By early 1961, more than twenty high schools had formed their own Society for the Study of National Unification. Amidst this unification craze, many Koreans, especially conservative politicians, intellectuals, businessmen and military officers, became increasingly anxious about the threat to socio-political stability posed by the widespread rejection of anti-Communism. Some of the media, such as the *Minjok Ilbo* (National Daily), first published in February 1961, followed a pro-active left wing policy. Communist sympathy, from the viewpoint of the conservative Koreans, had progressed far enough when, on 3 May, the members of the *mint'ongyŏn* from Seoul National University called for a meeting among students from both North and South Korea. The students openly appealed to North Korea: "Brothers, come to us and let us march together! ... Let's go to the North! Come to the South! Let us meet in P'anmunjŏm."<sup>36</sup>



The anxiety of Koreans about the growing social unrest reached new heights when, on 13 May, over ten thousand citizens and students staged a public rally chanting "Old Generation Get Out!" and "Yankee Go Home!," and calling for unification.<sup>37</sup> Despite serious problems and contradictions in the Korean social system, most Koreans were not prepared for the social disruption that came with free expression, especially the controversy surrounding the unification campaigns conducted by progressive reformist forces. Given that the military coup was staged amid this social turmoil, it is not too difficult to understand how the coup leaders would have won over the public, particularly the conservatives, by their massive purge of left-wing progressive reformists just three days after their seizure of power,<sup>38</sup> and how they were able to promote their coup as an act of "patriotism" to save the nation from crisis.

### *The Debate Prior to 1961*

Irrespective of the unification issue, by April 1961 many leading liberal intellectuals sought to build Korea around two themes: construction of economic prosperity and reformation of the national character. The minimal expectation of the April Student Revolution had been "... a society which is at least capable of feeding and clothing its people."<sup>39</sup> To achieve this goal, intellectuals argued for national stability and autonomy through labor management and free enterprise within a planned economy. In a special feature article in the March 1960 edition of *Sasanggye* entitled "A free economy or a planned economy?" (*Chayu kyöngjenya, kyehoek kyöngjenya?*) economic commentators, including Yi Ch'angyö, Professor of Economics at Korea University, argued that Korea should utilize a "mixed economic system" (*bonhap kyöngje ch'eje*) in which Korean industry would seek to absorb the unemployed most efficiently by focusing on certain industries. Furthermore, according to Yi, Korean industry also needed to find the most effective means of allocating materials, resources and demand to allied industries. Yi argued:

The economic direction that we require must be a kind of mixed economic system. We obviously lack the necessary accumulation of national capital. We also lack endeavor and our natural resources are scarce. But we have an excessive surplus of labor. In order to lead this labor force near to full employment, there needs to be a kind of "supply effect." This effect can be regarded as a form of imbalanced development. By selecting a certain group of industries, regardless of whether a market exists or not, and by maintaining their development through intensive investment, even by force—not through so-called free competition but through planned investment, it is intended to stimulate the productivity of other industries spontaneously with the supply of materials that would be produced through such development ... . It should be clear that it is very difficult to expect balanced economic growth in our current condition.<sup>40</sup>

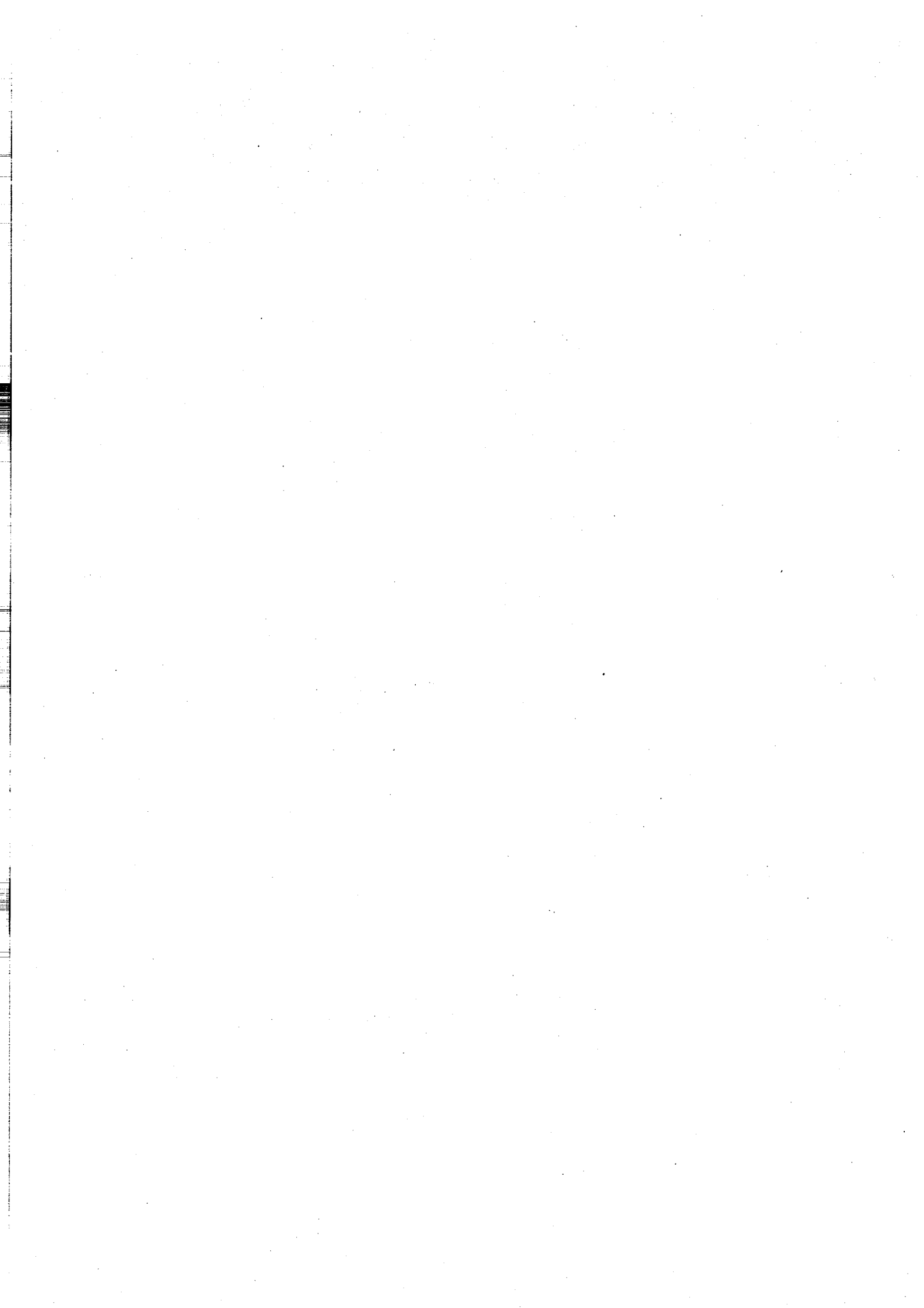
The planned economy argument was largely, although not exclusively,

<sup>37</sup> This rally was organized by the Central Council of the National Self-Reliant Unification (Minjok chaju t'ongil chungang hyöp'wüihoe), which consisted of many socialist and progressive reformist groups and pro-active youth clubs for unification, including the Student Federation of the April Revolution (Sawöl hyöngmyöng haksaeung yönhaphoe).

<sup>38</sup> Cho Yongsu, owner-president of the *National Daily* and many other leading members of his company were among the victims of this purge. Cho was executed, others received heavy sentences, and some died in prison. A prominent historian, Song Könhö, noted that this purge led to the virtual disappearance of unification campaigns in Korea (Söng Könhö, "60.70 nyöndae üi t'ongil noni," pp.150-1).

<sup>39</sup> Hong Isöp, "Sawöl hyöngmyöng üi chaep'yöngkka" [Reevaluation of the April Revolution], *Sasanggye* (April 1961): 54.

<sup>40</sup> Yi Ch'angyö, "Han'guk kyöngje ch'eje üi chillo" [The direction of Korea's economic system], *Sasanggye* (March 1961): 108.



<sup>41</sup> Cho Kagyöng, "Hyöngmyöng chuch'e üi chöngsinjok hönni: chuch'esöng hwangnip üi mokp'yo nün chökkükchök chayü wa kyöngje pugang" [Psychological confusion of the leading actors of the April Revolution: the goal of establishing *chuch'esöng* is the establishment of positive freedom and economic wealth], *Sasanggye* (April 1961): 76.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hong Isöp, "Sawöl hyöngmyöng üi chaep'yöngkka," p.58. It is noteworthy that Hong's mention of a feudal dynasty refers to the common perception of Korean history to the end of the Chosön dynasty as feudal. However, this concept has been rejected in reference to Korean traditional society by most Western historians.

<sup>44</sup> Kim Sanghyöp, Sin Sangch'o, Hwang Sandök and Han Taeyön, "Naekak ch'aegimje üi paryuk sangt'ae" [Developmental condition of the cabinet system], *Sasanggye* (December 1960): 54.

<sup>45</sup> Yi Sökhwan, "Kaesön toeyahal woekyo chöghch'aek" [The foreign policy that must be revised], *Sasanggye* (May 1961): 31-2.

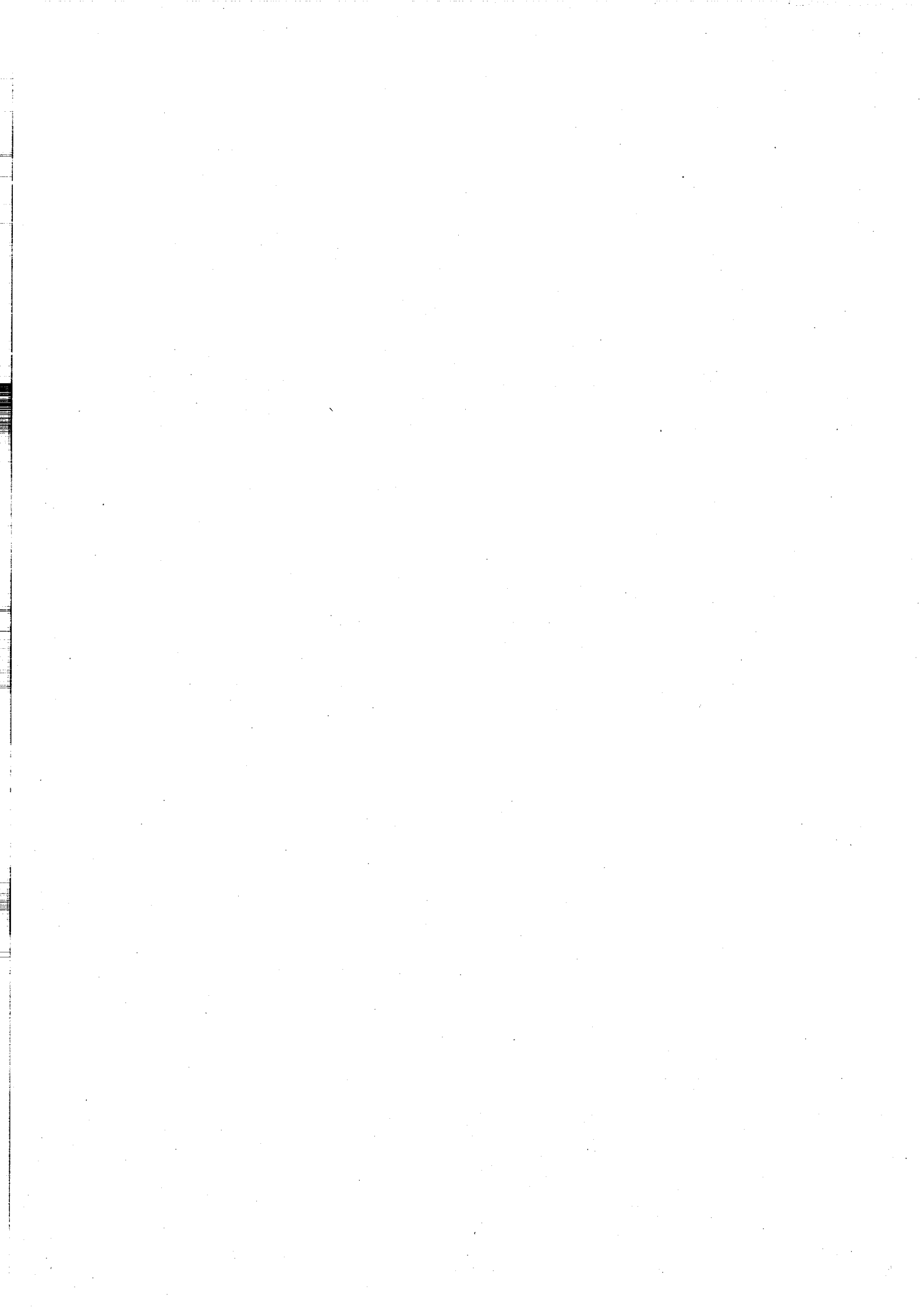
based on the West German model, seen by intellectuals as pre-eminent in the ideological conflict between East and West Germany. The much discussed "German economic miracle" was viewed as having been achieved by "developing economic strength to the maximum, utilizing a strategy which, on the one hand, adopted the principle of democratic free enterprise and, on the other, managed a planned economy under rationalized control."<sup>41</sup> In viewing the Korean condition of Cold War politics, however, Cho Kagyöng, Professor of Philosophy at Seoul National University, argued in *Sasanggye* in April 1961, "Communism is not a force which can be eradicated by [a theoretical] opposition. The infiltration of Communism can be blocked only by the strength of an economy which is self-reliant (*charip*) and self-sufficient (*chajok*)."<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, in his 1961 essay, "Re-evaluation of the April Student Revolution" (*Sawöl hyöngmyöng üi chaep'yöngkka*), the leading historian Hong Isöp argued that Korean society must be "revolutionized" in order to establish economic prosperity. Referring to the Korean economy under various political systems throughout history, from the feudal dynasty to the Rhee government, Hong observed that the present government (of Chang Myön) must concentrate immediately on changing economic structures. He called for reform in order to tackle three major tasks: first, the reorganization of debts in all farming and fishing villages; second, the reallocation of land to tenant farmers; and third, securing both fishery and agricultural products including fertilizer.<sup>43</sup> In the end, many leading academics and intellectuals shared the economists' view that, "All problems are due to economics" (*modün munje nün kyöngje ro t'onghanda*).<sup>44</sup>

### *The Call for Chuch'esöng*

At the core of the call for Korea's "*chuch'esöng*" (independence/autonomy) in politics and the economy, especially government decision-making, there emerged a strong sense of self-awakening, as well as resentment about dependence on the United States. Many educated urban citizens argued that Korea's foreign policy needed revision, particularly the lopsided ROK-US Status-of-Forces Agreement which proved incapable of preventing criminal activity by US soldiers in Korea, let alone respecting the Korean government's sovereign right to govern without US domination. In the May 1961 edition, *Sasanggye* published a letter submitted by a first-year student from Korea University.

