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ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Developmental Dictatorship in East Asia as Model for Africa? The Era Park Chung-hee in South Korea (1963–1979) in Comparison to the Era Paul Kagame in Rwanda (2000–Today)

Ralph Wrobel 

Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Applied Sciences Zwickau, Zwickau, Germany

Correspondence: Ralph Wrobel (ralph.wrobel@fh-zwickau.de)**Received:** 3 October 2024 | **Accepted:** 3 December 2024**Keywords:** developmental dictatorship | developmental state | Park Chung-hee | Paul Kagame | Rwanda | South Korea

ABSTRACT

Rwanda is among the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, often discussed in the context of a 'development state'. This paper examines whether Rwanda can be classified as a 'developmental dictatorship', a term closely associated with South Korea. It compares Rwanda's development under Paul Kagame (2000–2024) with South Korea's under Park Chung-hee (1963–1979). Although both countries share similarities in their developmental preconditions and the motivations of their leaders, their policies differ significantly. Park Chung-hee focused on industrialization through Five-Year Plans, whereas Kagame emphasizes creating favourable business conditions. Consequently, South Korea has achieved significant wealth, whereas Rwanda remains a Less Developed Country, though both exemplify successful 'developmental dictatorships'.

JEL Classification: N45, O14, O53, O55

1 | Introduction

Nowadays, South Korea is a developed state and one of the leading exporters worldwide, whereas Rwanda is still a less developed nation. But both countries have some similarities. Both started their development after a huge crisis, South Korea after the Korean War (1950–1953) and Rwanda after the genocide (1994). Both countries were and are ruled by dictators, South Korea by Park Chung-hee (1963–1979) and Rwanda by Paul Kagame (2000–today). But although South Korea is already a successful model for a developmental state, or in concrete a developmental dictatorship, Rwanda is at most on the way to achieving such a process. If Rwanda can be called a 'developmental dictatorship' or not is of highest interest because the academic discourse has already examined Rwanda's development within the context of

a 'development state' (e.g., Goodfellow 2017; Hasselskog 2018). But a final evaluation is still open.

Therefore, in this paper, it will be asked if Rwanda under the rule of Paul Kagame can be described as developmental dictatorship and if the results of both dictators are comparable. To find this out, the case South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s will be compared with the case Rwanda in the new millennium. In concrete, after a discussion of the terms development, developmental state and developmental dictatorship, the preconditions in both countries as well as the persons of dictators and their policies will be examined. This will help to find out if Henley's thesis of the absence of a 'serious developmental intent on the part of national political leaders' in most parts of Africa, and the presence in most parts of Asia, can be applied to Rwanda,

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too (Henley 2015, VIII). Additionally, the results of the developmental policies will be compared to measure the success of both cases.

2 | Development, Developmental State and Developmental Dictatorship

Economic development refers to ‘a process of creating and utilizing physical, human, financial, and social assets to generate improved and broadly shared economic well-being and quality of life’ of regions or nations (Seidman 2005:5). Several key theories describe the development of nations. Already, French Philosopher Montesquieu (1748) tried to explain ‘The Difference of Men in Different Climates’ taking climate as main reason for diverging levels of human development. Also, American economist Mancur Olson saw the main reason of (under)development ‘in the scarcity of productive resources per capita’, that is, in geographical matters (Olson 1996, 5). Additionally, local or national *culture* has been analysed as key factor for economic development (e.g., Panther 1997; Rosenbaum 1999). But both approaches are tending to be *overgeneralized* cutting off advanced serious research (Johnson 1982, 8).

In contrast to these theories based on natural conditions, modernization theory suggests that development follows a linear progression, with nations transitioning from traditional to modern industrial societies. Already Rostow (1960) created a model of five stages of economic development, focussing on the development of ‘traditional societies’ to the phase of ‘mass consumption’ in modern societies. Nowadays, on the one hand, institutionalist theories on inclusive versus extractive institutions by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) or postcolonialist studies on underdevelopment, basing on Said’s book ‘Orientalism’ (1978), are mainly discussed. Although institutional theory highlights the role of strong institutions—such as the rule of law, property rights and stable governance—in fostering development, dependency theory argues that underdevelopment in some nations is a result of their exploitation by more developed countries, creating a dependent relationship that hinders growth. Each of these theories provides a different perspective on the complex factors that influence the economic development of nations.

In economic policy practice today, institutional approaches are dominant. But the neoliberal ‘Washington Consensus’ and the neo-mercantilist approach of the ‘Developmental State’ are particularly opposed to each other (B.-C. Lee 2006, 13). The Washington Consensus refers to a set of economic policy recommendations that became prominent in the late 20th century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. It was initially coined by economist John Williamson (1990) to describe a standard set of economic reform policies that were widely advocated by Washington DC-based institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank. These recommendations were primarily aimed at Latin American countries to help them stabilize their economies and promote economic growth, especially in the wake of financial crises. The key elements of the Washington Consensus typically include institutions like liberalizing interest rates, exchange

rates, trade and FDI, privatization, deregulation and ensuring property rights.

Although the Washington Consensus was initially seen as a pragmatic approach to economic reform, it has been criticized for its one-size-fits-all nature and for focusing too much on market liberalization at the expense of social welfare. In contrast to this neoliberal model of development, Johnson (1982) in his study of Japan’s post-World War II economic miracle coined the term *Developmental State*, describing a state that follows a particular model of economic planning and management. Or, as Woo (2023, 104) pointed out, the developmental state ‘refers to a state formation, often nationalistic, that is capable of intervening in the economy with long-term goals and plans, without stifling economic incentives prevalent in market economies. It does so through a social coalition that includes the bureaucracy, dominant political parties, and big business’. Industrial policy is the core of the developmental state’s policy to build up a competitive and dynamic manufacturing sector, in short industrialization. Two institutional attributes are necessary to attain this goal: (1) a competent bureaucracy, mainly a central agency dedicated to devising and implementing a planned process of economic development, and (2) and embedded autonomy of the bureaucracy that is able to maintain effective relationship, especially with regard to the direction and the funding of industrial investment, with the domestic business sector (Kasahara 2013, 3–6). Therefore, the model of the developmental state can be seen as third way between neo-liberalism (*laissez-faire*) on the one hand and the plan ideology of the Socialist-Leninist command economy on the other hand (Moraes 2023, 817). Main examples for successful developmental states are Japan—the conception can be traced back even to the Meiji Restoration of 1868—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, nowadays also the People’s Republic of China (e.g., Johnson 1982; Cheang 2022; Karagiannis 2021). But, also, the ‘Belgian Congo’ (1908–1959) has been described as a developmental state by Kisangani (2022, II) who emphasized that this colonial entity in Africa achieved successes in developing the economy ‘by investing its higher rates of fiscal revenue in political stability, physical infrastructure, education, and healthcare’.

