

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Negotiating conservation and competition: national parks and ‘victory-over-communism’ diplomacy in South Korea

Jaehwan Hyun

Institute of Liberal Education, Pusan National University, South Korea
Email: jhwanhyun@pusan.ac.kr

Abstract

Focusing on South Korean biologists and their efforts to establish national parks in the 1960s and 1970s, I illuminate the ways in which they negotiated their relationship with the ecological diplomacy of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the anti-communist and developmentalist diplomacy of the South Korean government. To justify their activities, these South Korean biologists emphasized the importance of nature conservation activities in the competition for international recognition and economic development with their northern counterparts. The national-park initiative was thus subsumed into the politics of this legitimacy competition between the two Koreas, or what I call ‘victory-over-communism’ diplomacy. The IUCN’s influence over South Korea was limited to the extent that both the government and scientists recognized the diplomatic merit they could gain in the context of their Cold War competition and developmentalism. It is also shown how, during the short detente period of the two Koreas, South Korean biologists used victory-over-communism diplomacy to renew their government’s attention to their activities. This Korean episode contributes to the wider perspective of decentralizing the Cold War history of environmental diplomacy in the free-world bloc by illustrating the importance of its entanglement with the Cold War politics surrounding Asian developmentalism.

This paper contributes to the history of environmental diplomacy with a particular focus on South Korean biologists’ interactions with their own government and with an international non-governmental organization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, the International Union for the Protection of Nature before 1956), in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ The historiography of environmental diplomacy has mostly paid attention to the late 1960s and the decades that followed, when environmentalism took on significance in international relations. That was the period when the idea of the compatibility between economic development and environmental protection was born in order to persuade Third World political leaders of environmentalism, and when national governments began to recognize environmental protection as a significant international political arena.²

¹ I adopt the McCune–Reischauer system for the romanization of Korean; all Korean names in this article are given surname first, followed by given name.

² For instance, during the period of Richard Nixon’s presidency (1969–74) the US government utilized environmental diplomacy to reduce American investment in international aid and used intra-bloc diplomatic tools for detente. J. Brooks Flippen, ‘Richard Nixon, Russell Train, and the birth of modern American environmental

In recent years, historian of science Lino Camprubí has coined the term ‘ecological diplomacy’ to describe earlier diplomatic activities played out by global conservationists in international environmental organizations propagating the model of the Swiss nature park worldwide and encouraging local ecologists to envision conservation in terms of national-park management, with a strong basis in ecological science.³ Ecological diplomacy flourished in the 1960s when Euro-American conservationists in the IUCN made efforts to establish nature parks around the world.⁴ They particularly focused on newly independent nations and on making use of their developmentalist aspirations to try to influence those newly formed governments to establish nature reserves.⁵

In line with Camprubí’s approach, using the case of South Korea, I investigate the IUCN’s ecological diplomacy in Asia, which has been largely overlooked by previous scholarship in environmental diplomacy. This Korean episode contributes to a decentralization of the Cold War history of environmental diplomacy in the free-world bloc, which has, until now, mainly focused on the Nixon government or on international environmental organizations. In particular, IUCN ecological diplomacy in the Third World has often been described as the postwar reconstruction of transnational, colonial networks of European and American conservationists in Asia and Africa.⁶ From this perspective, the international environmental organizations’ successful access to developing countries was only possible after the conception of sustainable development was conceived, and after international environmental-cum-technical aid to those countries was implemented in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷ The Korean episode indicates the ways in which IUCN ecological diplomacy worked out in a very different setting where, unlike in other Third World territories, IUCN conservationists could not rely on established ties and networks. With regard to South Korea, a former colony of the Japanese Empire, IUCN conservationists had a limited understanding of basic natural conditions and, furthermore, did not realize at that time that South Korean scientists and governmental officials had no serious interest in conservation activities. In the 1960s, the only backchannel via which South Korea could be accessed was American scientific aid projects. US-based IUCN conservationists promoted their national-park movement as if it would potentially lead to developmental aid for South Korea in the future.⁸ Throughout this work, this paper questions the current periodization by unveiling the IUCN’s earlier engagement with developmentalism in Asia in the 1960s, the original decade of ecological diplomacy.

To illuminate this point, this essay pays specific attention to South Korean biologists at the Korean Commission for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (KCCN) in the 1960s and 1970s, with a focus on their reception of IUCN diplomacy and their efforts to

diplomacy’, *Diplomatic History* (2008) 32(4), pp. 613–38; Stephen Macekura, *Of Limits and Growth: The Rise of Global Sustainable Development in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

³ Lino Camprubí, ‘Birds without borders: ecological diplomacy and the WWF in Franco’s Spain’, *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* (2020) 50(4), pp. 433–55.

⁴ Patrick Kupper, ‘Nature’s laboratories? Exploring the intersection of science and national parks’, in Adrian Hawkins, Jared Orsi and Mark Fiege (eds.), *National Parks beyond the Nation: Global Perspectives on America’s Best Idea*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016, pp. 114–32.

⁵ Simone Schleper, *Planning for the Planet: Environmental Expertise and the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1960–1980*, London: Berghahn Books, 2019.

⁶ Macekura, op. cit. (2), pp. 41–2; Schleper, op. cit. (5), pp. 5–6; Perrin Selcer, *The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, pp. 75–9.

⁷ Macekura, op. cit. (2), pp. 213–33; William M. Adams, ‘Green development theory? Environmentalism and sustainable development’, in Jonathan Crush (ed.), *Power of Development*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 85–96; Catherine Corson, ‘Shifting environmental governance in a neoliberal world: US AID for conservation’, *Antipode* (2010) 42(3), pp. 576–602.

⁸ Jaehwan Hyun, ‘Brokering science, blaming culture: the US–South Korea ecological survey in the demilitarized zone, 1963–8’, *History of Science* (2020) 59(3), pp. 315–43.

moderate it within the context of South Korea's competition for legitimacy with North Korea. Until recently, the previous literature exploring the Cold War environmental history of the two Koreas has been mainly state-centred.⁹ The recent national-park historiography points out that scientists and their international activities were as crucial to the institutionalization of the national-park system as national governments were.¹⁰ This essay also illuminates the diplomatic game played by South Korean biologists in their dealings with the IUCN and the South Korean government, and thus how the establishment of national parks was not a simple result of the South Korean government's will; South Korean biologists' moderation and translation efforts played a crucial role.

When the IUCN conservationists approached South Korea in the mid-1960s, the South Korean government began to promote a diplomatic strategy named 'victory-over-communism diplomacy' (*sūnggong oegyō*). The government allowed, if not encouraged, South Korean scholars to participate in international events where their communist rivals were present in order to demonstrate their intellectual, economic and cultural superiority over communists. But South Korean scientists had been framing their international activity within this logic even before the government made it official: to justify their international participation, they claimed that membership in international organizations was an arena where the struggle for legitimacy could play out, and requested that the government see their international participation as a diplomatic act. Korean scientists claimed that their failure to join the International Geophysical Year (IGY, 1957–8), in which North Korean scientists had participated, marked a defeat in the legitimacy competition with the North. They proactively requested that the government reframe participation in international conferences as 'public diplomacy made by scientists'.¹¹ South Korean biologists also promoted victory-over-communism diplomacy to tread a fine line between the IUCN's ecological diplomacy and the South Korean government's anti-communist and developmentalist diplomacy.¹² Chronologically, they used 'victory-over-communism' diplomacy in two ways: first, in the 1960s, they embodied it when translating the IUCN's national-park movement to South Korea and persuading their government to establish national parks. Second, amid the short detente between the two Koreas in the early 1970s, they used it to attract the government's attention and support for their conservation activities.