It is said that Korea's foreign policy is a 'Yes, Sir!' policy... . At a time like this when Korea is not even at war after the establishment of the armistice, US soldiers stationed in Korea cut Korean women's hair at random and deliberately kill a perfectly normal boy. And yet, the Korean government has neither the right to punish those criminals nor the status to voice its views on such conduct. [In this situation], how can Korea be an independent nation and not a dependency of the US?<sup>45</sup>





An equally upsetting aspect of US policy in Korea, according to one technical executive, was US management of aid, which, he argued, was lopsided, unilateral and managed with political coercion to maximize America's own national and commercial interests.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, another economic observer argued that while the structure of the US aid program established an initial framework for the Korean economy, it nevertheless created what he termed, "dependent state monopoly capitalism" (*chongsokchök kukka tokchöm chabonjuï*). This phrase, it should be noted, became one of the most powerful dictums of Korean democracy activists and university students in their subsequent struggle against Park's state-led economic development during the 1970s.<sup>47</sup>

By November 1960, intellectual criticism of US aid policy complemented the anti-American mood of the general public, with *Sasanggye* featuring this theme in its November 1960 and March 1961 issues. Under the heading "Is it Autonomy or Dependency?" (*Charip inya? Yesok inya?*) Pu Wanhyök, an economic analyst, and Cho Tongp'il characterized American aid policy in Korea and its inevitable consequences as the major source for weakening and undermining Korea's political and economic *chuch'esöng*, especially in terms of decision-making on national affairs. Cho commented:

The American aid program hitherto implemented in Korea has failed to achieve any particular effect in creating economic conditions conducive to building economic independence. Instead, it has increased the degree of Korea's economic dependence and intensified Korea's dependence on the American economy. ... Because of this, the masses in Korea, I suspect, would think that the [Korea-America] Economic Aid Agreement this year was also intended to intensify Korea's dependence [on America].<sup>48</sup>

Cho argued that Korea needed to take a new direction in accepting American aid if its aim was to establish national autonomy. He identified US aid policy as the main reason for the backwardness of countries in other regions such as Latin America and Southeast Asia. He believed the emergence of anti-Americanism among some countries was due to an American aid policy that was designed primarily for America's own economic interests.<sup>49</sup> This criticism was not restricted to a handful of liberal intellectuals and their supporters. By March 1961, public resentment towards the US aid program became so intense that it popularized anti-Americanism coupled with a new wave of nationalism emphasizing Korea's *chuch'esöng*. In observing this nationalistic anti-American climate, the US Embassy in Seoul reported to its State Department as follows:

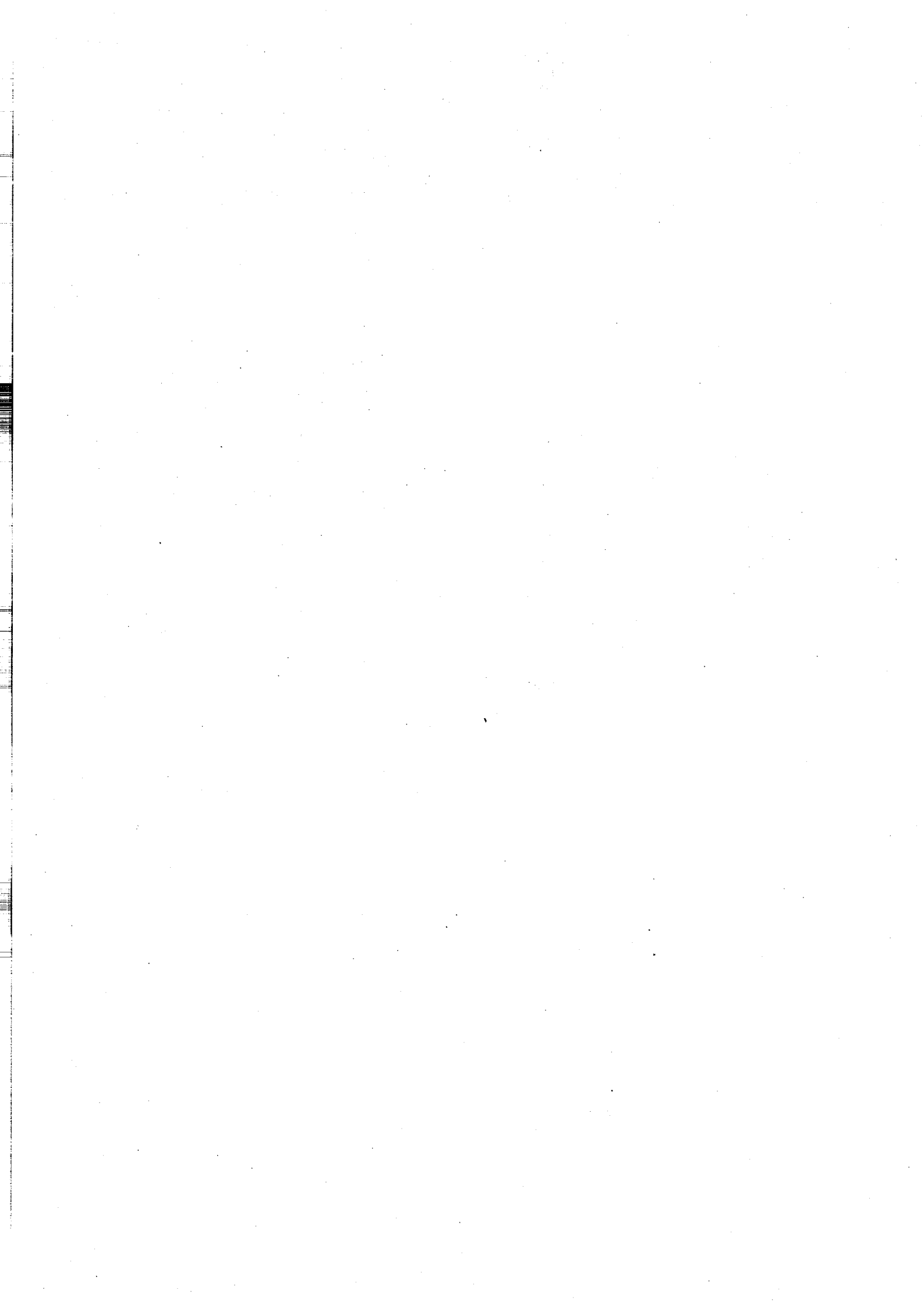
During recent months there has been a growing questioning of the U.S. [sic] position in the ROK, focusing on the question of ROK sovereignty, US economic aid, and on demands for a Status of Forces Agreement. In this climate of criticism there has developed a public hypersensitivity regarding the effectiveness of US aid, *especially as concerns a lack of long range economic development* and of our involvement in the ROK economic decision-making process. The controversy over ratification of the economic aid agreement, the negative public reaction to press reports of Under Secretary Ball's speech

<sup>46</sup> Yi Tonghong, "Ch'ungju piryo könsöl sosa" [A brief on the construction of the Ch'ungju fertilizer plant], *Sasanggye* (November 1960): 62.

<sup>47</sup> Im Wont'aek, "ICA wönjo hyökkwa rül kömt'o handa" [An examination of the aid impact of the ICA], *Sasanggye* (November 1960): 78.

<sup>48</sup> Cho Tongp'il and Pu Wanhyök, "Taadam: charipinya? Yesog inya? Hanmi kyöngje hyöpjöng ül pip'an handa" [Discussion: national autonomy or dependency?: a critique of the Korea-America economic agreement], *Sasanggye* (March 1961): 207.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.206-7.



<sup>50</sup> Donald Stone Macdonald, *U.S.—Korean relations from liberation to self-reliance: the twenty-year record* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1992), p.289 (emphasis as in original).

<sup>51</sup> Cho Sunŭng, "Han'guk ūi yangdan kwa miguk ūi ch'aegim" [Korea's division and America's responsibility], *Sasanggye* (July 1960): 57.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>53</sup> Macdonald, *U.S.—Korean relations from liberation to self-reliance*, p.289.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Wolf, Jr., "Economic planning in Korea," *Asian Survey* 2.10 (1962): 23.

on 7 March in Chicago, and the disproportionately extravagant, favorable press treatment of the recently concluded ROK-West German Technical Aid Agreement, are illustrative of this public climate.<sup>50</sup>

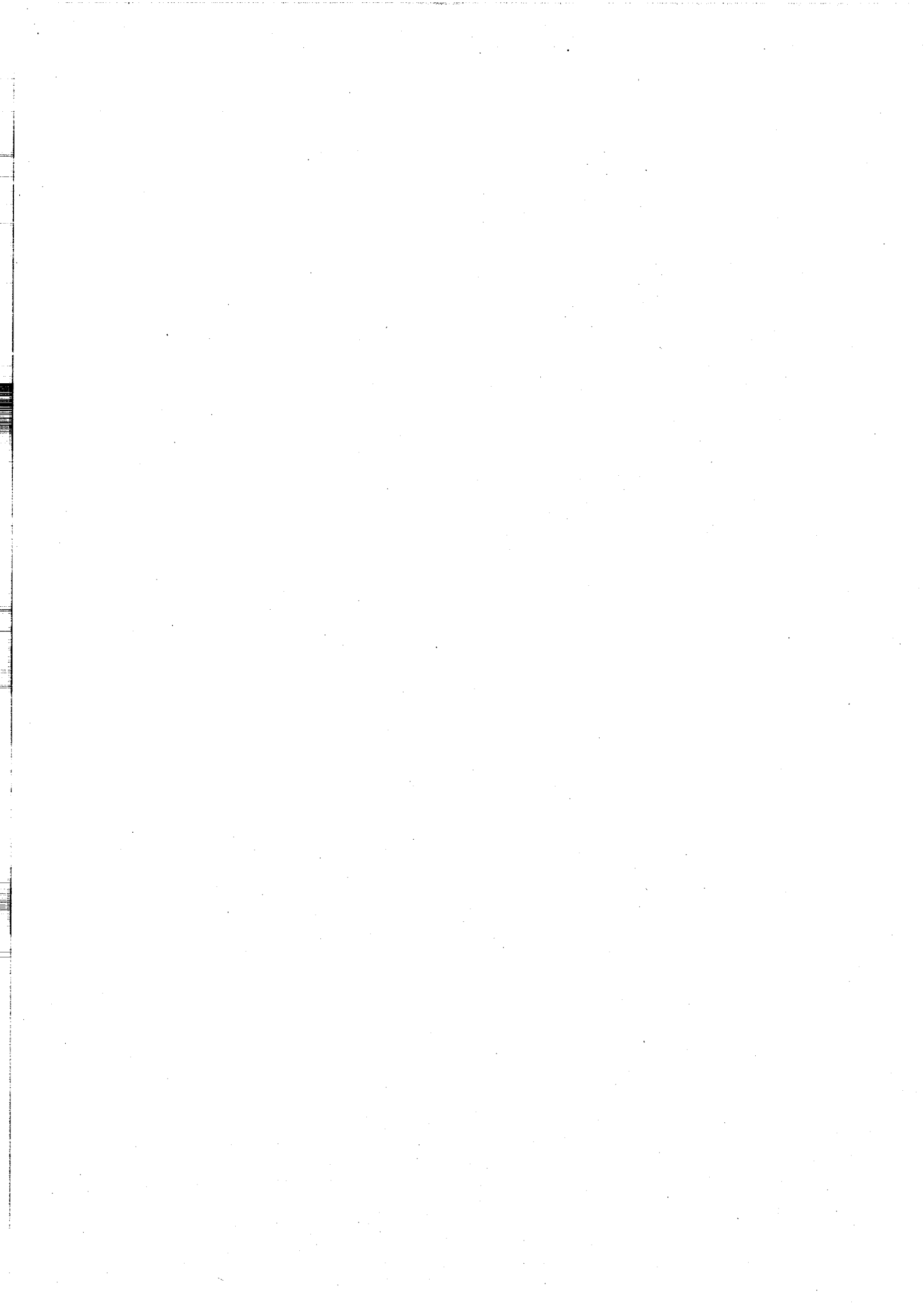
It is true that the anti-American climate became a recognizable social phenomenon only after the April Student Revolution. But this does not necessarily mean that the Korean people as a whole bore no deep-seated resentment towards the US, particularly regarding its role in the division of their country into North and South Korea. In fact, just a month after the April Student Revolution, Cho Sunŭng, Professor of Political Science at Seoul National University, openly blamed the US for the division of the Korean nation. He argued:

Korea's division was a tragedy created by the 'politics of power' between the Great Powers, which Korea could not help avoid. ... As a victorious nation in World War II, America held hegemony in world politics through which she could exercise her dominance in any way she wished. ... [Therefore,] today's tragedy [of Korea] would have been avoided if America had thought through the future implications for Korea and prepared for it by planning a resolute policy toward Korea, to defend her against the diplomatic offensives of the Soviet Union.<sup>51</sup>

Cho concluded that Korea had been a victim of the particular style of US foreign policy. President Harry Truman's foreign policy, according to Cho, had been one of military diplomacy predominantly focused on producing immediate victories rather than long-term outcomes. As a consequence, Cho asserted, America made a "big mistake" when it suggested the 38th parallel to the Soviets and thereby scattered the seeds of tragedy on the Korean peninsula.<sup>52</sup> This open criticism by liberal intellectuals of American foreign policy clearly influenced the Chang Myŏn Government and the ruling Democratic Party. On 18 April, for example, the National Assembly passed a three-point resolution which, in the words of MacDonald summarizing US State Department archives:

(1) urged long-range economic planning by both the ROK and the United States to produce economic self-sufficiency and improved living standards; (2) asked the United States to 'give the fullest consideration to the sovereign rights of the Korean government in the administration of the economic aid plan,' while Korea paid full respect to American advice; (3) called for a nationwide austerity drive, emphasizing rehabilitation of the rural economy and of basic industries, with U.S. policies to support this goal.<sup>53</sup>

This resolution is noteworthy because it showed the prevailing preparatory state of the Chang Government's long-range economic planning after Prime Minister Chang had instructed the Economic Development Council to draw up a five-year development plan at the end of 1960.<sup>54</sup> In fact this resolution, according to Macdonald, did not reach the US Embassy until three days after the military coup. By then, Park and his military junta had already adopted key elements of the resolution as their platform for reform, including the first Five-Year Development Plan.



*The Call for a People's Revolution*

Rather than looking for solutions in specific problem areas of the economy or particular aspects of national dependency, Ham Sökhön called for an all-out people's revolution. Building a new nation, according to Ham, could not be achieved without a revolution of the national character. Historically, the fundamental cause of the Korean people's sufferings, he argued, was due mainly to the weakness of the national character and the only way to change the national character was to have a people's revolution.<sup>55</sup> Ham's call for another revolution first appeared in the January 1961 number of *Sasanggye*, and again in a three-part essay entitled, "How do we build a new nation?" (*Saenara rül öttökke seulkka?*) published in the April to June numbers of the journal. In his discussion of the Chang Myön Government's National Land Construction Movement, Ham called for what he termed a "revolution of the national spirit":

The National Land Construction [Movement] itself is in fact a revolution. This project cannot be accomplished without a revolutionary spirit. This is a bloodless revolution ... . Therefore, there are things to throw away and things to build anew. What should we throw away? Let us throw away our habits of factionalism, flunkeyism, fatalism and idleness, our prestige-oriented life principle and dependent mentality. ... What should we build anew? *Let each of us own 'self' before anything else; let us have the spirit of unity; let us cultivate an enterprising spirit; let us have a more inquiring mind; and let us positively build a new confidence.*<sup>56</sup>

Ham believed that a new revolution must be managed differently so the ordinary people would be educated and empowered to participate in "nara il" (national tasks). According to Ham, this revolution required a change in the people's attitude, including that of intellectuals: "... no revolution is possible without intellectuals who represent the middle stratum of society. However, they have a weakness for wanting to rise up like a balloon. As a result, the people always become deluded."<sup>57</sup> Stressing education, equality, and the need to instill a national sense of self-worth, Ham asserted that Korea's social system, which he referred to as the "master frame," had to change before anything else. He wrote:

Men are the servants of a system, of a [value-system] framework, because they are social beings. There cannot be a society without a certain framework, just as an individual cannot conceive his or her own mind without possessing a body. Although men create the [social] framework, it also in turn creates men. ... [I]f anyone desires to form newborn babies into a new people, one must first of all change the whole framework of society.<sup>58</sup>

Ham added that this frame had to be built on two common principles: "*hamyön pandüsi toenda*" (it will certainly happen if you try) and "*minjung üi kasümman pogo kara*" (proceed focused only on the feelings of the working masses).<sup>59</sup> These mass-oriented community ideals subsequently became

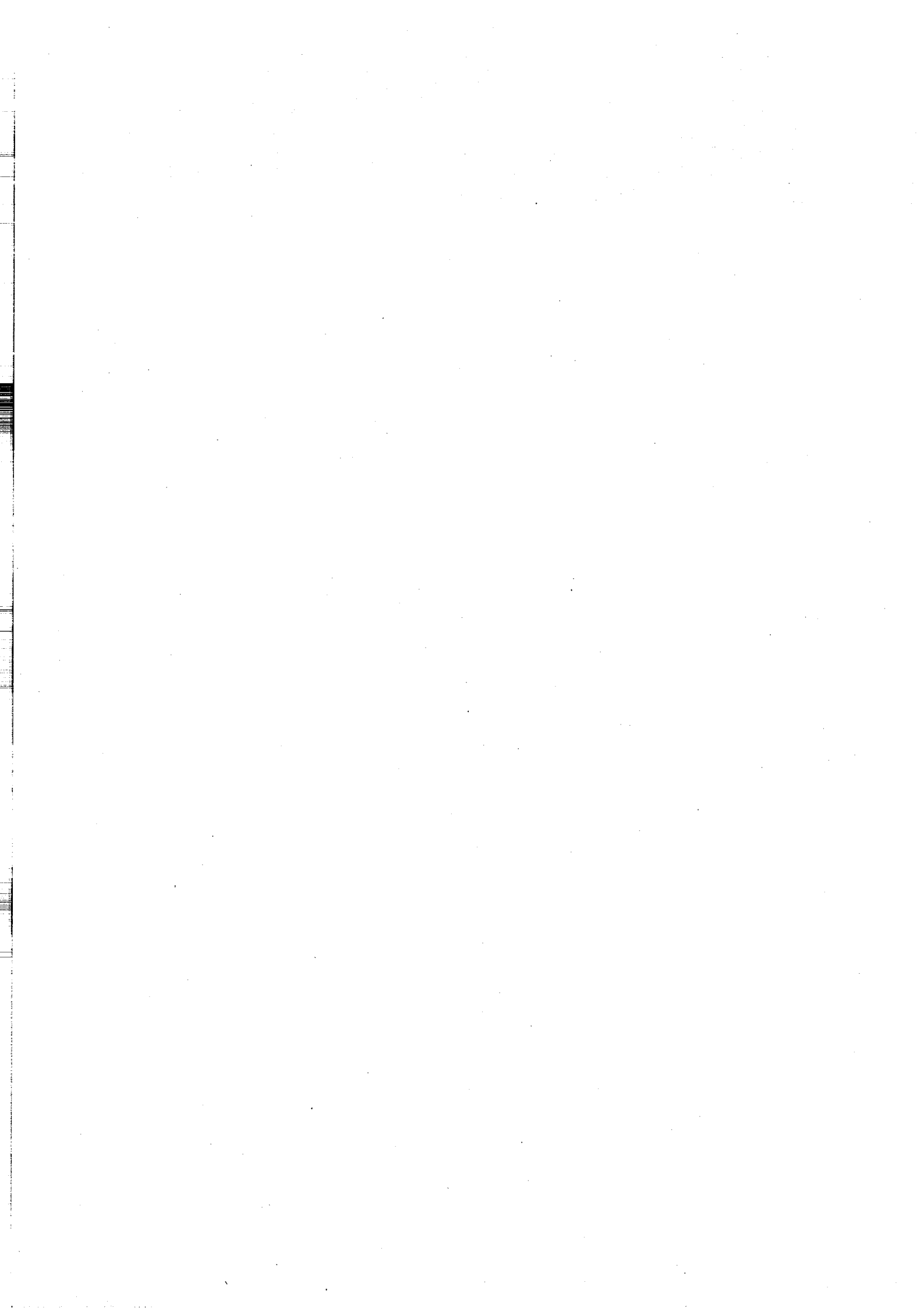
<sup>55</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Kung'min kamjõng kwa hyõngmyõng wansu," p.31.

<sup>56</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Saenara rül ottokke seulkka?" [How do we build a new nation?], *Sasanggye wan* [final issue] (June 1961): 50 (emphasis added). This statement is very similar to An Ch'angho's theory of self-strengthening expounded in July 1921 (see *An Tosan chõnsõ* [A complete collection of Tosan An ch'angho] [Seoul: Pomyangsa Ch'ulp'anbu, 1990], pp.411-17).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>58</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Kung'min kamjõng kwa hyõngmyõng wansu," p.31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>60</sup> Pak Chonghong and An Pyönguk, "Ch'ölhak ün saenghwal sog e itta" [Philosophy exists in everyday life], *Sasanggye* (January 1961): 164.

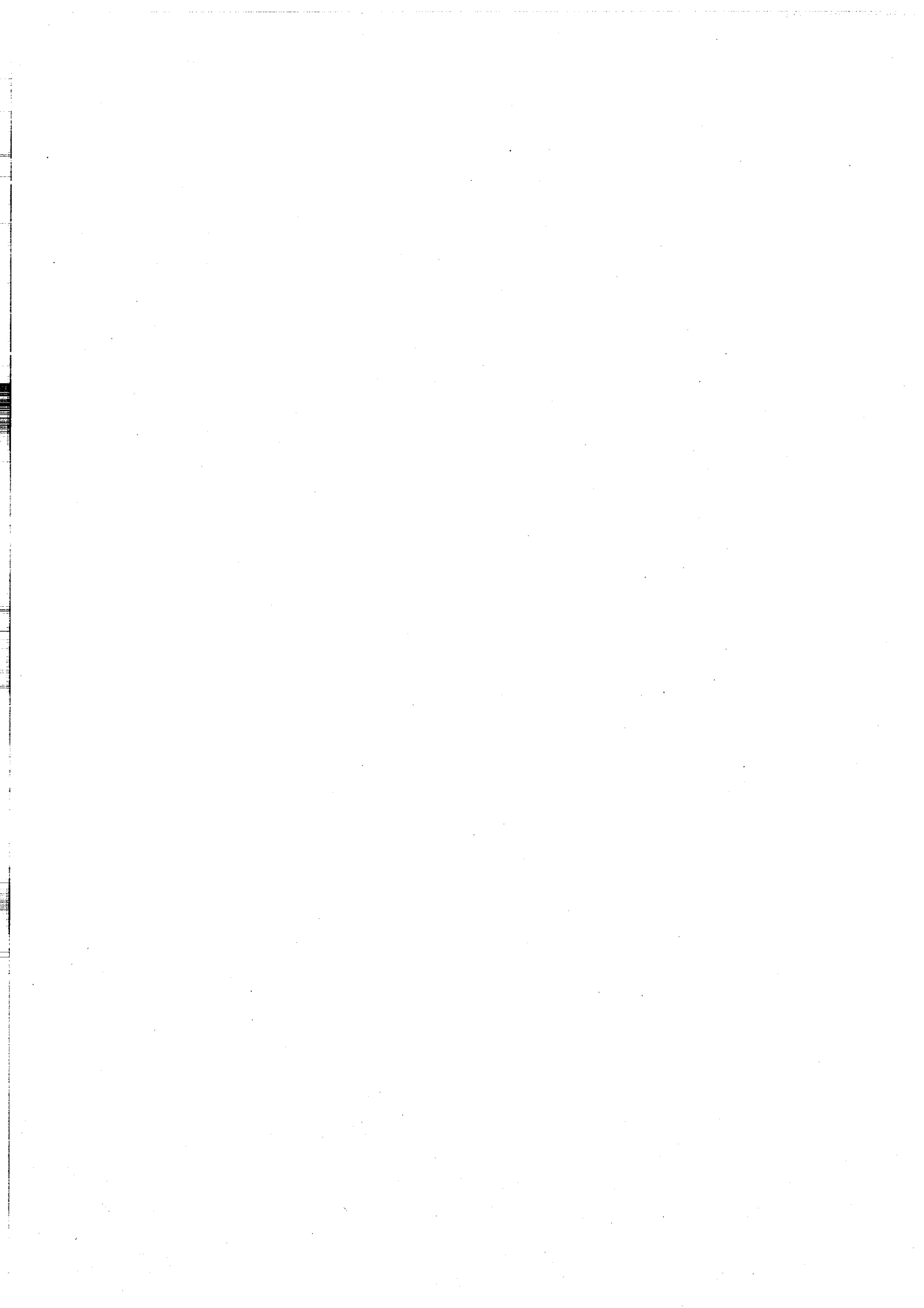
<sup>61</sup> Pak Chonghong, "Sasang kwa haengdong," p.45.

the conventional rhetoric of Korean nationalism as promoted by two major camps: the student-led working masses' human rights campaign and their democracy movement, and the state-led rapid development under Park and his successors. The fact that Ham never approved of Park, or served under him, is not important. What is significant, however, is that Ham's call for a people's revolution to rebuild the national character and spirit provided a basis for Park to justify his reform agenda after the coup—even though Park's idea of reform was all top-down and thus the complete opposite of Ham's idea of a "bottom-up" revolution, in which the mass of the people would undergo a transformation of values. By using Ham's language, in other words, Park appealed for "bottom-up" public support for and confidence in his junta leadership and his subsequent development policies.