Discussions on the developmental state have especially gained momentum after the 2008 global economic crisis again when the legitimacy of neoliberalism focussing on self-regulating markets has been questioned (Karaoguz 2022, 55). In the last years, the approach has been applied to some African states like Botswana (Botlhale 2017), South Africa (Masondo 2018; Pooe and Mohale 2022), Zambia and Zimbabwe (Saunders and Caramento 2018), Ethiopia (Wayessa 2021; Maru 2021), Namibia (Hope 2021) and Rwanda (Maru 2021), too. But it is consensus that it is not possible to ‘copy and paste’ the Asian paths to African countries. Instead, the different culture, history national identity and trajectories have to be taken into consideration (Karaoguz 2022, 56). Therefore, it must be followed Johnson (1982, 323), who already noted that ‘other nations seeking to emulate Japan’s achievements might be better advised to fabricate the institutions of their own developmental states from local materials’. Although there is no absolute obstacle blocking developing countries from establishing their own variant of a developmental state by formulating good policies through trial and error initiatives in Africa, it has not yet transformed into real success stories (Karaoguz 2022, 60–64).

The political framework for a developmental state is an additional question. A developmental state can exist within a democratic or semidemocratic framework, where the state's role in economic planning and development does not necessarily involve the suppression of political freedoms or authoritarian governance. But, also, the authoritarian variant of the developmental state is possible, the *Developmental Dictatorship*. Here, a dictatorship is simply understood as political regime in which rulers acquire power by means other than competitive elections (Gandhi 2008, 7). As Gregor argued for instance, already Italian Fascism could be called a developmental dictatorship (Gregor 1979, 302).

Although both, developmental dictatorship and developmental state models, emphasize the role of the state in driving economic development, they differ significantly in their approaches to governance, political freedoms and the role of the state in society. A developmental dictatorship refers to 'a system used to justify a dictatorship that restricts the people's participation in politics based on the reason that political security is a prerequisite to economic growth' (B.-C. Lee 2006, 5). This concept suggests that certain dictatorships prioritize economic growth and development, often at the expense of democratic processes and individual freedoms. The notion of a developmental dictatorship is often associated with regimes that emphasize state-led economic policies, centralized control over key industries and a strong focus on national development goals (Gregor 1979, 154). This is a clear contrast to another type of dictatorship, kleptocracy, 'where the state is controlled and run for the benefit of an individual, or a small group, who use their power to transfer a large fraction of society's resources to themselves' (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Verdier 2004, 162).

The rationale behind a developmental dictatorship is rooted in the belief that economic growth and development are paramount to the progress and stability of a nation. In this framework, authoritarian leaders argue that the constraints of democratic governance—such as the need for consensus, checks and balances, and the protection of individual rights—can hinder the swift and decisive action necessary to achieve rapid development. As a result, these regimes often justify their authoritarian practices, including censorship, political repression and limited civil liberties, as necessary sacrifices for the greater good of economic progress (B.-C. Lee 2006, 5). Historical examples of developmental dictatorships can be found mainly under the developmental states in East Asia. For instance, South Korea under Park Chung-hee, Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek and his successors and Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew are often cited as examples of authoritarian regimes that prioritized economic development while maintaining strict control over political life (e.g., Kanchoochat 2019, 47–68). These leaders implemented policies aimed at industrialization, export-led growth and the development of infrastructure, often achieving significant economic success. However, their methods included political repression, limited political competition and the curtailment of civil liberties.

In summary, although both developmental dictatorships and developmental states emphasize the role of the state in driving economic growth, they differ fundamentally in their approaches to governance and the protection of political freedoms. A developmental

state can coexist with democratic principles, ensuring long-term, sustainable development, whereas a developmental dictatorship often prioritizes short-term economic gains at the expense of political freedoms, with potentially negative consequences for the country's long-term political and economic stability.

3 | Preconditions for Development in South Korea and in Rwanda

3.1 | Similarities and Differences of South Korea and Rwanda

The political-economic situations of South Korea after the Korean War (1950–1953) and Rwanda after the genocide in 1994 present two distinct but instructive case studies of postconflict recovery and development. Additionally, both countries share colonial experiences: Korea was under Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945 and Rwanda under German respective Belgian rule from the end of the 19th century to 1961 (Cho 2019, 2; Byanafashe and Rutayisir 2016, 165–410). In the case of South Korea, even the argument of the 'colonial origin of the developmental state' has been developed (e.g., Eckert and Yi 1990, 403–404). Supporters see the developmental state model in South Korea under Park Chung-hee as a revival of the development in the colonial period, mainly the wartime industrialization process. For instance, already between 1912 and 1939, the traditional primary industry, predominantly agriculture, declined from approximately 70% to around 40% of GDP. Concurrently, the combined share of mining and manufacturing industries in the total economy increased significantly, rising from about 5% to roughly 20% (Kimura 2018, 23). In contrast, in Rwanda, such a development process during colonial times cannot be observed. Employment in agriculture was still about 85% of total employment in 2000 (Trines 2019).

