

THE HOPE AND CRISIS OF PRAGMATIC TRANSITION: POLITICS, LAW,  
ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOUTH KOREA

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Amy Beth Levine

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Amy Beth Levine, Ph.D.

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This dissertation demonstrates how the urgent condition of crisis is routine for many non-governmental (NGO) and non-profit organization (NPO) workers, activists, lawyers, social movement analysts, social designers and ethnographers. The study makes a contribution to the increasing number of anthropological, legal, pedagogical, philosophical, political, and socio-legal studies concerned with pragmatism and hope by approaching crisis as ground, hope as figure, and pragmatism as transition or placeholder between them. In effect this work makes evident the agency of the past in the apprehension of the present, whose complexity is conceptualized as scale, in order to hopefully refigure ethnography's future role as an anticipatory process rather than a pragmatic response to crisis or an always already emergent world. This dissertation is based on over two years of fieldwork inside NGOs, NPOs, and think tanks, hundreds of conversations, over a hundred interviews, and archival research in Seoul, South Korea. The transformation of the "386 generation" and Roh Moo Hyun's presidency from 2003 to 2008 serve as both the contextual background and central figures of the study. This work replicates the historical, contemporary, and anticipated transitions of my informants by responding to the problem of agency inherent in crisis with a sense of scale and a rescaling of agency. I demonstrate this scale of

agency—ideology, field, sacrifice, discourse, project, and agenda—along with its double bind entanglements. In so doing this dissertation shows the utopian and post-utopian hope in rescaling kinship from filiation to affiliation and rescaling agency from person to movement and from revolution to social design. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of scale and its shifts in the generation and sustainability of hope for NGO and NPO workers, activists, lawyers, social movement analysts, social designers, and ethnographers alike.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amy Levine was born in Texas and grew up in North Carolina, Maryland, and Florida. She received her B.A. in Anthropology and Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2002. She received her M.A. in Anthropology from Cornell University in 2005. Amy lived in Seoul, South Korea for a total of about four years from 2001 to 2007 as a student and researcher. She has lived and worked as a visiting professor at Changwon National University in Changwon, South Korea since 2008. Her research and teaching interests include NGOs, NPOs, think tanks, artifacts of work, leisure, hope, generation, crisis, and change, the anthropology of activist and academic knowledge, pragmatism, politics, law, pedagogy, science, economics, South Korea and the United States.

*For my mother Leslie and father Lewis*

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## Introduction: The Hope and Crisis of Pragmatic Transition: Politics, Law, Anthropology, and South Korea

### From Hope to Crisis

In the summer of 2002, many environmental activists traded their green and brown clothes for bright red Team Korea fare. When South Korea and Japan co-hosted the World Cup that year, 386 generation (*sam pal yuk sedae*)<sup>1</sup> activists came to the forefront as organizers of the “Red Devils” phenomenon. They appeared to use the same tactics of protest from the 1980s to organize World Cup events. There was a half-joke about “Be the Reds,” the ubiquitous slogan on Red Devils paraphernalia, indicating a relaxation of Anti-Communism in South Korea. Just a few months later, many of the same

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<sup>1</sup>The term “386 generation” was coined in the early 1990s when two-thirds of South Korea’s 43 million people were under the age of 40, the GNP was rising steadily, and democratic reforms appeared to quicken with the election of Kim Young Sam (Dong 1993:1; Lee 2007). Conventionally, the 3 of 386 refers to people in their 30s, the 8 to the decade they attended university (1980s), and the 6 to the decade in which they were born (1960s). When South Korea hosted the Olympics in 1988, the nation was said to have “what must be the world’s fastest-growing college population” with around 1.3 million students (Dong 1988:B1). At that time, South Korea’s percentage of students attending a four-year university was second only to the U.S. (Dong 1988:B1). Cho Hae-joang (1992) describes the nation’s first “socially stable” generation who came of age in the 80s as carrying “the weight of the country on their backs” (1994:146). Namhee Lee describes it as “a collective pressure to succeed for one’s own future, for family, and for the nation” (2007:149). As witnesses and beneficiaries of the rapid changes and economic growth during Park’s military dictatorship from the 1960s to the 80s, the 386 generation was expected to transform the nation not unlike the computer had done to the world economy. The analogy is not coincidental since the other explanation I have encountered of 386 is that it referred to the common computer processor at the time, which preceded 486 and Pentium. There is, in other words, a progression also evident in development discourses (e.g., Escobar 1995). 386 generation bundles together the “national utopian imagination” Laura Nelson (2000) describes in South Korea. The nationalism of the Red Devils and of many South Korean civil society leaders is evident in their shared practice of spelling Korea as *Corea* (see Chapter 2).

In this dissertation I follow the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism system of romanization except with the names of some public figures. In cases where there is a pre-existing published and/or preferred romanization, such as with Syngman Rhee, Cho Hae-joang and Roh Moo Hyun, I follow it.

people gathered in the same public squares to commemorate two Korean girls who had been run over and killed by an American military vehicle just outside of Seoul.

The election of Roh Moo Hyun, whose success was widely linked to 386 generation mobilization, was the culmination of these events in 2002. People who had never attended political rallies enthusiastically joined Roh in the same public squares that had seen World Cup rallies and candlelight vigils for the two girls killed by an American military vehicle (Levine 2004a). Roh was a former democracy activist and self-taught human rights lawyer who was not only the first South Korean president born after the colonial period, but also the first one not to graduate from an elite university. He gained widespread support not only from the 386 generation, but also from people who had never engaged in political campaigns before (e.g., Kang 2006). Roh made headlines shortly after taking office by telling the chair of Japan's Communist Party that South Korea would only become a "true democracy" if a communist party were allowed to enter the country (Yonhap 2003). The boldness and hope of these statements for many of my informants was later likened to Barack Obama's statements on the Iraq War and race in the United States. Both Roh's and Obama's statements were praised at the times they were spoken for their honest confrontation with painful histories, courage to openly share convictions despite negative consequences, and the hopeful move away from previous generational obsessions that both seemed to signal<sup>2</sup>. Korea's colonial and anti-communist inheritances from Japan and the United States are taken up later in the introduction and in the first chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal conversations on September 10, 2010.

Not unlike Obama's supporters, the distance between hope and crisis proved to be short for President Roh's supporters. Before Roh even took office, some of his fiercest supporters began to worry about the closing distance between NGOs and Roh's administration, which was a feature of neoliberal governance that had intensified during and after the Kim Dae Jung administration (Song 2009). The government liaison for an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO), for example, worried about how NGOs could go about their work when the President-elect had successfully used "methods (*bangbeop*)" that were conventionally their own—demonstrations in public squares and online networks (Levine 2004a). These methods were foundational to NGOs and their ongoing transition from student, labor, and democratization movements to increasingly expert (*jeonmun*) advocacy and governance organizations. The ongoing transition from *minjung* (mass people) to *simin* (citizen) which Nancy Abelmann (1996, 1997a) and Robert Oppenheim (2003, 2008) have described marked a turn away from violent activism to non-violent organization and administration. Similarly, the ongoing transition from liberal to neoliberal which Jesook Song (2009) has taken up, marks a turn from an oppositional and confrontational government-NGO relationship to a collaborative and co-opting one familiar to many neoliberal contexts (e.g. Paley 2001; Greenhouse 2009).

The CAGE campaign, which I address in the fourth chapter, is an example of how an alliance of NGOs combined authoritarian and liberal methods to great political effect in 2000. In the wake of this campaign, several prominent NGO and non-profit leaders expressed the need to be ahead of the government, "on

the cutting edge,” and “setting the agenda<sup>3</sup>.” At the end of Roh’s term and after Lee Myung Bak was elected president in 2007, NGO and non-profit organization (NPO<sup>4</sup>) workers at various levels said they needed to provide (practical) alternatives rather than just criticize if they wanted the ear and/or the funds of government ministries and commissions. The Hope Institute (*Huimang Jejakso*), the think tank which I focus on in the fourth chapter, was conceived in many ways to fulfill this role<sup>5</sup>. The cross-instrumental borrowing of methods that I theorized between government and NGO at the start of Roh’s term (Levine 2004a) came closer to an iron cage of instrumentalism at the end of his term (Riles 2006a). On one level, the hope Roh and many NGOs workers had for transparency reforms turned to disappointment and defensiveness about transparency being little more than an instrument for political advantage. On another level, Roh and many NGOs found it difficult to escape their familiar instruments of criticism, protest, and broad-yet-vague slogans of anti-dictatorship, pro-democracy and pro-unification, which are all taken to be legacies of the 386 generation.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews with author on July 21, 2004 and February 5, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between NGO and NPO at the time of my fieldwork in Seoul was one between advocacy and social welfare respectively. This was also a distinction internal to NGO Studies and the Lawyer Park family of organizations: PSPD is exemplary of NGO, the Beautiful Foundation of NPO, and the Hope Institute of think tank. However, there is a large and fast-growing segment of religious organizations in South Korea that obviates the advocacy and social welfare distinction. None of the organizations I researched had any official religious affiliation or mission; however, many staffers at various levels cited Buddhist, Protestant, or Catholic influences on social movement history as well as their personal stories of involvement in that history. South Korea is often recognized internally and externally as an exemplar of democracy and civil society, particularly in Asia. The rapid proliferation of NGOs and NPOs during the 1990s and 2000s mirrors the nation’s rapid economic development (e.g. Choi J.J. 2000). Yet management and training inside NGOs and NPOs has not kept pace and, as I discuss in the second chapter, was pronounced a “crisis” by some during the mid-2000s. The CAGE movement discussed in the fourth chapter and the NGO Studies phenomenon discussed later in this introduction and in the second chapter have been solutions to these problems that keep reform inside South Korea. This commitment to indigeneity or nationalism is foundational to the movement tradition for all of the NGOs and NPOs discussed in this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with author on January 11, 2008.

To give a sense of how quickly hope became crisis, the NGO government liaison that shared the above concern about Roh borrowing NGO methods had quit working for NGOs, studied for a short time in a NGO Studies program<sup>6</sup>, and was working for a presidential advisory commission just a couple years later. However, he left civil service disillusioned not long after (see Chapter 3). Another mid-level NGO manager shared repeated concerns that NGOs could no longer attract the best college graduates because both the government and media organizations were producing better versions of what they did in terms of investigative journalism<sup>7</sup>. To highlight her concern, she became a part-time NGO worker as she pursued graduate degrees in public policy and environmental studies while advising political parties and government commissions. Another veteran staffer who worked for the same NGO in the same position for almost 10 years finally decided to pursue a graduate degree

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<sup>6</sup> NGO Studies emerged in the late 1990s at Sungkonghoe University with Kyunghee University following in 2000. Now there are undergraduate and graduate programs at several more universities around Seoul. Cho Hee-Yeon, one of the field's founders, credited Korea's Confucian history of activist academicism, growth in the number and scope of NGOs and NPOs during the 1990s, and the success of the CAGE movement with the field's establishment. Cho was also working to establish South Korea as the leader and hub of NGO Studies in Asia not unlike politicians and business leaders were imagining South Korea's position in Northeast Asian regional trade. He and many of the graduates I spoke with likened it to a professionalizing experience for NGO and non-profit workers that was already available to government and company workers. In this way, NGO Studies was part of neoliberal governance by training NGO and NPO workers to do work that had previously been done by the state (e.g. Song 2009). Many of the NGO workers I knew treated NGO Studies as a sabbatical—a short and relatively luxurious study break during which to gain a broader perspective on their work. This was particularly true for people who could not travel abroad for one reason or another. NGO Studies was part of the growing infrastructure and support available to NGO and NPO workers who received relatively low pay compared to their government and private industry counterparts, but who faced similar demands to upgrade and professionalize. For the purposes of this dissertation, I approach NGO Studies obliquely as an example of a neoliberal and pragmatic response to the bundle of crises some NGOs faced at the same time it demonstrates the connection between academic and advocacy institutions in South Korea.

<sup>7</sup> Her first statement to this effect was in a personal conversation on June 15, 2004, which was just after the Democratic Labor Party picked up an unprecedented number of parliamentary seats in the general election.

in the U.S. that had long been on hold soon after her secretary-general stepped down to work as a consultant to city government commissions. These stories of mid-level and veteran staff attrition became the subject of research studies and newspaper headlines of crisis during the time of my fieldwork from August 2005 to July 2007. As I explore in the second chapter, NGOs were in a “crisis (*wigi*)” which variably referenced their changing role and relationship to government and business sectors, increasing staff turnover, decreasing dues-paying members, and waning media attention.

Crisis was not only internal and institutional, but also external and moral. One 386 generation leader, Secretary-General Choi, told me that the old activist methods of writing press releases, having press conferences, and organizing street demonstrations were not working as he and his colleagues prepared for the last push against the largest government-led land reclamation in Asia<sup>8</sup>. His NGO, Green Korea, joined several others around the country in closing down office operations to coordinate large protests ahead of the final court ruling on the lawsuit to stop the Saemangeum reclamation. Not long after the court ordered the reclamation to continue, he wondered if doing nothing would have been better than all the work done over the past few years<sup>9</sup>. He told me several months before, that the real problem for NGOs was that they did not have the scale of theory (*iron*) necessary to challenge not only the increasing scale of reclamation projects, but also the more pervasive scale of capitalism and neoliberalism<sup>10</sup>. Secretary-General Choi, whom I discuss in the second and third chapters, was constantly diverted from his larger theoretical and

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<sup>8</sup> Interview on March 6, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Interview on May 8, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Interview on November 22, 2005.

ideological aspirations by one crisis or another—the Saemangeum reclamation, protests in Pyeongtaek over the expansion of U.S. military operations there, the negotiation of a South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, or the latest eruption of North-South tensions—and his Green Life Theory project relegated to one of many items on the agenda that often got pushed aside temporarily or indefinitely. As a volunteer activist, fieldworker, and teacher in the field, I empathized with this frustration, particularly when I had to carve out time and space for writing field reports and this dissertation.

This dissertation is an effort to suspend anthropology's and law's pragmatic impulses, particularly in response to crisis, long enough to enable a lateral ethnography of pragmatism. As Thomas Yarrow reflects in his study of activists, "it is imperative that anthropology resists answering the question 'what is to be done?' on its own terms" because others, including many of my informants, are already doing so (2005:228-229). I take a cue from informants such as Secretary-General Choi in reapproaching units of analysis such as ideology, field, discourse, project, and agenda in terms of scale and Lawyer Park in rescaling individual actions to larger social movements and designs; rather than asking what is to be done on its own terms, this dissertation attempts to rescale agency. Here I am positing scale following Gregory Bateson (1958) and Marilyn Strathern (1991) as a means or method to apprehend, organize, and analyze complexity. Scale was not only my analytical device, but a hopeful device I shared with my informants (e.g., Choy 2003; Riles 2000; Yarrow 2005). Following the work of Hiro Miyazaki (2004), this dissertation attempts to replicate past and present movements, both activist and analytical, in order to reorient in terms of scale, crisis, and

pragmatism. In the next section I make evident the vibrant tradition of movements—social, political, and analytical—that already exists in Korea and Korean Studies.

### Movements, Replications, and Compressions

In her 1996 ethnography, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent*, Nancy Abelman intermittently replicates the practices of her subjects—student activists, tenant farmers, and the like—who engaged Korean history and social life in terms of movements. As in many postcolonial contexts, there is a “pace, urgency, and passion of South Korean historical discourse, and, correspondingly, of South Korean political activity...” (1996:9). Consideration of social movements, Abelman writes, “goes to the heart of debates over national legitimacy and political struggles” (1996:24). Her informants’ engagements with historical and contemporary movements partially framed her own analytical engagements with social and anthropological theories of movement, narrative, and discourse, which I take up in subsequent chapters. In other words, Abelman extends and in some cases replicates the practices of her informants. She takes up the mobility and movements of individual and collective subjectivities by discursively situating “the reigning social imaginaries on social movements and activisms, their vocabularies, their grammars, their aesthetics, and their historical consciousnesses” (Abelman 1996:6). Abelman implicates “the nature of the tasks and the horizons of the contexts that ethnographers should embrace” through her movement “across multiple sites and subjectivities and in concert with heterogeneous social discourses and narrative practices” (1996:6-7).

Movements have been an origin and return point in the divided and postcolonial space Korea occupies. As Abelmann observes, both North and South Korea “claim to be the legitimate offspring of colonial period national movements; each presents itself as the legitimate state for the entire Korean nation” (1996:25). In his study of the ongoing effects of national division in Korea, Roy Richard Grinker describes a range of activist practices as “*movements*, literally and figuratively, because they represent real and imaginary travel and return in both geographic and temporal terms” (original emphasis 1998:193). In her historical study of the postcolonial *minjung* movement in South Korea, Namhee Lee (2007) defines its central commitment to treating the people, or *minjung*, as the rightful subjects of history by praxiologically joining them and/or studying them in historical sites of importance (*hyeonjang*). Lee replicates this commitment and hope in her own study by “treating the minjung movement as the rightful subject of history...” (2007:303). For Lee this means historicizing the conditions of the movement’s emergence as well as generating a historical praxis “not to restore the fallen bygone hero but to give history the capacity to enable individuals and society to reconceptualize social relations in an empowering and participatory way” (2007:303). In various levels of discourse in and about Korea, history has long been imbued with agency and subjectivity and the absence of such as crisis, which I take up later in the introduction (Abelmann 1996; Grinker 1998; Lee N.H. 2007; Oppenheim 2008).

The movements of history, in particular their speed, have come to define modernity and postmodernity in South Korea. In fact, Cho Hae-joang (2000) argues that South Korea skipped modernity and went to postmodernity while

Jesook Song (2009) makes a similar argument for liberalism and neoliberalism. Choong Soon Kim's personal recollection is exemplary of many in the field:

I was still unable to comprehend Korean progress until I witnessed the scene myself in 1981, when I returned to Korea for the first time since leaving for graduate school in 1965. Experiencing so suddenly the results of years of economic development and industrialization, I felt a case of 'future shock.' The entire country seemed to vibrate with economic progress...I remember that near the end of World War II...most Korean schoolchildren were unable to wear decent shoes because material for shoes had been confiscated by the Japanese for war supplies. Ironically, in 1986, Korea was the world's largest exporter of shoes (1992:xiv).

John Lie (1998) asserts that it would be difficult to exaggerate the economic, political, and social changes South Koreans experienced in the last half of the twentieth century. Hagen Koo writes of South Korea's modernization as "one of the swiftest and most compressed processes of proletarianization in the world..." (2001:24). Chang Kyung-Sup describes it as the "most drastic and compressed process of national development in human history" (1999:51). Nancy Abelman (2003) has called compression a consensus and condition about modernity that ethnographers and their informants share in South Korea, which I address more directly in the first chapter.

In the wake of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s when South Korea received an unprecedented IMF bailout, many of the positive and "miraculous"

pronouncements of development in South Korea turned to sobering reassessments. Bruce Cumings writes:

I still do not understand why the immense sacrifice that the Korean people made to drag their country kicking and screaming into the late-twentieth century rat race should merit such uncritical, well-nigh hysterical enthusiasm from academics who are presumably not paid for their views (1997:384).

Chang Kyung-Sup described the late-1990s mood as “a sober awakening about [South Koreans’] own miracle of achieving over a mere few decades what took Westerners two or three centuries” (1999:31). He called it a “grave society-wide pessimism about renewed long-term economic and social development” in which “the very mechanisms and strategies for achieving rapid national development now function as fundamental obstacles to current and future development” (Chang 1999:31). This collapse and continued blockage of development and progress—economic, political, and social—has constituted another sense of crisis in South Korea. In this context, informants such as Team Leader Kim worried about the challenges South Korea faced as an “advanced (*seonjin*)” nation no longer able to rely on nineteenth century modernization theories from China of “Eastern body, Western technique (*dongdoseogi*)” nor on the 1970s and 80s view that “the West is good and we are bad<sup>11</sup>” (see Chapter 1). For many informants, transparency was associated with the West, particularly during and after the late 1990s when its absence or lack was diagnosed as the main cause of the financial crisis (e.g.

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<sup>11</sup> Quotes are from an interview with the author on May 10, 2006.

Woo-Cummings 1999). Not long after an indigenous coalition of NGOs led by Lawyer Park, the aforementioned CAGE campaign, wielded transparency as a political reform tool for better and for worse (see Chapter 4). When I was preparing to go to the field in 2004 and 2005, anti-corruption legislation was being championed by President Roh Moo Hyun and GO-NGO commissions were increasing as fast or faster than they had during Kim Dae Jung's administration (Song 2003, 2009). The question I entered the field with was what role, if any, would transparency play for NGOs and non-profits in their increasingly professional and potentially collaborative governance role?