By October 1960, the established terminology, national independence/autonomy, whether expressed as *minjokchök chuch'esöng* or *minjokchök chajusöng*, referred to the state and the people's pursuit of a "Korean-style" philosophy of life, ethics and social order. Professor Pak Chonghong's interview with An Pyönguk, entitled "Philosophy exists within daily life" (*Ch'ölhak ün saenghwal sog e itta*), discussed the search for "a new world view, a new value-system, new behavioral rules and a new morality, all of which had to be based on *minjokchök chuch'esöng*."<sup>60</sup> In a related article, Pak outlined his thoughts on why a nation requires an ideology and its essential criteria, and on the need for the Korean people to identify an ideology as "our ideology." Pak stated:

Ideology is something which can entirely determine one's action and direction and something to which one cannot help but respond completely because it thoroughly touches one's heart and soul. Ideology must therefore not only be part of one's flesh and blood, but must also be defined in terms of matters which have been the subject of everyone in this nation's heartfelt outcry ... our ideology must be unearthed from our own thought and be defined by ourselves, not by others. In this way, our ideology becomes something by which we live and to which, if possible, we will give our lives without a second thought and for which we would gladly die without regret. Only that sort of ideology can become our [very own] ideology.<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, the terms *minjokchök chuch'esöng* and *Han'gukchök chuch'esöng* implied "our ideology." These fundamentally nationalistic terms symbolized a new Korean perspective, which not only emphasized the importance of national autonomy and the rejection of foreign dominance, dependency and flunkeyism, but also promoted the value of hard work, creativity and patriotism. Importantly, historical and cultural tradition was called upon to serve as a foundation for the new ideology. The use of the words, *chuch'e* and *chuch'esöng*, however, calls for particular attention, especially when it is juxtaposed to North Korea's adoption of "*Juch'e sasang*" (self-reliance ideology) as its "only ideology" after the Communist Party's Fourth Congress





in September 1961.<sup>62</sup>

I have found no evidence, however, of South Korean intellectuals of that time focusing on Kim Il Sung's *Juch'e* (*chuch'e*) ideology. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that intellectuals in South Korea were not entirely unfamiliar with North Korea's promotion of the term *minjok chuch'esöng* which was based on the historical notion of anti-flunkeyism and national independence that held sway in the 1920s. Although Park may well have been familiar with the Japanese concepts of *sbutai* 主體 and *sbutaitteki* 主體的<sup>63</sup> from his colonial days, he also adopted Pak Chonghong's interpretation of the term *chuch'esöng* as the official stance for the state's economic nationalism. It was no coincidence that Pak Chonghong later authored the National Charter of Education which, in December 1968, was officially declared as a manifesto of Park's leadership ideology.

### *Agenda for National Reconstruction*

Chang Chunha, an ardent nationalist liberal intellectual and the publisher-editor of *Sasanggye* (1953-67), informed his readers in his February 1961 editorial that, "Only hard work can save Korea."<sup>64</sup> He argued that constructing an efficient labor system was the only way to transform Korea into an "Advancing Fatherland." Chang called for a change in social ethics so that the nation would develop a genuine appreciation of diligence and hard work. To achieve such change, and in order to rebuild a society that was sluggish and lacked will, the government needed to cultivate a strong ethos amongst the people to promote practicality, plainness, saving, stability, trust, and constructiveness. He stated that it was economically essential to establish a labor management system. However, Chang believed that in backward nations such a system was only possible

... under a far-sighted plan and thought-out policies provided by an empowered government [under] strong leadership. ... Therefore, Korea needs more desperately than ever a government that will effectively implement our historical tasks according to a plan which is not weak or temporary but thoroughly tested, and with strong leadership.<sup>65</sup>

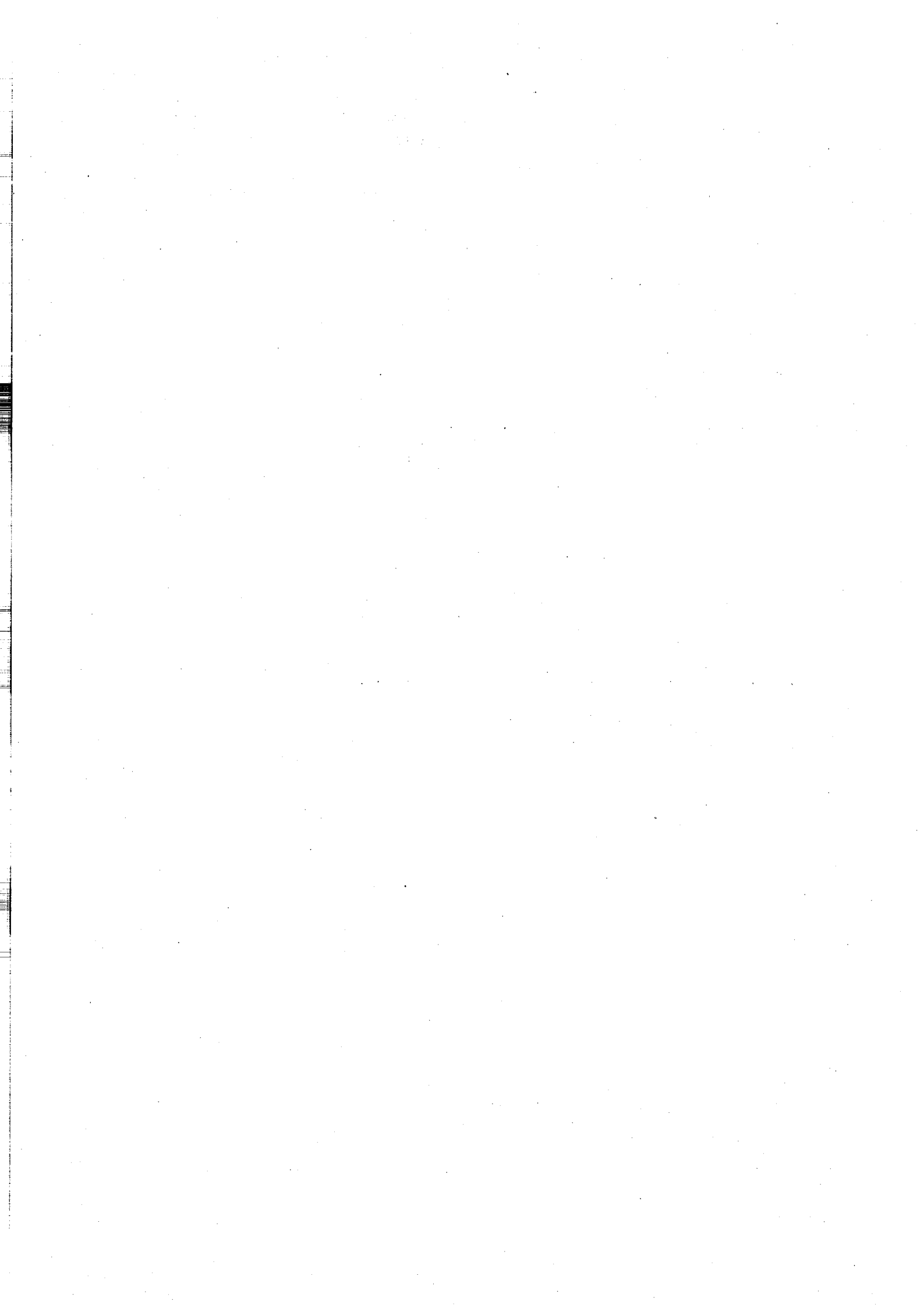
By referring to "liberal democracy" as a precondition for national reconstruction, Chang's prescription for social reform, proceeding under a "strong leader" and "guided democracy," called for a morally superior political leader who would direct his people in the task of nation-building. Likewise, many other leading liberal intellectuals, including Kim Sanghyöp, Sin Sangch'o and Han T'aeyön, also used the term "liberal democracy" in conjunction with "strong leadership." Under the slogan "changing the national character for the better," these intellectuals highlighted the fundamental necessity for the Korean people to adopt a spirit of "diligence and frugality." They argued that a new Korean ethos founded on these two virtues, combined with strong leadership, was crucial for national reconstruction. The building of a "liberal

<sup>62</sup> The term *chuch'e* was first used by Kim Il Sung in a speech delivered in December 1955. For Kim's idea of *chuch'e*, see *Hyöngmyöng kwa könsöl e kwanban Kim Il Sung tongji üi widaeban saenghwallyök* [The thought of Comrade Kim Il Sung on revolution and construction and its great strength] (Pyongyang: Sahoe Kwahagwön Ch'ulp'ansa, 1969); for an analysis of the idea of *chuch'e*, see Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: the North Korean leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), esp. ch.17, pp.301-13.

<sup>63</sup> I am indebted to Professor James B. Palais who has provided me with the authoritative encyclopedia explanation of the origin of the term *chuch'e*. According to *Dai Kanwa Jiten* [The great Chinese-Japanese dictionary] (1:234), the *locus classicus* in the history of the Han dynasty, the term *chuch'e* had two meanings: (1) the body or essence of the emperor-king, or the ruler, and (2) a thing which becomes something for which it is intended, or the essence of a thing (*mono no bontai* 物之本体). The *Kenkyüsha* dictionary translates *bontai* as substance, noumenon, entity, the thing itself, and the Japanese use *sbutai* and *sbutaitteki* in contra-distinction to *taritsu* 他律 to draw a contrast between the subject acting on its own or the subject acting on the direction of someone else or something outside itself.

<sup>64</sup> Chang Chunha, "Küllo mani saigilida" [Only hard work can save Korea], *Sasanggye* (February 1961): 24-5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>66</sup> Kim Sanghyŏp, Pu Wanhyŏk, Sin Sangch'o and Han T'aeyŏn, "Chwadamhoe: minju chŏngch'i ch'ŏeh'u ūi kyodubo" [Discussion: the last bridgehead of democracy], *Sasanggye* (May 1960): 35.

<sup>67</sup> Chŏng Yangŭn, "Han'gukin ūi yŏltŭng ūising'non" [A theory regarding the Korean people's inferiority complex], *Sasanggye* (April 1961): 111-17.

<sup>68</sup> Yi Man'gap, "Han'guk sahoe ūi kach'i kujo" [Structure of the value system in Korean society], *Sasanggye* (May 1961): 70.

<sup>69</sup> Chŏng Yangŭn, "Han'gukin ūi yŏltŭng ūising'non," p.111.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

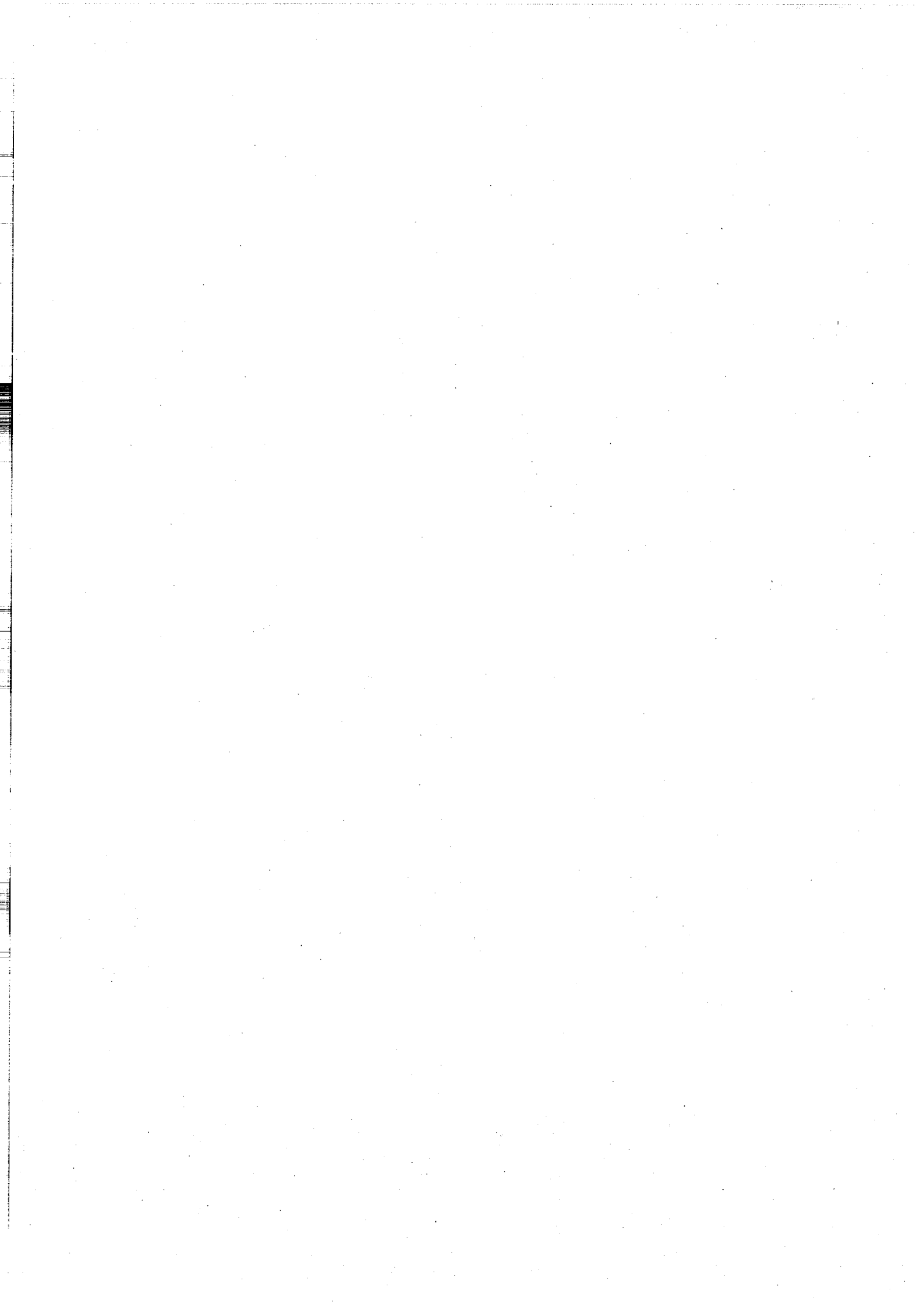
democratic nation-state," according to these liberal intellectuals, required a "young and revolutionary leader."<sup>66</sup> In the April 1961 issue, *Sasanggye* published the full text of "On heroic leadership and the dilemma of strong men and weak peoples" by Arthur Schlesinger, jun., aiming to reinforce public feeling about the government's weak leadership. *Sasanggye*, attempting to stimulate intellectual debate, also featured the article, "A theory regarding the Korean people's inferiority complex."<sup>67</sup>