In South Korea, also, the introduction of a European-style Japanese educational system—although strictly in Japanese language—is mentioned as part of the developing infrastructure in colonial times (Cho 2019, 8). Also, in Rwanda, schools were initially established by colonial rulers at the beginning of the 20th century, primarily as missionary schools. However, higher education at the secondary school level was preferentially given to a small number of Tutsi children, only, whereas Hutu children faced discrimination. This educational disparity contributed to the tensions that led to the genocide in 1994. In comparison to South Korea, school education in Rwanda remained at a low level during the 20th century. For instance, the elementary gross enrolment ratio increased from 46% in 1973 to 65% in 1990, only (Trines 2019).

Another historical background makes South Korea and Rwanda more comparable, the existing statehood. When South Korea became an independent nation from Japan after World War II, state structures were existing because Korea was a kingdom for centuries before the colonial period. Quite similar, Rwanda has an advantage in comparison to other African countries, which were also European colonies. Unlike many of its neighbouring countries, Rwanda has a unique historical background, originating from the Nyiginya kingdom. The legitimacy of royal authority was grounded in spiritual rituals and was also limited by them, whereas military power was centralized to facilitate the expansion and governance of the state. During the colonial rule from

1885 to 1961, German respective Belgian authorities simply controlled the ancient state structures in Rwanda (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 12). That gave rulers like Paul Kagame other possibilities than comparable leaders in Africa have, today. The state of Rwanda was consolidated, already, when he took power.

Also, economic preconditions are quite similar. Following the Korean War, South Korea was left devastated, both economically and politically. The country faced immense challenges, including a destroyed infrastructure, widespread poverty and the ongoing threat from North Korea. The early postwar period saw the establishment of a fragile democracy under President Syngman Rhee, which was marred by political instability, authoritarianism and corruption. Rhee's government struggled to maintain control, leading to widespread discontent, eventually culminating in his resignation in 1960 (Cho 2019, 12–14). In this year, the unemployment rate in South Korea had reached 34.2%, but even those in paid employment lived in impoverished conditions (Lee 2021, 187–188). The military coup of 1961, led by General Park Chung-hee, marked a turning point in South Korea's political landscape. In that year, in South Korea, the GDP per capita was USD 94, measured in current USD 2024, only (Macrotrends 2024). At that time, South Korea was one of the poorest countries worldwide.

Quite similar, Rwanda's political situation after the 1994 genocide was one of profound crisis and fragmentation. The genocide, which saw the mass slaughter of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, left the country in ruins (Blouin and Mukand 2023, 180). With the assistance of the Museveni regime in Uganda, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda winning a military victory in 1994 after the genocide (Takeuchi 2019, 124). The postgenocide government, led by the RPF, faced the enormous task of rebuilding a nation deeply divided along ethnic lines. Economically, Rwanda was in a dire state after the genocide. The conflict had destroyed much of the country's infrastructure, displaced millions of people and decimated the workforce. GDP per capita in 2000 was USD 255, measured in current USD 2024, a bit less than threefold of that in South Korea in the reference year 1961.

At all, South Korea in the 1970s and Rwanda in the 2010s show some similarities across political, economic, social and spatial dimensions. Both countries experienced strong leadership and had histories of colonization or civil war. Economically, both were characterized by a dependency on foreign aid. Socially, South Korea had a strong institutionalized collaboration network and a supportive community climate with mild social conflicts, whereas Rwanda's social setting was weaker, with stronger conflicts. In terms of spatial arrangement, South Korea experienced significant urbanization and spatial disparities, like Rwanda in the 2010s (Lee and Lee 2014, 246). But South Korea was much earlier industrialized than Rwanda and had a longer history of the education system.

3.2 | Two CVs in Comparison: Park Chung-hee Versus Paul Kagame

Park Chung-hee and Paul Kagame have significantly shaped their respective countries through authoritarian leadership. Park Chung-hee, who ruled South Korea from 1961 to 1979,

came to power through a military coup (see Figure 1). In contrast, Paul Kagame has been the authoritarian ruling president of Rwanda since 2000, emerging from the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 (see Figure 2). Park Chung-hee, born in 1917 in what was then Japanese-occupied Korea, grew up in a period marked by intense political and social upheaval. His early life was influenced by Japanese colonial rule, and he initially pursued a military career, enrolling in the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. After Korea's liberation in 1945, Park continued his military career in the newly formed South Korean Army. His involvement in the Korean War and subsequent rise within the military laid the groundwork for his coup d'état in 1961, which marked the beginning of his authoritarian rule over South Korea (Lee 2012).

In contrast, Paul Kagame was born in 1957 in what was then the Belgian colony Rwanda. His family was quite prosperous and had close ties to the royal family (Soudan 2015, 14–15). His early years were marked by ethnic tensions and political instability, including the impact of the 1959 Rwandan Revolution and the subsequent Hutu-Tutsi conflict (Gourevitch 2000, 59). The Tutsi Kagame and his family fled to Uganda during the 1960s, where he grew up in exile and later joined the Ugandan rebel forces, eventually becoming a key military leader in the Ugandan National Resistance Army. His early exposure to armed struggle and political turbulence in Uganda significantly influenced his approach to leadership when he emerged as a key figure in the Rwandan Patriotic



FIGURE 1 | Park Chung-hee (1950). Source: Wikipedia (public domain).



FIGURE 2 | Paul Kagame (2010). *Source:* Adapted from Wikipedia and licenced under CC BY SA 3.0.

Front and later assumed power in Rwanda following the genocide (Weerdesteijn 2019, 226–227). In conclusion, it can be asserted that before ascending to power, Park Chung-hee and Paul Kagame experienced notably different early years that shaped their paths to leadership, but both are characterized by military experiences in a foreign army.