#### From Transparency to Pragmatism

What it took me some time to realize once in the field was that transparency had become, or perhaps had always been, a tool or a means to another end. Transparency was not only a (Western) technique, or means for financial reform and better governing (Song 2009), but also a means for self-promotion, NGO promotion, and social design. A professor at the leading governmental economic think tank helped point me toward this realization when he matter-of-factly dismissed transparency as an “after the fact rationalization<sup>12</sup>” of the financial crisis. An activities director at one of the few NGOs still advocating transparency as a main campaign in the 2000s pushed this point even further by negatively defining transparency as “fundamental means (*gibonjeok sudan*)<sup>13</sup>” rather than any goal or end (*mokjeok*).

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with author on July 21, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with author on January 23, 2006.

Transparency can be re-fashioned as a blacklisting weapon and political reform tool, as with the 2000 CAGE campaign, and then it can boomerang back as someone else's weapon. For example, the same NGO that led the CAGE campaign in 2000, PSPD, became the subject of a professor's study in 2006 tracing the elite pedigree and network of its ties to government positions (Lee J.Y. 2006). During my fieldwork, many inside NGOs and non-profits followed that case and treated it as a warning shot for potentially worse things to come. It was a case of an outsider and rumored New Right<sup>14</sup> professor turning transparency back on them. Just a few years before insiders—feminists who were former student movement activists and NGO workers—publicly disclosed the names of NGO workers accused of sexual harassment and created a big controversy (Jones 2003). NGO and non-profit staffers pointed out the practical difficulties that even the largest organizations had with paying their workers on time as reminders of how limited resources were

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<sup>14</sup> New Right was a term that grew in prominence and power during Roh Moo Hyun's administration from 2003 to 2008. Nicola Anne Jones (2003) writes of a relatively weak and disorganized Right in relation to the feminist legal reforms, including the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality, instituted during Kim Dae Jung's administration from 1998 to 2003. Jesook Song (2003, 2009) observes that Kim's administration effectively neutralized the Right by incorporating neoliberal (*sinjaju*) policies alongside its liberal (*jayu*) accomplishments. Roh Moo Hyun, on the other hand, provoked, radicalized, and organized the Right particularly early in his term with his plan to abolish the National Security Laws and statements about a conservative media bias. Shin Ji-ho, the president of Liberty Union (which was later described as the theory side of the New Right movement), said he established the group in reaction to a lecture Roh Moo Hyun gave at Yonsei University in 2004. In that lecture, Roh said, "No matter what kind of conservative—even reasonable or mild—let's never change and become a conservative" (Noh 2008). Pastor Kim Jin-hong, chairman of the New Right Union (practice side of the New Right movement), said that he started his organization in 2005 because he felt Lee Myung Bak would be a great president (Noh 2008). Just a few days after Lee was elected President in 2007, a senior editor for a major newspaper proclaimed "A Crisis for the New Right" because the movement cannot be content with just electing Lee (Noh 2008). This editor also worried that President-Elect Lee was showing signs of relying too much on New Right organizations such as the New Right Union for policy plans just as Presidents Kim Young Sam, Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun had allegedly done with the Leftist NGO PSPD (Noh 2008). An in-depth study of the New Right, particularly its links to the religious right in South Korea and the U.S., is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is part of the ongoing movement and reversals (see Chapter 2) that have occurred in political and civil societies in South Korea (e.g. Jones 2003).

and how much further they had to go before they could credibly demand transparency of themselves. One accountant who supported and audited several NGOs dismissed many of them as “petty retail merchants<sup>15</sup>” who could be seriously threatened if they were ever held to the same standards as private companies. Several NGO coordinators who did organizational or accounting work said activists were indifferent or overtly hostile toward them. Some activists were upfront about their indifference and contempt for the accounting work they had to do such as keeping track of receipts. I take up this internal division between coordinators (*gansa*) and activists (*hwaldongga/undongga*) following Department Leader Lee and other workers who were conducting an ad hoc job title project in the third chapter. The 1990s and 2000s in South Korea are strewn with cases of high-level business, government, and NGO leaders disgraced by charges of personal corruption including Presidents Kim Young Sam, Kim Dae Jung, Roh Moo Hyun, and Lee Myung Bak.

Transparency, in other words, was as much about self-promotion and self-protection as it was about open (*yeollin*) decision-making, auditable accounting, and good governance (e.g. Strathern 2000, 2006). Transparency was also “open” or available to anyone for any ends, much as law was (e.g. Riles 2004a). Lawyer Park, the focus of the fourth chapter, explained to me that “under a dictatorship, law is a weapon of dictators but in a democratic society [law] is a weapon of activists<sup>16</sup>.” He and the NGO he led during the 1990s exhibited a “pragmatic disposition” (Rho 2007). They used

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with author on October 12, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

transparency and other things, according to Lawyer Park, as “concrete ways to change society based on legal means” to achieve “hundreds of legal changes in one decade during Korea’s transition from a dictatorship to a diverse civil society<sup>17</sup>.” Lawyer Park and other leftist legal activists approached the law as instrumentalists with culturalist ends (Riles 2005). That is, they treated the law “in primarily pragmatic instrumental terms, as a tool to be judged by its successes and failures in achieving stated ends” when those ends were to redress authoritarian abuses of human rights, strengthen whistleblower protection, regulate financial practices in the private sector, and protect civil liberties (Riles 2005:973-974). Lawyer Park, like many of his former law school and activist colleagues (Dezalay and Garth 2007; Kim 2007), treated the law as a tool or means toward social design<sup>18</sup> (e.g. Riles 2005). Law was self-consciously “politics by other means” (Latour 1988:229).

What I learned in starting a study of transparency is that I had to finish with a study of pragmatism. Nearly everyone I spoke with in the field harbored some claim or aspiration for pragmatism, either in its mundane or high theory forms (Desautels-Stein 2007; Riles 2003). Even an activist who was bitingly critical of nearly every American policy in South Korea remarked upon first learning

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<sup>17</sup> Beautiful Foundation 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Jesook Song (2009) has recently drawn attention to the unintended complicity of some former student activists to neoliberal projects in South Korea during the Asian financial crisis. Song writes: “former student activists (including many of the informants in the book and myself) were not fully aware of their own roles as (neo)liberal social engineers during the crisis...” (2009:118). She provides a rich and reflexive account of many of the historical reasons and implications for this shared liberal and neoliberal social engineering ground in South Korea. Following Annelise Riles (2004a, 2005), I locate the ongoing imagination and literalization of law as social engineering to the success of the mid-century legal realist movement not only in law (Desautels-Stein 2007), but also in anthropology (e.g. Levine 2004; Strathern 1985,1992). Lawyer Park’s social design discussed in the fourth chapter may also be taken up in this legal realism context, but I leave that for another project.

that I am American that “at least that means you’re practical (*siryongjeok*)<sup>19</sup>.” She went on to say that unless NGOs and NPOs get more “practical” and “engaged” in the “site of historical importance (*hyeonjang*)” then they would be obsolete. The valorization of *hyeonjang* (field, site of historical importance, praxis), a legacy of the postcolonial *minjung* movement, which I take up in the first chapter, was a universal aspiration of leftist NGOs and NPOs in Seoul during the time of my fieldwork. *Hyeonjang* along with the practical study movement (*sirhak undong*) constituted the claimed historical inheritances of the Hope Institute (see Chapter 4). These inheritances also pointed to the epistemological and methodological similarity I as an anthropologist working in Korea had with many of my informants, which I take up later in the introduction and in the first chapter.

#### Grounding Crisis in Pragmatism

Many informants advised me that there were more pressing things than transparency, particularly when the South Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations heated up in 2007. There was always a “crisis (*wigi*)” demanding urgent action (e.g. Fortun 2001; Song 2009). For example, I briefly discuss the “citizen’s movement reproduction crisis (*simin undongui jaesaeng wigi*)” along with the Saemangeum reclamation crisis in the second and third chapters respectively. Yet I do so without drawing attention to them as special or exceptional.

This dissertation is an attempt to resist or discipline my ethnographic focus away from the crisis as special or exceptional (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005). It

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<sup>19</sup> Personal conversation with the author on May 26, 2001.

is an effort to foreground the mundane movements, however inchoate as projects (Choy 2003; Tsing 1997), and background the mobilizing crises that often become the objects of activist mobilization and ethnographic concern in South Korea (e.g. Abelman 1996; Choi 1993; Choi 2009; Lee 2007; Oppenheim 2008; Song 2009).

Cho Hae-Joang, a prominent feminist and public intellectual, reflected amid the financial crisis in the late 1990s, “I/we live in a society where every week is critical, a society where crisis is chronic, a society that makes crisis chronic” (2000:67). She goes on to add that her article was translated into English without any major changes because she has “been too busy taking action in the current ‘state of emergency’ as a consultant to the government and as a project manager dealing with the sudden unemployment crisis” (2000:68). Many informants similarly shared and lamented how easily their attention was diverted from larger scale, long-term projects by endless emergencies. Park Chung Hee’s dictatorship during the 1970s has been called a “crisis’ government” given the number of emergency decrees (*ginjo*) it issued to enforce strict anti-Communist and economic development policies (Lee N. 2009; Oppenheim 2008). Lawyer Park, as I discuss in the fourth chapter, situated himself as offspring to this period in South Korean history. In this study, I take crisis as the state rather than the exception; it is the ground rather than the figure.

One of the most pervasive descriptions I encountered in the field was that South Korean civil society and South Korea more generally were “in transition” (e.g. Chang 1999; Cho K.S. 2000). This was an explanation for many of the

problems organizations faced in the shift from movement to organization (e.g. Alberoni 1984). At the same time, transition has been a general trope of social science, particularly political science, discourses about liberal democracy and market institutions in post-dictatorship and post-socialist contexts. Michael D. Shin (2005) has written about the “more general crisis” that South Korea has been facing since the 1990s. He describes it the following way:

Though the ideals of the democracy movement have been partially realized, democracy remains an incomplete project. However, the configuration of social forces has changed so much that it is difficult to determine who can be effective agents of social change, despite the emergence of new forms of civic movements. These developments suggest that the problematic of the 1980s has run its course and needs to be reworked to be relevant to the present. (Shin 2005:16).

Shin’s formulation summarizes a great deal of literature on “democratic transition” and “democratic consolidation” (e.g. Cohen and Arato 1992; Diamond et al. 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996; O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). This dissertation attempts to situate this “general crisis” or transition in anthropological and socio-legal literatures interrogating the limits of liberalism, democracy, and pragmatism (e.g. Ballesteros 2010; Coles 2004; Greenberg 2006; Paley 2001; Povinelli 2002; Song 2009). In particular, my own effort follows the experimentalism of Roberto Mangabiera Unger, who attempts to make legal and political change “less dependent on crisis” (2007:42).

At the same time, transition highlights the shift from developing to developed nation, which many informants were anticipating with development campaigns in East and Southeast Asia. Many Korean scholars and activists imagined themselves at the vanguard of activist academicism in Asia. “NGO Studies” was the institutionalization of this nexus between scholars and activists and the vehicle some South Korean universities were using to “lead” Asia. This leadership and “advancement (*seonjinhwa*)” was part of the wider “Korean wave (*hallyu*)” phenomenon, which was an effort to re-position South Korea vis-à-vis the world and particularly Asia (e.g. Choi Y.S. 2009; Iwabuchi 2002). As a peripheral participant in this area, I was struck by how foundational the notion of being in transition was for many informants. As one friend joked, “there has never been a time when [South Korea] has not been in transition<sup>20</sup>.”

The international humanitarianism field, which historically and contemporaneously inflects Korea and specifically NGOs and NPOs, operates in continual transition and crisis. This sustained crisis seems to necessitate pragmatic response. In his study of the international NGO Medecins Sans Frontieres, Peter Redfield describes the “states of crisis” and “ethic of emergency” that humanitarians feed and necessitate and their “pragmatic focus on immediate action” (2008:197-205). Redfield (2008) traces this pragmatic tradition of prioritization in crisis settings to military medical treatment in the field. The U.S. military greatly improved its emergency medicine or triage practices along with its funding and scope of action—what later became known as the military-industrial complex—during the Korean War (e.g., Cumings 2010). A wide range of NGOs and non-profits with

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<sup>20</sup> Personal communication on November 9, 2006.

humanitarian goals going back to the Korean War and continuing up to the present with aid to North Korea continue to inflect contemporary NGO and NPO practices. The battlefield and emergency room, both historical sites of importance (*hyeonjang*) in modern Korea, were also pragmatic images and idioms of work for many informants (see Chapter 2 and 3). The urgency and imperfection of action in extreme, yet routine situations of crisis are continuing pragmatist inheritances of the South Korea-United States relationship through colonization, World War II, national division, the Korean War, and military dictatorship.

The past and its study still has tremendous agency in the present and the future, particularly in a postcolonial, partially post-socialist, and still divided Korea. Roy Richard Grinker, an American anthropologist, writes:

Colonialism is not a thing of the past, for the past is still happening. The same must be said about national division in Korea. Although Korean and American history textbooks often objectify division as an event that once happened, in Korea division is an ongoing and creative process of remaking, remembering, and representing (1998:70).

*Han*, as Koreanists have theorized, is a historical poesis of accumulated anger and resentment that relaxes conventional distinctions between active and passive as well as rational and affective (e.g., Abelmann 1996; Grinker 1998). Bruce Cumings, the preeminent modern historian of Korea, has long put a sharper point on this sentiment addressed to his fellow Americans in his effort to “uncover truths that most Americans do not know and perhaps do not want to know” about their role in shaping modern Korea (2010:xv). Cumings and

many other Koreanists have long demonstrated the active presence and agency that history and historiography have in Korea (Abelmann 1996; Choi C. 1993; Grinker 1998; Lee 2009; Oppenheim 2008).

The division between affect and instrumentality is an example of the active inheritance of Korea's modern history. Following indigenous scholars such as Kang Man-gil and Paik Nak-chung who have described the ongoing effects of the Cold War division between North and South Korea, Roy Richard Grinker (1998) draws attention to the division between "sentimentalism (*gamjeongseong*)" and "pragmatism (*hyeonsilseong*)" in various South Korean discourses. This division parallels the stark division many feminists have identified between men's "affective" roles and women's "instrumental" roles (Cho 1988; Kendall 2002; Yi 1993). Elements of pragmatism, in other words, have long served as one side of a division in indigenous conceptions of unification and gender. The past and its study have long been central to studies of pragmatism and Korea.

#### Grounding Pragmatism in Hope

The population of crisis and transition in history, particularly modern Korean history, fits with the broader pragmatist philosophy of truth. In his historical study of American pragmatism, Louis Menand wrote of the "continual state of upheaval that capitalism thrives on" while theorizing the pragmatic skepticism that enables people to cope and respond (2001:xii). This sense of upheaval, which goes by crisis or transition, has become a unifying tradition for pragmatists. Colin Koopman (2009) has attempted to reunify the split between classical pragmatists and neopragmatists around transition. He goes back to

William James's statement that "life is in the transitions" to foreground the continuities between the classical pragmatism of James and Dewey and the neopragmatist linguistic turn of Quine, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Rorty, Putnam, and Habermas (Desautels-Stein 2007). Koopman theorizes transition as temporally-mediated and purposive development, or change in light of historical and temporal context; it is working toward a future and trying to achieve it with the resources and circumstances that are available in the present (2009:14-15). Pragmatists have approached human thought and action as "an affair of traveling from hypotheses to their outcomes, of from conceptions to their effects..." wherein the success of such traveling, or transition, can only be worked out in practice (Koopman 2009:17). Truth is reconstructive, which means it is worked out in the necessary transitions of practice (e.g. James 2000; Latour 1999a, 1999b). The pragmatist orientation toward truth is to treat it as human artifact rather than metaphysical or transcendent manifestation of God or nature.

Although transition is neutral in terms of progress, pragmatism is not. Colin Koopman traces a hope for progress, or what he calls meliorism, running through pragmatism going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and James Dewey. Meliorism for Koopman is a "resolute hopefulness in the abilities of human effort to create better future realities" (2009:22). Democracy has long been this better future reality for philosophers and scientists alike (Deneen 2003; Koopman 2009). Democracy has also been located in the future rather than the present in South Korea's *minjung* movements and in its ongoing transition from procedural to practical consolidation. Democracy, like unification and economic development, is often treated as a utopian

imagination—literally a “no place” of deferred achievement (Grinker 1998; Nelson 2000). This hope for utopia perpetuates transition, which is evident in approaches to democracy, economic development, and unification. This dissertation aims to show that the transition between the utopia of ideology, the ambivalence of discourse, and the pragmatism of agenda is often more recursive than linear despite and because of the recurrent (pragmatic) hope in linear progress.

One of the most important legacies of pragmatism is its turn from truth, or what Richard Rorty calls knowledge, to hope. Rorty advises “one should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one’s present beliefs” (1994:34). Rorty made this point more explicit when he wrote that “substituting hope for knowledge” means “substituting the idea that the ability to be citizens of the full-fledged democracy which is yet to come, rather than the ability to grasp truth, is what is important about being human” (2000:3). In Koopman’s conception, hope is the characteristic attitude and mood of the pragmatist (2009:17). Hope, in the pragmatist tradition, is faith that humans can make a better future. Patrick Shade (2001) calls it a transformative hope of “acting as *if* our contribution can improve conditions—intelligently assessing means and ends, testing the success of our ends-in-view as guides by acting on them, and adapting ends when necessary...” (original emphasis 190). The pragmatist, according to Koopman, is “at bottom” hopeful because s/he is “fully situated amid the transitions in which we find ourselves and rightly confident that we can, through our effort, see these transitions through to better futures” (2009:17-18).

The hope of the pragmatist is based upon faith in human agency, which holds that people have the capacity to create better selves and better futures. Rorty describes this hope as “only to think that there are some *projects* for which our tools are presently inadequate, and to hope that the future may be better than the past in this respect” (emphasis added 1999:51-52). The conception of problem as project and the pragmatic implications for scale (Choy 2003) and temporality (Riles 2010a) are taken up in the third chapter.

Many of the informants and friends I have known in Seoul since 2001 and conducted formal fieldwork with from 2005 to 2007 conceived of their work in terms of projects. In the second through fourth chapters, I discuss a range of formal and informal projects that these people engaged in to reassess job titles, reimagine what living a “green life” meant, propose a “grand theory” and “alternative” to sustainable development, and recapture the hope of economic nation-building without repeating its social costs. Many fantasized about and sought reprieve from the administrative spaces they were increasingly called upon to occupy. These informants had some affinity with what Wendy Brown and Janet Halley describe for left liberal socio-legal scholars as “a yearning for justice that exceeds the imagination of liberal legalism, a critical and self-critical orientation, and a certain courage to open the door of political and legal thought as if the wolves were not there” (2002:36). Jesook Song’s (2009) ethnography of (neo)liberalism during the Asian financial crisis and Kim Dae Jung’s presidency demonstrates many of these yearnings.

Lawyer Park, discussed in the fourth chapter, embraced pragmatist faith in human agency and claimed it as a modern Korean inheritance. The

compressed development that many lamented in the late 1990s around the Asian financial crisis (e.g., Chang 1999) was a source of hope for him. Lawyer Park used the financial crisis and the infrastructure collapses at that time to put forward new regulations and monitoring of large business conglomerates (e.g. Rho 2007). In contrast, several veteran Green Korea staffers, whom I discuss in the subsequent chapters, were engaged in an ongoing debate about the limits of human agency. The debate was often framed as one between deep ecology, which conceives of pragmatist hope as hubris, and sustainable development, which is predicated on such hope. Secretary-General Choi sought a “grand theory” alternative to sustainable development, which was the impetus for the Green Life Theory project I discuss in the third chapter. This was a hope in theory and its “grand” transcendence rather than a hope in God or humans.

Hope has been a foundational disposition for pragmatists. Annelise Riles (2003) is one of the first and only anthropologists to undertake an ethnography of pragmatism. In a special symposium entitled “Ethnography in the Realm of the Pragmatic: Studying Pragmatism in Law and Politics” Riles writes of “the current theoretical moment” being “characterized by a renewed interest in pragmatism:”

From law to anthropology, from science and technology studies to philosophy, the epistemological and political conflicts that characterized the academy in the 1980s seem to have given way to widespread agreement on pragmatic grounds (2003:1).

Justin Desautels-Stein (2007), Mariana Valverde (2003), and Annelise Riles (2003) make evident how a pragmatist orientation unites the political left and right of the legal academy. Following Patrick Deneen (2003) and Hiro Miyazaki (2004), Riles (2003, 2004a) points out the pragmatist foundations and commitments of socio-legal scholars and anthropologists alike. Roberto Unger (2007) describes pragmatism as “the reigning philosophy of the age.” What is remarkable about pragmatism at this theoretical moment is how foundational it has become despite its anti-foundationalist claims in a post-foundational world. Stanley Fish, another neopragmatist, seemed to anticipate this:

Turning into just another would-be foundation—into another theory that would then have consequences—is always the danger pragmatism courts when it becomes too ambitious...[W]hatever form it takes, the[ambitious] project is an instance of what I call the critical self-consciousness fallacy or antifoundationalist theory *hope*, the fallacy of thinking that there is a mental space you can occupy to the side of your convictions and commitments, and the *hope* that you can use the lesson that no transcendent standpoint is available as a way of bootstrapping yourself to transcendence... (emphasis added, 1999:305).