In the following month, *Sasanggye* focused on the Korean value-system by introducing five feature articles under the theme of the re-examination of Korean value consciousness. The chaotic condition of Korean society was believed to be mainly "due to the absence of [strong] leadership" and due to the "loss of harmony and consistency in new value-systems which have spread widely in Korean society."<sup>68</sup> Intellectuals argued that the problems of weak leadership and poor national character were responsible for the low self-esteem of the Korean people. In examining the causes of the Korean inferiority complex and its psychological processes, Chŏng Yangŭn, a professor of psychology, described the contemporary images of Korea before 1961 as follows:

In the olden days, we were told that our neighboring countries admired our civilization so that they wished to learn from us. They regarded our nation as the 'Eastern Land of Refinement.' But what is the current situation? Some comments we occasionally hear about Korea from abroad indicate that Korea is seen as a nation similar to hell on earth: it is a nation of thieves, it is packed with beggars and vagrants, and it is a smelly nation strewn with rubbish.<sup>69</sup>

Chŏng outlined three reasons for the inferiority complex. The first was Korea's long history of playing second fiddle to superior powers in the arena of world politics. Korea served China as her "servant" throughout the five hundred years of the Yi dynasty (1392-1909); was then subject to Japanese colonial rule (1910-45) which led the "nation to her critical stage of ruin"; and finally was liberated, except that liberation was not achieved by the Koreans themselves, but rather was presented to them by the American forces as an outcome of the US victory in World War II. Chŏng argued that the image created by the global perspective that Korea, historically, was an inferior nation inevitably affected the psychology of the Korean people.

The second reason, Chŏng suggested, was the Korean people's disillusionment with their own culture which, he asserted, seemed to be dispensable whenever a foreign culture invaded Korea. This phenomenon was blamed on the historical perception that Korea possessed no distinct culture of its own and consequently possessed no indigenous cultural basis. As a result, Chŏng concluded, Koreans were inevitably burdened with an inferiority complex caused by self-disillusionment. Chŏng's third reason was Korea's economic inferiority which, he argued, rendered the nation too easily subject to foreign dominance.<sup>70</sup> Chŏng had put his finger on three factors which, he averred, combined to produce a massive Korean inferiority complex. The intellectuals accordingly called for the Korean people to undertake a search



for self-knowledge and understanding. Yi Man'gap, Professor of Sociology at Seoul National University, asserted that whoever wished to know the workings of the Korean mind had to "discover the psychological characteristics of the Korean people and know the objective circumstances in which Koreans are placed."<sup>71</sup> The "objective circumstances" referred to the complex and oppressive history of Korea's "pre-modern value-system."

According to Yi's school of thought, the Korean people's self-image, especially that of the commoners, had been shaped entirely by despotic Confucian feudalism. In the words of Ham Sökhön, "... the *minjung* [masses] were treated like filthy maggots,"<sup>72</sup> and so they perceived themselves. Up until the 1960s, common terms used by Koreans to describe themselves were "cheap cash" (*yöpchön*) and "straw shoes" (*chip'sin*), which represented prevalent self-images of the ordinary Korean working masses. Yi Man'gap linked these perceptions of the Korean people to their flunkeyism:

On the one hand, [Koreans] abuse their own people but, on the other hand, cringe in front of powerful foreigners; or they tend to heckle and seek concessions relying on the influence of foreigners. In so doing, the Korean people willingly surrender unconditionally to powerful nations externally and, internally, to those who are in high-ranking offices, powerful, and senior to them.<sup>73</sup>

Korean intellectuals' introspective analysis of the people's national pride and its character showed a strong resemblance to that prevalent in China during the 1920s and 30s when the Chinese mood of cultural despair was so pervasive that it led to a period of "remorseless national self-flagellation" stimulated by Chinese intellectuals. Lloyd E. Eastman discusses the despairing assessments of the Chinese people's character by many intellectuals of that time. He states:

The Chinese were indolent, they feared difficulties, they lacked any progressive spirit, they assumed no responsibility but waited for others to act for them, they had no concern for the collective welfare, they lacked human-heartedness.<sup>74</sup>

Hu Shi 胡適, a prominent Chinese intellectual, argued the Chinese failed to meet the new challenges of modern times because they had become "a spineless, worthless people" and because "our rottenness is so deep."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, many writers and scholars concluded that the Chinese were becoming an "inferior race" (*liedeng minzu* 劣等民族). Some went further, drawing the radical conclusion that the "inferior races will inevitably be destroyed in the struggle for survival," implying the inevitable ruin of the Chinese nation. The most radical analysis by intellectuals of the "despair and humiliation that Chinese felt in the early 1930s," however, called for a so-called "new style" dictatorship or despotism. Zhang Hong, a writer and former student of Hu Shih, described the type of despotism the Chinese wanted as follows: "[It] must not be a barbaric despotism, lawless despotism ... a stop-freedom-of-speech despotism, but an enlightened despotism, a meaningful despotism, a put-public-welfare-first despotism."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Yi Man'gap, "Han'guk sahoe üi kach'i kujo," p.64.

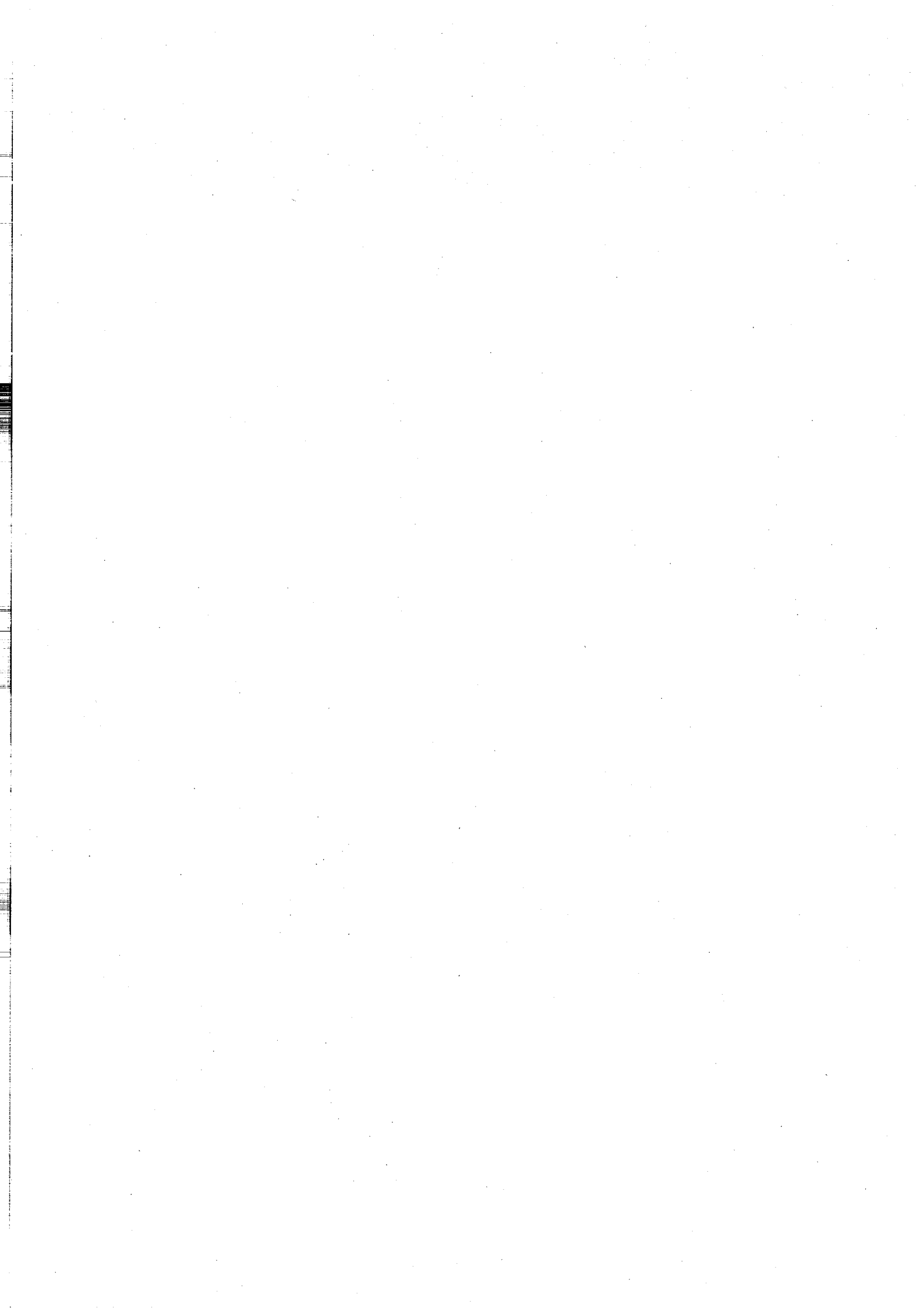
<sup>72</sup> Ham Sökhön, "Saenara rül öttökke seulkka?," sang [part one], *Sasanggye* (April 1961): 94-103.

<sup>73</sup> Yi Man'gap, "Han'guk sahoe üi kach'i kujo," p.66.

<sup>74</sup> Lloyd E. Eastman, *The abortive revolution: China under Nationalist rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.158. This summary by Eastman is based on many intellectuals' observations and remarks on the Chinese national character. The despair of Korean intellectuals over the Korean national character can also be compared with that of Malaysia's Dr Mahathir Mohamad (later to be Prime Minister) in his *The Malay dilemma* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Eastman, *The abortive revolution*, p.158.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.



<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

No Korean intellectual, regardless of their political persuasion, supported the idea of a dictatorship or despotism as openly and explicitly as the Chinese. However, their description of a strong leader was almost identical to that cited by Eastman as the Chinese intellectuals' version of "the ideal dictator" who had to be "a national leader who stood above class strife, above economic interests, and would strive for the welfare of the entire nation. He would be ... a 'new-style' dictator."<sup>77</sup>