The similar military experiences but different ways of early lives led to surprisingly similar but not same ideological approaches of both leaders. The military education, mainly the ideological and experiential lessons Park Chung-hee learned from the Japanese in the military schools in Japan and Manchuria, became fundamental for the establishment of the developmental dictatorship in South Korea. He learned also from ultrarightist officers and the subsequent establishment of the Manchurian state (1932–1945) by the Japanese military. At all, he saw the Japanese Meiji-Restoration of 1868 and the establishment of the Manchurian state as ideal models for South Korea (B.-C. Lee 2006, 20). But he combined the Japanese approach of top-down mobilization with US technocratic principles, blending them with Korean nationalism in ways that were both distinctly un-Japanese and un-American, to pave the way for economic growth (Kim and Vogel 2011, 115). Following the military coup in 1961, the junta promptly announced its objective to reconstruct a self-sufficient national economy. This reconstruction strategy emphasized the development of military capabilities to combat communism, with the intention of resuming their traditional roles upon the completion of these objectives (Lee 2021, 188).

Also, Paul Kagame believed in nationalism and the possibility to develop his country. When he served in the Ugandan army, he said himself ‘all my ideas revolved around Rwanda’ (Soudan 2015, 31). He reportedly wanted ‘every Rwandan to be able to live here in peace’. His vision was a society ‘that allows [all Rwandans] to live in freedom and prosperity’. But at the same time, he believed also—like Park Chung-hee—that development over freedom would be best for his country. Additionally, beside a prosperous Rwanda, Kagame has the goal to turn the country into a home for the former Tutsi refugees (Weerdesteijn 2019, 233–237). For him, economic development is also viewed as a means to address ethnic tensions and foster national unity, with the idea that ‘the traumatic divisions of the past are mended through the melting pot of commercial activity and growing employment’ (Kagame 2007, 4).

In South Korea, the Chang Myon government (1960–1961) was paralysed by internal conflicts. Therefore, society awaited a new political elite to rescue it from economic poverty, political instability and social stagnation (Kim and Vogel 2011, 35). Park Chung-hee orchestrated a military coup on 16 May 1961, overthrowing the Second Republic of Korea’s government to fulfil these expectations. He established the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, initiating authoritarian rule. From 1963 on, Park ruled the country officially as elected president, but his rule was characterized by political repression, human rights abuses and suppression of dissent. Park extended his presidency through constitutional amendments and emergency decrees until his assassination in 1979 (Lee 2012, 63).

With regard to the policies of Park Chung-hee, two periods must be distinguished, the era of ‘Modernizing the Fatherland’ (1964–1971) and the so-called Yushin Regime of ‘All-Out National Security’ (1972–1979). During the first period, South Korea became a subordinate partner of the US. Therefore, Park had to accept the advice of the United States while he was also learning from the postwar experiences of Japan. The industrial policy in this period was relatively flexible. Additionally, state guidance of the financial sector and the labour policy on strike and assembly was less rigid. In the second period, *Yushin*—a term borrowed from Japanese Meiji Restoration—means full authority of the ruler over government and nation became basis of the perpetual dictatorship in South Korea. The result was conflicts between the oppressive regime and social resistance movements (B.-C. Lee 2006, 26–30). As time went on, Park Chung-hee’s use of repression became increasingly clumsy, as he lost the vigilance, discipline and system of checks and balances that had effectively supported him during the 1960s. On 17 October 1972, he reversed South Korea’s constitutional advancements by replacing the existing constitution with a new one, claiming it was necessary for ‘revitalizing reform’, the so-called Yushin Regime (Kim and Vogel 2011, 233). The most problems of Park Chung-hee’s developmental dictatorship occurred in this second phase of his rule. Because Park could not establish a hegemonic party system, he started ruling by martial law and emergency decrees. But already in the 1960s occurred a series of ‘red complex’ incidents initiated by the government against supposedly procommunist organizations like the People’s Revolution Party or the Unification Revolution Party. Then, in the 1970s, Park created so-called ‘local reserve military forces’, initiated military drills for university students and established other laws transforming

schools and civil society into anticommunist or semimilitary organizations (B.-C. Lee 2006, 43).

Park Chung-hee was assassinated on 26 October 1979 by the director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency while civil demonstrations were taking place in the country (Podoler 2016, 272). But this incident did not end the time of dictatorship in South Korea because his developmental dictatorship was followed by a new military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan (B.-C. Lee 2006, 47).

In contrast, Paul Kagame started his career as vice president and minister of defence after the genocide. But step by step, he could expand his power. Soon, president and prime minister were just figure heads. During several scandals within the new Rwandan regime, his autocratic tendencies became clear. Then, by parliamentary support, he assumed the presidency in 2000. Also, in 2003, he won the elections with an overwhelming majority. His regime consists mainly of former Tutsi refugees from Uganda. In addition, he seems to be suspicious of both Rwanda's Hutu population as well as the original Tutsi population (Weerdesteijn 2019, 233–234). Recent changes of the Rwandan constitution to allow for another presidential term suggest that Paul Kagame tries to maintain his power also into the future. Additionally, the current Rwandan constitution immunizes Paul Kagame from every criminality even after he leaves office (Himbara 2020, 67). Therefore, Paul Kagame took power in a more peaceful manner than Park Chung-hee, but both ruled their countries in the same way autocratically.

But also, Rwanda's rapid transformation has been achieved at the expense of Kagame's strict governance and repression. That includes legal constraints on association, speech and identity, along with government interventions in the economy to drive extensive development. It also involves the mobilization of the population for developmental initiatives organized by the ruling party (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 11). Although anticommunism does not play any role in nowadays Rwanda, the regime is also brutal against dissidents. Paul Kagame is responsible for several human rights violations. For instance, already in the first years after the genocide, the Hutu elite in Rwanda was imprisoned and killed by the new national army (Weerdesteijn 2019, 224–226). After eliminating the Hutu political opposition, the regime turned on its internal Tutsi critics. The RPF forced several senior members into exile and has been accused for killing dissidents at home as well as abroad (Clark 2021, 185). So far, both regimes—Park Chung-hee's in South Korea and Paul Kagame's in Rwanda—can be characterized as 'dictatorships' showing all the dark side of this political system, too.