This paper consists of four sections. First, I offer a historical background concerning the South Korean government's policies in the 1950s, before its period of environmental management in the following decade. In the second and third sections, I show that the government's establishment of a regime of environmental management coincided with the IUCN's approach to South Korea in the 1960s. To justify nature conservation's legitimacy and render it a meaningful agenda for the South Korean government, South Korean

⁹ State-centrism is more common in the North Korean historiography mainly due to the limitation of access to non-state materials. See Robert Winstanley-Chesters, 'From dialectic of nature to the Asian mode: a pre-history of North Korean environmental approach', *Capitalism and Nature Socialism* (2016) 27(3), pp. 46–63; Robert Winstanley-Chesters, 'Vibrant matter(s): fish and fishing histories in North Korea', in Ts'ui-jung Liu and Micah Muscolino (eds.), *Perspectives on Environmental History in East Asia: Changes in the Land, Water, and Air*, London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 136–58. For the case of national park establishment, see Manyong Moon, 'Social history of national parks in South Korea', 6th Biennial Conference of East Asian Environmental History, Kyoto, Japan (online), 10 October 2021.

¹⁰ Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler and Patrick Kupper (eds.), *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2012; Patrick Kupper, *Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2014; Emily Wakild, 'Conservation on tour: comparing nations, scientists, and parks in the Americas', in Howkins, Orsi and Fiege, op. cit. (4), pp. 91–113.

¹¹ Young-Dai Kwon, 'One year of our science world' (Urigwahakgyeui illyeon), *Donga Daily*, 23 December 1961, p. 4.

¹² After its establishment in 1963, the organization changed its name several times, in 1965, 1967 and 1974. In this paper, I will use KCCN as an abbreviation for the organization's name, regardless of name changes.

biologists established the KCCN and successfully integrated a national-park initiative into their victory-over-communism diplomacy. In the final section, I illustrate that it was KCCN biologists who attempted to revitalize the IUCN proposal for a Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) national park as a means of peaceful unification between the two Koreas in the early 1970s. While promoting the DMZ peace park movement, KCCN biologists used the framework of victory-over-communism diplomacy once again, but for a different purpose than in the previous decade.

Before the 1960s: natural restoration from the ruins of war

Rhee Syngman's administration (1948–April 1960), the first South Korean government, did not pay much attention to protecting or managing fauna, flora and their habitats. Only a few isolated laws and related campaigns – not originally intended for nature conservation per se but established to restore natural and cultural resources lost during the Korean War (1950–1953) – functioned as conservation measures until the early 1960s.

The Korean War presented three urgent conservation problems: forestation, natural monuments and wildlife. Over 50 per cent of the total forest land had been depleted or degraded during the war.¹³ The concomitant loss of habitats in and around natural monuments and for animals followed. For instance, according to a postwar academic expedition report, forests were cut down at Mount Odae in eastern Gangwon province to make way for supply train railways during the war; many parts of the Woljeongsa temple, a famous national monument, were burned; and finally, several indigenous fish species, including the Manchurian trout (*Brachymystax lenok*), living in the Odaecheon stream near the temple, became endangered.¹⁴ In the late years of the Korean War, for these reasons, the government legislated the Forest Protection Special Law and revitalized the Conservation Decree of the Chosun Treasures Historic and Natural Monuments and the Hunting Decree, originally enacted by the governor general of Korea during the colonial period.

These laws gave powers to designate forest protection areas or set a protected area for breeding declining populations of specific species and promote greening and natural-monument conservation campaigns.¹⁵ In particular, the Special Conservation Committee for National Treasures Historic and Natural Monuments (reorganized as the Cultural Property Committee in 1962), established in December 1952 by the Conservation Decree, promoted preservation campaigns for natural monuments and carried out field-work surveys to identify the status of the designated monuments and their habitats.¹⁶ The Hunting Decree also served to designate protected species as non-game animals: cranes, for example, were explicitly listed.

South Korean biologists engaged in these early post-liberation period activities and formed their own idea of conserving nature, or 'national land conservation', in the late 1950s.¹⁷ Leading biologists, including botanist-cum-authority at the Ministry of Education Park Man-Kyu and Seoul National University professor of zoology Kang

¹³ David Fedman, *Seeds of Control: Japan's Empire of Forestry in Colonial Korea*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020.

¹⁴ Yeong-Ho Jung, 'Winter expedition to Mt. Odae' (Tonggi odaesan tapsagi), *Donga Daily*, 13 February 1955, p. 4.

¹⁵ Hon-kyu Kim and Pyong-oh Won, 'The bird preservation in Korea' (Han'gugüi chosuboho), in Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, *A Report on the 12th International Council for Bird Preservation Meeting*, Seoul: Ministry of Agriculture, 18 September 1960, pp. 41–59.

¹⁶ Woo Chul Lee, 'On the natural monuments in Korea' (Ch'önyön'ginyömmure kwanhan sogo), *Korean Journal of Plant Taxonomy* (1969) 1(1), pp. 27–35.

¹⁷ Jaehwan Hyun, 'Reconfiguring mountain expeditions: the transwar origins of the Korean nature conservation movement, 1926–1962', *Korea Journal* (2022) 62(3), pp. 79–115.

Yung-Sun, were nominated as members of the Conservation Committee and promoted preservation campaigns for natural monuments. They often joined academic expeditions to mountains and remote islands, mostly organized by national or regional alpine clubs, and used those expeditions as an opportunity to identify the status of natural monuments and potential future candidates. They were also active in heading government-led greening campaigns.¹⁸ Furthermore, applied entomologist Kim Hon-Kyu and young ornithologist Won Pyong-Oh began to develop their interest in bird preservation while connecting with the international bird conservation community via Japanese ornithologists in the late 1950s.¹⁹ As a result, around 1958, Korean biologists began to claim the need for 'nature protection' by fostering tree planting and protecting natural monuments and beneficial birds.

However, the rationale used by the Hunting Decree for protecting specific animals – mainly birds like cranes – was their agricultural benefit, namely that they eat many bugs and other pests that are harmful to crops. This was especially important in late 1950s South Korea where insecticide was not widely available.²⁰ This strong reliance on the usefulness of forests and birds as natural resources left the boundary between nature preservation and conservation blurred.²¹ A lack of clarity between the two concepts would serve South Korean biologists in the integration of their protection efforts and allow them to combine the IUCN's conservation conceptions into the next government's developmental aspirations while pursuing a more preservation-oriented conception in terms of national-park planning.

International ecological diplomacy meets local anti-communist diplomacy

The early 1960s was a transformative period in South Korea's environmental management regime. Army general Park Chung-hee snatched power in May 1961, led his junta for over two years, became president of South Korea in 1963, and maintained that position until 1979. In its early years, the junta government enacted the Forest Law (1961–2), the Cultural Property Protection Law (1962), and the Hunting Law (1961), which had already been drafted but had failed to pass the National Assembly under previous governments.²² In particular, the Bureau of Cultural Property Preservation (CPP), a bureau of the Ministry of Education (later moved to the Ministry of Culture and Information), was established following the CPP Law. The CPP became an institutional backup in the context of which Korean biologists could carry out fieldwork for nature protection purposes and it was particularly supportive of the biologists for two reasons. First, botanist Park Man-Kyu became the first chairman of the Scenic Sites and Natural Monuments Subcommittee of the Cultural Property Committee (SSNMS-CPC) in 1962. Second, as members of a new governmental office, the CPP authorities eagerly sought their expertise in natural, as well as cultural, preservation.