In the precarious balance between meliorism, the moral ambition of people such as Dewey, and the post-Truth antifoundationalism of people such as Rorty, there is still an impulse to hope (for transcendence). Ernst Bloch (1986) redefined this transcendence away from God and away from humans<sup>21</sup>; instead it was about temporality. In Hiro Miyazaki’s (2004) analysis, Bloch and

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<sup>21</sup> Bloch was a committed atheist who strongly disliked American culture and so did not share the faith in America that pragmatists such as Rorty did (Miyazaki 2004:144).

others generate hope through their attention to the temporal direction of knowledge and its reorientation. Miyazaki demonstrates how the temporal incongruity between, for example, the retrospective contemplation of history and the prospective momentum of hope is an engine for knowledge. In *The Method of Hope*, Miyazaki (2004) reconceptualizes hope away from being a pragmatic problem or resource and toward hope as a method or commitment. I place this move in a tradition of anthropological knowledge with and against utilitarianism, instrumentalism, and pragmatism later in the introduction. Before doing so, however, I turn to the engagement with history that is central to pragmatic study.

#### The Agency and Scale of History

A short newspaper editorial appeared in the Korean and English versions of the *Joongang Ilbo*, a high-circulating daily newspaper in South Korea, at the end of my fieldwork period in 2007. The editorial captures a sense of history shaping the present. The editorial distills the everyday pragmatism intimately associated with contemporary mainstream Americanism that had become common wisdom in the transition from Roh Moo Hyun to Lee Myung Bak in South Korea (Desautels-Stein 2007). This common sense, action-oriented pragmatism emphasizes consequences over ideals and was what the aforementioned activist was referencing when she said that my being American meant that at least I am practical. It is worth quoting Yang Sung-hee's editorial at length:

[Pragmatism] is a philosophy that values action and practice above everything else. It uses utility as the sole yardstick for judgment of truth.

Knowledge is also regarded as a useful tool to promote the prosperity of humankind. There is a close correlation between pragmatism and contemporary America. Pragmatism is nearly the only philosophy that the United States follows. Pragmatism is deeply rooted in the utilitarianism that prevailed in Europe at the end of 19th century. At that time, European capitalism was faced with an extreme income gap between the haves and have-nots, as well as an intense labor movement. The bourgeoisie needed a new ideology to stand against the proletariat, which was moving toward socialism. The solution was the utilitarianism that advocated the famous phrase, 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number.' Pragmatism is often called the evolution of utilitarianism from an American perspective (2007).

After Yang briefly summarizes Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, he quotes Korean philosopher Tak Sok-san's lecture:

'Pragmatism has been misunderstood as a political term that puts a priority on the people's prosperity and well-being, but it is the philosophy that Korean people have pursued during all of the last century.' He also said, 'As the need arose, pragmatism has served as a useful ideological frame. It has helped Koreans decide what they needed most to be successful, in terms of resolving the impending tasks they faced as the nation experienced industrialization and democratization during the past six decades' (2007).

The argument put forward in the first chapter of this dissertation is that even the progressivism of pragmatism—both temporal and political—has a self-critical and doubly-bound relationship with the ideological past. Following feminist and postcolonial critiques, I do not approach pragmatism or liberal democracy in a vacuum; rather, these must be examined alongside other indigenous, quasi-indigenous, quasi-transplanted, and transplanted ideologies defining South Korea’s discursive space. Like Kim Fortun (2001), I take up the double bind as a method for keeping constraint and scale proximate in a time of transition. It also enables a sense of scale both in terms of space, agency, and social relations (e.g. Choy 2003; Yarrow 2005). As such, it enables me to make some sense of the contradiction Koreanists have long posited between liberal democratic “ideals” and military authoritarian “reality” (e.g. Grinker 1998; Hwang 2009; Kwon 2000; Lee N.H. 2002; Paik 1994).

Following Timothy Choy (2003) and Thomas Yarrow (2005), I draw attention to how distinctions, particularly in units of analysis and agency, are enacted as imaginations of realities and experiences of scale without taking as self-evident relationships between people and ideas. Yarrow writes, “In a post-modern world, dualisms and dichotomies have been much maligned, yet all thought requires distinctions” (2005:12). Distinctions between ideology and discourse, for example, do work for those who use and believe in them (e.g. Jean-Klein 2002). Imagining colonialism as a discourse rather than an ideology has had profound effects in a divided Korea (Choi C.1993). At the same time, imagining liberal democracy and pragmatism as ideology—American or otherwise—is having effects in South Korea. Ideology often allows national commitments to the state and international commitments to

liberalism and democracy to supersede filial, local, and regional commitments (Yarrow 2005). Shifts in scale enable different translations and articulations (Tsing 1997) between the ethnographer and her field (Strathern 1991), the global and the local (Tsing 2005), and the universal and the particular (Choy 2003). Jae Chung has written of this approach as “opening up” the “connectivity of heterogeneous things...in which their ‘countability’ is left open rather than closed” (2009:65).

Robert Oppenheim (2008) has already put forward an Actor Network Theory-inflected approach to scalar politics and scholarship within and beyond Korean Studies:

‘Kyongju,’ ‘South Korea,’ and ‘the global,’ do not nest according to some prior order of generality. A task for anthropology is rather to trace these scaling processes that make the orders of these and other terms in different situations. Likewise, the field of Korean Studies might be at its best when it places the scale and hierarchy inherent to its name under erasure (2008:226).

This dissertation takes this “erasure” and exploration of scale as its starting point. A moment in the field when an activist confronted the failure of his project, described in the third chapter, made scale salient for me (e.g. Miyazaki and Riles 2005). He matter-of-factly described discourse (*damnon*), which his project was invested in changing, as “less than theory, smaller than ideology.” This statement underscored how discourse, ideology, and theory constituted a scale for some informants.

Ideology was presented by some former *minjung* activists as a unifying system while many coordinators (*gansa*) and staffers associated it with a dogmatic and regressive past. Discourse was often presented as a middle ground or placeholder until something better came along (Riles 2010a). Positing a “social design agenda,” as discussed in the fourth chapter, was a movement away from the grand ideologies and discourses of the activist past to something future-oriented, hopeful, and practical. Yet at the same time it was an appeal to the past, or what one informant called people’s “hunger for hope,” going back to South Korea’s rapid nation-building during Park Chung Hee’s military dictatorship from 1961 to 1979.

One of the findings of this dissertation is how that dictatorship continues to not only be active in people’s memories, but in their humor and hope (Chapter 4). This has been a recurrent finding in cognate post-socialist contexts (e.g. Greenberg 2006; Tanuma 2007; Yurchak 2005). Even former *minjung* activists and staunch critics of Park’s authoritarianism, such as Lawyer Park in the fourth chapter, conceded an “inheritance of optimism” from what they otherwise characterized as a “development first (*gaebaljisangjuui*)” period of harsh human rights abuses. The “near past” of Dictator Park’s “nation design” comports with the “near future” of Lawyer Park’s “social design” (Guyer 2007). The likeness is not so unsettling or unflattering at a time when many South Koreans ambivalently recall Park Chung Hee as the only president who did not just promise, but actually delivered hope. Lawyer Park and the Hope Institute are attempting to thread a difficult needle; they are attempting to undo what Jae Chung has called “the Faustian Korean bargain between economic

progress and political freedom” (2009:53). Park and other social analysts and designers are trying to recapture the scale of the “national utopian imagination” (Nelson 2000) without repeating its human rights and social development costs. They are attempting to avoid the historical precedent of failure, a powerful trope in postcolonial contexts.

Nancy Abelmann points out a resonance between *minjung*, the activist heritage of many of my informants, and Indian historiography (1996:261). She cites Ranajit Guha:

It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come into its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of either the classic nineteenth century type under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or a more modern type under the hegemony of workers and peasants, that is, a ‘new democracy’—it is the study of failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India (1987:7).

Abelmann writes, “Because Korea’s liberation was imposed and because there are two Korean states that claim to be the legitimate offspring of colonial struggles, many historians endeavor to explain or explain away ‘failure’ (1996:261). Namhee Lee has extended this footnote into a theory of the “crisis of historical subjectivity,” which she argues “gave rise to the discourse of *minjung*, which constituted the intellectual basis of the *minjung* movement” (2007:2). Lee describes the *minjung* movement as a characteristically

postcolonial phenomenon with resonances in South Asian, Latin American, and Eastern European contexts. This postcolonial sense of “failure” and “crisis” is also evident in the “democratic transition and consolidation” literature (e.g. Choi J.J. 2000; Cohen and Arato 1992; Linz and Stepan 1996; Merkel 1999). As I take up in the fourth chapter, democracy is conceived in terms of “levels” of scale. There are transitions, for example, between procedural and practical democracy. South Korea is widely perceived to be transitioning between these procedural and practical levels, which renders democracy an “incomplete project” (Shin 2005) and pragmatism an object worthy of ethnographic attention.

As Jesook Song’s (2009) ethnography makes clear, liberalism is also an incomplete project superseded by neoliberalism in South Korea. For many *minjung* activists, liberal democracy is a “site of intense longing for a ‘utopian horizon’... and of contestation with the state” (Lee N.H. 2007:6). In this dissertation I couple Roy Richard Grinker’s (1998) historical and ethnographic study of utopian impulses in unification contexts with Namhee Lee’s (2007) historical exploration of the utopian liberal-democratic impulses in the *minjung* movement. I place these insights alongside Laura Nelson’s (2000) ethnographic exploration of the more widespread “national utopian imagination” of Park’s dictatorship to make some sense of a few utopian and post-utopian pragmatic projects taking place inside NGOs and non-profits in Seoul.

Lateral Ethnography and Social Design

This dissertation is an ethnography of theory after many of the distinctions between academics and activists have become difficult to sustain (Ballesteros 2010; Choy 2003; Riles 2000, 2006a; Yarrow 2005). The movements in my informants' conceptual tools are familiar to our own. In fact, it is precisely the movement between activist tool and academic representation that makes things real (Riles 2000, 2002). Annelise Riles' (2000) ethnography, *The Network Inside Out*, offers an account of how and why this collapsed distance between ethnographer and subject as well as theory and data has exhausted many theoretical frameworks.

Riles likens her networking subjects to social movement analysts rather than social movement participants for a couple reasons. First, her subjects view "themselves as sympathetic facilitators of others' activism rather than activists themselves" (2000:66). This shift from participant to participant-analyst was part of what Lawyer Park was and the Hope Institute were positing with social design, which I take up in the fourth chapter. Second, they "are fascinated by the way in which language convinces, and they devote considerable time to the close analysis of language and design..." (Riles 2000:66). My discussion of discourse, particularly the questions I often fielded from informants about choosing the most efficacious translation of terms, is evident in the third and fourth chapters.

Riles draws an analogy to the study of social movement rhetoric inspired by Kenneth Burke's (1969, 1984) work which sought to reveal how and why movements elicited commitment (Riles 2000:66). Riles juxtaposes commitment to means and ends. She describes networking as "a full-time

commitment, not a means to some greater end” (2000:57). This commitment was to form or aesthetics, which is “outside” and “in a different register than, strategic action, in the conception of the analyst (social scientist or networker)” (Riles 2000:68). Hope operates in the much the same way as commitment in Miyazaki’s (2004) analysis. Amanda Snellinger (2007) similarly conceives of the commitment and hope of the Nepali activists she worked with in the register of “devotion” and “sacrifice” rather than strategy or means and ends. The activists I worked with in Korea enacted a similar commitment to and hope for sacrifice, which I take up in the second chapter. Iris Jean-Klein (2003) and Annelise Riles (2006a) subsequently reflected on form and aesthetics as a way to achieve some analytical distance from the hegemony of pragmatism and instrumentalism.

Anthropologists have explicitly engaged this tension with instrumentalism going back to Mauss, who conceived of his canonical work *The Gift* as the revelation of an already flourishing alternative to “natural economy” and “utilitarianism” (e.g. Strathern 1988:19). Mauss ostensibly redirected scholarly attention from the 19<sup>th</sup> century European struggles between utilitarianism and socialism. He revealed a shared pattern and practice of both—gift-giving—which has continuously shaped modern anthropology. I read Gregory Bateson’s work and Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* as very much in this tradition, particularly when read through the work of Marilyn Strathern (1991), Annelise Riles (2000), Hiro Miyazaki (2000, 2004), and others who have taken up the aesthetics of information, knowledge, and theory. This trajectory of anthropological work, according to Riles (2000:185), resists Kantian notions of aesthetics on one hand and Foucauldian notions of knowledge on the other

while finding kinship with some linguistic anthropology (e.g. Brenneis 1996). Attention to the “pattern which connects” in Bateson’s (1979) words and the “persuasiveness of form” in Strathern’s (1991) words has sustained ethnographic attention to and resistance of “knowledge which is invariably and merographically defined as useful for or relevant to some *other* purpose beyond itself” (original emphasis Strathern 1992:132). Subsequent anthropologists have taken up this tradition, organized loosely as an anthropology of knowledge, and have sought to highlight both ethnography and hope in terms of means rather than ends (e.g., Miyazaki 2004; Riles 2004a).

This trajectory of work is the inheritance of this dissertation, particularly in its refiguring of anthropological knowledge and the ethnographer-informant relationship. Debora Battaglia (1997) and Alfred Gell’s (1998) work has been critical in this respect given his reworking of person-thing agency.

In Korean Studies, Robert Oppenheim (2008) has recently taken up Gell’s (1998) collaborations in terms of the “vicinity of objects” while Jesook Song (2009) has written of her informants as “social engineers” and “crisis knowledge brokers.” Following this, the work of Annelise Riles among others (e.g. Maurer 2005; Miyazaki 2004), and Lawyer Park (see chapter four), I conceive of my informants as social movement analysts and social designers (*sosyeol dijaineo*) whom I laterally approach and collaborate with in a study of pragmatic and aesthetic commitments to liberal democracy and pragmatism. In Lawyer Park’s terms, we are all “social designers” trying to “set the agenda.”

The agenda, I argue in the fourth chapter, is an artifact of pragmatism. It is both an object of the most mundane practical concerns and a practice of the highest theoretical aspirations (Riles 2000). The agenda often moves from items up for discussion in a meeting, to scheduled actions yet to be taken, to the strategic vision for a person, movement, organization, or discipline.

George Marcus has been at the forefront of anthropological theory and pedagogy in resetting the research agenda over the last thirty years. He has done so with pragmatic consideration and rhetorical effect going back to *Writing Culture* and through his 1999 re-assessment, *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*. Marcus (2009) has most recently rearticulated anthropological fieldwork as a “design process” borrowing from studio fields such as art, graphic and industrial product design, and architecture. He finds the constant feedback, built-in research from conception to reception (e.g. Riles 2006b), and consideration of ethical issues to be “good to think” in reconceiving anthropology’s research process (2009:26-27). Marcus seeks “full expression as a framework of practices rather than remaining just a professional ethos and set of regulating aesthetics” (2009:27). Marcus’s “research design” is an effort to make explicit and formalize the informal and implicit aesthetics that have long shaped anthropological knowledge. In many ways, he is attempting to recapture the “profound rupture and reorganization of the research agenda of socio/cultural anthropology” that he helped define (Marcus 2008:1). Marcus reflects in a piece tellingly titled “The End(s) of Ethnography: Social/Cultural Anthropology’s Signature Form of Producing Knowledge in Transition”, that he and his colleagues are trying to do for fieldwork with *Fieldwork is Not What*

*It Used to Be* what he and Clifford did for writing with *Writing Culture* (2008:5-6). However, they are attempting to do so without repeating the relative weakness of the discipline's center compared to its interdisciplinary engagements (Marcus 2008:1). Marcus writes, "After *Writing Culture*, the interdisciplinary movements concerned with culture defined anthropology's research agenda, and it has never had its own questions within a theoretical fashion of its own design or making since then" (2008:8). In other words, Marcus is trying to recapture and rearticulate the discipline's methodological and theoretical imagination with and against the pervasive pragmatist apprehension of being in crisis or in transition (e.g. Koopman 2009). He approaches anthropology's method as "in transition."

I approach this laterally as an analog from my field, which has been in sustained crisis and transition. Lawyer Park sought to recapture the scale and therefore the hope of the "national utopian imagination" (Nelson 2000), which he and many other civil leaders in South Korea vigorously critiqued, without repeating its human or social costs. This movement of selective recapturing is progressive and hopeful (e.g. Greenberg 2006; Miyazaki 2004; Tanuma 2007). Many social movement analysts and social designers in my field fantasize about the utopian theory they first imagined as student activists, yet do not wish to go back to ideology. There is a pragmatic acceptance of the inability to return to the utopia of ideology; yet at the same time there is a hope to put ideas in motion so as to reimagine the scale of agency and design. Ultimately, I return to anthropology's transitional moment in the conclusion with a reoriented approach to crisis and the hopeful role of ethnography.

## Chapter Summaries

In the first chapter, I return to the foundational debates that have animated social movement analysts. This chapter provides an ethnographic account of the recent movement past and its implications for NGOs and NPOs in the near future (Guyer 2007). I take Cho Hae-joang's series of books, *Reading Texts*, *Reading Lives* (*Geul Ilkgiwa*, *Salm Ilkgi*), as both an artifact of my field and a methodological challenge. Her diagnosis of the crisis that the student movement confronted in the early 1990s—namely that it “turned away from or even oppressed those contradictions that emerged from people’s daily lives”—is my theoretical starting point (Cho 1994:151). I inflect contradictions through the rich anthropological literature on double binds and scale to articulate what I take to be not only a characteristic feminist and postcolonial phenomenon, but what I hope emerges as the setting for an account of pragmatism. Ideology is this setting, which following Thomas Yarrow (2005) I approach as a scalar imagination of reality. Ideology is both the possibility to supersede existing divisions and the entrenchment of new divisions. It is the double bind and ground for the progressivism—both political and temporal—of pragmatism. I argue that to understand any future design or agenda, which appear in later chapters, requires an understanding of this ideological past. In many accounts of the movement from the field, a hopeful and pragmatic future only appears as the progression from an ideological and utopian past.

In the second chapter, I approach sacrifice as a demonstration of commitment which keeps both human resource limits and transcendent alternative imaginaries proximate. Many NGO and NPO workers treated sacrifice as a

necessary commitment to solidarity or kinship by other means and as a means to live a more humane and green life. Yet with past entanglements to military authoritarianism, sacrifice is “a medium that connects activities far apart on the ideological spectrum” (Han 2004:84). “One working as one hundred (*ildangbaek*)” is an activist idiom of sacrifice that captures the superhuman aspiration to act despite the physical, financial, organizational, and expertise limits regularly confronted. Sacrifice is an inheritance from the past across the ideological spectrum and for many informants it is crucial to any hope for the future. Sacrifice, in particular Chon Tae-il’s suicide in 1970, is an example of the hope for agency on a larger scale, which I also address in the fourth chapter.

In the third chapter, I enact a recursive movement by ethnographically re-encountering discourse (*damnon*). Department Leader Lee directed my ethnographic attention to discourse when she reflected on it as an object of activist obsession. For her, it referenced the pragmatic failure of activists trying to be scholars. Yet for other activists, such as Secretary-General Choi, discourse was a middle ground placeholder for activists who had to try to be more like scholars to offer a “grand theory” alternative to sustainable development. In his own words, discourse is “less than theory, smaller than ideology.” I approach discourse in process by conceiving of it as project. Following Timothy Choy, I take as a “unit of analysis smaller than discourse” which specifies “relatively coherent bundles of practices, rhetoric, and expressive forms in everyday life that in concert can become discourse” (2003:107). I juxtapose two projects—Department Leader Lee’s job title and

Secretary-General Choi's Green Life Theory projects respectively—against the backdrop of the broader NGO failure to stop the government-led Saemangeum reclamation project. The ubiquity of project as both a unit of work and analysis points up the hegemony of pragmatism in high theory and mundane practices (Riles 2003).

In the fourth chapter, I continue the movement from discourse to agenda, which I encountered with Lawyer Park and his leadership of the Hope Institute (*Huimang Jejakso*). Lawyer Park and many of his colleagues treated his career as if it were the history of civil society in South Korea. In so doing, the progressive temporality of both Park's career and the nation are reinforced as if agendas (Greenhouse 1996; Yarrow 2005). Lawyer Park was not just a person; rather, he was a movement. In particular, I juxtapose Bruno Latour and Lawyer Park as self-consciously dynamic and pragmatic analysts in my own attempt to suspend such pragmatic impulses to instead refigure the scale of analysis. Given that pragmatism is the ground for Latour, Lawyer Park, and many others, I reverse the process to posit pragmatism as figure, which renders crisis into ground.