4 | The Policies: Developmental Versus Oppressive Approaches

4.1 | Institutional Framework of Developmental Policies

Because it is not possible to 'copy and paste', the Asian paths to African countries identical policies in South Korea and Rwanda cannot be expected. But several similarities can be observed,

whereas differences are obvious, too. Economically, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world at the end of the Korean War, relying heavily on foreign aid, particularly from the United States. However, under Park Chung-hee's leadership, the government implemented a series of Five-Year Plans focused on industrialization and export-oriented growth. The state played a significant role in guiding economic policy, nurturing key industries such as steel, shipbuilding and electronics, which later became the backbone of South Korea's economy. Additionally, the 1960s were the era of export-oriented industrialization, whereas the 1970s can be seen as the era of heavy industries (S.-C. Lee 2006, 81).

The South Korean industrialization regime consisted of state intervention into property and class relationships as well as the mobilization and management of national savings towards selected industrial sectors. Already in the first period, the economic goals and strategies of the government were formulated in '5-Year Development Plans', and the processing was given to an 'Economic Planning Board' (EPB) in 1961 what showed the shift of a free market system to a government-driven capitalism (S.-C. Lee 2006, 83). The EPB functioned as a 'super-ministry' encompassing strategic roles such as development planning, national budget management, and the oversight of aid, foreign capital borrowing and technology management (Romana and Leonardo 2014, 4). At that time, key industries as electricity, coal, oil refining, fertilizers and steel were highlighted. Additionally, light industry-centred export strategies were adopted, focussing on the dual approach of import substitution and export promotion (Cho 2006, 112–113). As a result, exports as a percentage of GDP rose from less than 10% in the 1960s throughout around 30%–40% in the 1980s (Jung 2011, 454). But especially in the early 1960s, zigzags in policy-making and learning by doing were the main strategy of the regime. Some of the consequences of policy-making were not intended or could not be predicted (Gemici 2013, 179).

In contrast, in Rwanda, Paul Kagame's government adopted a strategy of national unity and reconciliation, emphasizing the creation of a strong, centralized state to maintain stability and prevent further ethnic violence. The government banned the use of ethnic identities in politics and focused on a narrative of shared Rwandan identity. Additionally, following the Korean example, Rwanda has used developmental state techniques to improve the reputation of its bureaucracy and to boost its capacity to set and meet development deadlines (Kayizzi-Mugerwa and Lufumpa 2021, 26). But instead of the Korean Five-Year Plans, economic development was pushed mainly by several programmes: (1) 'Rwanda Vision 2020' (2000), (2) 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper' (2002) and (3) 'Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2008–2012' (2007). But in contrast to South Korea, all these programmes are characterized 'by the idea of laissez-faire and neo-liberalism' (Takeuchi 2019, 125). Also, the latest programme 'Vision 2050' (2015) is basing on these ideas, only spongy planning to transform the country 'into a knowledge-based upper middle-income country by 2035, and into a high-income country by 2050' (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 2). Therefore, the main pillar of the Rwandan development strategy was the promotion of the private sector development by improvement of the business environment instead of concrete planning of developing

successful sectors like in South Korea (Takeuchi 2019, 125). At least in 2008, the Government of Rwanda drew also inspiration from Asian development boards and established the ‘Rwanda Development Board’ by consolidating eight existing government agencies. Its aim was to foster a business-friendly mindset and encourage the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises. The primary role of the Board is to simplify and promote investment in the country while boosting the private sector’s contribution to the GDP (Akamanzi, Flores, and Yarrow 2017). Nowadays, Rwanda’s plans ‘to become a hub for information and communication technology’ in the near future are a little bit more concrete (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 3). But obviously, both approaches differ clearly. On the one hand, both institutional approaches are comparable, but on the other hand, planning in South Korea was more strict, creating new industry sectors than in Rwanda where mainly an advantageous playing field for business was created.

4.2 | Differences in the Developing Industrial Structure

In South Korea, the period of the developmental dictatorship also saw the rise of large conglomerates, known as chaebols (e.g., Samsung and Hyundai), which were instrumental in driving the country’s economic expansion. After the military coup in 1961, those chaebol families who actively cooperated with the Park Chung-hee regime’s industrialization policy were rewarded by exclusive patronage measures (Cho 2006, 109). In this way, the chaebols became the major investors being provided with privileged subsidies financed by socially mobilized capital—and the main developmental partners of the regime (B.-C. Lee 2006, 33–35). As a result, they could enter new business fields and secure growth opportunities under government protection (Cho 2006, 117). On the other hand, the economic growth in South Korea was also a result of the dedication of labourers, the workforce military-like controlled by the state (B.-C. Lee 2006, 35). To ensure financial resources for the necessary investments, the oppressed labourers had no alternative but to accept low wages and excessively long working hours. By the combination of imported foreign technology and low-wage labour, the chaebol remained competitive and achieved a rapid growth (Cho 2006, 119–121).

In Rwanda, the resulting structure of the economies is different. The central role of a single enterprise, Crystal Ventures Limited (CVL), may mirror the ‘chaebol system’ known from South Korea somehow. But CVL, an investment holding company, is primarily owned by the Rwandan Patriotic Front and controls several of the country’s leading firms. Similarly, the Horizon Group was initially funded by the Military Micro Finance Cooperative Society, a fully military-owned enterprise. Also, state-owned enterprises like Rwanda Air are active in the modern business sector (Takeuchi 2019, 128). In 2020, CVL was the largest business group in Rwanda with 12,000 employees involved in various industries in Rwanda (Himbara 2020, 58). Especially, CVL invests in areas with potential for socioeconomic benefits and alignment with ‘Vision 2050’. In doing so, instead of private entrepreneurs, the government serves both as an initiator and a risk-taker, aiming to foster private sector opportunities while also creating additional monopoly rents (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021,

10) But that makes the entrepreneurial structure in Rwanda different from that in South Korea. Additionally, it can be emphasized that the rise in the Rwandan business sector is basing on the initiatives of the ruling party, the military and the state. But these enterprises place the ruling party in the centre of the economy. That gives the president the authority to decide who gains economic influence, thereby weakening the financial capabilities of opponents while providing a legal and discreet way to reward key aides (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 19).