The establishment of the SSNMS-CPC coincided with IUCN conservationist Harold Jefferson Coolidge Jr's visit to South Korea. In June 1960, Coolidge was flown to Seoul for an official visit as director of the Pacific Science Board of the US National Academy of Sciences. The official purpose of his visit was to promote a formal relationship between

¹⁸ Hyun, op. cit. (17), pp. 100–2.

¹⁹ Jaehwan Hyun, 'Cold War environmentalism in a South Korean context', a virtual workshop at the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science, Department III, Berlin, Germany (online), 10 May 2021.

²⁰ Pyong-oh Won, *The Bird and Animal Preservation (Chosuboho)*, Seoul: Central Forest Experiment Station, 1956.

²¹ This obscurity of the distinction between preservation and conservation originated from the Japanese Empire's forestry and landscape management practices, and thus postwar Japanese conservationists also confused the two concepts. See Hyun, op. cit. (17), pp. 82–3.

²² Hyun, op. cit. (8), pp. 319–26.

the US and the Korean National Academy of Sciences and to encourage Koreans to take part in the upcoming Pacific Science Congress the following year. Coolidge fashioned himself as a benevolent pro-South Korean friend, bringing US scientific aid to the government and local scientists. Indeed, he did help them to liaise with the Smithsonian Institution to gain support for the establishment of a national science museum and for a long-term ecological survey. Coolidge also used his political power to influence the Asia Foundation to support the international activities of South Korean scientists.²³

Unofficially, Coolidge wanted to persuade Korean scientists to join international conservation efforts by establishing national parks, having just taken the chairmanship of a Commission on National Parks within the IUCN after its creation a year earlier.²⁴ His first main programme was to prepare the first United Nations world list of national parks and he planned to convene the first World National Park Conference (WNPC) in Seattle, Washington, in the summer of 1962. In the context of this programme, Coolidge solicited developing countries' governments, including South Korea's, to establish national-park systems.²⁵

Hoping to make nature conservation part of its agenda and to be engaged with national-park planning, the CPP proactively responded to the IUCN's request. In 1963, the CPP supported the establishment of a special committee for nature conservation (later, in 1965, re-established as the Korean Committee for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, KCCN), consisting of zoologists and botanists mainly from the SSNMS-CPC. Coolidge dispatched American national-park expert William J. Hart to Seoul to help KCCN biologists plan an ecological survey of potential sites suitable for designation as national parks. A year later, he also approved limited financial support for the survey project.²⁶

Coolidge tried to further tighten their involvement by suggesting that the KCCN join the IUCN as a national member. It was not the first invitation; in 1957 the IUCN had officially asked the Rhee government about its interest in membership, but the request was rejected because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was sceptical about its merits.²⁷ The Rhee government did not even accept the ministry's alternative suggestion of allowing a private organization to join the IUCN. Indeed, the Rhee government had maintained strict anti-communist diplomacy and only allowed South Koreans to join non-governmental international organizations when the international bodies in question were able to offer specific financial aid and support, or help the propagation of anti-communism.²⁸ Another reason was to prevent potential contact with North Koreans. Along this line, the Rhee government totally dismissed scientists' request to take part in the IGY of 1957–8 on the ground that North Korean researchers would be present.²⁹

²³ There was a short-lived government (August 1960–May 1961) between the Rhee and Park regimes.

²⁴ Hon-Kyu Kim, 'National park status in Korea', in Science Council of Japan (ed.), *Abstract of Papers Related with Agriculture, Forestry, Animal Science and Conservation for the Eleventh Pacific Science Congress*, vol. 6, Tokyo: Science Council of Japan, 1966, p. 6.

²⁵ Martin Holdgate, *The Green Web: A Union for World Conservation*, Oxon: Earthscan, 1999, pp. 69–71.

²⁶ Most of the financial support came from the CPP.

²⁷ 'IUCN membership request review' (IUCN kaip kōmt'o), in Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ed.), *The Republic of Korea Foreign Affairs Archives Guide*, vol. 1: 1949–1959 (*Taehanmin'guk oegyosaryohaeejip 1. 1949–1959nyōn*), Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, p. 329.

²⁸ For the case of UNESCO participation see 'UNESCO general assembly, the 8–10th' (UNESCO ch'onghoe, che 8–10ch'a), 1958, in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, op. cit. (27), p. 299.

²⁹ For the competition of two Chinas in the IGY see Zuoyue Wang and Jiuchen Zhang, 'China and the International Geophysical Year', in Roger D. Launius, James Rodger Fleming and David H. DeVorkin (eds.), *Globalizing Polar Science: Reconsidering the International Polar and Geophysical Years*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 143–55.

When Coolidge approached South Korean scientists, the situation was starting to shift. Park Chung Hee's junta government later developed a new anti-communist strategy named 'victory over communism'. In stark contrast to Rhee's regime, the new government recognized the impossibility of exterminating communist countries in the near future and aimed instead to triumph against them in the competition of political regimes.³⁰ Under this scheme, victory over communism would not be secured via a second Korean War – a war for which the Rhee regime had ardently longed – but by assuring higher economic growth and demonstrating technoscientific and cultural achievements that could be internationally recognized. This victory-over-communism diplomacy became official foreign policy in 1966. This made it possible for South Koreans to participate in international events, even those held in communist countries, in order to show the intellectual, economic and cultural superiority of free-world Koreans over communists.³¹

I argue that when it comes to their engagement with international scientific organizations and projects, South Korean scientists were already firmly embedded in this conception of foreign relations before its official articulation in the mid- and late 1960s. They furthermore persuaded the junta government to expand their diplomatic view to encompass scientific cooperation. By defining the failure to join the IGY as a diplomatic defeat to the North, the scientists asked the new junta government to reframe international conference participation as 'public diplomacy' and support their international activities.³² The junta government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs followed the scientists' argument and framed losing membership of international scientific organizations as a serious diplomatic crisis. This can be seen when the International Astronomical Union endorsed the membership of the North Korean astronomical society in August 1961. As a result, the ministry immediately asked the Korean scientific societies to join other member unions faster than North Korea.³³

The KCCN's international activity took place in the context of these membership politics. In 1963, Coolidge informed South Korean biologists that the Association for Nature Conservation of Korea (ANCK), a North Korean organization, had already applied for national membership of the IUCN, but he promised the KCCN faster approval than their northern competitor. In addition, the diplomatic merit of IUCN membership had increased as a result of its strengthened ties with the UN via its park list project.³⁴ For this reason, with the support of the Park government, KCCN biologists moved quickly

³⁰ For the history of anti-communism and its transition during the Park period see Seong-Bo Kim, 'Cracks and conversion of anti-communism in Korea after the Korean War' (Chōnhu han'guk pan'gongjuūūūū kyunyōlgwa chōnhwan), *Journal of History and Practical Thought Studies (Yōksashirhak'oe)* (2017) 62, pp. 191–219.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'A problem of attending international conferences organised by communist countries' (Kongsan'gwōn kaech'oe kukchehoēūū ch'amgamunje), 22 April 1966, National Archives of Korea (subsequently NK), CA0007233. In 1972, the Park government officially promoted academic exchange with the communist countries of Eastern Europe beyond participating in international conferences or seminars in which scholars from communist countries would take part. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The promotion of academic exchange with the communist bloc' (Kongsan'gwōn'gwaūū haksul kyoryu ch'ujin), 1972, NK, CA0361926.

³² Kwon, op. cit. (11).