In the conclusion, I directly address the figure-ground reversals (Strathern 1991; Wagner 1978) I have performed in order to make more evident the hopeful role for ethnography. The discipline (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005) of this role has been theorized by feminist and queer theorists (Brown 1999; Butler 2004; Grosz 1998, 2000; Wiegman 2000) and as well as anthropologists (Miyazaki 2004, 2005; Riles 2010a). My own work is

particularly inspired by that of Hiro Miyazaki (2004), who predicates hope on an open future while anticipating how a hopeful role for ethnography might appear.

## Chapter 1: Ideology as Double Bind

“...the general difficulty of attaining unity over means, let alone ends, among people who have been robbed of political power.”

--- Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1897-1937*

### Scale and Ethnography

In the 1980s and 90s, biography and life history came to the fore in anthropology (e.g. Crapanzano 1980; Herzfeld 1997; Holland and Lave 2000). These engagements have foregrounded agency after its apparent backgrounding to social structure and totality in structuralist, structural-functional, systems, and Marxist approaches. Nancy Abelmann (1997a, 1997b, 2003) has been at the forefront of this anthropological turn within Korean Studies articulating a social mobility and narrative-driven life history approach. Following Lisa Rofel's (1999) work on generational cohorts of women in China, Abelmann seeks discursive articulations of generational positions of dissent. Activists, as Abelmann reflects:

...are neither self-styled free agents nor are they cultural dopes executing social codes; they are negotiating subject positions fashioned by South Korea's changed political-economic and ideological climate and by the contingencies of their own life trajectories (1997a:273).

Abelmann has carved out a discursive space for her and her informants—student activists and a post-war generational cohort of women—as “betwixt

and between” structure and agency (2003:1). She ambivalently oscillates between bold assertions about one woman’s story standing in for the larger national history of division, patriarchy, and status and later reducing such “talk” to a generation of South Korean women (2003:1,10). As backdrop and necessary cause for this approach, Abelman has continuously asserted the mind-boggling and profound compression of change that people in South Korea have experienced. “Change,” she writes, “seems somehow understated” when talking about South Korea (Abelman 2003:60). In a bolder moment, Abelman writes:

Change in South Korea is not of the step-by-step variety; rather, it races, leaving behind perhaps only the likes of plodding ethnographers to dare to author some pages, just as so many blank ones unfurl ahead... South Korea is simply not a place for very long-lived interests or projects. Of the ethnographer of South Korea who resides outside of the country, South Korea makes an anachronism (2003:60).

In the terms of this dissertation, Abelman is making an argument about change and scale. Rapid change and the ambivalent oscillation between bold generalities and humble particularities is a shared condition for informants and ethnographers alike. While at one level there are generations or what she terms “step-by-step” change, at another level, there are compressions that race ahead leaving people behind (2003:60). In the latter sense of change, one person can stand in for the movement (see Chapter 4), as the term for student activist, *undongwon*, collapses the distinction between individual activist and movement (Lee N.H. 2002, 2007).

The life histories scattered throughout this work, which are set off from the text, are an attempt to treat neither people nor reality in any self-evident relation (Yarrow 2005). They often shift between career movements and personal reflections to serve as compressed examples of the scale changes and attendant double binds encountered in the field.

### The Double Bind

A situation set up or perceived to be a double bind is one in which a person must choose between two or more equally valued, yet incompatible options. They are often incompatible because they condense different logical types, or levels of scale, into one experiential field (Fortun 2001:12). Bateson was interested in how family interactions produce these binds, such as when a parent tells a child “I want you to disobey me.” In this case, to obey the message is to disobey the parent-child relationship while to disobey the message is to obey the relationship. In a different context, Sharon Traweek (1988) demonstrates how double binds animate interactions among work colleagues such as when high-energy physicists-in-training receive official messages of cooperative group work, yet are rewarded for individual competition and careful insubordination. Following Bateson, Traweek describes how the mismatch between rules and experiences of social relations often induces “severe pain and maladjustment” yet “if this pathology can be warded off or resisted, the total experience may promote creativity” (Bateson 1958:278 quoted in Traweek 1998:89). Kim Fortun (2001) makes explicit this dual potential for pathology and creativity in her analysis of advocacy after the Bhopal disaster. The double bind not only positions advocates, corporations,

and governments to the disaster, but operates as the prevailing idiom for reckoning with environmental crisis in a globalized world. The complications of scale among local residents, national sovereignty, and international trade are particularly emblematic of the generative yet difficult paradoxes of postcolonial life. Following Anna Tsing's work, Timothy Choy (2003) renders shifts between local and global as articulated knowledges wherein universality and particularity are in a post-foundational double bind. Stacey Langwick (2008) describes how nurses and their aides negotiate the double bind of urgent, yet undersupported care in a Tanzanian hospital. The double bind becomes an idiom for reckoning with biomedical crisis in a postcolonial world. More generally, the double bind is an entry point for order and method in times of transition and crisis (e.g. Marcus and Faubion 2009).

As an analytical tool to come to grips with great change, or what is often glossed as crisis, the double bind enacts a tension with what can be treated as static. Bateson's (1958) work on the problems of recognizing, classifying, and theorizing change modeled this tension in the process of revisiting his previous work. Following Kim Fortun, I read his 1958 epilogue to *Naven* as an analytical demonstration of the double bind, which entails "the problems posed for an ethnographer when confronted by messages of different logical types" (2001:363). Bateson visibly struggles to weave together different levels of scale without imparting "objective reality" to those levels; rather, he treats them as "processes of knowing" or "ways of putting the jigsaw puzzle together" (1958:281). The question, Annmarie Mol writes, "of how objects, subjects, situations, and events are differentiated into separate elements and how they are coordinated together is opened up for study" (2002:83).

Robert Oppenheim (2008) has begun to rearticulate the field in terms of scale and double binds. He explores the multiple and often conflicting demands to speak credibly as both a local, indigenous organization as well a national Korean NGO mobilizing national and international experts. The difficult fusion that many movement activists must achieve between blood relations (filiation) and social relations (affiliation) is analogous to the difficult fusion many NGOs must achieve between being local and grassroots while networking and expanding. Oppenheim has extended these insights to Koreanist scholarship. Oppenheim attempts to set a new agenda for Koreanists, particularly anthropologists, by placing the “scale and hierarchy inherent to [Korean Studies] under erasure” and instead tracing scaling processes (2008:226). In this chapter, I attempt to analyze the scale of commitment to ideas (ideology) and to people (solidarity) and how these two commitments sometimes constitute double binds.

In so doing, the double bind appears as an activist relation with the past in terms of socialist and liberal democratic aspirations alongside Confucian, colonialist, anti-communist, and military authoritarian realities. Several scholars have pointed out the historical distance between the liberal-democratic Constitution and military authoritarian reality in South Korea (Hwang 2009; Lee S.H. 2002). There is a persistent self-critique about the colonialist, authoritarian and nationalist inheritance of ideology. Over the course of the chapter, ideology moves from being a source of struggle to a source of systemic solidarity, division, regressive colonialism, and progressive movement. The central argument of this chapter is that ideology is a double

bind between these inherited and imagined realities. Insook Kwon, a student activist who became a generational and feminist hero for her landmark sexual harassment lawsuit, provides a window into the double bind of liberal democratic aspirations and military authoritarian reality. Finally, I recast the reception of Cho Hae-joang's series of books—*Reading Texts, Reading Lives*—as an expression of the ambivalent impulses to reject some ideologies as colonialist while embracing others as liberating. In the final section of this chapter, I begin to address the compressed distance between myself as ethnographer and many of my informants. I begin, however, with some context.

### Ideology

“Even if there are only two people in a room,” one non-profit executive director joked about Korean activists, “there are three opinions<sup>1</sup>.” This joke made light of activists' commitment to ideology and the resulting factionalism that many criticized as plaguing historical and contemporary movements in Korea (Robinson 1988; Shin 1995; Lee N.H. 2007). The 1987 presidential election was cited on several occasions as proof of this tendency toward destructive ideological factionalism. In that election, military-backed Roh Tae Woo won after former activists Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam split the vote. At the same time, it was also seen as a failure of ideology insofar as it provided a textbook example of regionalism<sup>2</sup>, or commitment to filial region above and beyond any commitment to ideas or policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Roh Tae Woo, from the political and military establishment centering in the city of Daegu in North Gyeongsang province, easily carried this area and narrowly carried some other regions. Kim Young Sam carried his home city of Busan in South Gyeongsang province and narrowly edged out Kim Dae Jung in many other regions. Kim Dae Jung made a strong showing in his home Jeolla region while Kim Jong Pil carried his home region, South Chungcheong. In the

The 1987 election was the first formal democratic election in the Republic of Korea since 1971. Yet many of the former student activists and civil leaders I knew retrospectively treated the 1997 election as the first “real (*silje*)” post-dictatorship election because Kim Dae Jung, veteran activist and opposition leader from the historically underprivileged Jeolla region (please refer to Chapter 3 for additional background), was elected. The peaceful transfer of power between political parties coupled with the success of Kim Dae Jung after narrowly losing the presidential election in 1971, 1987, and 1992 led many activists to treat the 1997 election as democratically and ideologically redemptive. One former student activist and long-time NGO supporter reflected on Kim Dae Jung’s election as “a rare proud moment in Korean politics<sup>3</sup>,” which he saw as crippled by regionalist divisions and patronage. Another long-time NGO supporter reflected on Korean political parties as a “charade” with “strong regional ties and little or no ideological differences<sup>4</sup>.” Ideology was an aspiration for many former democracy activists (Kang 2008); they struggled for a politics based on ideas against a politics based on lineage or money.

Roh Moo Hyun’s election in 2002, especially following that of Kim Dae Jung, marked a major advancement in ideological politics for many former activists. Roh broke the mold of all previous presidents in terms of his age and educational background. He pushed ideological differences between generations and political parties into stark relief (e.g. Kang 2008). Roh’s

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end, Roh won 36.6 percent, Kim Young Sam 28 percent, Kim Dae Jung 27 percent, and Kim Jong Pil 8.1 percent of the nationwide vote.

<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation with author on June 9, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with author on June 30, 2001.

election coincided with the departure of the “Three Kims”—Kim Jong Pil, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Dae Jung—from political life. Just as the authoritarian legacy was fading with the departure of the “Three Kims,” President Roh was asserting a pragmatic<sup>5</sup> choice between legacies when he described South Korea “as being at the crossroads of either going back to the dictatorial past of the Yusin era, or revitalizing the reforms era<sup>6</sup>, or moving forward to the future” (Roh 2004 quoted in Kang 2008). At the same time, Roh convened several truth and reconciliation-style commissions to investigate controversial historical events such as Korean collaboration with the Japanese colonial government, the uprising on Jeju Island in 1948, and suspicious civilian deaths during Park Chung Hee’s rule. These investigations coupled with his progressive ideological stands, particularly in taking on the media establishment and seeking to repeal the Anti-Communist National Security Laws, polarized people along ideological lines and mobilized the “New Right.” One history professor, Huh Dong Hyun, wrote in an English editorial about the “moral politics” that Roh’s administration prescribed. At the end of Roh’s term, Huh reflected:

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<sup>5</sup> Roh began calling himself a “pragmatist (*siryongja*)” immediately after the election to perhaps soften his image as an ideologue. While many dismissed this as only rhetoric at the time, it later became a disappointment and failure for many activists, particularly when Roh sent Korean combat troops to Iraq and championed a free trade agreement with the U.S. After Roh left office, and particularly after his suicide, some Leftists revisited his pragmatic compromises as proof of the power of old military, university, and regionalist networks in politics. Lee Myung Bak’s election in 2007 and his subsequent “New Right” and “pragmatic (*siryong*) government” confirmed many Leftist fears about the resurgence of authoritarian and corrupt politics.

<sup>6</sup> “Yusin” literally means revitalization and refers to military dictator Park Chung Hee’s harshest period of rule while “reform” refers to the globalizing, (neo)liberal reforms of Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. Kim Jong Pil links them both as a former high-level advisor to Park Chung Hee and as a political ally to Kim Dae Jung.

The age of ideologies has ended and the world is moving forward to an era of creative integration, such as the Third Way or neo-moderates. So, the Korean administration's interpretation of history is a product of old times, when ideologies dominated everything and leaders wrote history on their own for the purpose of justifying their utopia (Huh 2008).

At the end of his term, Roh's administration was widely seen as ideologically polarizing, unrealistically utopian, and practically incompetent<sup>7</sup>. In the long-standing division between affect and instrumentality or sentiment and practicality (e.g. Grinker 1998; Kendall 2002; Yi 1993), Roh was associated with the former and critiqued on the basis of the latter.

Many student activists-turned-NGO and NPO pioneers faced similar critiques—at times from each other and from younger staffers in their own organizations. As mentioned in the introduction, Roh and former democracy movement-turned NGO leaders were bundled together as members of the 386 generation. This generation, as I explore in this chapter, are perceived to be idealist, ideological, utopian, and self-righteous such that they fashioned movements and organizations with the same qualities. In the words of one former student activist-turned- NGO accountant, “[NGOs] are all brains with no one to work on the bottom<sup>8</sup>.” A common observation about 386 generation activists, often from others, was that they were too busy protesting on the

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<sup>7</sup> Roh's advisors and activist supporters were often his most vicious critics. I heard disdainful stories from professed insiders in 2006 and 2007 of Roh's appointment of an inexperienced liaison between the Blue House, the President's residence and office, and the National Assembly in an effort to be “transparent” as well as some of his foreign policy advisors relying on simple internet searches for key policy briefings ahead of major diplomatic trips.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with author on October 17, 2006.

streets to study and learn what they needed to in order to govern effectively<sup>9</sup>. At the same time some veteran movement activists accused new NGO hires of being “selfish” and “career-driven” (Chapter 3). What I often found, however, were many staffers working between, or in the middle of these views. Team Leader Yoon is exemplary:

**Team Leader Yoon (Yoon Timjangnim)** had worked for the same NGO for six years. He was one of the first people to work on NGO public finance (*jaejeong*), but had since switched jobs to start a campaign modeled on Morgan Spurlock’s *Supersize Me* to draw attention to fast food consumption, misleading advertising, and childhood obesity in South Korea. Like Spurlock, Yoon made a film documenting the personal effects of eating fast food, which helped persuade the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to regulate advertising aimed at children and require fast food companies to provide more information about ingredients. He considered it a “practical success<sup>10</sup>” and example to other NGOs as well as to companies in his ongoing partnership work between NGOs and businesses. Several others, particularly seniors, were suspicious or openly disapproved of partnering with big businesses. He joked that he often had to endure more hostility and critical questioning from his own NGO colleagues than from anyone else. Yoon regarded some of his colleagues as “relying more on ideology (*idieollogi*) than on expertise (*jeonmunseong*) or practical experience (*siryongjeok gyeongheom*).”

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<sup>9</sup> Paraphrased quote from different interviews with author on February 9, 2007 and March 20, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> All statements are from an interview with the author on February 9, 2006.

He maintained, “Some people joined NGOs with political aims, but most did not” and so he sensed a shift in NGOs away from ideology and toward culture. He reflected that his earlier efforts to improve internal administration and finances were far more frustrating and draining because he could not “get things done.” Yoon explained that “most NGOs were established in only the last 15 years so they are in the process of changing” organizational styles and strategies. He went on to say that because of their short history, “NGOs depend on a few people who initiated the movement, but time will solve this problem.” Yoon was hopeful that he and others like him working for NGOs and NPOs “can improve the work situation” for junior colleagues by minimizing patronage practices. Yoon recognized the difficulties of changing old organization and bookkeeping practices inside his NGO and so redirected his energy to being a mentor for junior colleagues and to taking on a fast food campaign aimed at children. Yoon, like many other mid-level NGO and NPO workers I will discuss, had to be practical in order to be effective in an ideologically divisive and transitional work environment.

### In the Middle

Mid-level NGO and NPO workers, or those who held the title of “team leader (*timjang*)” or “department leader (*gukjang*),” were often the ones working “on the bottom (*miteso*).” They were also the ones most often interested in reflecting on double binds because they had to move between their seniors, who were student activists and NGO or NPO pioneers, and their juniors, who

were often fresh college graduates who not only had no memory of the 1970s and 80s student movement, but also were critical of its legacies.

**Department Leader Yoon (*Yoon Gukjangnim*)**, a seven-year staffer at the same NGO, had worked on both environmental campaigns and general organizational management and accounting. Before this he had studied physics and engineering in university, but had little social experience. Yoon had family pressure to become an engineer or scientist, but felt he needed more diverse social experiences before doing so. A newspaper advertisement and push from a friend led him to apply for work at an environmental NGO. Yoon had a reputation for shyness and kindness when I first started volunteering at his NGO in 2001. However, he had developed a reputation among his colleagues for his “quiet” but “sharp” style by the time I returned in 2005. He never lost his kindness, according to a couple close friends, but he developed the kind of backbone and confidence (*jasingam*) that was needed to lead. According to many juniors, Yoon led by “example (*mobeom*)” rather than by force. His long-term relationship and eventual marriage to a NGO colleague was often whimsically described and credited with cementing his own work commitment. According to many seniors, he had blossomed into a leader by complementing his already strong work ethic with stronger social skills. He credited experience (*gyeongheom*), belief (*sinnyeom*), and human relationships (*ingan gwangye*) with much of his success and had grown suspicious of book-based knowledge (*jisik*) and expertise (*jeonmunseong*). Yoon also shared over a series of drinks and chats that the symbolism of his seniors’ past struggles

was losing its meaning as they got more rigid and ideological while the apparent lack of commitment and loyalty from his juniors was also troubling.

Department Leader Yoon shared some reflections on what kinds of changes he thought “the movement” needed to undertake in 2007. I quote him below because he is emblematic of a viewpoint that most mid-level NGO workers espoused while I was in the field from 2005 to 2007, which contained a familiar division between ideals (*isang*) and practical reality (*hyeonsil*):

While change is necessary, it must begin from a clear role distinction between the *simin* movement and the *minjung*<sup>11</sup> movement. The *simin* movement must find methods for solving social contradictions in practical reality (*hyeonsil*). While the *minjung* movement worries about putting emphasis on ideals (*isang*), the *simin* movement must worry about putting emphasis on practical reality (*hyeonsil*). Accordingly, the *simin* movement must concentrate its power on practical problems where they can work together with citizens to fix actual contradictions, and on this basis they must begin to forge solidarity with the *minjung* movement<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Minjung*, particularly in the 1980s, indexed a revolutionary non-elite and often village-based communitarian movement, critical historiography, and some kinds of religious practice that conceived of “common, mass people (*minjung*)” as the central historical and political subject in Korea. *Simin* (*citizen*), on the other hand, indexed an often urban, diverse, non-violent, capitalist and middle-class-focused set of environmental, feminist, human rights, labor, and quality of life concerns (Abelmann 1996; Lee N.H. 2007; Oppenheim 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Excerpt from written survey response received February 14, 2007.

In this chapter, I will discuss the importance of Yoon's distinction between ideals and reality and how national and movement history informs it. Before doing this, however, I turn to the importance of ideals and ideology in the *minjung* movement and how these constituted struggle and division.

### Ideology as Struggle

The NL-PD division is an active legacy of the postcolonial, labor, and student-led *minjung* movements of the 1980s. Namhee Lee characterizes the two factions—PD (People's Democracy) and NL (National Liberation)—as agreeing that South Korea is “a state-monopoly capitalist dependent on foreign powers” (2007:133). For Lee, the division turned on how the factions saw national autonomy:

PD recognized that South Korean society had produced a capitalist system with a unique logic of its own, while the NL, denying any autonomy to Korean capitalism, saw South Korean capitalism as a U.S. imperialist attempt at domination, and saw the class contradiction (i.e. the contradiction between capital and labor) as taking the form of the contradiction between imperialism and the South Korean people (2007:133-134).

The NL faction took up North Korea's self-reliance ideology (*juche sasang*) and in so doing heightened resistance to U.S. imperialism (Grinker 1998:184; Shin 1995:523-524). Somewhat simplistically, NL was for nationalist revolution against U.S. imperialism while PD was for an international Marxist-Leninist class struggle (Lee N.H. 2007:134).

A department leader put it to me a different way one day. She said that NL and PD disagreed over “Korea’s first problem<sup>13</sup>.” For NL it was reunification and so they advocated “reunification first, democracy later (*seon tongil, hu minju*)” while it was democracy for PD and so they called for “democracy first, reunification later (*seon minju, hu tongil*)” (Grinker 1998:192). So while the movement shared resistance to Confucianism, military authoritarianism, anti-communism, capitalism, and imperialism broadly conceived and imagined a socialist alternative (whether indigenous and/or North Korea-based), they split over agenda, or pragmatic priorities.