Instead of South Korea, where Park Chung-hee created new economic sectors, the Kagame regime in Rwanda is focussing only on the competitiveness of the four already existing exporting sectors: coffee, tea, tourism and mining. Although old industries focussing on natural resources were supported, new industries and new exporting sectors were not established (Takeuchi 2019, 125). For instance, still in 2020, 47.6% of Rwanda’s working-age population was involved in either subsistence or market-oriented agriculture. As a result, Rwanda’s private sector remains small and underdeveloped until today (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 5). Instead, no concrete planning of the industrial structure took place. Only, the banking system is open, dynamic and aligned with international standards. It has expanded in recent years, with notable improvements in stability, structure and efficiency due to central bank regulatory measures. Authorities are proactively working to enhance access to finance and promote the establishment of new financial institutions. Although highly concentrated, the banking sector remains competitive (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 20). At all, whereas South Korea’s growth was largely driven by manufacturing and the development of concrete global industries, Rwanda’s strategy has been more diversified, with a strong emphasis on agriculture and services.

4.3 | Reforms in the Agricultural Sector by ‘Saemaul Undong’

Following the land reforms of the early 1950s, the rural areas in South Korea became a solid support base for the ruling regime. This loyalty stemmed from the farmers’ immersion in traditional culture, their political conformism and their reliance on clan leaders, village elders and local officials for guidance (Kim and Vogel 2011, 345). But also, the agricultural sector in South Korea was reformed by Park Chung-hee’s regime. The ‘Saemaul Undong’ (New Village Movement) of the 1970s aimed to revitalize the rural economy by ranking villages and farm factories based on their project achievements, with government support given only to high performers. Villages were treated like competitive private firms, and low performers received no support. This movement embodied President Park’s strategy of economic discrimination based on merit and justice, encapsulated in the principles of rewarding merit and helping those who help themselves. Initially intended as a social reform to change the nonself-help mindset of rural people, the movement also significantly increased farm sector incomes (Jwa 2023, 21).

Also, in Rwanda, interventionist policies and practices in the agricultural sector can be observed, for example, in the ‘Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme’ for rural development from 2008. The programme intended to increase jobs and exports in rural

areas by interventionist policies like giving microcredits to the rural population, for instance (Habimana and Haughton 2022). But actually, the agricultural sector in Rwanda is characterized by mainly three policies: (1) ‘land-sharing’, a programme to resettle Tutsi-refugees on land Hutu residents have been occupied in between; (2) the ‘Family Law’ of 1999, which stipulated equal rights for males and females to own land, but bringing some disturbances into the conservative Rwandan society; and (3) the ‘Organic Land Law’ of 2005, organizing land registration which was almost completed as of 2013. As a result, agricultural production has significantly increased in Rwanda in the last decades (Takeuchi 2019, 126–127).

Additionally, in the agricultural sector reform, South Korea became a direct model for Rwanda, indeed. Rwanda adopted elements of South Korea’s Saemaul Undong policy through pilot projects launched by Gyeongsangbuk-do province since 2010. These projects focused on three key areas: environmental improvement, income generation and mindset reformation. Rwandan leaders, inspired by the success of Saemaul Undong in Korea, participated in international training to learn community development strategies. In four villages in Kamonyi district, efforts included improving infrastructure (e.g., water supply and sanitation), advancing farming techniques and fostering community cooperation through Saemaul associations. These initiatives aimed to address poverty and drive rural development, mirroring Korea’s transformation in the 1970s (Lee and Lee 2014, 243–246). But the results of the programme to reduce absolute poverty in Rwanda were relatively poor (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 16). Rwanda’s agricultural development is lacking behind—perhaps because of different preconditions in culture, climate and social settings.

4.4 | External Environment: Interventionism Versus Market Liberalism

Without a favourable external environment, a domestic economic policy cannot produce good results. In the case of South Korea, it must be mentioned that the United States provided money and markets to Korea—and under the guidance of the US—Japan provided money, technology, equipment and markets, mainly in the second half of the 1960s (Gemici 2013, 181). In this way, South Korea processed goods and exported them mainly to the United States which induced the economic growth in the country. Also, the GATT, allowing dumping and export subsidies for developing countries, as well as the Bretton Woods currency system with fixed exchange rates and capital controls across the borders supported the development in South Korea at that time (B.-C. Lee 2006, 36–38). Like South Korea in the 1960s, also, nowadays Rwanda is mainly supported by the United Kingdom and the United States. Therefore, it is not surprising that Rwanda is mainly focussing on economic liberalism, a system supported strongest by these both countries worldwide.

But is the Korean approach interventionist whereas the Rwandan is market-oriented? In Rwanda, the neoliberal approach was combined with a protectionist agricultural policy. In concrete, the government has applied some kind of active interventionism to rural and agricultural policies (Takeuchi 2019, 129). Additionally, Rwanda pursued a path of reconciliation and

national unity, coupled with strong state control and a focus on good governance and modernization. In contrast, in the debate on state intervention in South Korea, some argue that despite the apparent government involvement, South Korea’s economic policies were market-conforming. Industrial targeting and foreign trade interventions effectively balanced each other, resulting in South Korea operating similarly to a liberalized economy. As can be observed, with rising per capita income and increasing economic complexity, the government progressively reduced its specific targeted interventions in favour of broader macro-economic controls (Romana and Leonardo 2014, 7). Therefore, the ideological differences between current Rwanda and South Korea in the 1960s should not be overestimated.