³³ 'ICSU member unions membership' (ICSU sanhadanch'e kaip ch'ujin), in Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ed.), *The Republic of Korea Foreign Affairs Archives Guide*, vol. 2: 1960–1963 (*Taehanmin'guk oegyosaryohaejeip 2. 1960–1963nyōn*), Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 251. Competition surrounding ICSU union membership similarly occurred between Taiwan (Republic of China) and mainland China (People's Republic of China), especially after the United Nations took the decision to expel Taiwan while accepting mainland China in 1971. For example, see Jo Ann Joeslyn and Alik Isamil-Zadeh, 'IUGG evolves (1940–2000)', *History of Geo- and Space Sciences* (2019) 10, p. 58.

³⁴ Holdgate, op. cit. (25).

and their application was officially approved in 1966. As Coolidge had promised, in 1969 the South Korean organization was finally sanctioned as a member.³⁵

KCCN biologists continued to have concerns about their northern counterparts, especially after they came to know of their publication of a high-quality booklet in English that introduced the ANCK as ‘a member of [the] IUCN’.³⁶ The first volume of the ANCK’s English booklet *Korean Nature*, published in 1965, detailed North Korea’s environmental management regime, conservation organizations and natural resources and reserves. It highlighted that although ‘there are no national parks declared’, there were ‘some natural parks and natural reserves which have a long history and strict protection status’ and ‘are by no means inferior to national parks’.³⁷ It proudly stated that the ‘establishment of the socialist system enabled the conservation of nature in our country’, and the ANCK’s activities were acknowledged by the IUCN.³⁸ As a diplomatic response, the KCCN published a periodical journal from 1968 onwards, partially financed by Coolidge’s American Committee for International Wildlife Protection, and sent it to the IUCN headquarters.³⁹ The final outcome was a voluminous English–Korean book titled *Nature in Korea* (1970), written by KCCN scientists and supported by the CPP. The title was an intentional slight on the northern rival ANCK’s *Korean Nature*. Except for a few remarks on the DMZ, the book made no mention of another Korea. While introducing South Korea’s national parks and natural monuments, *Nature in Korea* described the nature of the whole of the Korean peninsula as its territory and highlighted the KCCN as the only legitimate ‘Korean’ organization sanctioned by the IUCN.⁴⁰

Although KCCN biologists and later the South Korean government found diplomatic merit in IUCN diplomacy, not all of their suggestions were considered. As I will show below, the KCCN was not simply a sub-organization of the IUCN, and the government was initially resistant to the IUCN version of national-park ideas. The KCCN was different from other similar national organizations in former colonial territories where the IUCN European executives already had well-established colonial networks with which they were able to influence the establishment and development of a national-park system – for instance, Belgian conservationists’ activities in post-colonial Congo.⁴¹ With some freedom, using their previous nature protection experience and by utilizing existing institutional conditions, South Korean biologists strove to adjust the IUCN initiative to fit in with their developmentalist state’s pre-existing rural development plan.

Integrating national conservation into the ‘new’ national-park planning

As a response to the IUCN’s 1962 invitation to the first World National Park Conference (WNPC), the South Korean government decided to dispatch architect Kim Chung-up,

³⁵ IUCN, *Tenth General Assembly, New Delhi, 1969*, vol. 2: *Proceedings and Summary of Business*, Morges: IUCN, 1970, p. 42.

³⁶ George C. Ruhle, *Advisory Report on National Parks and Reserves for the Republic of Korea, 1966*, New York: American Committee for International Wildlife Protection, 1968, p. 21; AKCN, ‘Nature and natural resources of Korea’, *Korean Nature* (1965) 1, pp. 14–15, 15.

³⁷ AKCN, *op. cit.* (36), pp. 14–15.

³⁸ AKCN, *op. cit.* (36), p. 15.

³⁹ Harold J. Coolidge to Yung Sun Kang, 14 June 1969, Harvard University Archives, Harold J. Coolidge Papers (subsequently HP), Box 33, folder ‘ADM: International Relations 1969; International Unions: IUCN; Area Info: So Pac & Asia’.

⁴⁰ KCCN, *Nature in Korea (Han’gugüi chayön)*, Seoul: Bureau of Cultural Properties Protection, Ministry of Culture and Information, 1970.

⁴¹ Raf de Bont, ‘A world laboratory: framing the Albert National Park’, *Environmental History* (2017), 22(3), pp. 404–32.

only on the condition that the IUCN would cover his travel costs.⁴² At first glance, he might seem an odd choice for such an event. However, given the infancy of the global idea of national parks, the event was crucial in the debate about how to define national parks.⁴³ Plans for national parks developed under the previous Rhee regime had focused on the promotion of tourism and earning foreign currency, in particular from the US Forces Korea. The first National Park Law draft, initially discussed in 1957 and deliberated in 1959, articulated the purpose of the law to ‘contribute to the improvement of public health and the development of the tourism industry’.⁴⁴ In this commercial spirit, in 1954, the Rhee government designated the historical mountain fortress Namhansanseong, emergency capital during the period of the Joseon, the first ‘national park’ and planned to establish a further national park at Gyeongju, a historic site well known as the capital of the ancient kingdom of Silla. Kim Chung-up was the very architect designing the Gyeongju National Park, making him a good fit for the WNPC from the South Korean government’s perspective.

Park’s junta government tried to revitalize the National Park Bill in a similar developmentalist spirit.⁴⁵ The Tourism Promotion Law of 1961 defined the merit of national parks as basic infrastructure for tourism. Planning for Gyeongju National Park was taken over as part of the National Land Construction Project (*kukt’o gönsölsaöp*), contributing to job creation and future foreign-exchange earnings via tourism. Mayors and governors with historic sites and scenic mountains in their regions rushed to join the national-park projects to access rural development support from the central government.⁴⁶ The United States Operations Mission to Korea (USOM), the US aid agency under the US embassy in South Korea, and such international tourist organizations as the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) also influenced this trend by advising and supporting the South Korean government to utilize national parks for tourist purposes.⁴⁷

The Mount Chiri national-park survey was a representative case in this effort. When Kim Chung-up returned from the WNPC and reported a need for designating national parks, not only for tourism but also for research purposes, the junta government developed a basic survey project for agricultural development at Mount Chiri (1,915 metres) – the second-tallest mountain in South Korea, located in the southern region – to be

⁴² William J. Ford to Harold J. Coolidge, 4 May 1962, National Archives and Records Administrations via National Library of South Korea, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788–1964, folder ‘310 International Conference (General), 1962’.

⁴³ Kupper, op. cit. (4).

⁴⁴ ‘The national park law (draft) (Kungnipkongwönböp(an)), 1959, NK, BA0084231, p. 323; ‘The national park law (draft) (Kungnipkongwönböp(an)), 1960, NK, BA0084231, p. 152. The definition of national parks was very obscure. According to the final draft, any scenic sites (*p’unggyöngji* or *p’unggwangji*), where it is possible to contribute to the improvement of public health and development of tourism industry, could be designated by the Minister of the Interior (in case of national parks) or mayors (in case of regional parks). This recreational (and national-health-driven) national-park idea originated from the Japanese Empire and contemporary Japan’s national-park planning. Kazuki Okauchi, ‘Dreaming of “human-uninhabited” areas? national park debates in modern Germany and Japan’, *Urbanscope* (2018) 9, pp. 55–63.

⁴⁵ The National Park Law draft discussed in 1959 was planned to be enacted in 1961 but was withdrawn in 1962 by the junta government.

⁴⁶ It would be worth noting that similar regional competition to bring national parks in their places happened in the mid-1930s when the governor general of Korea announced the national-park plan as a way to promote regional tourism. It was not put into action due to the radicalization of the second Sino-Japanese War from the summer of 1937. For colonial national-park planning see Chan-mo Park, ‘Mt. Chiri and “national parks” in colonial Korea’ (Ilchegangjömgı chirisan’gwa kungnipkongwön), in Dong-kyu Moon and Chan-mo Park (eds.), *Mount Chiri and the Gurye-Yeonha Association (Chirisan’gwa kuryeyönhaban)*, Seoul: Taehaksa, 2017, pp. 69–86.