This split constituted a major ideological struggle (*inyeom tujaeng*), which came to define the movement during the 1980s. Namhee Lee describes these struggles as “comprehensive debates on political theories, organizational theories, strategies, and tactics” inspired by and modeled on Lenin’s *What is to Be Done?* (2007:254). A great deal of intellectual and emotional energy went into ideological struggles and occasionally movement activists (*undonggwon*) came “to fight each other violently with wood poles in public and disrupt each other’s public gatherings” (Lee N.H. 2007:134). She sees “some of the most regrettable aspects of the student movement” in this ideological division which included sabotage, physical assaults, and the labeling of student suicides as an “easy way out of the ideological struggle” (Lee N.H. 2007:180). A foreign text such as Lenin’s circulated in underground student movement circles and were “absorbed” as an “absolute science” which “defined reality” (Lee N.H. 2007:164).

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<sup>13</sup> Personal conversation with several people on July 5, 2006.

One civil leader described teaching himself Japanese while pouring over translations of these major texts in jail<sup>14</sup>. Another said he learned Russian and German so that he could read the original texts<sup>15</sup>. Lawyer Park, a civil leader I discuss in the third and fourth chapter, recalled reading a German legal text titled “Struggle for Rights” while in jail as a student activist, which set his future course<sup>16</sup>. Many student movement activists (*undongwon*) read translated pamphlets and described a self-transformational and utopian horizon when engaging foreign works as ideologies. Pouring over difficult political, legal, and philosophical texts in foreign languages often created an imaginary ideological world not unlike the “imaginary West” Alexei Yurchak (2005) describes in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 80s. Yet what some activists realized during the course of their real encounters with former imaginations was a disorienting inability to stay committed to any idea or ideology.

**Team Leader Kim (*Kim Timjangnim*)** did not like to discuss his student activist past; instead he preferred to talk about the challenges policy makers faced. I learned from Kim’s colleagues that he was exiled for his attempted trip to North Korea in the 1970s. As a result, he lived in Germany for over eight years, where he met his wife (another student activist exiled for traveling to North Korea), and that experience reshaped him. Kim traveled for long periods of time in Europe and the U.S. to conduct research into the governmental and semi-governmental

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with author on April 22, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with author on September 13, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with the author on February 5, 2007.

anti-corruption systems that already existed in order to design and refine Korea's Pact for Anti-Corruption and Transparency (KPACT), a semi-governmental advisory council to Roh Moo Hyun's administration. Kim was reflective about the challenges Korea faced as an "advanced (*seonjin*)" nation no longer able to rely on nineteenth century modernization theories from China of "Eastern body, Western technique (*dongdoseogi*)" nor on the 1970s and 80s view that "the West is good and we are bad<sup>17</sup>." He reflected that since the 1990s, there are fewer benchmarks to be taken from other places because no other place has quite the same history of economic development and democratic reforms as Korea. Kim said, "I cannot concretize what is other," but said that Koreans had to find a "different" and "better" way than other countries to advance. He went on to say that "theories are thrown into the dustbin" and gave the example of sustainable development. He said that the idea that the Earth will collapse in 30-40 years was being challenged and so the whole premise of sustainable development was being questioned. Kim asserted, "Unfortunately, there is no panacea." He recalled his many trips overseas as unsettling rather than affirming any ideology he had as a student activist about North Korea, Germany, Japan, or the United States. Kim was interested in the "practical work" of benchmarking and "experimentation" of "deliberative democracy."

### Ideology as Solidarity

386 generation movement activists were often doubly bound to their blood families and movement families. They were raised on what Laura Nelson

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<sup>17</sup> All quotes are from an interview with the author on May 10, 2006.

(2000) calls the “national utopian imagination,” which was predicated on the belief that personal work and sacrifice would enable a better personal, familial, and national future. Yet what many of them reported realizing in the course of becoming *minjung* movement activists (*undonggwon*) was how unseamless these levels of relations could become, particularly in the face of *minjung* suffering. Insook Kwon, an *undonggwon* in the mid-1980s, wrote the following about her first experience working alongside *minjung* one summer in university:

A sense of injustice began to present itself to me when I compared their conditions to the privilege of my family and myself. In my growing years poverty was not alien to me but it was other to me. My father and mother came from rural areas. So I had many relatives living there. They always visited my father to ask for help or money. My mother gave my cousins my old clothes. However, I had not been sympathetic to them at all. I simply thought that I was different from them (2000:154).

Kwon goes on to describe her transformation:

After ten days of working hard and staying with peasants, an increasing class-consciousness resulted, as well as a desire to struggle for equality. Also, I felt I emotionally became aware that somehow my privilege was connected to their conditions of poverty. On the way back home, I cried a lot on the bus. I cried from shame about my attitude toward life. There was always only me. I was only concerned with my

welfare and well-being. It was the first time I looked back on my life from a different angle. At that moment, I gave up the idea of becoming a fashion designer and pursuing study abroad (2000:154-155).

Like many others in the movement during the mid-1980s, she dropped out of university to work in a factory, the “historical site of importance (*hyeonjang*)” for the movement (Kim S.K.1997; Koo 1993; Lee N.H. 2007). Students, particularly from elite backgrounds, felt great pressure to sacrifice their elite privileges as Kwon did and join the non-elite workers in factories to educate and organize them (Kim S.K. 1997; Lee N.H. 2007). Both Nancy Abelmann (1997a) and Namhee Lee (2007) provide personal stories of how activists struggled with their movement obligation to forego a university diploma, studying abroad, enrolling in graduate studies, or any aspiration to become a doctor, lawyer, or artist. Student activists also frequently chose marriage partners according to their prospective partner’s commitment to the same obligations. Insook Kwon chose a different path when she was arrested in 1986 for illegal labor organizing and made headlines for bringing an unprecedented sexual harassment lawsuit against a police detective. Kwon ultimately became a feminist critic of the *minjung* movement, which I will discuss later in this chapter. The same year Kwon brought her suit another student reportedly threw herself in the river over the “dilemma” between her own dreams and the responsibility she felt to forego such dreams for the sake of the movement (Lee N.H. 2005:917). Movement activists often felt conflicted about the upwardly mobile class dreams they were raised on and that their families sacrificed for and supported on one hand and the communitarian and egalitarian dreams they came to learn as part of the *minjung* movement on the

other. The movement commitment often negated the filial commitment and vice versa, which constituted a double bind.

Movement families consisted of senior-junior (*seonbae-hubae*) relations along with ideological circles and seminars. *Seonbae-hubae* relations are age-based and hierarchical. However, they are not “strictly hierarchical or unilateral” (Lee 2007:161). Namhee Lee analogizes them to sibling relations, which are based on “mutual respect and reciprocal obligations” (2007:161). Seniors (*seonbae*) are expected to act as responsible moral guides, counselors, and models to be emulated while juniors (*hubae*) are to act as appreciative and enthusiastic followers. *Hubae* often compel *seonbae* to act just as the reverse is expected. The stakes in protest were often raised through these reciprocal obligations; each demonstrated their commitment to the other through increasingly dangerous and difficult actions (Lee N.H. 2007).

The moral necessity, age-based hierarchy, and reciprocity of these relations reflected Confucian teachings, but the basis of the relations constituted a major shift (Lee N.H. 2007:161). *Seonbae-hubae* relations grew out of “circles” and “seminars,” which is how students came together to study texts and form ideologies. These “circles” were at times referred to as *jip* (Kwon 2000; Lee N.H. 2007), which Eunhee Kim Yi defines as “not necessarily... ‘family’ or ‘household” (1993:97). *Jip* has been remarkably flexible from the Joseon dynasty through the colonial period which has been defined not only by blood (Yi 1993). Admittance to *undonggwon jip* hinged on school, major, friends, family background, school records, and ideological orientation (Han 1974; Lee N.H. 2007:165). Once in the *jip*, *seonbae*

were the critical and in some cases determining factor in an *undonggwon* individual's ideological orientation, so much so that in the mid-1980s, it was said that, 'If the *seonbae* belonged to NL [National Liberation], then the *hubae* would also be a member of NL (Lee 2007:161).

Within a given *jip*, *seonbae* would sometimes train a select group of *hubae* and call them "*songgol*," the term denoting true-bone rank during the Silla dynasty (Kwon 2000:201). In Silla's strictly hierarchical system, only those of the true-bone rank could head a government ministry because they were of the highest hereditary rank (Eckert 1990:32).

Despite the anti-Confucian rhetoric, there was frequently a mixing of filial and affiliational metaphors, such as "the bloodlines of activism" evident in *minjung* literature, which trace unresolved struggles through generations (Abelmann 1996:35). *Han*, Abelmann defines, as a "historical poesis" of accumulated anger and resentment (Abelmann 1996:37). Sometimes characterized as the essence of Koreanness (e.g., Grinker 1998), *han* "relaxes the temporal and geographic patchwork of passive and active, resistance and non-resistance" because "it assumes that historical experience does not need to be individually or consciously part of the rationale by which people explain their actions or motivations, particularly when protest or struggle are involved" (Abelmann 1996:37). *Han* can latently accumulate and then dramatically blow-up as it is passed from generation-to-generation (e.g., Grinker 1998; Kendall 1988). In some ways, *han* constituted *minjung* activist "belief in the existence of

undiscovered or suppressed radicalism that took quotidian form” (Abelmann 1997a:252). *Han* is a popular and academic way of accounting for the agency of the past in the present and future.

One former student activist who became the executive director of a NPO reflected on how student activists during the 70s and 80s shared the “three mins”—*minjok* (single ethnic nation), *minju* (democracy), and *minjung* (mass people). She fondly recalled reading Marx and Lenin in university while seeking “systems” (*siseutem*) rather than “theories” (*iron*). She worried that her younger colleagues did not have a similar “system,” or ideology, of thought and solidarity (*yeondae*). After returning from a weekend retreat with her former student movement activist (*undonggwon*) friends, she remarked:

[*Undonggwon* from the 70s and 80s] share a common heritage from the student movement so there are no communication problems between us...We look for systems while [younger staff that did not experience the student movement] search for particular theories to match particular issues<sup>18</sup>.

Secretary-General Choi’s Greenism compared to the more specific policy reforms many of his younger staff pursued is one example of this difference (Chapter 3). Another *undonggwon* from the 1980s said that the *minjung* and *simin* movements depended on systemic-thinking solidarity as it grew to work on many different issues in its “department store style” (*baekhwajeomsik*). “Even if we don’t agree on every issue,” she said, “we know we agree on the

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with author on January 13, 2007.

big things because we were together in the student movement (*hakbeon*)<sup>19</sup>.” She reasoned that the informal networks through which activists know each other was changing and was unsure, like many other former *undonggwon*, about how solidarity (*yeondae*) would continue. Like many other 386 generation NGO and NPO leaders, she lamented the disinterest of new staff in meeting for alcoholic drinks most nights.

During my fieldwork in the mid-2000s, most people working for and with NGOs and NPOs professed the kind of post-ideological pragmatism that Roh Moo Hyun’s administration appeared to necessitate. On a number of occasions, people went out of their way to proclaim how passé 1980s ideological struggles were in the current moment. One coordinator (*gansa*), said that iconic NGOs such as PSPD used to attract members because of a “shared ideology,” but that NPOs such as the Beautiful Foundation attracted donors because of a “shared culture<sup>20</sup>.” A frequent refrain among people of all ages working in NGOs and NPOs during the 2000s—even those who were *undonggwon* or identified as 386 generation—was that ideology not only kept the movement back, but also threatened the nation. One research director claimed that *undonggwon* from the 80s “stick to ideology” and so “do not prepare for the future.” A professor and NGO supporter matter-of-factly stated that Koreans had moved past ideology and that to return to it would be tantamount to regression<sup>21</sup>. Pragmatism and its linear progression will be taken up further in the fourth chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with author on March 31, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with author on September 16, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with author on March 17, 2007.

The *minjung* imaginary aspired to mobilize a non-Confucian, non-lineage-oriented, non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, and non-authoritarian kinship and nation through ideology. This ideology co-existed with, fed off of, and pushed off against other ideologies such as Confucianism, socialism, Marxism, Leninism, North Korea's self-reliance ideology, South American liberation theology, and American style liberal democracy. Yet these ideologies existed at different logical and experiential levels in South Korea, which is what constitutes the double bind. For example, liberal democracy was an "academic subject" taught in schools and mandated in the South Korean Constitution, while military authoritarianism was the "reality" during the 1970s and 80s (Dong 1987; Lee S.H. 2002). "The discourse of liberal democracy was the meta-narrative of the Republic of Korea," writes Hwang Byeong-ju, "but the lived experience of the common people offered very little freedom" (2009:14). The *undonggwon* who grew up during this time and so experienced liberal democracy and military authoritarianism as a double bind went on to become members of the 386 generation.

#### Insook Kwon and the Double Bind of Democracy and Militarism

I take Insook Kwon's story to be emblematic of the 386 generation double bind. Kwon is the aforementioned student activist I quoted at length who brought a sexual harassment lawsuit against a police detective in 1986. This action elevated her, along with her subsequent published reflections, to a symbol of self-critique within the movement (e.g., Lee N.H. 2007). In particular, Kwon critiqued the movement's implicit militarism. With her lawsuit, Kwon effectively used liberal democratic laws as a means to redress some of the painful effects of militarism. Kwon (2000) reflected on these experiences in the context of a

dissertation she completed in the U.S. The dissertation, entitled *Militarism in My Heart: Militarization of Women's Consciousness and Culture in South Korea*, is an examination and self-reflection on the insidious social effects of militarization in South Korea.

Kwon describes how militarized even the anti-military dictatorship and pro-democracy *undonggwon* were in their actions. "Student activists," Kwon reflects, "always pursued and dreamed of democracy but did not experience what democracy was in reality" (2000:306). As a result, democracy was viewed as "anything but military dictatorship" rather than a system of equality and decision-making (Kwon 2000:94). Kwon reasoned that this reality of democracy would have challenged the prevailing militaristic reality among *undonggwon* (2000:306). I read her dissertation as an account of the double bind between military authoritarian reality and democratic dreams.

Kwon opens the dissertation recounting a conversation she had with two Korean graduate students studying in the U.S. When Kwon explained that she was studying militarism (*gunsajuui*) both women asked what that meant. After Kwon translated it into English and said she was looking at the relationship between women and militarism both women thought she meant women in the military. Kwon said this type of response was very common when she spoke with Korean friends:

Their responses suggest two things: first, [the two students] had not needed to look for a comparable word in Korean for militarism until then.

Second, the only possible relationship they could recall regarding women's relation to militarism was women in the military (2000:1).

Kwon goes on to say she had a similar response when she was first confronted with the concept of militarism. She recounts taking Cynthia Enloe's course "Women and Militarization" in 1997 and being asked how militarism had affected her own life or those around her and being "embarrassed because I did not know anyone who had been militarized" (Kwon 2000:1). In trying to complete an assignment for the course, she contacted a friend whose father had been a colonel in the South Korean marines figuring she could shed some light on being militarized. When Kwon explained the assignment her friend responded, "Aren't you the representative one whose life has been militarized in South Korea" (2000:2)? Kwon explains:

She was referring to the incident in which I was tortured by the military regime in 1986. I did not know what to say at that moment. In fact, her response took me by surprise. To be honest, I was offended because, for me, the military was a bad thing. Therefore, being related to it seemed insulting (2000:2).

Kwon's response to her friend's question reveals how unaware she was of her relation to militarism. This realization became the starting point for her dissertation:

I, who grew up in a representative military city in South Korea, who was subject to military training from elementary school on, who held the flag

for anti-communism rallies, who was ashamed of my own physical weakness when male student activists threw stones and fire bottles at riot police during demonstrations in the 1980s, had never thought of any kind of personal or group relation to the military or militarism. Above all, during much of my childhood I feared another Korean War, raised enmity to North Korean Communists, and agreed with the strong military build-up under military regimes. After a conversation with a friend, I kept asking myself, 'How could I not be aware of militarism's relationship to my life and to South Korean society (2000:2)?'

The answer, she argues, is "hegemonic domination." Kwon describes militarism as a pervasive yet invisible part of South Korean culture such that even those trying to overthrow the military regime, the *undongwon*, "never seriously thought of and discussed the military as an institution" (2000:2-3). Militarism not only dominated through naked force, but through the "spontaneous consent hidden or embedded in values, norms, perceptions, beliefs, sentiments, and prejudices..." (Kwon 2000:25). Kwon likened hegemonic domination to the process of forming a habit, which "resides in the inarticulation and hidden homogenization of thoughts, morals, and values" (2000:25).

The hegemonic domination of militarism was evident in the *minjung* movement's privileging of violent struggle, or what Kwon calls the "masculinized activist model" (2000:3). This model was manifest in how women *undongwon* dressed and behaved:

tall with deep voice, no make-up, no hair-do, no skirt...smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, wearing only jeans and using tough language...were evidence of whether any female activist had overcome her conventional femininity and, thus, her petty-bourgeois upbringing... (Kwon 2000:117-119).

Women *undonggwon* reported measuring their activist commitment against men's violent activities such as throwing rocks and fire bombs on the frontlines of demonstrations. Women reported feelings of weakness and guilt when not doing such activities (Kwon 2000:122-127). Kwon casts the idea of even wearing a skirt as threatening to movement strength and solidarity. The militarized uniformity *undonggwon* displayed, particularly during their demonstrations, was a source of strength. Kwon quotes a former woman *undonggwon*:

My friend had said that we were almost into the movement like heroin addicts. The greatest fantasy, we then imagined, was human relationships. I was proud that I would die for my comrades (2000:126-127).

Kwon argues that this self-sacrificing uniform solidarity was an expression of militarism's hegemonic domination. Most forms of movement solidarity appear militaristic in her account. For example, she describes senior-junior (*seonbae-hubae*) relationships as following Confucian and militaristic practices. Kwon writes of *undonggwon* as:

desirable warriors who grew up accustomed to enmity culture and valuing and practicing the prioritization of national interests over personal interests. They knew how to sacrifice themselves for larger causes. They were already trained warriors who had been organized as para-military forces in high school. Military culture and information was always available because of male universal conscription and strong military influences in society (2000:306-307).

Kwon's dissertation ostensibly demonizes solidarity as militarization. Militarism rather than ideology appears as the culprit of twisted solidarity. Kwon, in fact, casts solidarity as a militarized reality which democratic reality would combat (2000:306). After writing about the gap between the dream and reality of democracy, Kwon concludes that:

[student activists] did not have a strong desire for democratic realities, such as a democratic structure for decision-making, taking action and engendering equal culture, a structure that could work against solidarity, combat readiness, and effective fast actions (2000:306).

Kwon's description captures the double bind of liberal-democracy and militarism. Her self-critique was neither the first nor the last of its kind.

#### Self-Critique of Ideology as Colonialism

Kim Chi-ha (1978), a poet, novelist, and activist who was deeply influential in the *minjung* movement, also spoke out against the militarism in the movement during the 1980s. After a string of *undongwon* suicides, Kim publicly

critiqued the movement's glorification of death and militaristic style of meetings and demonstrations. Some activist and literary organizations dismissed Kim from their member rolls in response to his comments, but just a couple years later more insidious critiques began to appear.

Chungmoo Choi's (1993) critique opened the movement to postcolonial and feminist perspectives. Choi celebrated the possibility of the movement to be a decolonizing force, particularly after the Gwangju uprising in 1980, yet critiqued the movement's reality of colonialist militarism. Choi defined the American military government's education policy in South Korea after World War II as based "not on liberalism but on the structure of the Japanese-style educational system, which was originally designated to implement obedience and complacency toward the colonial rulers" (1993:82). Cho Hae-joang presented a similarly ambivalent, yet more intimate portrait of the movement.

Cho's series of books, *Reading Texts, Reading Lives (Geul Ilkgiwa Salm Ilkgi)*, appeared in the early to mid-90s and began a conversation about not only how to "read" texts, but how to "read" social change and relationships through generations. She effectively shifted the movement field (*hyeonjang*)—or site of praxis (Lee N.H. 2005)—for intellectuals and *undonggwon* from the farm and factory back into the classroom (see also chapters 3 and 4). The books were another form of activism in which she extensively quoted students from her social theory classes at Yonsei University. One student wrote the following sarcastic poem:

Teacher, don't ask us questions that are not in the book.

Teacher, we are happy to memorize the canon.  
Afflicted high-schoolers? No, afflicted universities.  
Give us an order in an authoritative voice.  
Tell us what the problems are, and give us the solutions too.  
We don't want to see reality (Cho 1992:125).