5 | The Results of Developmental Policies

5.1 | Structural and Institutional Differences

In South Korea, as the export strategy showed unexpectedly good results, the government carried out its heavy and chemical industry policies in the second development phase while continuing the export-oriented focus (Cho 2006, 113). Main goal was to build a base for technological capabilities (Jung 2011, 460). Through these efforts, South Korea achieved remarkable economic growth, transforming from an agrarian society into one of the world’s leading industrialized nations within a few decades (Gemici 2013, 176). A positive cycle *wage restrains → profit increases → investment increases → future hiring and wage increase* could be created (Cho 2006, 125). This is also called the ‘miracle on the Han river’ (B.-C. Lee 2006, 45). But—mainly under the Yushin Dictatorship—the heavy and chemical industrialization, which was undertaken to create military self-reliance, brought a too close alliance between the dictatorial power and the chaebols. As B.-C. Lee (2006, 40) pointed out, ‘the national economy [of South Korea] was transformed into a chaebol republic.’ In the end, South Korea finished the developmental state period in the 1980s with an opening of the economy as well as deregulatory reforms (Jung 2011, 460).

However, under Kagame’s leadership, Rwanda pursued an ambitious agenda of economic recovery and development, emphasizing good governance, anticorruption measures and economic liberalization. Rwanda has since achieved notable economic progress, often referred to as the ‘Rwandan Miracle’. The government prioritized sectors like agriculture, tourism and technology, with a strong focus on attracting foreign investment. Kigali, the capital, became a symbol of the country’s transformation, known for its cleanliness and safety. Also, the compulsory universal health insurance—heavily subsidized for the poorest citizens—has improved Rwandan’s quality of life (Clark 2021, 192). In 2020, it covered about 74% of the population (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 22). Despite its development progress, Rwanda continues to rely heavily on financial and technical assistance from donor agencies, with over 32% of the 2019/2020 government budget funded by external sources (Bernatzki, Busse, and Hoekstra 2021, 13). At all, Rwanda’s socioeconomic performance can be characterized by a rapid economic growth, but the industrial structure has not changed fundamentally. No industrial upgrading can be observed (Takeuchi 2019, 123).

But corruption and nepotism are huge problems in both cases. In the 1960s, South Korea numerous politicians formed corrupt alliances with business, allowing the insiders special privileges. That highlighted in the ‘Emergency Decree for Economic Stability and Growth’ of 3 August 1972, which supported the corrupt business against bankruptcy, for instance (B.-C. Lee 2006, 43). In this way, Park Chung-hee’s developmental dictatorship combined market-oriented development strategies and state-capitalism with cronyism (Gemici 2013, 179). Also, Paul Kagame abused funds and is responsible for nepotism and clientelism within the bonds of the ruling elite based on a shared past in Ugandan refugee camps and schools (Weerdesteijn 2019, 226). Therefore, some observers blame Kagame for being ‘a powerful ruler, using party and state institutions [to build] a business empire that benefits private interests’ (Himbara 2020, 66). Additionally, although the constitution and laws provide for property rights, in practice, this primarily applies to titled urban and rural land owned by a small elite and the urban middle class, only (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 21). But within mainland Sub-Saharan Africa, in 2023, Rwanda holds the second-best position (score 53, rank 49) in the Corruption Perception Index, after Botswana (score 59, rank 39) (Transparency International 2023). That shows that limited levels of corruption and nepotism may not be in fundamental contradiction with a developmental state.

5.2 | Empirical Differences

The economic trajectories of South Korea and Rwanda can also be analysed by comparing data from the first 25 years following the rise to power of their respective leaders, Park Chung-hee in South Korea and Paul Kagame in Rwanda. Although the timeframes differ—1961 to 1985 for South Korea and 2000 to 2024 for Rwanda—the comparison provides insights into the varying impacts of their leadership on economic development under differing historical, political and economic contexts. In 1985, about 25 years after Park Chung-hee assumed power, South Korea’s GDP per capita had surged to USD 2482, marking a 27-fold increase from USD 93 in 1961. Conversely, 22 years after Paul Kagame took office, Rwanda’s GDP per capita in 2022 stood at USD 966, representing only a 3.8-fold increase from USD 255 in 2000 (Macrotrends 2024).

Therefore, although both countries started at the same level, the growth in wealth per capita in South Korea during the first 25 years of its developmental dictatorship was approximately seven times greater than that observed in Rwanda over a comparable period. In 1976/2015, South Korea overtook Rwanda (see Figure 3).

This divergence must be attributed to the differing average growth rates during the observed periods. Between 1961 and 1985, South Korea experienced an average annual growth rate of 9.4%, whereas Rwanda’s average growth rate was 6.3% during its corresponding period, only. In both cases, economic growth was mainly driven by the rise of external trade.

In South Korea, exports have tripled or quadrupled from the 1960s to 1980s. If one will believe in Rwandan statistics, which numbers might be systematically exaggerated, external trade rose even by 14 times in 20 years between 1995 and 2015 (Takeuchi 2019, 121–122). Thereby, it is important to note that South Korea as well Rwanda faced significant economic challenges within the observed period: South Korea in 1980, including a disastrous harvest, rising international oil prices, increasing interest rates and domestic political unrest. These factors contributed to a sharp decline in economic performance, with a contraction of –1.6%. Similarly, Rwanda was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, resulting in a contraction of –6% (see Figure 4).