⁴⁷ Jaeyoung Ha, ‘Preservation as a force of development: local, national, and Cold War dynamics in the making of South Korea’s first national park’, Ecological and Environmental History Seminar of the Korean Society of Environment and Ecology, 29 November 2022 (online).

conducted in January 1963. IUCN adviser Hart, who had stayed in Seoul to advise the KCCN, interacted with the Mount Chiri survey project's committee members, including Kim Hon-kyu and Won Pyong-Oh. IUCN diplomacy – inviting Kim Chung-up to the WNPC and informing him about a new concept of national parks on the one hand, and letting Hart influence biologists working on the Mount Chiri project on the other – turned out to be effective, as the National Park Subcommittee was formed and Kim Hon-kyu took its chairmanship.⁴⁸

Despite this backdrop of IUCN diplomacy, the national-park section of the final report was full of developmentalist aspirations: it offered a complete package to develop the Mount Chiri National Park into a recreational and tourist area with cable cars, tourist hotels, recreation villages and even helipads and airports. This version of park planning was still heavily grounded in the old national touristic parks promoted by the Rhee government.⁴⁹ The final proposal divided those involved; the main architect, Kim Hon-Kyu remained a strong supporter and became a partner for the Ministry of Construction, while Won Pyong-oh distanced himself from the proposal and worked more closely with SSNMS-CPC as a core member of the KCCN.⁵⁰

In parallel, the KCCN was developing a different national-park proposal based on their previous nature protection activities. In spring 1962, a few months before the WNCP, the newly established SSNMS-CPC's chairman Park and other Korean botanists carried out the first natural monument survey of Jeju Island. Through the fieldwork there his team discovered the habitat of the flowering cherry (*Prunus yedoensis matsumura*), previously considered a Japanese species, and claimed that its origin was Mount Halla, the highest mountain (1,947 metres) in South Korea. Park thus sought to make Mount Halla a national park. However, his proposal coincided with the junta government's plan to develop Jeju Island as a national park for tourism using a foreign loan. Park's proposal envisioned an institution to preserve primeval forests on the mountain, while the other defined the national park as a place for tourists. Park did not negate the latter totally and instead delicately negotiated it, putting more emphasis on the former by promoting the feeling of nationhood that would be created by sharing the scenic view with young people and using these sites as research samples for future forestry research and afforestation planning.⁵¹ At least when appealing for afforestation efforts and the preservation of the flowering cherry, the previous discourses of natural monuments and forest conservation became entangled in his national-park vision.

In other words, by the time Coolidge was developing his ties with Korean biologists, there were already two types of national-park proposal in existence: the Mount Chiri

⁴⁸ Survey and Research Committee for the Development of Chiri-Mountain Area, *Report on the Survey for the Development of Chiri-Mountain Area (Chirisan jiyökkaebare gwanhan chosabogosö)*, Seoul: Korea National Reconstruction Movement Headquarters, 1963.

⁴⁹ It might be wrong to define the Mount Chiri proposal as only a legacy of the previous Rhee government's national-park planning. As Korean historian Jaeyoung Ha recently discovered, in the 1960s bureaucrats of the Ministry of Construction and Ministry of Transportation developed the Mount Chiri national-park plan under the inspiration of USOM's and PATA's technical assistance to the South Korean tourism industry. Ha, op. cit. (47).

⁵⁰ In 1966, even when Coolidge showed his strong support for the KCCN's proposal, Kim Hon-kyu continuously suggested Mount Chiri as a proposed national park. After the final Park Law was passed in 1967, Kim became the only biologist member of the Ministry of Construction's Committee of National Parks Management. Hon-Kyu Kim, *National Parks in the World (Segyeüi kungnipkongwön)*, Seoul: s.n., 1970. In 1968, when Kim was active as a national-park adviser to the Ministry of Construction, Coolidge explicitly expressed his distaste for his activities and advised the US national-park authorities not to work with him. Harold J. Coolidge to Anthony Wayne Smith, 31 July 1968, HP, Box 27, folder 'ADM: International Relations 1968; International Unions: IUCN; Area Info: Pacific-Asia; General'.

⁵¹ 'A roundtable talk for the cultural property protection weeks' (Munhwajaeahogigane puch'inün chwadam-hoe), *Donga Daily*, 10 November 1962, p. 3.

survey subcommittee's developmentalist proposal and the SSNMS-CPC's Mount Halla proposal. Although the latter did depend on the conception of the conservation of national resources, it would not have agreed with building hotels and cable cars reliant on bulldozing primeval forests, and rather advocated for national resources to be catalogued, managed and protected.

The IUCN conservationists disliked the Mount Chiri survey subcommittee's version, although it was in part a product of their ecological diplomacy. William Hart did not consider the proposal a compromise between the government's regional development plan and the newly inspired conservationist ideal. Based on Hart's evaluation, Coolidge also regarded the Mount Chiri proposal as a developmentalist plan disguised in greening terms.⁵² Coolidge's distaste for the Mount Chiri proposal's developmentalist exuberance was one reason he supported the KCCN's candidate national-park survey in 1963–4, despite his early scepticism of the CPP as a governmental partner.⁵³

From 1964 to 1967, the KCCN expanded the SSNMS-CPC's Mount Halla proposal, and the IUCN fully supported it. In February 1964, after Hart's consultancy, the KCCN surveyed Mount Halla, Mount Seorak (1,708 m), and Huksan Island (and Hong-do).⁵⁴ The KCCN/SSNMS-CPC announced the future establishment of national parks in these areas and exerted its legal power to designate them natural monument reserves.⁵⁵ In 1965, at his public lecture at Seoul National University, Coolidge stated the urgent need in South Korea for designating parks in the KCCN-proposed areas, to reinforce their membership in the UN-led international community.⁵⁶ His speech was extensively covered by domestic news outlets.⁵⁷ A year later, Coolidge dispatched another IUCN consultant, George C. Ruhle, to survey and consult South Korea's national-park planning, particularly targeting the Ministry of Construction, which was the main proponent of the tourist park idea and of the Mount Chiri proposal.⁵⁸ Ruhle's advisory report, submitted to the IUCN and the Korean government, explicitly recommended the KCCN proposal. Ruhle pointed out that if the South Korean government was willing to establish 'genuine' national parks in its territories, it had to regard 'the development of sites for international tourism' as a 'secondary consideration'.⁵⁹ National parks should be a place where human activities were

⁵² William Hart to Harold J. Coolidge, 20 April 1964, HP, Box 11, folder 'ADM: International Relations; International Unions: IUCN; ICNP; Area Info: So Pac & Asia; General'.

⁵³ The IUCN originally favoured the Bureau of Forestry since the CPP seemed to be mainly related to preservation of 'cultural property' rather than 'nature conservation'. Yet the Bureau of Forestry narrowed its focus to forestry management after the government drove a long-term nationwide afforestation initiative.

⁵⁴ 'For the first time in Korea: designating Mount Seorak and Mount Halla as national parks' (Urinaraesŏ ch'ŏumŭro – sŏraksan'gwa hallasanŭl kungnipkongwŏnŭro), *Kyunghyang shinmun*, 16 May 1964, p. 5. The KCCN's original proposal also included other sites, such as Ulleung Island, the Nakdong river delta and Chin Island – mostly redesignated natural monuments two years earlier in tandem with the legislation of Cultural Property Protection Law. The first two regions were later designated natural reserves as well. Bok-Sung Cho to William Hart, 28 December 1963, HP, Box 11, folder 'ADM: International Relations; South Pacific Area'.