Cho laments the militaristic and authoritarian education students received, which continued to inform the movement. Students righteously sought “the right answer” with a militaristic temperament learned over many years in order to promote “historical progress” for the movement and the nation (Cho 1994:145-147). Following Fanon and other postcolonial theorists, Cho equates the passive and uncritical reading many students learned in school with being “colonial” and attempted to demonstrate an active, critical, and self-reflective way of reading and living in order to decolonize the mind.

The “fury of ideology” in which “no one was free from either *juche sasang* [North Korean self-reliance ideology] or Marxism-Leninism” came to be seen as a manifestation of colonialist and militaristic excess (Lee 2007:140-141). The NL-PD split was exemplary of these excesses. The “ideological struggles” many *undongwon* agonized over during the 1980s came to look “colonial,” which was precisely what they sought to resist. The “single-minded obsessions, exclusions, and righteous self-sacrifice” *undongwon* evinced in these struggles came to appear regressive and destructive—things commonly disdained as “colonial”—and so a “movement void” followed (Cho 1994:149-150). Cho writes, “[These movements] turned away from or even oppressed those contradictions that emerged from people’s daily lives—so instead of

readying people for the next era of social movements, they've silenced them" (1994:151).

*Reading Texts, Reading Lives* contains the ambivalent reflections of the would-be next generation of student activists. There was a mixture of liberation and oppression in the "ideological struggles" of the 1980s, yet students were "fairly united in expressing the need to unlearn the canons of political ideology drummed into them during their primary and secondary school years" (Grinker 1998:203). Activists of varying ages expressed this sentiment to me during the 2000s as a wish to "get their childhood back"<sup>22</sup>. The "colonial" and "authoritarian" continuity Cho's books instantiated between the militaristic anti-communist ideology students learned in primary school and the Leninist ideology students poured over in movement circles configured a dialogue about generations. In particular, Cho's work revealed the alienating effects of ideology on the would-be next generation of the student movement. Her books appeared at the same time the student movement foundered in the early to mid-1990s and so attracted a particularly large audience. I encountered very few people in NGOs and NPOs during the early to mid-2000s who had not read or at least heard about these books.

#### Self-Critique of Ideology as Division

Cho Hae-joang's language and diagnoses about the *minjung* movement in the 1990s came through in some activists' reflections on the citizens' (*simin*) movement in the 2000s. One human rights lawyer matter-of-factly asserted that most NGOs have an "authoritarian culture" closer to military dictator Park

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<sup>22</sup> Personal conversation with author on August 4, 2001.

Chung Hee's administration than to their overseas NGO counterparts<sup>23</sup>. Scholar (*Hakja*) Lee, an environmentalist who recalled taking classes with Cho Hae-joang in the 1980s, wrote the following about his generation, 386, in response to a written survey I conducted in 2007:

They planned...to sacrifice themselves for their values and beliefs (*sinnyeom*). However, their weak side is that they have a self-righteous attitude (*dokseonjeogin taedo*) about their self-sacrifice (*jagi huisaeng*) and this belief in only what is right and wrong cannot breakthrough the complex real world (*hyeonsil segye*) and present concrete alternatives (*guchejeogin daean*)<sup>24</sup>.

**Scholar Lee** had been a student activist during the 1980s yet often pointed out the excesses and failures of what had become of his generation later. He recalled learning how to write “personal narratives” in Cho’s classes at Yonsei University, but wished he had learned more “theory (*iron*).” Discussing theory (*damnon*), is what he often enjoyed doing over drinks and coffee. Like many other former *undonggwon*, theory discussions seemed to transport him back to his university days. He told me in 2007 that Korea had suffered one “legitimacy crisis” after another and that activists and NGOs had become “exhausted” and “overly disciplined” in their work. Like many other civil leaders at the time, he said that activists needed to “slow down” and suggested the slow fermentation process of *gimchi* as an analogy. During long discussions in 2006 and 2007 at a junior’s coffee shop, he reflected on

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with author on January 10, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Excerpt from written survey response received March 2, 2007.

the similarities between Christianity and Socialism in South Korea. He recalled his devout mother and strict Christian upbringing and then his rebellion as an activist until he joined a group of Christian Socialists. Both Socialists and Christians demand self-sacrifice, he said, and both know how to network. He said that Lee Myung-bak demonstrated how well Christians network with his successful 2007 presidential campaign. Yet in the next breath he praised the film *Secret Sunshine (Miryang)* for its portrayal of the “bad side” of Christianity.

Department Leader Yoon, the person I opened the chapter with, wrote the following about what kinds of changes he thought the citizens’ (*simin*) movement needed to undertake in 2007:

While change is necessary, it must begin from a clear role distinction between the *simin* movement and the *minjung* movement. The *simin* movement must find methods for solving social contradictions in practical reality (*hyeonsil*). While the *minjung* movement worries about putting emphasis on ideals (*isang*), the *simin* movement must worry about putting emphasis on practical reality (*hyeonsil*). Accordingly, the *simin* movement must concentrate its power on practical problems where they can work together with citizens to fix actual contradictions, and on this basis they must begin to forge solidarity with the *minjung* movement.

These reflections criticize the *simin* movement for doing much of what the *minjung* movement did—according to Cho, the latter “turned away from or

even oppressed those contradictions that emerged from people's daily lives" (1994:151). The self-reflexive work of feminists such as Chungmoo Choi, Insook Kwon, and Cho Hae-joang locate this persistence in colonialist and neo-colonialist inheritances, particularly from the U.S. military. Other prominent intellectuals similarly located the shortcomings of the *minjung* movement in its colonialist and Anti-Communist inheritances. Choi Jang Jip (1989) wrote that Korean nationalism "became transformed into a statism that privileged Anti-Communism over unification" immediately after the country was divided. Hyokbom Kwon wrote:

The difference between Anti-Communism in South Korea and Anti-Communism in other Third World countries and in the U.S. is that in South Korea every form of Leftist thinking is considered taboo and the expressions of that thinking have become the target of legal and social oppression. Thus, North Korean Communism has been defined as an evil, and its overthrow has been a foremost task. It justifies the existence of South Korea—no matter how much it has negative characteristics—as far as it opposes North Korea and deters and prevents North Korea from invading (1999:50).

Anti-Communism became increasingly blunt as policy and law under Park Chung Hee's military dictatorship from 1961 to 1979 (Kwon 2000; Lee N.H. 2007). The National Security Laws, the legal legacy of South Korea's anti-communist ideology, was what Roh Moo Hyun sought to repeal while in office. Park's *Yusin* (revitalization) ideology during the 1970s inextricably linked national security and anti-Communism as the war in Vietnam escalated. His

regime began propagating this ideology, as activists came to see it in the 1990s, as “morality” and “ethics” (*dodeokseong*) in school textbooks (Grinker 1998; Kwon 2000). Chungmoo Choi wrote, “For more than two decades after the national partition, South Korean schoolchildren visually depicted North Koreans literally to be red-bodied demons with horns and long fingernails on their hairy, grabbing hands” (1993:81). This was the ideology students wished to unlearn and the childhoods they wished to get back. Namhee Lee described the division and its enabling anti-communist ideology as “deeply internalized and pervasive, ‘bewitching [people’s] psyche and warping their perspective’ to such an extent that Koreans became ‘self-divisional” (2007:3).

In the late 1970s, prominent historian Kang Man-gil began to use the term “division consciousness (*bundan uisik*)” to bundle together critical efforts to engage with post-1945 Korean history (Lee 2007:42). “Division consciousness” questioned South Korean autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. In particular, it questioned the U.S.’s decision to divide Korea, which eventually led to the Korean War, while reigning in anticommunism as the state ideology and suppressing pro-democratic post-1945 social movements. Paik Nak-chung, another prominent public intellectual, put forward an all-encompassing system (*cheje*) to account for this internalized division.

Paik articulates a broad, deep, and indigenous system of what I take to be double binds. He calls Korea a “division system (*bundan cheje*)” following Wallerstein’s world system. Paik Nak-chung describes this system as a *sui generis* subsystem of the world system with considerable powers of self-reproduction (Grinker 1998:37-38). Roy Richard Grinker, an anthropologist

who worked for a long time in Africa and for a short time in Korea, has rearticulated Paik's system as "a form of deep structure" evident in identity politics where North and South Korea "are united not only in the division system, but also as a subsystem of a larger global political and economic system, of which the United States is the clear leader" (1998:37).

The U.S. aided liberation from Japanese colonialism at the same time it divided Korea into a Cold War artifact. This division created a system of paradoxes between unification and stability as well as democracy and national security. "There seems to be no way out," as Grinker writes, "Without unification there can be no democracy; without democracy there can be no unification" (1998:38). Paik criticized both NL and PD factions for oversimplifying Korea's problems into discrete, consecutive steps—"democracy first, unification later" or vice versa—rather than acknowledging their systemic nature (1994:127). The NL-PD ideological struggle, in other words, can be read as an artifact of the division system, which is predicated on the double bind relation between Korea and the U.S.

Using Paik's system as an analytical resource, Roy Richard Grinker brought to light another expression of the division system: the ideological struggle between "pragmatic (*hyeonsiljeok*)" and "sentimental (*gamsangjeok*)" approaches to unification. Grinker outlines some key moments of this struggle in governmental, academic, and artistic discourses over the last half century. For example, South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee, advocated an aggressive "pragmatic" policy whereby the south would use military force to

ensure the north held democratic elections. Conversely, Chang Myon's brief administration installed after student protests in 1960 followed a "sentimental" policy of appealing to people's hearts through family reunification rather than any military threat (Grinker 1998:218-219). Grinker demonstrates how this split between pragmatic and sentimental approaches turns on differing notions of "reality." For sentimentalists, the reality is the sentiment of divided families longing to reunite and in so doing return home and reunify the homogenous nation. For pragmatists, on the other hand, the reality is the political, economic, militaristic, and cultural divisions that have grown over the last half century. Pragmatists often treat sentimentalist reality (*silje*) as fantasy, dream, or ideal (*isang*) by querying, "How can we achieve homogeneity when the reality of our situation is war" (Grinker 1998:219,286)? There are two words often interchangeably used for reality: *silje* and *hyeonsil* (Grinker 1998:219). While in many contexts both words refer to concrete facts, details, and circumstances opposed to abstract ideals (*isang*), in the unification context, the abstract and concrete mix and at times reverse in such a way that realities often appear suspended or unattainable. Grinker points out that both *hyeonsil* and *silje*:

can refer to north Korea's 'true' intentions, the privileged position of the truth of diplomacy over sentiment, the reality of Korea as a unified nation, the actual conditions of democracy or communism, or the realities of the world that the north Korean government hides from its citizens (1998:219).

With this in mind, Grinker offers the following distinction: "Although it is true (*silje*) that Korea is one nation, the reality (*hyeonsil*) is that Korea has two

states” (1998:219). “Sentimental” passion for one nation is a “reality (*silje*)” while “pragmatic” consideration of two states is another “reality (*hyeonsil*).”

The aforementioned critiques of activists contain the pragmatic (*hyeonsil*) sense of reality. Department Leader Yoon asserted: “While the *minjung* movement worries about putting emphasis on ideals (*isang*), the *simin* movement must worry about putting emphasis on practical reality (*hyeonsil*).” This response was provided in the context of a written survey which asked him an open-ended question about the necessity of changes in the *simin* movement; there was no mention of the *minjung* movement. Yet like many activists, Department Leader Yoon addressed the *simin* movement only against the backdrop of the *minjung* movement. In particular, the *simin* movement had to be “practical” against the “idealistic” *minjung* movement just as pragmatists had to be against sentimentalists in unification contexts. This extreme division between sentimental and pragmatic reality, or ideological and practical, continues to define contemporary political, unification, and gender discourses (Cho 2000; Grinker 1998; Kendall 2002; Yi 1993). However, this imperative to be “practical” was difficult for many former *undongwon*, who in the words of Dr. Lee were constrained by their “self-righteous attitude” and “belief in only what is right and wrong.” Ideology bundled together these constraints, which were often taken to be a legacy of the past

### Ideology as Base

Ideology emerged as a fruitful ground, or “base” in the words of one activist, from which to create movements. In the conversation I recount below, Cho Hae-joang’s books, *Reading Texts, Reading Lives*, worked as a ground for

generational similarities and differences. The conversation occurred during weekly “English classes” I conducted with staff at an environmental citizens’ group, Green Korea United (GKU, *Noksaegyeonhap*). These classes often contained a mix of Korean and English and occasionally happened outside the office. This particular conversation was hosted over dinner at Department Leader Jeong’s home. Before getting to the relevant part of the conversation, it is helpful to briefly introduce the three activists who participated.

**Department Leader Kim (*Kim Gungjangnim*)** was a sharp-witted activist who did not bristle at debate and often enjoyed needling her colleagues. She was an *undongwon* in the 80s who read Marx and Lenin and got a good laugh out of telling me how she refused to buy Levi’s or drink Coke at that time. In the next breath, however, she was deadly serious in praising how “strict” she and her friends were as *undongwon*. She referenced the NL/PD split in terms of the “North Korea *juche* (self-reliance)” group and the “South Korea democracy” group yet was quick to point out how that “ideological division” had been smoothed over. Department Leader Kim was one of the founders of Green Korea and a senior leader in the “environmental movement (*hwangyeong undong*).” One of the goals of this movement, as she stated, was to smooth over the ideological divisions in the student movement.

**Department Leader Jeong (*Jeong Gungjangnim*)** shifted effortlessly from being a no-nonsense activist to being a kind, consoling “senior” (*seonbae*) and friend. She was a university student in the early to mid-

90s who recalled studying the “cultural theory” (*munhwa theory*) of Foucault and Derrida while enjoying pop songs and foreign films to “appreciate cultural differences.” It was she who reframed the NL/PD division for me “as different answers and movements to the question of what is Korea’s first problem.” Like Department Leader Kim, Department Leader Jeong saw the “environmental movement” as a solution to the ideological problems of the 1980s. For her, the citizen movement (*simin undong*)—the movement environmental, economic justice, human rights, feminist and other citizens’ groups in Seoul saw themselves as part of—needed to get “beyond ideology” and connect with people. She had been working in this capacity for several years as Green Korea United’s leader of the citizen participation department.

**Activist Choi (*Choi Hwaldongganim*)** had earned the respect and praise of her seniors and juniors in short order. She was a university student in the late 90s and early 2000s during which time she studied postmodern theory in the U.K. She was visibly grappling with the contradictions of being a postmodernist and an activist since returning to Seoul. Activist Choi rejected the certainties of ideology, grand theory, and even what she called “meta-discourses” in an effort to “listen to alternatives from the people.” She rarely spoke of movements or ideologies, but she did see citizens’ groups as promising a space “free from capital.” Activism for her did not necessarily mean action, as she stated on several occasions; rather, activism required being “as critical of yourself as you are of society.” Her self-deprecating humor was an expression of this commitment. At the same time, colleagues took her

long hours and hard work as an expression of her activist commitment.

In the couple years I knew her at Green Korea United, Activist Choi was the only new hire who regularly worked late nights and weekends.

Department Leader Kim had spent some time in the Philippines studying at the Korean NGOs' Asian Center while she pursued a master's degree in NGO Studies. A couple years later, Department Leader Jeong also went to the Philippines to work at the NGO center and improve her English. It was there that both women became friends with a local activist, Myrla, who worked on U.S. military base issues. Green Korea invited Myrla to Seoul to participate in an international conference on U.S. bases in 2005. We started the class discussing the conference and Myrla's visit. At one point Department Leader Jeong re-posed a question Myrla had asked her: is there a uniquely Korean kind of socialism?

Department Leader Jeong said she was not sure. Department Leader Kim emphatically declared there is while Activist Choi stayed quiet and smiled. Then they all turned to me, seemingly at once, and asked if I knew about the "generation gap." I queried if they meant in terms of 386 generation and mentioned Cho Hae-joang's *Reading Texts, Reading Lives*. Department Leader Jeong finished saying the book title before I did. Mention of these books appeared to transport all of them back to their university experiences. They shared parts of what I recount above. At one point, Department Leader Jeong called herself a "sandwich generation (*saendwichi sedae*)" between Department Leader Kim and Activist Choi. She viewed the "cultural theory" that she had studied in the 90s as the "superstructure" to the 80s "base" of

Marxist-Leninist ideology. She contended that “387 generation (*sam pal chil sedae*)” better captured her than 297 because she was in her 30s, could identify with *undongwon* in the 80s, and was born in the 70s. Activist Choi echoed this sentiment by saying she felt closer to Department Leaders Kim and Jeong than to many people her own age. During those couple hours around the table in Department Leader Jeong’s living room, ideology was a movement “base” rather than a sullied and divisive legacy.

All three women agreed that they were part of the “June generation (*yuweol sedae*),” an epithet that had appeared in a newspaper a few years before to highlight the connection between large actions going on around the 2002 World Cup to the history of student and *minjung* protests from the 1960s through the 80s (Cho 2004). June referred to the common month of landmark events from the 1960s through the 2000s and effectively transcended activist generation divisions. June effectively dis-aggregated generational differences by year and re-aggregated them in terms of month. This scale shift unified often disparate activist generations and pointed up a transcendental hope among movement activists: a reclamation of the past for the future, which constituted movement as a shared foundation or ground for solidarity.

#### *Hyeonjang (Historical Site of Importance, Fieldsite, Praxis)*

While ideology was widely imagined as the past for NGO and NPO workers, a pragmatic approach to “the complex real world (*hyeonsil segye*)” and “actual contradictions (*hyeonsil mosun*)” constituted the present and the future. Nancy Abelman (1996, 1997a) and Robert Oppenheim (2003, 2008) have articulated this as an “aesthetic” and “moral” shift from *minjung* to *simin*

activism in terms of class, scope, and organizing strategies. Both Abelman (1996, 1997a) and Oppenheim (2003, 2008) articulate this shift in terms of ideology and pragmatism. Abelman (1996) documents the valorization of activist perspectives “free from ideology” and the widespread post-80s fatigue and distance not only from the “military authoritarianism of the recent past, but also from the righteousness and drama of dissent—from the totalizing projects of both the left and the right” (1997a:250). Oppenheim similarly concludes that *simin* activism achieves moral privilege “not in ideological (or ‘interested’) commitment but in post-ideological pragmatic semi-detachment...” (2003:482). The “post-ideological pragmatic” activism I encountered inside movement organizations during the mid-2000s was not only an apparent break from the ideological past, but also a continuation of it. In particular, *hyeonjang* was a continuation of the ideological commitment to match belief and action going back at least as far as the *minjung* movement (Lee N.H. 2007).

*Hyeonjang*, as Namhee Lee writes, in the context of 1980s *minjung* movement

literally means ‘site or ‘field’, but its import depends on the context and the word with which it is paired: it can be a place where something happens, such as a construction site or an accident scene, or a place of historical importance. It was used among the activists to denote a work that one pursued with the democratization movement’s goals in mind and had a strong connotation of ‘praxis’ as opposed to ‘theory’ (2007:217-218).

Like Insook Kwon, an unprecedented number of student activists left university in the 1980s to work as laborers in factories<sup>25</sup>. This move constituted “going to *hyeonjang*” for activists who prioritized factory work as “the barometer of one’s commitment to the movement” (Lee 2002:915,920). *Hyeonjang* was the source and measure of commitment; it was the privileged site of learning and praxis for activists as well as a measure of the class privileges they were willing to sacrifice for the sake of the movement. Namhee Lee describes how student activists in the 1980s derived “moral authority” from “the fact that one practiced what one knew (*chihaeng ilchi*)” and called out others in the movement who fell short in this regard (2007:159). This relationship between belief and action, in particular the correspondence of the two (praxis), is often how activists imagined their distinctiveness from non-activists (e.g., Yarrow 2005). However, activists and academics often mingled in NGOs and non-profits.

There was a revolving door between academia and many NGOs and NPOs in South Korea. As Robert Oppenheim (2003) observes, sophisticated social movement theorists self-consciously shape discourses through a kind of “historicity before the fact.” They frequently advise organizations on a formal and informal basis. For example, they often participate in informal leadership and staff meetings and conventionally serve as the public faces or “representatives (*daepyo*)” of NGOs and NPOs by performing ceremonial duties and advising on public relations issues. Cho Hae-joang, for example,

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<sup>25</sup> Namhee Lee says that Insook Kwon was one of an estimated 3,000 *undonggwon* working in factories in the mid-1980s. However, both the government and labor activists have claimed that the actual number was higher (Lee 2007:213-214).

had just agreed to serve as “representative” for the largest environmental NGO in South Korea at the end of my fieldwork period in 2007.