The main reasons for these different developments are mainly different preconditions of the developmental process and the lack of industrialization in Rwanda. Especially, the differences in growth rates can be traced back to the different levels of industrialization. Between 1995 and 2015, the share of the agricultural sector in Rwanda decreased from 39% to 29% indeed, but only the service sector rose from 51% to 57%, whereas mining and construction increased from 5% to 9%, only, and the manufacturing sector remained at 5 to 6% (Takeuchi 2019, 123). In contrast, in South Korea already in 1939—during the Japanese colonial period—the agricultural sector was reduced to about 40% of GDP, showing South Korea’s advantage to Rwanda. Additionally, it must be mentioned that some part of economic growth during Rwanda’s intervention into the Congo war (1998–2002) and right after that must be traced back to the exploitation of the neighbouring country’s mining

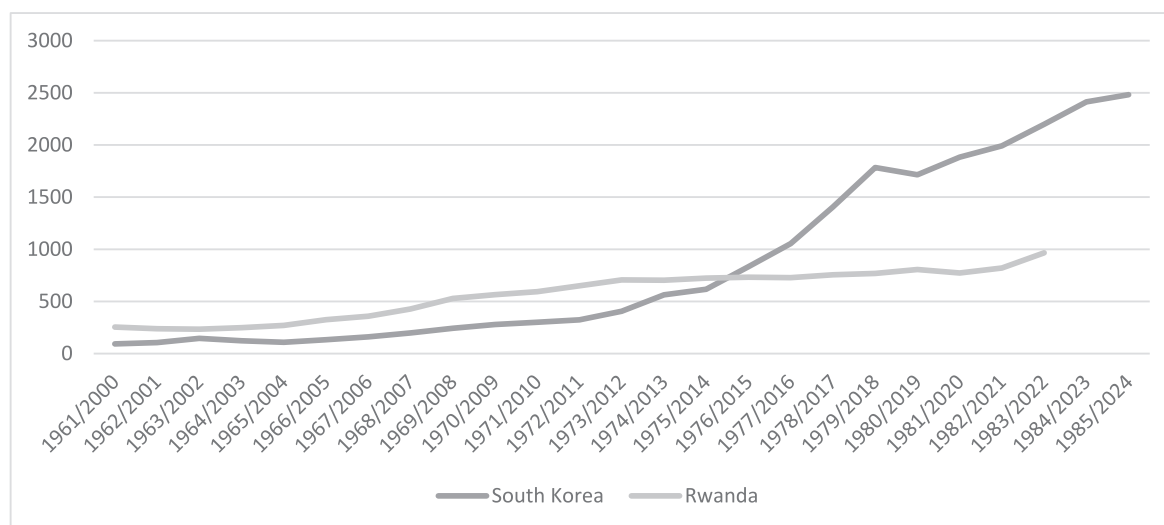


FIGURE 3 | GDP per Capita (in current USD) in South Korea (1961–1985) versus in Rwanda (2000–2024). Source: Macrotrends (2024).



FIGURE 4 | Growth of GDP in % in South Korea (1961–1985) versus in Rwanda (2000–2024). *Source:* Macrotrends (2024).

sector (Weerdesteijn 2019, 226; Takeuchi 2019, 132). Nowadays, still about 70% of the workforce in Rwanda operate in the informal sector (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 19).

What both cases—South Korea and Rwanda—have in common is a rising inequality within the societies during the developmental period. By the principle ‘growth first, distribution later’, the members of the South Korean nation were divided into insiders and outsiders, already in the 1960s (Cho 2006, 109). Also, in Rwanda, social inequality rose during the transformation period, measured by the Gini coefficient rising between the mid-1980s and 2006 from 0.289 to 0.510 (Takeuchi 2019, 123).

6 | Conclusion

The economic development in South Korea as well as in Rwanda is quite fast in comparison to neighbouring countries. Therefore, the case South Korea is called the ‘miracle on the Han river’, sometimes (B.-C. Lee 2006, 45), whereas other observers call also Rwanda at least ‘one of the most impressive and successful examples of post-conflict reconstruction’ (Soudan 2015, iii). South Korea and Rwanda both experienced significant authoritarian rule and corruption, though the specifics differed. In South Korea, Park Chung-hee’s regime used martial law and repression, with corruption rooted in crony capitalism and political-business alliances during rapid industrialization. Quite similar, Rwanda under Paul Kagame has enforced strict controls on freedoms and engaged in widespread corruption and nepotism, with the ruling elite benefiting disproportionately from political and economic power. Although both regimes have used authoritarian measures to shape their development, South Korea’s corruption was closely linked to its industrial growth, whereas Rwanda’s is tied to postgenocide power consolidation and state control. Although Rwanda’s

strategy has already been characterized as ‘post-developmental’ (Honeyman 2016) and ‘neo-developmental’ (Goodfellow 2017) within the framework of developmental state theory, the country can clearly be called a ‘developmental dictatorship’. What Paul Kagame erected in Rwanda is definitely ‘a system used to justify a dictatorship that restricts the people’s participation in politics based on the reason that political security is a prerequisite to economic growth’, as B.-C. Lee (2006, 5) has defined the developmental dictatorship.

Additionally, the similarities in the paths of development must be emphasized. Both South Korea and Rwanda emerged from devastating conflicts to achieve significant economic growth, but their paths diverged in important ways. The policies in Rwanda differ from those in South Korea in their emphasis and structure. South Korea’s postwar development under Park Chung-hee was driven by industrialization and export-led growth, with the government actively shaping key industries like steel and electronics, while forming powerful conglomerates, ‘chaebols’, through state intervention. Rwanda, however, under Kagame’s leadership, has focused on national unity, poverty reduction and private sector development. Unlike South Korea’s state-driven industrial strategy, Rwanda’s approach leans towards economic liberalism, with initiatives like ‘Vision 2020’ promoting private sector growth and transforming the country into a knowledge-based economy. That shows that different approaches of development due to history and culture can and must be chosen to be successful as developmental state but—at least in particular—also may explain the diverging results.

These have to be traced back mainly to the preindustrialization in colonial Korea, which cannot be observed in Rwanda’s colonial period. Also, differences in affinity to education and schooling that is very dominant in the Confucianist society of South Korea in comparison to the traditional African society in Rwanda may be a reason. But that leads back to the basic

approaches of development highlighting geography, history and culture as basic determinants of human development, again. But in summary, both South Korea and Rwanda illustrate the potential for recovery and growth following conflict, but their different historical contexts, strategies and outcomes emphasize the complexity of a 'developmental dictatorship' in the aftermath of devastation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available at Macrotrends (2024), the premier research platform for long term investors (available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/> [Accessed 27 August 2024]).

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