⁵⁵ 'Will establish national parks: Mount Seorak, Mount Halla and Huksan Island' (Kungnipkongwŏn kkumigiro – Sŏraksan, Hallasan, Hŭksando), *Chosun Daily*, 16 February 1964, p. 7; Park Man-Kyu, 'Special plants among natural monuments' (Ch'ŏnyŏn'ginyŏmmurŭi t'ŭksushingmul), *Korean Journal of Cultural Heritage Studies* (1965) 1, pp. 61–68, 67.

⁵⁶ The background of his lecture was the conferment of an honorary doctorate from Seoul National University. Harold J. Coolidge, 'The role of international nature conservation in the protection of human environment' (In'ganŭi chayŏnhwan'gyŏngŭl suhohame issŏsŏ kukchejayŏnbojonŭi yŏk'al), an inaugural speech delivered at Seoul National University, Seoul, 4 November 1965.

⁵⁷ 'Facing a crisis of extinction: natural resources should be protected' (Samyŏrŭi wigiesŏ: pohodoeŷa hal chayŏnjawŏn), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, 6 November 1965, p. 5.

⁵⁸ 'Proposed 1966 Eastern Asian Mission of Ruhle', 16 August 1966, HP, Box 20, folder 'ADM: International Relations 1966; International Unions: IUCN; ICNP'.

⁵⁹ Ruhle, op. cit. (36), pp. 40–4.

restrained, so wilderness could remain undisturbed.⁶⁰ The summit of Mount Halla fitted this definition since there were ‘no buildings, monuments, campsites, picnic grounds, similar facilities’. In contrast, Mount Chiri had already undergone development for tourist purposes and was in general ‘not sufficiently natural in characteristics to warrant commitment to national care’, a situation that the Ministry of Construction’s developmentalist plan would only make worse.⁶¹ While dichotomizing the two proposals, the IUCN consultant did not see, or at least made efforts to remain unaware of, the idea of national-resource conservation behind the KCCN proposal.

The KCCN’s proposal did not come to fruition despite the IUCN’s backing. In March 1967, the National Assembly finally passed the Park Law, and the Ministry of Construction, which had regional and touristic development visions, became the principal governmental agency for national-park planning, establishment and management. As a result, in December of the same year, Mount Chiri, the symbol of the tourist park proposal, was designated the first official national park.

This defeat did not mean that the IUCN and KCCN conservationists’ efforts had totally failed. At least the idea of nature conservation and an area-based approach to conservation were carved into South Korea’s national-park system because of the KCCN’s intervention.⁶² The 1968 report of the ‘Mount Chiri national park plan’ included the Article on a Nature Conservation Area (*chayŏnbohochigu*), according to which a specific site is a habitat for indigenous flora and fauna or a natural area required to remain undisturbed, for tourism, natural-monument management or scientific research purposes.⁶³ In addition, despite the presence of the tourism aspect in the legislation, in 1970 the KCCN’s proposed areas – Mount Seorak and Mount Halla – were also designated national parks in accordance with the Park Law. The South Korean government acknowledged that these establishments were based on Ruhle’s recommendation.⁶⁴ Last but not least, the interaction between the IUCN and KCCN also inspired a yet-unfulfilled idea for a natural park that would eventually become a post-Cold War diplomatic tactic – establishing a DMZ peace park.

The DMZ peace park proposal and victory-over-communism diplomacy

From the late 1960s, some scholars began to consider the DMZ park idea a potential option to help secure peace in the Korean peninsula.⁶⁵ In 1967, at the International

⁶⁰ Ruhle, op. cit. (36), pp. 5–6.

⁶¹ Ruhle, op. cit. (36), pp. 67–8.

⁶² Yung Sun Kang to Harold J. Coolidge, 10 July 1967, Smithsonian Institution Archives, RU271, Box 16, Folder 4.

⁶³ The article’s limitation was evident. The size of the protected area was much smaller than the IUCN experts of KCCN biologists had suggested, and the budget for ‘conservation’ was mostly allocated for afforestation and the construction of management facilities. For instance, the official Mount Chiri National Park Plan after the Park Law legislation allocated 4,606,000 won for a conservation project out of a total budget of 400,491,000 won (1.15 per cent). In the conservation project budget, 500,000 won were allocated for constructing scenic-site conservation facilities, 3,806,000 won for afforestation and 300,000 won for removing rocks around twenty-kilometre mountain trails. ‘The submission of the Mount Chiri national-park plan’ (Chirisan’gungnipkongwŏn’gyehoekch’ul), 6 February 1968, NK, BA0224873, pp. 149–50.

⁶⁴ Hak So Kim to Harold J. Coolidge, 8 February 1968, HP, Box 33, folder ‘ADM: International Relations 1969; International Unions: IUCN; Area Info: So Pac & Asia’.

⁶⁵ For the reasons for the project’s suspension see Hyun, op. cit. (8), pp. 339–41. In a Korean-language article, Manyong Moon has detailed the history of the DMZ peace park proposal from 1970 to the present. While agreeing with the general narrative he makes, here I highlight more a need to locate this episode within the diplomatic dimension, as I shall show below. Manyong Moon, ‘The meaning and prospect of the ecological survey of the DMZ’ (Pimujangjidae saengt’aejosaüi üüiwa chŏnmang), *Daedong Culture (Daedong munhwa)* (2019) 106, pp. 35–64.

Conference on the Problems of Korean Unification held at Korea University, American political scientist Glenn D. Paige suggested the ‘demilitarization’ of the DMZ and the establishment of a ‘peace unification park’ for the purposes of cooperative research between North and South Korean scientists.⁶⁶ At that time, North–South Korean relations had plunged to their lowest ebb and his idea was written off by Korean political scientists as academic naivety, but in the following decades it became a serious consideration for the South Korean government.

But where did the DMZ peace park idea originally come from? Paige mentioned that it was taken from IUCN vice president Coolidge’s national-park proposal; the political scientist praised Coolidge’s proposal as ‘one of the most creative ideas of 1966’, helping the two Koreas take a step toward unification in the next decade.⁶⁷ The resulting question is how Coolidge developed the proposal. And the answer: it was an unintended outcome of IUCN diplomacy in South Korea.

According to the IUCN’s definition, a national park should be ‘a spacious wilderness area’ that has been ‘preserved unimpaired and undisturbed by human activities’.⁶⁸ It was specifically in terms of human intervention or the lack thereof that the DMZ was an intriguing site for IUCN conservationists. It was a buffer zone four kilometres wide and 250 kilometres long between the two Koreas, established after the armistice of the Korean War in July 1953. Most regions in the zone had been intensively farmed before the war, and during the war it became a fierce battlefield for the two Koreas. Since the armistice, human presence within the zone and the neighbouring Civilian Control Zone (CCZ) – an additional five- to twenty-kilometre southern buffer zone to the DMZ – had decreased drastically. Already in 1964, the first IUCN consultant, Hart, had pointed out the specificity of the DMZ, describing how the accidental no man’s land ‘illuminates the landscape outside the normal patterns of Asian agriculture’.⁶⁹ In the following year’s public lecture in Seoul, Coolidge started with Hart’s observation: the DMZ’s dense grassland was a stark contrast to South Korea’s general landscape, which had been formed by intensive farming over the centuries. Using a visual image, he claimed that the military-confrontation-induced green zone, full of wildlife, was a unique place where scientists could learn the succession process of an ecosystem after its total destruction by human intervention.⁷⁰

It might be worth noting that the DMZ proposal was closely linked to the IUCN’s wider interest in trans-border zones as nature park candidates. For instance, at the IUCN meeting just one year after Coolidge’s 1965 Seoul lecture, Israeli conservationist and IUCN member Amotz Zahavi remarked on a need for designating the Jordan–Israel borders in the Dead Sea area a national park. Soon, ecological research and the national-park planning programme on the Jordan border zone were suggested, and the US National Park

⁶⁶ Gi-Sik Han, ‘A report: the international conference on the problems of Korean unification’ (Han’gukt’ongilmunje kukchehaksurhoeüi pogo), *National Assembly Review* (1970) 105, pp. 73–9.