At the end of my fieldwork period in 2007, a group of colleagues at an environmental NGO became curious about conventional academic terminology as I discussed my recent schedule. They wondered: “What is the difference between a seminar (*semina*) and a lecture (*gangu*)?... OK, what about a conference (*hoeui*)? Symposium (*simpojieom*)? And workshop (*woksyap*)?” These queries were not unlike those several other NGO staffers had posed over the years as we went between Korean, Konglish, and English. Just an hour before this conversation, a staffer had to interrupt an interview I was doing with Green Korea’s secretary-general to ask him about the remarks he was preparing for an upcoming discussion panel. After a brief exchange about his trip itinerary, secretary-general turned to me before returning to the interview question to say, “I am always preparing remarks for some discussion panel (*toronhoe*) or another. By the way, how would you translate *toronhoe*<sup>26</sup>?” There was an earnest study and insatiable curiosity for these kinds of academic and quasi-academic translations and the clever turns of phrase that could sometimes result in efficacious uses of Korean, Konglish, and English<sup>27</sup>. On another occasion, Secretary-General Choi insisted on finding an appropriate translation for *ansingnyeon* as he explained why a few veteran activists would not be working in the coming months. He dismissed “temporary break” and “vacation” in favor of “sabbatical.”

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> During the same time a Korean-American friend living in Seoul who had worked for non-profits around the world launched a project to print T-shirts with clever romanizations of Korean words. She explained it as the inverse of what many Koreans had done in adapting English words to Korean. Her favorite example at the time was “moonpup”—a playful Romanization of 문법 (grammar).

What was the basis for this fascination with academic terminology and translations? Several professors and activists cited Confucianism as the basis for the intimacy between activists and scholars. Cho Hee-Yeon, one of the most prominent social movement analysts in South Korea and leader of the NGO Studies field, told me that Korea has a strong and proud history of “activist academicism” by virtue of its continued commitment to Confucian philosophy and practices. Another prominent sociologist and NGO representative reiterated this view and then noted the “irony” of this considering the strong anti-Confucian orientation of the *minjung* movement (e.g., Abelmann 1996; Oppenheim 2003). Scholars have been held in high repute since at least the Joseon dynasty while being some of the most visible critics of modern authoritarian regimes (e.g., Lee 2007; Song 2003). Movement organizations have associated themselves with the critical yet respected status scholars frequently enjoy and the protection it affords their activities (Oppenheim 2008) while many scholars have associated themselves with movement organizations for the more engaged, praxical dimension it affords their scholarship. There has been an exchange, in other words, between scholars and activists vis-a-vis social movements whereby both lay claim to *hyeonjang*.

**Professor Kim (Kim Gyosunim)** had been a student activist who went on to study American politics in the U.S. When I met him he was the newest hire and chair in an international relations department at a national public university outside of Seoul. He was very critical of fellow “progressives (*jinbojeokin*)”, particularly President Roh Moo Hyun,

whom he saw as “narrow-minded” once in power. Like other self-identified progressives, Kim often complained about the “conservative” and “bourgeois” values of some of his colleagues at the university. He told me matter-of-factly one day that “being a professor is only a means to being an activist<sup>28</sup>.” He often got quiet and excited, like he was about to share a big secret, whenever he talked about his activism with NGOs. One day he advised me to study one NGO instead of another because it was “humbler” and “more engaged with people.” He dismissed many of his senior academic colleagues as detached from research and activism, both of which he said were about being “in the field (*hyeonjang*).”

On several occasions, activists would emphasize similarities between their methodology and my own. The first time I mentioned my fieldwork as *hyeonji josa*, for example, a couple activist colleagues corrected me by saying *hyeonjang*<sup>29</sup>. Several activists pointed out that they did similar work when they went to Saemangeum (a wetlands area undergoing large-scale reclamation discussed in the third chapter), interviewed people, documented changes in flora and fauna, took pictures, and generally took in the mood of a place. Yet what was important for activists about places like Saemangeum was that an emergency, or crisis, was occurring there. Like the humanitarian in the field (Redfield 2008) or the nurse in an emergency room (Langwick 2008), activists

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with author on April 3, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> *Hyeonjang* has a wide range of reference to sites of crimes, disasters, events, or as Namhee Lee says “sites of historical importance” (2005:915). *Hyeonji josa*, on the other hand, often refers to field research investigation and is conventionally used by anthropologists to refer to fieldwork. *Hyeonjang* implies exception as a site of importance or urgency whereas *hyeonji josa* is mundane in empirical research settings.

were fieldworkers with big hopes and limited resources (Fortun 2001; see also next chapter).

During my fieldwork in the mid 2000s, many inside NGOs treated *hyeonjang* as a material place opposed to abstract theory such that new think tanks ostensibly bringing activists and academics together announced themselves as research institutes “where field and theory meet (*hyeonjanggwa ironi mannaneun*).” The Hope Institute, a think tank I will discuss in the fourth chapter, posited “the actual place (*hyeonjang*)” as a major organizational principle: “The actual place (*hyeonjang*) is important. When you go to the place, you will know the problem as well as the alternative (*daean*)<sup>30</sup>.” For them, *hyeonjang* highlighted a practical study (*silhak*) inheritance as well as a *minjung* one.

*Hyeonjang* did not just migrate to academic and activist practices; rather, it crossed over into popular cultural practices as well. Robert Oppenheim (2008) has written about *tapsa*, a widely popular cultural heritage practice in South Korea during the 1990s. He describes it as a “common middle-class weekend leisure activity conducted singularly or in groups, informally or on trips organized by various clubs or associations” (2008:83). Accounts of it can be found in weekend, travel or culture sections of major newspapers and on websites and blogs. Oppenheim writes:

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<sup>30</sup> Quotation from August 11, 2008 INews article, “When We Dream of Hope and Put it into Practice, there will be Hope’...Lawyer Park Won Soon (*Huimangeil ggumggugo silcheonhae nagal ddae, huimangeun saengginda’...Pak Wonsoon byeonhosa*).”

The word *tapsa* literally means 'survey' of 'field investigation,' as in the sort taken beyond the classroom by university history or art history departments or by engineers going to a site where a bridge will be built, but it has come to designate the specific practice of 'leaving the road to find places with a history' (Yu 1993:95): seeking out, viewing, studying, and sometimes documenting artifacts, relics, and historical sites within the national realm, a sort of serious fun that shades into mountain climbing on one end and museumgoing on the other (2008:83).

Yu Hong-jun, the person quoted in the above description, has often been linked with the popular boon in *tapsa* because of his publications, *Nau'i Munhwa Yusan Tapsagi (The Chronicle of My Field Investigation of Cultural Remains)*. Yu was an art history professor in the 1990s, but was named head of the government's Cultural Properties Administration under Roh Moo Hyun in the 2000s as a result of the popularity of his writings. Yu, who previously wrote about *minjung* art, "traced a 1980s expansion of *tapsa* culture from university departments to 'normal' (nonuniversity) people, all of whom have sought to investigate the 'scene of culture' (*munhwau'i hyeonjang*)" (Oppenheim 2008:97). Yu's off the beaten path ambulatory practice of encountering cultural objects in situ has a distinctively 1980s *minjung* praxiological sensibility (Abelmann 1996; Lee 2005, 2007; Oppenheim 2008:88-95).

Many academics were directly or indirectly engaged in the extension and critique of *minjung* historiographic and methodological practices during the 1990s. Seung-Kyung Kim, an anthropologist who worked with and studied

activists and laborers in a Masan factory during the late 1980s, began to reflect upon the methodological kinship between activist and academic subjectivities in a short reflective essay published in *Anthropology Today* in 1995. She drew upon the growing literature on native anthropology during the so-called reflexive turn in anthropology (e.g. Kondo 1990; Narayan 1993; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984) to rethink the relationship between herself and an informant that she largely wrote out of her dissertation—“a woman who was variously my friend, my key informant and an *alter ego* to an extent that is unusual in anthropological research” (original emphasis;1995:6). She goes on to juxtapose two types of fieldwork: “that of the ethnographer and that of the political activist, who were drawn together by related interests and social concerns” (1995:6). Jesook Song (2009) extended this insight in her study of how activists, underemployed intellectuals, and government bureaucrats became “crisis knowledge brokers” and “social engineers” in the wake of the Asian financial crisis during the late 1990s. Robert Oppenheim (2008) furthers these Foucauldian-inflected subjective negotiations into Latourian-inflected assemblies between not only activists, academics, and bureaucrats, but also persons and things in his provocative study of Gyeongju. Whether through networks, methodology, or commitment, the distance between activism and anthropology has seemed to close since Seung-Kyung Kim’s reflections in 1995.

Jesook Song’s aforementioned ethnography, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, offers a recent example of how activism continues to inflect anthropological practice. In the preface to the book, Song explains why she shifted from her original interest in sexuality

politics to the financial crisis (2009:xiii). She writes, “Although I tried to protect my research from being overwhelmed by the crisis, I could not resist the growing concern of women’s and other groups marginalized in the labor market; I was compelled to look at unemployment policies” (2009:xv-xvi). The footnote at the end of this sentence reads:

It was not a coincidence that I was motivated to extend beyond my original research population. I had attended college in Seoul in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was part of the so-called last generation of student activists—against the military dictatorship, U.S. military and economic imperialism, cold-war ideology, and the capitalist exploitation of cheap laborers and peasants. Wanting to keep alive the memory of colleagues and activists who were injured, jailed, traumatized, or dead, I was driven to action when I perceived the resurgence of conservative nationalism and the escalation of neoliberal economic and welfare policies during the crisis (2009:142).

Song’s change in research topics was not only intentional, but self-consciously activist. She was “compelled” and “driven to action” to examine neoliberal employment and welfare policies amid the resurgence of familiar enemies—conservative nationalism and in particular the Confucian-inflected “family breakdown” discourse (Song 2009:xvi,142).

In one case, she describes her informant and her as “in somewhat similar positions” (Song 2009:129). Song elaborates:

We were both Ph.D. students who had reluctantly, but nevertheless seriously undertaken government-related work—work that we had hardly imagined ourselves doing because of our antifascist views. Despite the recent democratization, the collective memory of a three-decades-long era of fascism remains strong. We were both attempting to carry out the militant leftist guerilla tactics of the 1980s, working in quasi-governmental agencies as an activist strategy (2009:129-130).

Her work as team leader of a quasi-governmental public works program undertaking public policy through research collapses the “activist strategy” with ethnography. The “militant leftist guerilla tactics of the 1980s” are *hyeonjang*-inspired. Song describes her and her colleagues doing research by conducting interviews and doing participant-observation as they “shared, empathized with, and represented the struggling young people” (Song 2009:107). Song and her team tried to debunk dominant government and media-supported discourses of “idle and spoiled young adults” by making strategic reference to these same discourses’ promotion of “creative capital” and “new intellectuals.” She gives examples of the team’s appropriation of dominant neoliberal discourses to describe the “multiple and fragmented subjectivities” of her and her informants (Song 2009:108). As “semiexperts,” Song and her team did “the *actual labor* of translating youth into investable human capital within a neoliberal market paradigm” (emphasis added 2009:108). As a result, they become unwitting and complicit “social engineers” and “crisis knowledge brokers” during the compressed liberalization and neoliberalization taking place in many areas of South Korea during the late-90s debt crisis (Song 2009:xiv,130). This Foucauldian

articulation of Marxist contradiction is exemplary of the self-reflective critiques many former 1980s *minjung* activists and 386 generation people have put forward (e.g. Kwon 2000; Lee N.H. 2007).

Jesook Song reflects on her policy research and report-writing for the city government as “field research” and “the meta-ethnography of what was itself an ethnographic process” (2009:xx-xxi). She visibly wrestles with her complicity in (neo)liberal social engineering by admitting to *using* the tactic of naturalizing women’s physical weakness, which she rejects in her theoretical work, in an effort to attract funding for homeless women. She concludes, “If these were the strategic decisions I made as an activist at work in the government, this book is the choice I made as a reflective scholar—to problematize the very process of constructing the ‘proper’ welfare subject” (Song 2009:xxi).

Song’s visible struggle to reconcile her activist and scholarly work is similar to many activists’ self-critical struggles in the 1980s to match action and belief. As Namhee Lee writes, “For those in the movement, one’s moral authority came from the fact that one practiced what one knew...” (2007:159). In the 1980s, the privileged site of praxis was labor organizing and factory employment (*hyeonjang*). An Chaeseong, a student labor activist, reflected in his autobiographical novel, “every activist prioritized the labor movement, [and] factory work became the barometer of one’s commitment to the movement” (quoted in Lee 2007:259). In a similar way, work for NGOs and governmental or semi-governmental organizations was the *hyeonjang* for committed activists in the late 1990s and 2000s, as I will examine in subsequent chapters. This

work is rife with double binds both for activists and ethnographers as both approach their work with a heavy dose of apprehension and self-critique. At the same time, both activist and ethnographic fieldwork demand commitment even and especially when ideology is cast aside.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reapproached ideology as a historical site of importance (*hyeonjang*) for self-critical engagements with the past, present, and future. At one moment, ideology transcends conventional blood, regional, and political divisions and constitutes a liberating and utopian horizon. Yet this possibility for liberation carries its own obligations and constraints. Ideologies shift from being explanatory, efficacious, and liberating to imperialist and colonialist cages holding people and progress back. This double bind constitutes the setting for the temporal and political progressivism of pragmatism, which I take up in subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 2: Green is Life

### Commitment and Sacrifice

Sacrifice is one of the oldest topics for anthropology. So old, Peter Redfield writes, “that it rarely features in contemporary debates” (2008:199). At the same time, sacrifice has been a prominent topic for contemporary studies of activism. Sacrifice is a demonstration of endurance through personal hardship, risk of life and limb, and perseverance in movements (e.g., Hirsch 1990; Lee N.H. 2007). In other words, sacrifice is the demonstration of commitment (Burke 1969, 1984; Hirsch 1990; Snellinger 2010; Yarrow 2005).

Just as social scientists and theorists have sought an empirical or material way to know people’s ideas, beliefs and commitments, activists have sought the same. Amanda Snellinger writes, “Hardship reconfirms the nature of selflessness and devotion to the country that people exercise through political struggle” (2007:354). Thomas Yarrow theorizes sacrifice as a kind of “currency” among activists to demonstrate morality and commitment (2005:55). Beyond college and lucrative jobs, activists in South Korea have sacrificed filial well-being, normative social connections, physical and mental health, and at times their lives for solidarity, ideology, and hope (Abelmann 1996, 1997a; Lee N.H. 2007; Song 2009).

Just as social scientists and theorists have sought an alternative or outside to reigning ideological frameworks and social orders—from rational choice to strategic action—activists have sought the same (e.g., Hirsch 1990; Riles 2000). Sacrifice, the demonstration of commitment, has recursively served as

hope for alternatives both for academics and activists (e.g. Nelson 2000; Song 2009). In this chapter, it appears as an imagined alternative to economic development, capitalism, and neoliberalism even as it comports to a similar progressive temporality. Like other inheritances of both the military dictatorship and student movements, Koreanists are ambivalently re-approaching sacrifice as “a medium to link activities far apart on the ideological spectrum” (Han 2004:84). In a sustained state of crisis, this means many staffers—particularly those sandwiched between the founders and recently-hired juniors of NGOs and NPOs—are facing the “conundrum of designating their own sacrifice, even while opposing the sacrifice of others” (Redfield 2008:197). Not unlike doctors undertaking triage in the field, or nurses in an emergency room, this chapter shows many mid-level NGO and non-profit workers expressing and confronting double binds with humor and strength (Langwick 2008; Redfield 2008). Many of them take on the super-human demand to multi-task and multi-specialize in order to act one as if one hundred (*ildangbaek*) amid the resource limits of their organizations. During the “citizens’ movement without the citizens” and the “reproduction crisis” of the mid-2000s, NGO and NPO workers find solutions in NGO Studies programs and in consultation with government and political party organizations. In the process, they also foreground a kinship by other means—relationships built on commitment to ideas, or ideology, rather than conventional filial, school or regional ties (e.g., Song 2003; Yarrow 2005). Many NGO and NPO workers necessarily and deliberately sacrifice, some for a short time and some for a long time, to render themselves human resources on a larger scale.

Entangled Inheritances of Sacrifice

One of the most pervasive statements I encountered in the field went something like this:

Korea is a small country without many natural resources (*jawon*) surrounded by large countries. People are Korea's best resource (*jawon*) and hope (*huimang*). That is why Koreans work so hard<sup>1</sup>.

I heard versions of it from activists and businessman, progressives and conservatives alike. Many attributed it, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively, to the Park Chung Hee regime. Park's legacy is complicated and people's views of it often revealed their politics. Many remember Park's mobilization of people's hope (*huimang*) and confidence (*jasingam*) through sacrifice (*huisaeng*) to build an egalitarian and prosperous national future (Han 2004; Jager 2003; Lee N.H. 2009; Nelson 2000; Oppenheim 2008). He rendered people into human resources for the purposes of nation and economy-building (Han 2004; Nelson 2000). Many of my informants, however, remembered Park's militaristic, fascist, and authoritarian abuses of human rights and social development<sup>2</sup>. Team Leader Kim, for example, lamented how so many Koreans "sacrificed" human and social development for economic development<sup>3</sup>. Another staffer described the problem as a cultural preference for "results (*seonggwa*)" over "process (*gwajeong*)"<sup>4</sup>. In this view, sacrificing political freedom or basic human rights for economic progress was

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<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation with the author on July 30, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Lawyer Park's ambiguous and ambivalent thoughts on Park Chung Hee and his legacy in the fourth chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with author on May 10, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with author on September 15, 2005.

unacceptable. This view came into sharp relief around the Hwang Woo Suk scandal when I began my fieldwork in the fall of 2005.

Hwang was a highly funded and publicized Korean scientist who announced the creation of human embryonic stem cells in a 2004 issue of *Science* magazine. He enjoyed hero status with around-the-clock bodyguards, news reports, fan websites, and campaigns to award him the Nobel Prize (Choi Y.S. 2009). However, it abruptly came to an end when an investigative news program in South Korea aired allegations that Hwang had coerced his female researchers into donating their eggs for his research. This spurred Seoul National University, his research base, to investigate and led *Science* to re-evaluate Hwang's findings. Several informants told me that they wished they had been surprised, but that sadly it was just another case of Koreans valuing "results over process" or ends over means<sup>5</sup>. Yoon S. Choi places the fraud in the context of the "lengths Koreans will go to achieve global success" (2009:25). One of the leading scholarly journals in South Korea, for example, *Changjakkwa Bipyong*, devoted an entire issue in 2005 to the Hwang scandal "as an outcome of the Korean state's rush-to-development mentality which began in the 1960s during Korea's modernization period under former President Park Chung Hee" (Choi 2009:198). Choi summarizes, "All that had seemed to matter to Koreans was the glory Hwang could deliver. It did not matter what means he used to attain it" (2009:205). The Hwang scandal exemplified the ongoing liberal and progressive critique of the Park regime—in particular its valuation of "results over process."

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<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation with author on October 1, 2005.

Many scholars have taken up the active and entangled legacy (Thomas 1991) of Park Chung Hee in South Korea. Rob Oppenheim (2008), whose work I take up more in later chapters, reapproaches Park's legacy through one of his crowning achievements, cultural preservation in Gyeongju. Oppenheim shows how Park instilled confidence in South Koreans about their "glorious cultural past" and how that past compelled a fulfillment of the future (2008:28). Laura Nelson writes about how "the carrot of a better, more equitable, wealthier, democratic (and unified) Korea was dangled before the population by the government and its media and institutions" (2000:20). In particular, "the hope that their children would live to see a prosperous, unified Korea was a complex and powerful motivation for many South Koreans" to hope through sacrifice and participate in the "national utopian imagination" (Nelson 2000:21). Sacrifice, as Seung-Mi Han writes, "emerges as a medium to link activities far apart on the ideological spectrum" (2004:84).

Sacrifice was also a key part of the student and labor movements that struggled against Park's dictatorship. Seung-Mi Han has called it a "synergism" between Park's egalitarian populism and the *minjung* movement's Freirean-inflected conscientization (2004:71). Nancy Abelmann (1996, 1997a) and Namhee Lee (2007) have written extensively of the marriage, job, and travel aspirations many student activists sacrificed for the sake of the movement. As discussed in the previous chapter, activists felt tremendous pressure to practice what they knew, or correspond knowledge and conduct (*chihaeng ilchi*), by foregoing personal dreams like Insook Kwon

did with fashion design and choosing spouses based on class background and commitment to the movement (Abelmann 1997a; Kwon 2000; Lee N.H. 2007).