**Figure 9**

*Major-General Park Chung Hee immediately after the May coup*



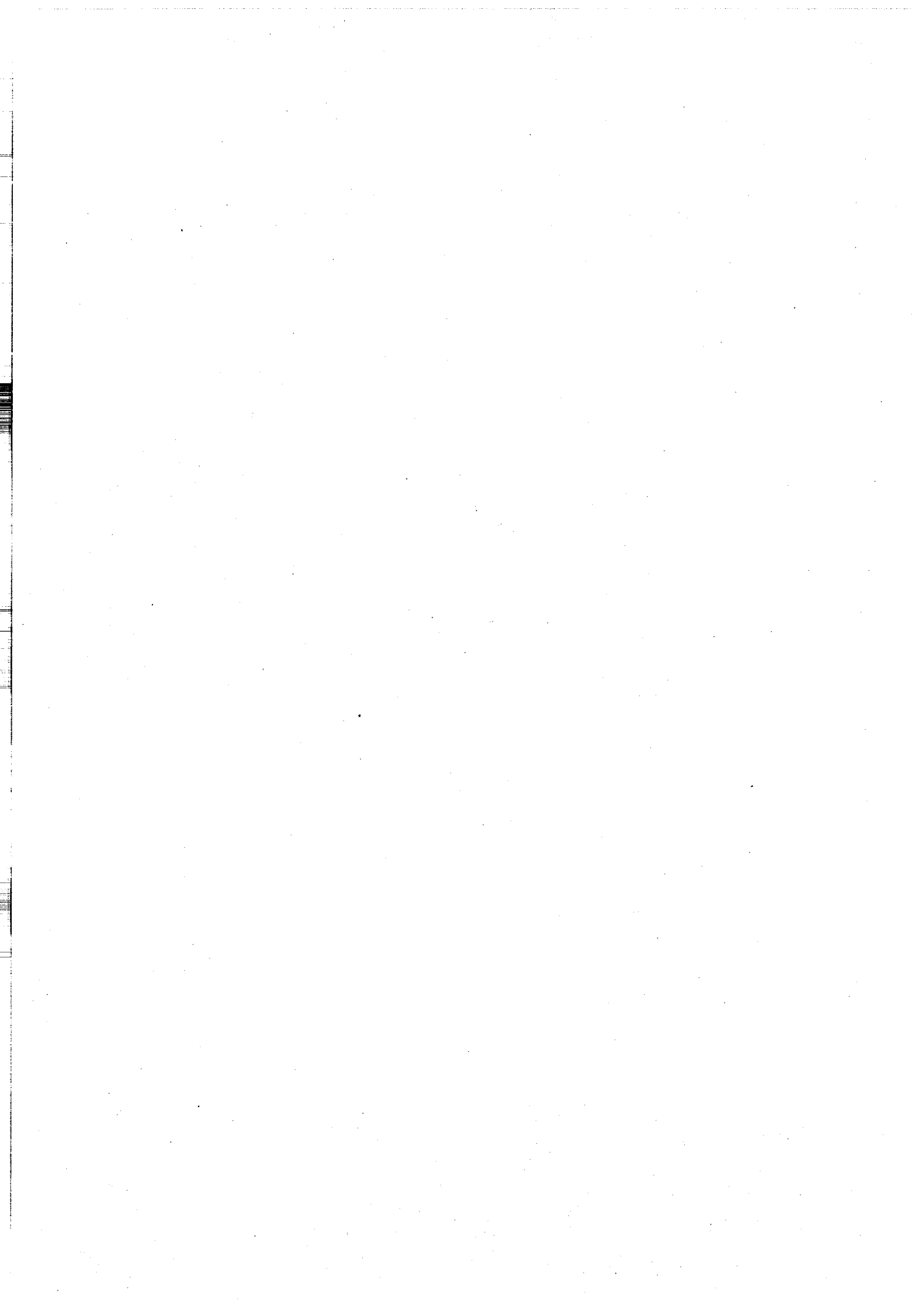
### *Military Reappraisal and the May 16 Coup*

#### *The "Clean-up the Military" Campaign*

While most of the populace was demanding "total reform," as expressed and articulated by many liberal intellectuals, what were the Korean military doing? Their activities, especially in terms of the military's own demands for radical reform, were extremely audacious, much more so than those of any civilian progressive reformist or political group at that time. As early as 8 May 1960, less than two weeks after President Rhee resigned on 26 April 1960, and just six days after the then Major-General Park Chung Hee had demanded the resignation of the Army's Chief of Staff, General Song Yoch'an. Eight lieutenant-colonels who were also graduates of the Eighth Class of the Military Academy launched their petition for what later became known as the "Clean-up the Military" campaign against the corruption, financial irregularities, incompetence and factionalism of a number of commanding generals.

In fact, this intra-military campaign developed rapidly into an extra-military clean-up movement of the entire armed forces, including the Marine Corps. This campaign resulted in the replacement of the three Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces (Army, Air Force and Navy), as well as the Marine Corps Commandant, within two months of the commencement of the campaign. Of these the replacement of the Marine Corps Commandant, Lieutenant-General Kim T'aesik, resulted not only in his retirement, but also in an open challenge, led by Brigadier-General Kim Tongha, the Commander of the First Marine Division, against his superior, alleging both political and financial corruption. In this process, Kim demonstrated the intensity of the push for military reform among junior-ranking officers. Confronted with forced retirement, however, Kim Tongha aligned himself to other reformist colonels in their reform campaign and just one year later played a key role in the May 16 military coup.

The military's reform drive was therefore extremely serious and daring and, in retrospect, needs to be looked at in the context of the reformist colonels' military coup plot, originally set for 8 May 1960 and known as the "May 8 Plan." This coup plan was allegedly cancelled because of the unexpected student revolt of 19 April, which turned into the April Revolution. The Army's "silence" or "tolerance" towards the student demonstrations during





this time was highly praised by the public, with some portraying the Army as "angels from Heaven."<sup>78</sup> However, the real reason for the Army's silence and tolerance of the student demonstrations had less to do with the Army being "angels from Heaven" than with its division into two camps, the mainstream group and non-mainstream group, each sitting on the fence protecting its respective longer-term interests.

The mainstream group—largely senior-ranking generals who had been personally nurtured in their careers by President Rhee—did not wish to jeopardize their careers by supporting President Rhee who, by the late 1950s, was no longer favored by American policy makers. The non-mainstream group—largely the reformist colonels and other junior-ranking officers in the Army—was heavily involved in its own coup attempt. In any case, most Koreans believed, and rightly so, that the success of the April Revolution was due to America's "moral and political support."<sup>79</sup> Some argue that the reformist colonels aborted their planned coup because they, especially Park Chung Hee, believed that they would have had no credibility with the public if they had carried out a military coup in the midst of the Students' Revolution.

### *Military Grievances*

Of course, while the coup was cancelled for the time being, the reformist colonels' coup plan was never entirely abandoned, but skillfully altered to incorporate a contingency plan in line with popular demands for total reform. According to Kim Chongp'il in 1998, the "Clean-up the Military" campaign intended to "bring out into the open their method of reform struggle" so that the reformist colonels could promote the unity of officers in the armed forces.<sup>80</sup> Kim's claim need not be the only explanation. What it reveals, however, is the reformist colonels' highly calculated, although extremely risky, strategy for mobilizing the military as their power base. In other words, the reformist colonels drew their power mostly from the collective grievances of the Korean military, especially those of junior level officers who, in the course of the rapid growth of the military,<sup>81</sup> had been grossly disadvantaged in their career opportunities due to a lopsided hierarchical system.

Most higher-ranking generals, for example, were the least trained (most for just forty-five days), and yet had been promoted to senior ranks, having mainly experience of military service in either the Japanese Imperial Army or Japanese Manchurian Forces. By 1960, all graduates of the First and Second Classes of 1946 had been promoted to ranks ranging from major general to general. In contrast, graduates from later years, especially the Academy's Eighth Class of 1949 had attained ranks from lieutenant colonel to full colonel.<sup>82</sup> The difference in age between Lieutenant Colonel Kim Chongp'il, who was undoubtedly the most well-known member of the Eighth Class, and the army's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Chang Toyŏng, was just three years, the former being thirty-six and the latter thirty-nine at the time of the May

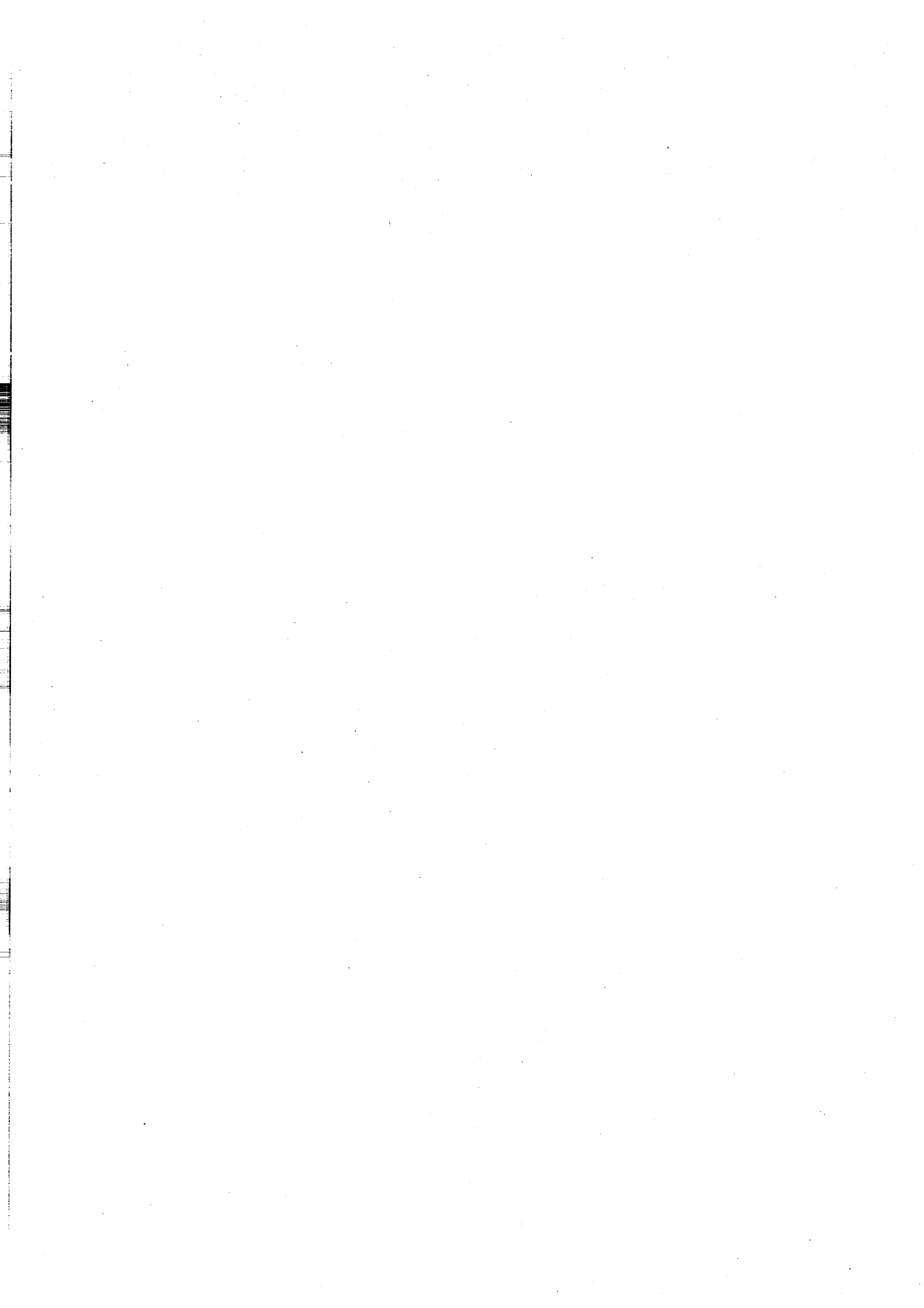
<sup>78</sup> Yi Man'gap, "Kunin: ch'immuk ūi taemo-dae," *Sasanggye* (June 1960): 78.

<sup>79</sup> Pu Wanhyŏk, "Hyŏngmyŏng ūi hyŏn tan'gye wa kŭmhu," *Sasanggye* (June 1960): 133.

<sup>80</sup> Kim and his colonel initiated this petition after Kim had made a trip to Pusan to consult with Park Chung Hee on 6 May, a day after General Song had summoned the staff at Army Headquarters and publicly condemned Park's letter to him as an act of insubordination that ought to be punished.

<sup>81</sup> The Korean military grew from a non-existent force in 1945 to 700,000 by 1955.

<sup>82</sup> Kang Ch'angsŏng, *Ilbon/Han'guk: kunbŏl chongch'i* [Japan/Korea: politics of military factionalism I] (Seoul: Haedong Munhwasa, 1991), p.351. Only seven of the Eighth Class had attained the rank of colonel by 1960.



<sup>83</sup> *Nobyöngdül üi chungön: Yuksa p'alkisa, sang* [The testimony of old soldiers: a history of the Military Academy's Eighth Class, part I] (Yukkun Sagwan Hakkyo Che P'alkisaenghoe [The Eighth Class Association of the Military Academy], 1992).

<sup>84</sup> *Ch'ungmujang kyörü* literally means "the resolution at the Ch'ungmu Restaurant."

<sup>85</sup> Hyön served in this position for only 20 days (from 23 August to 12 September 1960). He was appointed for a second time, however, as Defense Minister on 30 January 1961.

<sup>86</sup> Yi Sangu, *Munmin sidae e toedora ponün kunsä chöngkwön naemak: Park Chung Hee, p'amyöl üi chöngch'i kongjak* [Inner workings of military government examined in the civilian ruling period: Park Chung Hee, the political maneuvering of a downfall] (Seoul: Tonga Ilbosa, 1993), p.54.