⁶⁷ Glenn D. Paige, ‘1966: Korea creates the future’, *Asian Survey* (1967) 7(1), pp. 21–30, 27.

⁶⁸ Ruhle, *op. cit.* (36), p. 5.

⁶⁹ William Hart, *A Systems Approach to Park Planning*, Morges: IUCN, 1966, p. 50.

⁷⁰ Hyun, *op. cit.* (8), pp. 323–6. The ‘field’ has been a hotspot for historians of science to decentre laboratory-centred understanding. For instance, Amanda Rees looks at fieldworkers in animal behavioural studies as a lens to renew our understanding of animal agency. In recent years, place-making in the field has gained the attention of historians. The case of the DMZ national park can be examined in the context of this historiography, and I will focus on it in future research. Amanda Rees, ‘Wildlife agencies: practice, intentionality and history in twentieth-century animal field studies’, *BJHS: Themes* (2017) 2, pp. 127–49; Erika Lorraine Millam, ‘Making place in the field’, *Isis* (2022) 113(1), pp. 121–7. For the historiography of field sciences see Robert E. Kohler and Jeremy Vetter, ‘The field’, in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *A Companion History of Science*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016, pp. 282–95.

Service, jointly with Coolidge's IUCN Commission on National Parks, planned to dispatch experts in the national-park service to Jordan for this very purpose.⁷¹

A similar action took place after the KCCN scientists accepted Coolidge's call and conducted a preliminary survey. The North Korean side denied them access to the inside of the DMZ, so in December 1965 South Korean biologists surveyed the CCZ, where they identified four well-preserved areas (Panchuk-gol, Myojang-dong, Injae Punchbowl, and Hyangnobong). In the following year Coolidge liaised between the KCCN biologists and American ecologists at the Smithsonian Institution to initiate an ecological survey there.⁷²

With high expectations for the DMZ ecological survey, Coolidge invited KCCN president Kang Yung-Sun to the IUCN Commission on National Parks meeting in Lucerne, Switzerland, on 22 June 1966. There, Coolidge introduced the DMZ project as a study of 'the most undisturbed and thoroughly protected area' to make it a future 'research reserve'.⁷³ Late that summer, Coolidge brought the KCCN scientists to the 11th Pacific Science Congress in Tokyo and had Kang introduce the DMZ project. Furthermore, he pushed the KCCN scientists to ask the congress committee to give an official statement suggesting that the South Korean government designate the DMZ a national park.⁷⁴ As a result, the Korean news media introduced the DMZ project as a national-park planning project.⁷⁵

Despite the suspension of KCCN-Smithsonian ecological research projects in 1968, as I stated above, the DMZ park idea started to be more widely shared, beyond conservationist communities. It began to garner even more public attention when a radical change in the relationship between the two Koreas occurred at the dawn of detente. In June 1971, after the US government withdrew 20,000 troops from South Korea as part of the Nixon doctrine and the Korean Army took over patrolling the whole of the DMZ area, the UN Command proposed that North Korea clear all military installations and allow civilians to reclaim the buffer zone for farming purposes.⁷⁶ In the following year, when peace reached its peak – thanks to two serial inter-Korean dialogues mediated by the International Committee of the Red Cross – Paige's peace park proposal resurfaced via the Board of National Unification (BNU), the South Korean government's North Korea strategy think tank.

After the North-South Joint Communiqué in 1972, the first joint statement signed by the two Koreas to establish principles of unification (independence, peace and nationwide unity), the BNU requested that political scientist Lee Young-ho develop an implementation plan. Lee revitalized Paige's peace park proposal as an implementation strategy for materializing the communiqué's peace principle. According to Lee, the establishment of an ecological research institute would help promote North-South Korean collaborative

⁷¹ IUCN, 'IUCN commission on national parks: minutes of meeting of June 22, 1966, Lucerne, Switzerland', 22 June 1966, HP, Box 20, folder 'ADM: International Relations 1966; International Unions: IUCN; ICNP; General'.

⁷² For the detail of the KCCN-Smithsonian ecological research on the DMZ see Hyun, op. cit. (8), pp. 322–41.

⁷³ IUCN, op. cit. (71).

⁷⁴ 'Designating the DMZ as a national park' (Pimujangjidaerül kungnipkongwönöro), *Donga Daily*, 29 August 1966, p. 1; 'The Korean DMZ national park statement was adopted' (Han'gukpimujangjidae kungnipkongwönan ch'aet'aek), *Donga Daily*, 1 September 1966, p. 7.

⁷⁵ 'An excellent potential national park' (Möshinnün kungnipkongwön'gam), *Donga Daily*, 17 September 1966, p. 5.

⁷⁶ 'The minutes of the 312th–320th UNC military armistice commission general meeting' (Kunsajöngjönwiwönhoe ponhoeüi hoeüirok, che312–320ch'a), in Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ed.), *The Republic of Korea Foreign Affairs Archives Guide*, vol. 7: 1971 (*Taehanmin'guk oegyosaryohaejeip. 7, 1971nyön*), Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, pp. 395–6; 'Allies propose clearing military from Korean DMZ', *New York Times*, 13 June 1971, p. 13.

research on the DMZ ecosystem.⁷⁷ Even in January 1974, when relations between the two Koreas rapidly deteriorated, Lee maintained that establishing international facilities, including the ecological research institute, would be a peaceful use of the DMZ.⁷⁸

Lee's conviction about the DMZ's ecological value was based on the KCCN's resumed DMZ national-park movement. The KCCN capitalized on the UN Command's 1971 peaceful-use suggestion as an opportunity to renew the South Korean government's, as well as the IUCN's, interest in and support for their conservation activities. This was particularly important as just previously these conservation activities had suffered several complications: the KCCN-Smithsonian ecological research project was ended awkwardly in 1968, the South Korean organization became a sanctioned member of the IUCN in 1969, and KCCN supporter Coolidge's tenure as president of the IUCN ended in 1972. In that context, the IUCN totally lost interest in the KCCN's activities, as did the South Korean government. The issues surrounding IUCN membership politics were finally resolved in 1969, and the Mount Seorak and Mount Halla national parks were established in 1970. So from the South Korean government's perspective, the KCCN had already accomplished its mission, so there was no longer any need for its existence.

