

## South Korea's Blue House Scandal

Written by Mi-yeon Hur

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# South Korea's Blue House Scandal

<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/02/21/south-koreas-blue-house-scandal/>

MI-YEON HUR, FEB 21 2017

Since October 2016, every weekend, Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul has been flooded with hundreds of thousands of people demanding the ouster of current South Korean President Park Geun-hye. Park faces allegations that she helped her close confidante, Choi Soon-sil, extract money from South Korean conglomerates to use for personal gain, while Choi Soon-sil was arrested on charges of fraud and abuse of power. Pundits outside South Korea tend to focus on the unusual and sensational aspects of the issue, such as Choi's shamanism, how much control Choi enjoyed over Park, or when and how Park would step down. However, these aspects hardly give a clear understanding of the Blue House[1] scandal and the series of ongoing public demonstrations in South Korea. The core issue amid the chronic scandals engulfing South Korea is the country's distorted economy and immature democracy. The title of "11<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world" is the wrapping paper that covers the political discrepancies and socio-economic disparities that South Korean society is currently experiencing. Outsiders must understand that what South Korean citizens are demanding is not only the removal of an incapable and apathetic ruler but also meaningful changes to the rigged economic and political structure.

More specifically, what South Koreans want to achieve is the completion of the 1987 democracy movement and revision of the chaebol-driven economic system.[2] To fully grasp what is actually going on in South Korea, people must understand how defective and inefficient the South Korean political system has been and how South Korean presidents with their imperialist power have pursued economic policies that have deteriorated economic justice and social equality. This will allow people to understand that the recent candlelight protests are an extension of the pro-democracy movement that started decades ago, how such detestable leaders were able to occupy the Blue House, and why South Korean people call their home country "Hell Chosun." [3]

### South Korea's Democracy: Already but Not Yet

South Korea is witnessing what I would call a "civil revolution without bloodshed", a citizen struggle against authoritarian rule and for a true democracy. Politically, South Korea has been under a quasi-democratic system where public opinion is restrained and manipulated. The recent Choi Soon-sil scandal shows that the media was never free from political pressure; the political parties neither respect public sentiments nor represent public preferences; Park Geun-hye was able to rule the nation as an imperialist dictator.[4] All of these truths stem from the fact that South Korea has yet to complete its democratization process.

In its process of democratization, South Korea has experienced a few nation-wide democratic uprisings. The first democratic protest, which occurred on April 19, 1960, is known as the "April Revolution." Thousands of college students and citizens took to the streets of Seoul, boldly demanding the resignation of Rhee Syng-man, who was elected as the first president through massive electoral fraud. The April uprising successfully toppled the Rhee regime, but the Blue House was taken over by General Park Chung-hee, who seized the opportunity and political uncertainty to lead a coup on May 16, 1961. Under Park Chung-hee, democratization movements became more intense. A series of protests developed into massive uprisings in the southern cities of Busan and Masan in October 1979, triggering internal conflicts among the coup leaders, which led to the assassination of Park.

The brief period after the dictator's assassination, often called the "Seoul Spring," gave people high hopes for a democracy. However, Major General Chun Doo-hwan began maneuvering to gain control over the Korean Central







## **South Korea's Blue House Scandal**

Written by Mi-yeon Hur