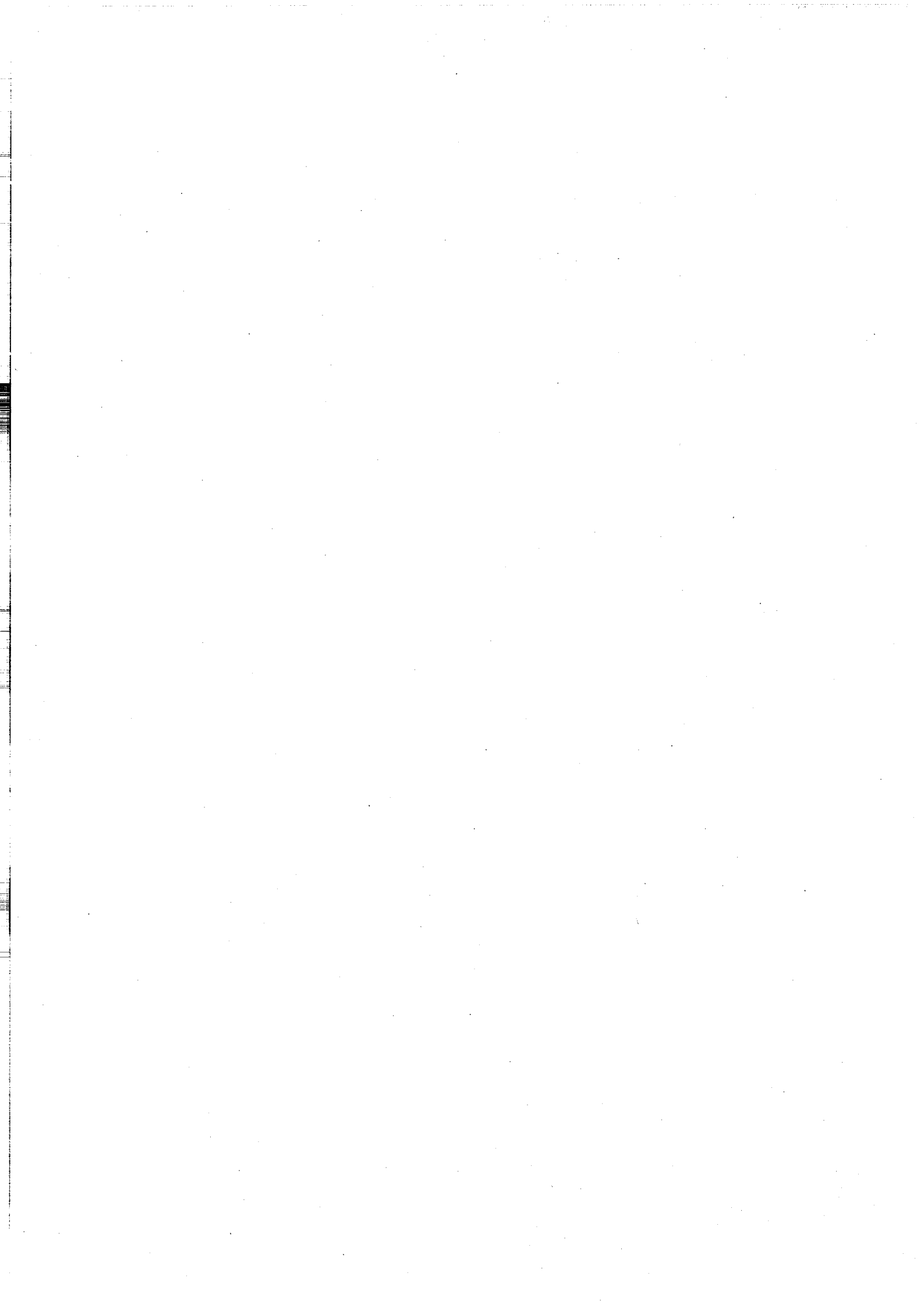
<sup>87</sup> Lieutenant-General Yi Chongch'an was a highly respected 'old soldier' who, as Chief of Staff in the army (during 1952), maintained military neutrality under the Rhee regime. His defiance of President Rhee in Pusan in 1952 is particularly important for an understanding of his personal authority and reputation in the army, especially in respect of General Park who, under Yee's direction, had attempted a military coup in 1952.

16 coup in 1961. Despite their obviously checkered career paths, however, the Eighth Class was a highly respected élite group in the army with a strong sense of nationalism and an egalitarian mentality. They were immensely proud and ambitious and, interestingly, had mostly rural backgrounds.<sup>83</sup>

The Eighth Class had the largest number of graduates of all the Classes in the Academy, a total of 1,345 officers of whom less than 450 survived the Korean War. Against this background, the lieutenant-colonels of the Eighth Class exerted themselves as a reformist pressure group, whose opportunity to exploit the military's reform mood increased dramatically when the newly inaugurated Chang Government (23 August 1960) replaced the Defense Minister, Lieutenant-General Yi Chongch'an, with a civilian, Hyön Sökhö. This increase in opportunity was particularly evident when, on 10 September, eleven colonels, including Kim Chongp'il, Kim Höynguk, Kil Chaeho and others who had been involved in the "Clean-up the Military" campaign, pledged themselves to an armed revolution, thus forming the nucleus for a military coup known as the *Ch'ungmujang kyörü*.<sup>84</sup>

These reformist colonels claimed that they were driven to make their pledge after they had failed to see the Minister of Defense, Hyön,<sup>85</sup> who had been out of his office when they had called on him. They reportedly planned to demand that all three-star generals—lieutenant generals—transfer to the reserve army, and that the future Army Chief of Staff and his deputy be appointed from within the rank of two-stars, which included Major General Park Chung Hee.<sup>86</sup> Such a daring challenge was now conceivable because, in the eyes of these campaigners, the government no longer held the authority to which they had formally owed allegiance once Lieutenant-General Yi had been removed from the Defense Ministry.<sup>87</sup> These colonels, who were promised by Minister Hyön that a clean-up exercise would be carried out, became even more aggressive, despite being briefly interrogated by the military police, when the next Defense Minister, Kwön Chungdon, another civilian, announced that he would appoint a military screening committee to clean up the military, especially its upper echelons.

Concurrently, Park Chung Hee, the ultimate leader of the clean-up campaigners, who had been demoted to the First Military District Command in Kwangju, a post known to the army as absurdly insignificant, was moved back to Army Headquarters on 11 September as Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations. This dramatic turnaround in Park's posting was effected by the new army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Ch'oe Kyöngnok who, on 29 August, had replaced Lieutenant-General Ch'oe Yöngnüi, yet another new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. From the campaigners' perspective, this appointment had a psychological impact and signified a real change in military policy. Ch'oe Kyöngnok publicly announced that, as the new army Chief of Staff, he supported the military's clean-up campaign which eased the immediate pressure on the Army hierarchy to contain the reformist campaigners.



In this context, Park Chung Hee's new assignment to Army Headquarters in Seoul was itself symbolic of Ch'oe's intention to clean up the army.<sup>88</sup> Psychologically, Park's transfer from the First Military District Command in Kwangju to Headquarters as the new deputy chief of staff had the immediate effect of raising the spirit of the military clean-up campaigners "sky high." By mid-September 1960, the Korean military had lost its stability and unity. The progressive build-up of grievances amongst two major groups within the military over the years immediately preceding this era of liberal thinking and calls for reform had begun to unravel the fabric of the Korean military.

The senior officers were aggrieved because of the military's conflicting systems of seniority which made them feel resentful and insecure about their rank. And junior officers were aggrieved because of the stagnation of the military hierarchy. To them, the whole system was based on factionalism and favoritism which they saw as largely the product of the actions of both President Rhee and the US military advisers in Korea.<sup>89</sup> The multiplicity of military grievances increased dramatically when the Government notified the United States at the Korea-America high-level talks on 25 August 1960 that it planned to reduce the armed forces by 100,000 personnel—initially it had aimed at a reduction of 200,000. This reduction meant that 17 per cent of the entire officer corps was under the threat of losing their livelihood without the protection of a pension. In this context, the collective grievances of the military became a decisive factor underpinning the reformist colonels' "Clean-up the Military" campaign.

#### *Plotting the Military Coup*

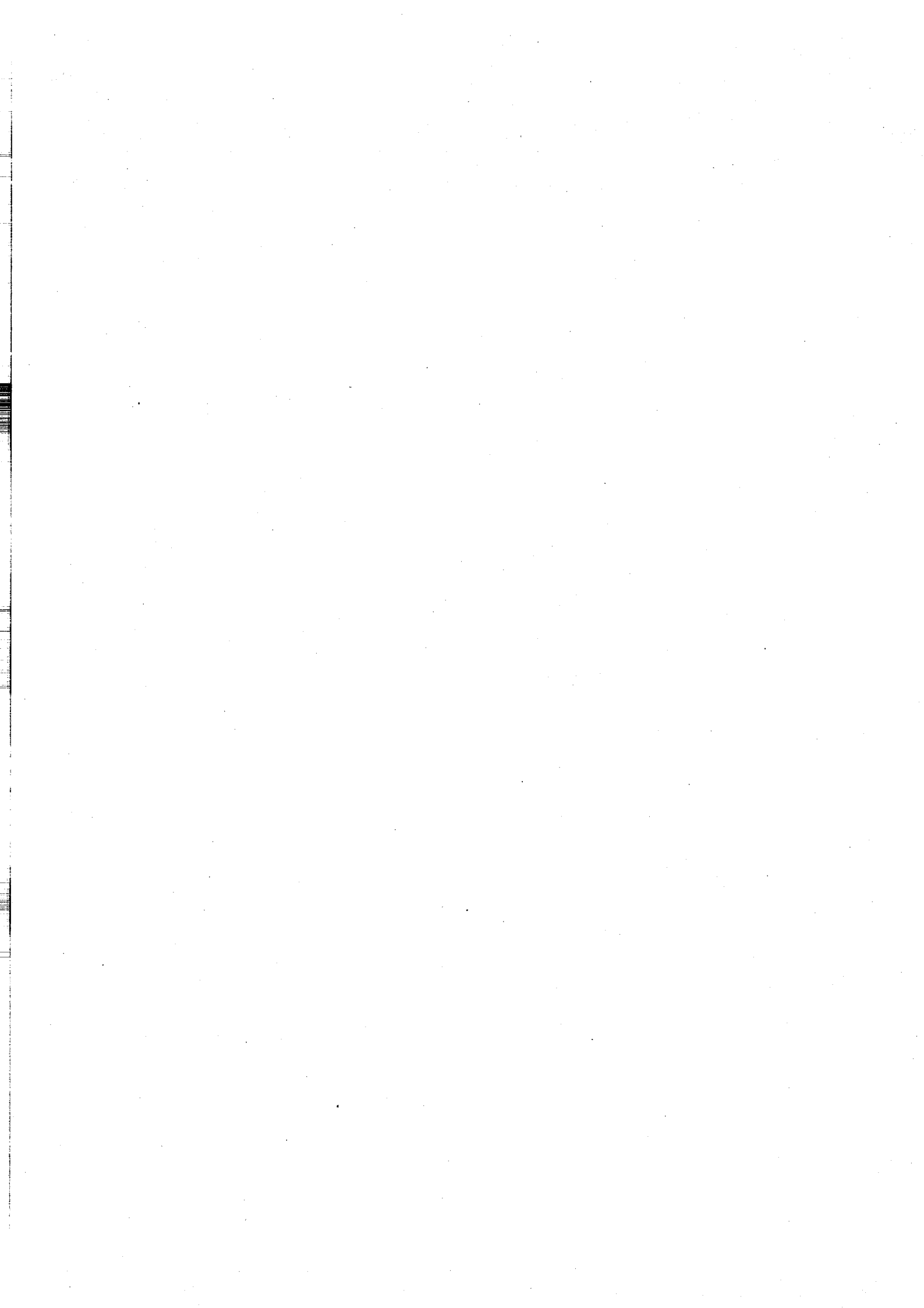
As if this were not enough to divide the military's unity and harmony, an unexpected conflict emerged between high-level officials in Korea and the United States following a statement by General Williston B. Palmer, Director of Military Assistance in the Defense Department. Palmer had visited Seoul for two days from 18 to 20 September 1960 as a personal guest of General Ch'oe Yŏnghŭi, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff. On the day before his departure, he made a public statement with the endorsement of General Ch'oe that he was personally opposed to the Army's purification campaign and that he also had doubts about the Korean Government's policy of reducing military manpower. These remarks immediately sparked strong reactions from both the Army Chief of Staff, Ch'oe Kyŏngnok, and the Defense Minister, Hyon Sŏkho. The former condemned it as a "clear violation of Korean sovereignty" and the latter as "interference in [the nation's] internal affairs."<sup>90</sup>

The loudest protest came on the morning of 24 September when sixteen colonels, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Kim Chongp'il, demanded the resignation of Ch'oe Yŏnghŭi on the grounds of alleged financial irregularities. This was a blatant counter attack by the reformist colonels on Ch'oe, who had attempted to prevent Park Chung Hee's return to Military Headquarters in

<sup>88</sup> Some argued that Park accepted his new appointment on the specific condition that he would be "allowed to exercise his own discretionary power, to some extent, to carry out the clean-up exercise in the army." See Kim Hyŏnguk and Pak Sawŏl, *Kim Hyŏnguk hoegorok, che 1pu, 5.16pisa* [Memoirs of Kim Hyŏnguk, 1: a secret history of the May 16 military coup] (Seoul: Ackim, 1985), p.36.

<sup>89</sup> For details of military factionalism instigated by President Rhee, see Kang Ch'angsŏng, *Ilbon/Han'guk: kumbŏl chŏngch'i*, pp.331-56.

<sup>90</sup> *Han'guk Ilbo*, 22 September 1960, p.1.



<sup>91</sup> Yi Ch'ölsüng, "Pak taet'ongnyöng kwa na üi kiguhan kwan'gye' [The ill-fated relationship between President Park and me], in *Pak Chöngbüi sidae* [The Park Chung Hee era], ed. Kim Söngjin (Seoul: Choson Ilbosa, 1994), pp.254-6.