As a response, the KCCN sought rational justification for their organization and found it in the rising political interest in finding a peaceful use for the DMZ. The KCCN scientists announced that an extensive scientific survey of the DMZ should be carried out before any agricultural development plans were implemented to designate ecologically valuable sites as preserved areas.⁷⁹ Just a few months before the communiqué, the BNU agreed, and requested that KCCN president Kang Yung-Sun write about the peaceful-use proposal of the DMZ in terms of its natural resources. In his final report, based on the KCCN-Smithsonian DMZ project (1966–8), Kang concluded that the eastern part should be 'designated as a nature reserve area or a national park'.⁸⁰ Kang also suggested that the two Koreas' cooperative research on natural resources at the zone be the first step towards its peaceful use.⁸¹

A month after Kang published the first BNU report, the KCCN requested CPP support for its survey of the DMZ's natural environments.⁸² In September 1972, the CPP quickly reallocated its annual budget to finance the DMZ general natural survey. From 26 September to 14 October, the KCCN carried out fieldwork at the CCZ areas they had studied with the Smithsonian scientists in the late 1960s. Based on the results, from April to July 1973, the SSNMS-CPC designated Hyangno Peak, Mount Daeam, Mount Daeu, and the Cheorwon Migratory Bird Habitat nature preserve areas within the CCZ. In December 1973, Kang published a report on the planning of the DMZ national park, once again, at the BNU's request. He proposed establishing a wide range of natural parks covering Mount Seorak and Hyangno Peak in South Korea and Mount Kumgang in North Korea. The national parks would include all the nature reserves that the KCCN and SSNMS-CPC had designated since 1966.⁸³

⁷⁷ Young-ho Lee, *Ideological Definition Issues and Implementation Plans of Three Unification Principles (Autonomy, Peace, and Solidarity of the Korean Nation) (Chaju, p'yŏnghwa, minjoktanhap samgaet'ongirwŏnch'igŭi inyŏmjŏk chŏngwi munjewa kuch'ehwa pangan)*, Seoul: The Board of National Unification, 1972, pp. 29–30.

⁷⁸ Young-ho Lee, 'A proposal for peace', *Korea Journal* (1974) 14(1), pp. 4–7, 6.

⁷⁹ 'Academic research should be the top priority' (Haksuryŏn'gu sŏnhaengdwaeya: kunsabimujangjidae p'yŏnghwajŏkkaebel munje), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, 27 July 1971, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Yung-sun Kang, *A Study of Natural Resources in the DMZ (Pimujang chidaei ch'ŏnyŏn chawŏne kwanhan yŏn'gu)*, Seoul: Board of National Unification, 1972.

⁸¹ Kang, op. cit. (80), pp. 61–2.

⁸² Kang, op. cit. (80), pp. 61–2.

⁸³ Yung-sun Kang, *The Problems and Resolutions of North Korea–South Korea Cooperation in the Co-development of the DMZ (Pimujangjidae kongdonggaebarŭl t'onghan nambuk'an sanghohyŏpchosangŭi munjejŏm mit taech'aek)*, Seoul: Board of National Unification, 1973, p. 4.

Kang's proposal also detailed possible options for North–South cooperative research on an ecological survey of the potential park areas. For Kang, the best choice was to establish parallel survey teams such that North and South Korean scientists would conduct field-work separately in their respective territories.⁸⁴

But why did the KCCN president suggest that KCCN scientists repeat the same surveys without direct collaboration with North Korean scientists, despite claiming that it would be North–South cooperative research? I interpret Kang's suggestion as evidence that the KCCN hoped to draw the South Korean government's attention by reminding it of its very own victory-over-communism diplomacy. During the short detente phase, the South Korean government's general distrust of and competition with North Korea was widely maintained. Following the government's position, Kang expressed his concern that North Korean scientists would not cooperate and might try to deceive them just as they had done during the inter-Korea Red Cross dialogues.⁸⁵ According to him, their North Korean counterparts were untrustworthy competitors. If so, similar to the IUCN membership competition of the previous decade, establishing the DMZ peace park faster than their northern counterparts would once again have become a priority. According to this logic, the KCCN biologists would have to survey the DMZ (albeit just its southern part) and designate nature reserves in that area more quickly than their competitors; they were, in fact, successful. In this way, the DMZ park idea for peaceful uses once again encountered victory-over-communism diplomacy.

Conclusion

In November 1974, South Korean forces discovered incursion tunnels crossing the DMZ, dug by North Korean troops. Two years later, two US Army officers were killed by North Korean soldiers in the Joint Security Area in the DMZ.⁸⁶ Following these incidents the DMZ proposal was put on hold, only to reappear in the early 1990s, after the seemingly imminent unification of the two Koreas, in light of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁸⁷

This paper has shown that transnational ecological diplomacy ultimately informed the South Korean national-park system and the conception of establishing a trans-border national park – the DMZ peace park. At the same time, the KCCN biologists' victory-over-communism diplomacy both created room for and limited the range of the IUCN's ecological diplomacy throughout the 1960s. The Park government's new foreign policy toward communist countries and Korean scientists' conception of membership of international scientific organizations as an arena for the legitimacy struggle were pre-conditions that conferred value on membership of the IUCN and the national-park initiative. KCCN biologists joined the IUCN, prepared periodic journals for nature conservation and planned the DMZ as a national park as they pursued international endorsement while envisioning competition with the northern enemy. In the 1960s, South Korean biologists projected the framework of victory-over-communism diplomacy onto their nature conservation activities and interactions with the IUCN, and this allowed them to carve their conservationist idea into the government's developmentalist national-park planning.

In the short period of detente between the two Koreas in the early 1970s, the KCCN biologists pulled it out again – now as a strategy to bring the South Korean government's

⁸⁴ Kang, *op. cit.* (83), pp. 8–12.

⁸⁵ Kang, *op. cit.* (83), pp. 15–16.

⁸⁶ Kang, *op. cit.* (83), p. 5.

⁸⁷ For the revival of the DMZ peace park proposal as a 'post-Cold War' diplomatic tactic see Lisa M. Brady, 'From war zone to biosphere reserve: the Korean DMZ as a scientific landscape', *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* (2021) 75(2), pp. 189–205.

attention to their conservation activities. While revitalizing the IUCN's DMZ national-park proposal and urging a need for conducting collaborative ecological research between scientists of the two Koreas on the DMZ for peaceful use, they sought to remind the South Korean government of possible future competition with their northern counterpart surrounding the establishment of the park. In this way, the South Korean biologists exploited victory-over-communism diplomacy for their diplomatic games in rapidly changing Cold War political contexts. By embracing this episode of victory-over-communism diplomacy, which casts light on the role of the South Korean biologists and their agency, I believe that the IUCN ecological diplomacy and its vestiges can be understood from a more balanced perspective.

This essay's case study also demonstrates the importance of switching to an Asian focus and the power that this has to challenge historical studies of science diplomacy. The South Korean case decentralizes the current periodization of the relationship between Cold War environmental diplomacy and developmentalism. IUCN ecological diplomacy in the 1960s – often considered to consist of non-developmental activities, dependent on colonial ties – held hands with the South Korean developmentalist state and, at least on the surface, turned a blind eye to the modest developmentalism of their local supporter, the KCCN, in their national-park proposal. IUCN ecological diplomacy in South Korea also met Cold War politics, the face of which was very different to what they had encountered in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America – that is, Asian anti-communism and developmentalism.

Acknowledgements. An earlier version of this article was presented at two online workshops, Science Diplomacy: Global Online Workshop on 23 July 2020 and De-centring Science Diplomacy: Cases from Asia on 22 January 2021, organized by IUHPST/DHST Commission on Science, Technology, and Diplomacy. I thank Aya Homei, Zuoyue Wang, Gordon Barrett, John DiMoia, Michitake Aso, Kenji Ito, Seohyun Park, Reiko Kanazawa, Yi-Tang Lin, Simone Turchetti, Jaeyoung Ha and Chuyoung Won for their insightful suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. Finally, I am very grateful for the detailed and critical comments of the two anonymous referees.

Cite this article: Hyun J (2023). Negotiating conservation and competition: national parks and 'victory-over-communism' diplomacy in South Korea. *The British Journal for the History of Science* 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087423000316>