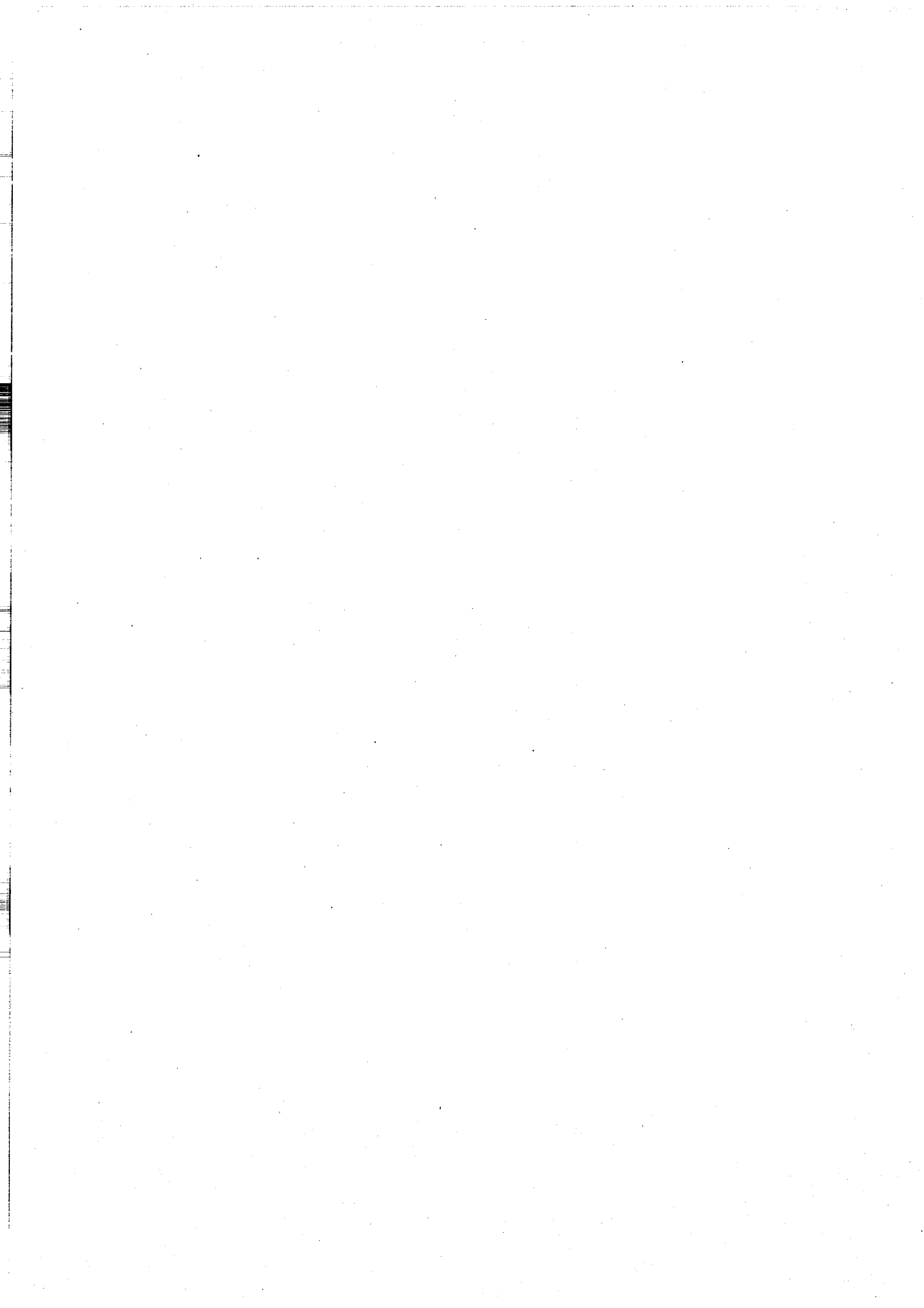
Seoul and continued to be unsympathetic towards their clean-up campaign. This revolt, known as *bagüksang sagön* (revolt against the seniors), not only led to Ch'oe's fall from his post on October 15, but more importantly accelerated the young colonels' plot to overthrow the Chang Government. In February 1961, the two key players in the *bagüksang sagön*, were discharged from the army, albeit officially through "voluntary" resignations. One of these was Kim Chongp'il who offered his resignation under the strict agreement that the army would not punish Park Chung Hee for his connection with the *bagüksang sagön*.

Paradoxically, as Kim returned to civilian life, the reformist colonels' military coup plot became even more audacious, but no one in the military or the government took any firm measures against it. The only plan the military contemplated and then only briefly was Park's retirement in May 1960. According to Yi Ch'ölsüng, then Chairman of the Armed Forces Committee in the National Assembly, who led the influential junior members' faction, *Simp'unghoe* (New Breeze Club) of the ruling Democratic Party, Park's scheduled retirement was confirmed by Prime Minister Chang Myön when Park was at Army Headquarters in Seoul as deputy chief of staff for operations. Yi went on to say that, instead of being retired, Park was transferred to Taegu as a result of his recommendation to the Prime Minister.<sup>91</sup> A counter-claim was made by former Lieutenant-General Chang Toyöng, one of Park's long-time supporters, who was then Commander of the Second Army in Taegu. Chang claimed that he had directly requested headquarters to appoint Park as his deputy commander after hearing that Park was about to be discharged.

Although both claims need to be considered with caution, it is obvious that Park had received extraordinary support from someone in power, if not General Chang himself, who appeared to have deliberately spread the rumor of Park's imminent removal from active duty in an effort to camouflage Park and his reformist colonels' secret coup plan. This hypothesis warrants close scrutiny because, by being transferred to the Second Army as Chang's deputy commander, Park not only avoided retrenchment, if in fact the rumor was true, but also and more significantly, obtained his permanency as major-general on 20 February 1961, just one day before Chang's appointment as Army Chief of Staff.

Most notably, by being transferred to the Second Army under Chang's obvious protection, Park was reunited with Major-General Yi Chuil, Chang's chief of staff, who was one of Park's oldest friends from their Manchukuo military training days, and a man who also played a key role in the May 16 military coup. Although the accounts surrounding this particular issue have never been questioned by anyone to date, Park's transfer to the Second Army less than five months before the May 16 military coup seems too neat, in its timing, cause and effect, to be accepted at face value. Even so, that these events underscore the final preparations for Park's military coup has nevertheless taken root in the popular mindset.

In regard to the timing of Park's coup in May, insiders have portrayed





Park as a desperate general trying to save his career by locking himself into a do-or-die race against the clock from the moment, on 12 January 1961, that he and his reformist colonels learned that the army had included Park on a list of 153 officers to be moved to the Reserve Army in late May. Those insiders argue that Park had no option but to pre-empt the army's decision by staging a military coup before he was removed from the army. And so, in the pre-dawn hours of Tuesday, 16 May, Park would cross the Han River with a bandit-size revolutionary force of just 3,600 troops.

### Conclusion

The background to the May 16 military coup of 1961 needs to be understood in two contexts: the Korean popular demand for total reform and strong leadership, and the increasingly destabilized military after the April Student Revolution, due largely to a major shake-up of the military hierarchy. In the case of the former, demands for reform were expressed by civilians, especially liberal intellectuals, politically sensitive urban citizens and students who, in reality, had very limited means, if any at all, to put their demands into effect. The only means at their disposal was to promote a popular consensus for total reform.

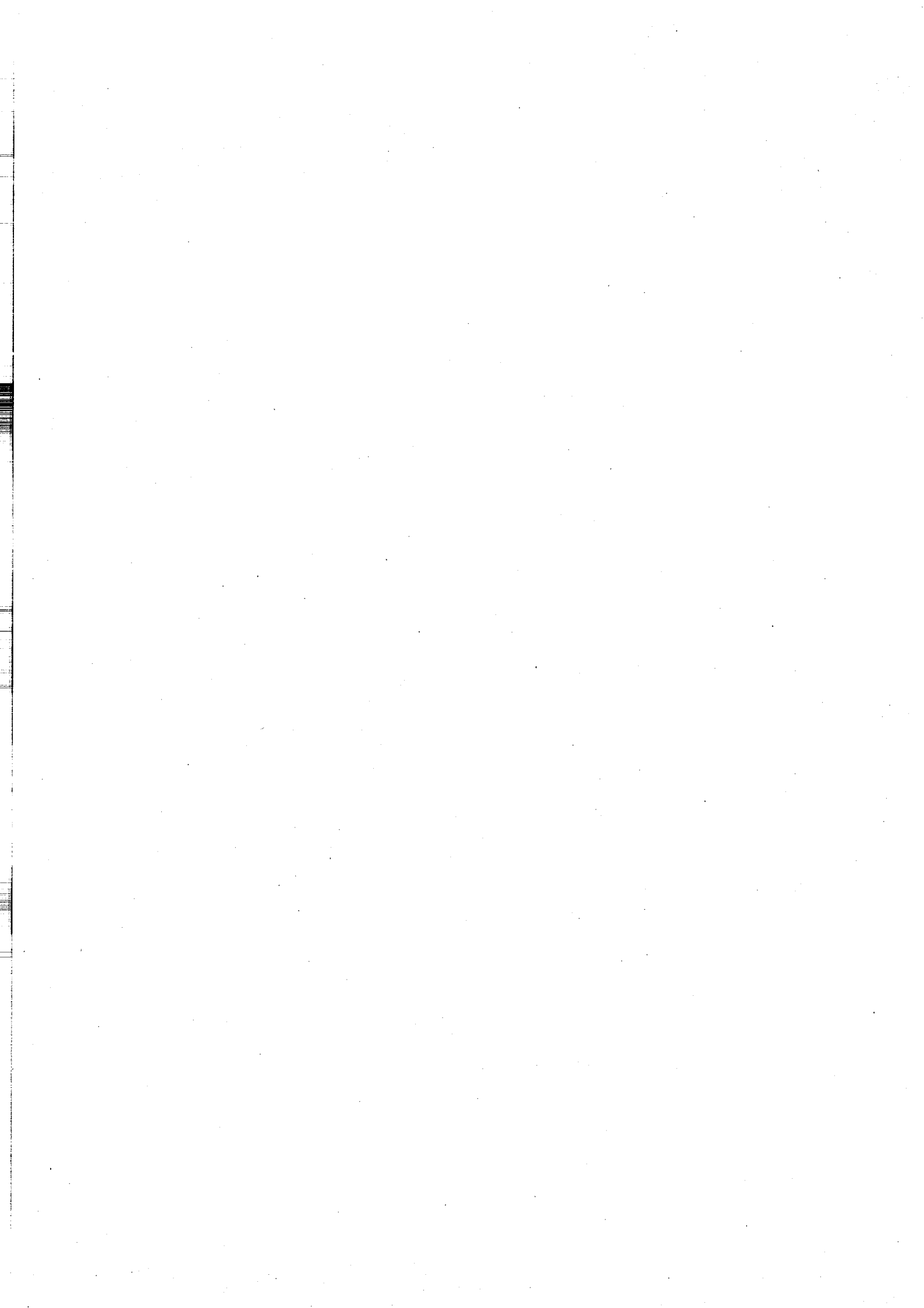
In the case of the military, however, the demand was quite specific: clean-up the military. This demand was the subject of a bold campaign by Park and his reformist colonels who, in effect, caused significant disruption within the military hierarchy, and enough confusion in the ranks of the government as to bring about its very downfall.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the coup was generally seen as inevitable and necessary to bring about change in Korean society. Even the most reputable daily newspaper, *Tonga Ilbo*, stated that Korean society at that time required total reform because it had lost its way due to "incumbent politicians' corruption, incompetence, inefficiency and ... chaotic factionalism."<sup>93</sup>

As tempting as it is to dismiss this view as all too obviously biased, and perhaps written under the coercion of the military junta, it nevertheless reflects an important aspect of the popular mood concerning the Chang government. Similarly, the liberal intellectuals' demand for strong leadership (perhaps more so than their views on the principles of liberal democracy) provided a strategic basis for Park to seize upon that demand. Most notably, Park justified the coup on the same grounds that the liberal intellectuals had provided as a basis for a nationalist ideology, in both rhetoric and action. This is not to say, however, that the ideas of the liberal intellectuals discussed in this paper comprehensively represent their ideas, or fully explains the overall opinion of the majority of Koreans in the aftermath of the April Student Revolution.

I have deliberately focused here on the intellectual debate on national development during the eleven months between the April Student Revolution and the May 16 military coup as being relevant to Park's reform agenda after

<sup>92</sup> For example, the Army Chief of Staff, General Chang Toyŏng, deceived his own mentor, Prime Minister Chang Myŏn, who had appointed him.

<sup>93</sup> *Tonga Ilbo*, Editorial, 19 May 1961.



<sup>94</sup> For the former, see Chang's "Kin'gŭp ūl yohanŭn hyŏngmyŏng kwaop ūi wansu wa minju chŏngch'i eroŭi pokkwi" [The urgent need for completing the task of the revolution and returning to democratic politics], *Sasanggye* (July 1961): 34–5; for the latter, see Ham's "O-ilyuk ūl ōtto'kke polka?" [What do we make of the 5.16?], *Sasanggye* (July 1961): 36–47.

*Kim Hyung-A*

Centre for Asia Pacific Social  
Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS)  
University of Wollongong, NSW 2500  
hyung@uow.edu.au  
kha@coombs.anu.edu.au

the coup and to his subsequent policies. To appreciate and understand this debate at that time, it is important to note that little did the intellectuals know, especially those whose articles on national development had been published in *Sasanggye* and who actively participated in the debate, that their ideas would be misappropriated to justify a military coup. This was evident when, in the July edition of *Sasanggye*, drafted in June—only one month after the coup—Chang Chunha argued that the military must return to democratic politics as soon as possible, and Ham Sŏkhŏn bluntly stated that the people are silent because they are anesthetized by the sound of gunfire and that true revolution is something that neither students nor the soldiers can achieve, but only the people.<sup>94</sup> What Ham and most Koreans did not realize, however, was that the road to the Korean people's revolution had already begun and that Park would be at the helm for the next eighteen years.