There is one person, in particular one sacrifice (*huisaeng*), whose importance for the *minjung* movements and many of my informants was seminal. South Korean high school students learn about his life and its legacy has extended far beyond the social movements that originally embraced him (Lee N.H. 2007). That person is Chon Tae-il, a poor factory worker who had been forced to work since age thirteen and whose efforts to change the dangerous factory conditions that enabled South Korea's rapid economic development during the 1960s largely went unnoticed. All of that changed on November 13, 1970 when Chon dramatically lit himself on fire in the downtown factory area of Seoul. His words that day as he burned, "we workers are human beings too" and "do not let my death be in vain," have been immortalized (Lee N.H. 2007:218). Namhee Lee writes:

Every activist came to know the intimate details of Chon Taeil's life: his dreams, disappointments, struggles, sufferings, and death. Many were inspired by and hoped to emulate, his devotion to fellow workers, and a few came to conclude their lives as Chon had. If Che Guevara stirred the souls of middle-class European and American college students in the 1960s, Chon Taeil and his death stirred the souls of thousands of Korean students and workers, eventually pushing them into the streets and factories (2007:218).

Chon's poor background and struggle alongside other factory workers, mostly women, combined with his attempts at fact-finding research into labor conditions, petitions to government and media, and efforts to mobilize protests were a "signpost and invitation" to intellectuals "making it no longer possible for [them] to pay lip service to labor" (Lee N.H. 2007:222). Chon's efforts to reach out to university students to help him understand labor laws left many "with a tremendous sense of shame and guilt" (Lee N.H. 2007:219). His protest suicide along with his words, carried through in his journal and the various books and films that followed, catalyzed the modern labor movement, *minjung* alliance between students and laborers, and many contemporary forms of activism particularly by the urban poor (Koo 1993; Lee N.H. 2007).

Chon's sacrifice was intentional, significant, generative of social bonds, and suggestive of both the past and the future just as sacrifice has conventionally been theorized in social science and religion literatures going back to Mauss and Hubert's classic work, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*. Chon's sacrifice has been understood as a "single spark" generating and sustaining the labor and democratization movements through generations.



Illustration 2.1: Still photo from 1995 film, *Single Spark*, dramatizing Chon's self-immolation.

**Vice President Im (*Im Huiksiljangnim*)** recalled majoring in Russian at university in the 1990s not because of interest or aptitude, but because of test scores<sup>6</sup>. She proudly recounted learning about Chon's suicide, socialism, and citizen uprisings in Gwangju and Masan from teachers in high school that belonged to the union. She followed her seniors (*seonbae*) in university by joining demonstrations against the Uruguay Round. Like many of her seniors, she stayed an extra year in university to train her juniors in the student movement. The violence of both the freely-elected government and her fellow activists left her wandering (*banghwanghagi*) for six months about how to think and reform in a free, but divided country. While her friends hung around the university working in factories, she heard about NGO work from a senior in jail. At first she thought going from the student movement to the citizens' movement<sup>7</sup> was a betrayal, but one of her seniors convinced her to try it. She was critical of the movement then for resorting to violence and remained critical of current labor leaders for just shouting slogans and demonstrating. She thought the movement needed to be more "cultural (*munhwajeok*)" and "emotional (*gamjeongjeok*)" and managed her staff and volunteers that way. Im referred to volunteers as "natural treasures

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<sup>6</sup> All statements from interview with author on November 22, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The student movement employed Marxist, Leninist, and Freirean-inflected approaches to class and labor and often undertook violent, street-based demonstrations similar to *minjung* movements well into the 1990s (e.g., Cho 1992, 1994; Grinker 1998; Lee N.H. 2007). The citizens' (*simin*) movement, on the other hand, employed liberal, democratic, and non-violent approaches to appeal to as many people as possible and to enable the transition from movement to organization (e.g., Abelmann 1996, 1997a; Oppenheim 2008; Song 2009).

(*cheonyeon ginyeom*)” while “serving (*seomgihagi*)” donors by maintaining “intimate (*chinhan*)” email or phone conversations with them. She had a long-distance partner that she rarely saw and put off taking a sabbatical for many months in order to minimize its effects on her colleagues. She did everything for the organization—from daily calls to donors, emceeding large events, organizing daily office tasks, and conceiving of NGO campaigns. She was exemplary of the “one working as one hundred (*ildangbaek*)” approach I discuss in this chapter. Every person that I spoke with who knew Im thought that the NGO would stop running without her.

Vice President Im captured the significance of Chon’s legacy for me one day over coffee. She named sacrifice rather than economic development as the “progress of people (*saramui jinboreul*).” She said:

...our country does not have many natural resources (*cheonyeon jawon*) and is surrounded by powerful nations so we must rely on people for progress (*jinbo*). People like Chon Tae-il who gave the ultimate sacrifice are our greatest resource (*jawon*) because they made progress<sup>8</sup>.

This statement reveals the shared progressive foundation of state authoritarianism and anti-state activism, which became a hopeful building block for social and national design in the 2000s (see Chapter 4). However, the entangled traditions of sacrifice on both ends of the ideological spectrum

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with author on November 22, 2006.

looked different in the recent past. Nancy Abelmann describes the pathological view from the 1990s:

Many people distance themselves not only from the military authoritarianism of the recent past, but also from the righteousness of drama and dissent—from the totalizing projects of both the left and the right...People remember *when* urban spaces were consumed by the violence of demonstrations and their suppression; *when* the government demanded sacrifice and restraint in the name of political stability, economic development, and nationalisms; and *when* the moral prerogatives of the left made those with progressive inclinations feel guilty that they couldn't do more. Thus, the culture of 1980s dissent is portrayed not for its progressive teleology but rather as a window on the pathological political and social character of the times (original emphasis 1997a:250-251).

Laura Nelson (2000) similarly argues that the hope and anticipation which past practices of personal and national sacrifice entailed were confronted after the 1990s with a great deal more ambivalence. Subsequent studies of military authoritarianism and *minjung* activism similarly foregrounded ambivalence (e.g., Lee N.H. 2007, 2009).

In the wake of Roh Moo Hyun-led governmental inquiries into previous governmental abuses, some historians and social scientists more openly took up the ambivalent and complicit support citizens gave to Park Chung Hee under the banner of “mass dictatorship” studies (e.g. Lee N.H. 2009). This

school, undertaken by scholars of European history—particularly fascism and post-1956 authoritarianism in Eastern Europe—have sparked debates by “asking questions that are politically and morally uncomfortable to many—and difficult to answer—such as whether ordinary Koreans supported or resisted the Park Chung Hee regime” (Lee N.H. 2009:42). These studies complicate coercion and consent to reveal uncomfortable complicity just as Jesook Song (2009) does in her discussion of liberal activists’ unwitting support for neoliberal welfare policies in the wake of the 1990s financial crisis.

The NGO and non-profit workers that are the subjects of this dissertation faced a variety of double binds. Many were wrestling with the entanglements of sacrifice in dictatorship and anti-dictatorship movement contexts. After the pathological reckonings of the 1990s (e.g., Abelman 1997a; Chang 1999; Cho 2000), many former student activists and committed NGO and NPO workers were “designating their own sacrifice, even while opposing the sacrifice of others” (Redfield 2008:197). Many informants, as I discuss in the chapter, approached sacrifice with a great deal of post-utopian humor (Tanuma 2007). Sacrifice was a necessary demonstration of commitment, which contained ambivalence with the past, at the same time it was hope for a better future.

### Human Resources

In the 2000s, NGOs and non-profits faced were accused of being part of the “citizens’ movement without citizens”<sup>9</sup> (*simin eomneun simin undong*)” as their

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<sup>9</sup> While *simin* is conventionally understood and translated as citizen, its Chinese root literally means “city person.” There is a long history and large discourse on city-countryside

membership numbers dropped and organizations had trouble retaining staff. Professor Lim, a long-time NGO supporter working at a government think tank, concisely summarized over tea the four main problems NGOs and NPOs faced in the mid-2000s: 1) shrinking support among the general population and media, 2) lack of long-term strategy, 3) lack of long-term staff and declining interest among young people to work for NGOs, and 4) the conflict of interest that comes from accepting government and business funds due to declining numbers of dues-paying members. Professor Lim sat on the boards of two major NGOs and used examples from each organization to support these points. One of the largest environmental NGOs in the country, for example, had lost over 10 percent of its members over the last five years and just a couple years later had to delay paying staff salaries due to lack of funds<sup>10</sup>.

By 2006, these “inside problems” were part of the “citizen movement reproduction crisis (*simin undong jaesaengsan wigi*)” announced on the front page of the *The Corean*<sup>11</sup> *NGO Times (Siminui Sinmun)*, a weekly newspaper with wide circulation and readership inside NGOs. In particular, a study conducted by the Korea Green Foundation (*Hwangyeong Jaedan*) that year found a wide gap between what NGO staffers wanted and what their group was providing in terms of training (*yeonsu*), education (*gyoyuk*), and support

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distinctions (e.g. Abelmann 1996) and within NGOs a focus on “decentralization (*jiyeokjuui*)” away from Seoul (e.g. Cho 2005; Oppenheim 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Interview with author on July 20, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> This Romanization signals an ongoing movement to change the spelling from Korea to Coreā, which is closer to how it appears in other languages (e.g. French). Many Koreans over the years have told me that Coreā is 1) closer to Hangeul and/or 2) was the more common Romanization before the Japanese colonized. One persistent story is that Japanese officials changed the Romanization from Coreā to Korea so that it would follow rather than precede Japan alphabetically.

(*jiwon*). The study concluded that staff desire for education and the organizational support for such education were two very separate things (*ttaro ttaro*). For example, the majority of the 246 respondents preferred on-the-job training, foreign travel, language study, and non-degree intensive education on legal, budgetary, and policy-making processes while NGOs prioritized leadership, general movement history, and theory training (Jeong 2006). This gap between staff and management preferences presents another reason for the growth of university-based NGO Studies programs.

Many staffers used stark terms and dark humor to capture the demands of NGO and non-profit work. I approach these statements as an example of the kind of “post-utopian” ironic humor Sachiko Tanuma (2007) describes in Cuba. One self-described activist who had worked for many years inside NGOs matter-of-factly stated, “[we] leave our human rights (*in-gwon*) at the door<sup>12</sup>.” I heard many staffers joke about their health and morbidity being worse than that of the much-pitied salarymen (*saelleorimaen*) of the 1990s (Lee J.J.H. 2002). One organization manager surmised, “[We] work longer, drink more, and smoke more than [salarymen].” He went on to speculate that “[activists] have a lower life expectancy than just about anyone else<sup>13</sup>.” Like many veteran activists, he smoked and drank most nights after work. After the birth of his son, he resolved to quit smoking along with several of his colleagues, but I observed many such pacts break down for one work-related reason or another. One staffer enthusiastically shared her new year’s resolution to go swimming everyday during her lunch break. She had calculated that this would allow for slightly more sleep time because she would shower at the pool

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with author on January 5, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Personal conversation with author on October 27, 2005.

rather than at home before coming to work. Yet just a month later, she reflected that she had only been to the pool once or twice in the past two weeks because they had an urgent deadline to meet. Another staffer reasoned that he could quit smoking for good by joining a scuba-diving club. The club instructor, a member of his NGO, offered a big discount to any staffers who wanted to learn. Yet after the first dive many staffers said they doubted they would return because it required a commute and long weekends were rare.

While vacation days were available, they had to be negotiated ahead of time and were often discouraged during particularly busy times of the year, which was when many staffers said they most needed days off. The staffer who wanted to scuba dive, for example, asked the secretary-general for a couple days off and was told to either take them at the end of the summer or during the winter, which were the least busy times of year. The implication was that other times may not be approved. The secretary-general rarely took vacation time; in fact, he was looking forward to a rare camping trip with his son late that summer.

The larger NGOs and NPOs I worked with had vacation policies on par with or better than company policies. In fact, many staffers said that was a major part of why they had decided to work for these organizations. One to two flex days per month adding up to between 15 and 20 days per year (7 days at a time) were standard for new hires in the better funded organizations. After three years, these groups typically offered paid breaks (*hyusik*) for one to two months, up to 6 months after 5 years, and up to a year after 7 years. While

these options were officially available, younger staffers often only took advantage of the policy if the secretary-general and mid-level leaders took advantage of it. One chastened staffer explained how the group he had previously worked for had a great vacation policy, but hardly anyone took advantage of it because senior staffers did not. He recalled how one leader was held up as a model for sleeping in his car many nights after long days of work and long nights of drinking. Another mid-level staffer matter-of-factly said that even if NGOs and NPOs dramatically increased the number of vacation days available and tried to strictly adhere to a five-day work week, the “best activists” would still come in on weekends and rarely take days off. Time in the office, both during regular business hours and otherwise, was often taken as a measure of commitment.

While senior staff often put implicit and explicit pressure on juniors to demonstrate commitment and sacrifice, they proudly praised their staff on the same counts to me. An activist from the 1970s who was leading a non-profit called the student movement the “reserve army<sup>14</sup>” of contemporary NGOs and NPOs. Where else, he wondered, could groups find “committed activists (*undongga*) willing to sacrifice (*huisaeng*) wealth and other things for the sake of the movement<sup>15</sup> and the nation?” He had just finished recounting with pride how his staff refused a salary increase so as not to cheapen their “commitment to social welfare.” Another secretary-general called activists “the three percent salt” (*sampeuro sogeu*) of society, which he described as “the

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Movement in this statement was a broad term encompassing the citizens (*simin*), mass people (*minjung*) movements as well as other historical movements such as Eastern Learning (*Donghak*) and Practical Study (*Sirhak*).

few who worked hard and sacrificed for the sake of preserving the whole<sup>16</sup>.” He said this just before telling me how much he enjoyed speaking at universities so as to encourage the next generation of activists.

The view was different among mid-level managers, who addressed the same set of problems within a more pragmatic, organizational view (e.g. Yarrow 2005). One mid-level policy director who took a break from work to write a master’s thesis on NGO human resource challenges confided during a long interview that there was a “health crisis (*geon-gang wigi*).” He claimed to have done the first comprehensive human resource (*injeok jawon*)-focused study of citizens’ movement organizations with a survey of almost 1,500 employees from over 120 organizations. Yun Sun-chul (2003) found glaring deficiencies in human resource investment. NGOs and NPOs, for example, invest on average one-fifth of the amount their private sector counterparts do in education and training for their employees (Yun 2003:119). They also pay on average 40 percent less than their corporate counterparts—about 896,000 won per month when the average family of four in Seoul required about 2,900,000 won per month (Rho 2007; Yun 2003:73). In contrast to other places where NGOs have flourished (Riles 2000; Yarrow 2005), the salary, benefits, and general status of NGO and non-profit work is low in South Korea.

Yun also found that only about 55 percent of NGOs or NPOs provide health insurance while the average staffer works 49 hours per week (2003:93,101). He cited these as reasons for the increasing turnover rate among workers in NGOs and non-profits: it was 18 percent in 2001 and jumped up to 24 percent

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with the author on October 13, 2006.

in 2002 at a time when the national rate was 2.4 percent (Yun 2003:89). One secretary-general lamented a 30 percent turnover among his staff in 2006.

Many veteran staffers were troubled by this trend, particularly in a post-financial crisis competitive labor market. One staffer pointed out that he could not sustain an informal network among organization and planning leaders—those in charge of human resources for NGOs—because even those people switched around too much<sup>17</sup>. Yun concluded that NGOs and NPOs ignore these “inside problems” at their own peril and that “human resource development” is the most important factor for their future survival (2003:71,129). Several other mid-level leaders shared similar concerns and new hires openly criticized inadequate or non-existent organizational training and support. A group of new hires at one non-profit said that it was their first job out of university and that they were going to request training after receiving none until they met colleagues at other organizations and realized that no one was happy with their training<sup>18</sup>.

Many occupying department and team leader (*gukjang, timjang*) positions quietly sacrificed. These mid-level workers described themselves as Department Leader Jeong did in the previous chapter: as a “sandwich generation.” They had to meet the often times uncompromising directives and deadlines they received from above while buffering their inexperienced juniors from much of the stress. One department leader regularly socialized with and yet complained about her seniors and her juniors. In one case she had to act as mediator after a junior posted an offensive comment on the NGO’s intraweb

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with the author on February 9, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

about a senior; she said that she could not understand either completely but was the only one who could talk with both of them about it.

One team leader who had worked for four years in NGOs and non-profits sketched the problem for me one day over coffee. He drew an upside down bell curve and labeled the lowest point those who had worked between three and five years. These mid-level staffers, he continued, received the least support and had the most expected of them. An increasing number of them were pursuing academic degrees or other professional development options funded by government and/or private industry scholarships. The activist who drew the upside bell curve, for example, was about to begin a peace studies degree in Japan. A secretary-general referenced this trend as part of the reason why he refused to write a recommendation for an activist who by all accounts he adored. He worried that such an opportunity would make the activist's return unlikely, which historical precedence backed up. At least two other beloved activists at this NGO had undertaken overseas studies in the past and neither returned to full-time work.

The overseas study opportunity that the activist tried to apply for in 2006 was a new program available to mid-level NGO and NPO workers in South Korea to get full funding to spend a year studying at one of five preeminent universities in North America. This opportunity, as one of the program initiators admitted, was one of the few viable and respectable opportunities available to such workers to support their professional development and provide some much needed refreshment. Only workers who had at least three years of experience were eligible for the fellowship. These workers, it was widely acknowledged,

were the ones who needed the professional respite and development the most. Most organizations, as previously discussed, only permitted a similar sabbatical (*ansingnyeon*) after seven years of service if seniors also did so.

Another common path of professional respite and development was to pursue a graduate degree inside Korea. The growing field of NGO Studies provided a viable university path along with a handful of government-funded or private industry think tanks. The activist who conducted the human resource study cited at the beginning of this chapter was on sabbatical pursuing a master's degree at the largest government-funded economic think tank. Another activist and graduate of the first NGO Studies program in Korea who stayed on as an administrative assistant in the program matter-of-factly said that most of her colleagues entered the program to take a break and gain some new perspective on their work. She said that both the people and the work had become exhausted in many cases. They needed "refreshment" and a way "to get new perspective on their work<sup>19</sup>." For her this came from the mental and physical exhaustion of "one working as one hundred (*ildangbaek*)," which I will take up later in this chapter. Before doing so I wish to describe in more detail how work unfolded in one NGO office.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with author on March 5, 2006.



Illustration 2.2: Green Korea's Office

#### A Weekend at the Office

“You’re a general hospital (*jonghap byeongwon*),” was the quip tossed at Department Leader Lee (*Lee Gukjangnim*) by one of her closest friends and seniors (*seonbae*) at Green Korea. She was blowing off steam to a couple of colleagues about neck pain and hair loss over some tea on a Saturday afternoon at the office. Editor Kim, the main editor of Green Korea’s monthly magazine *Small is Beautiful* (*Jageun geosi areumdapda*), delivered the joke with a disdainful tone to elicit laughter while not betraying care. I had heard the tone before when close friends would needle one another about gaining weight or looking tired. The joke instantly diffused a heavy moment and effectively circumscribed the space of complaint.

The four of us cleared off the table on the third floor of Green Korea’s cramped magazine office and environmental litigation center. Department Leader Jeong (*Jeong Gukjangnim*), the head of Green Korea’s citizen participation

department, had folded herself comfortably between the wood table and a couple stacks of books. She was using the books as a backrest while teasing Department Leader Lee about how she was the youngest among them, yet had the most health problems. The three of them had shared a trip to a nearby Korean traditional doctor (*hanuiwon*) that morning and then returned to the office to work.

We all sat down for some mid-afternoon tea after I fetched some fruit from the market down the street. Green Korea's office was empty except for the four of us, which was rare on a Saturday. Editor Kim was working around the clock as she often did ahead of the magazine's monthly deadline. She had slept a couple hours the night before in a sleeping bag near her desk. Since Department Leader Jeong and Lee both lived near the office, all three of them had decided to go to the doctor that morning. They reasoned that it would be cheaper that way.

Editor Kim suffered from chronic back pain and noticed a spike in her weight while Department Leader Jeong was concerned about recent irregularities with her digestion. All three of them had severe vision problems and at one time or another suffered from neck or wrist pain. They were all under the age of 35, unmarried at the time, and worked around 12 hours a day six days a week—much of it in front of a computer. This work schedule was typical among mid-level leaders, particularly those who had worked for the same group for at least three years.

Department Leader Lee's neck pain had gotten so bad recently that it affected her sleep and she had become increasingly self-conscious as she lost hair. She was peeling an apple and recounting this when she suddenly put the apple down mid-peel, lifted up her hair, and leaned into Department Leader Jeong asking if she could tell how thin her hair had become. Both her and Editor Kim took a close look and agreed that it was bad, "especially for a woman your age." With this, Department Leader Lee picked up the powder and special shampoo she had bought from the doctor and pleaded, "You must work!" Then she mumbled something about how much the shampoo cost and grunted in pain as she shifted her weight. Editor Kim's "general hospital" comment instantly lightened the mood. Department Leader Jeong mockingly consoled Department Leader Lee with the knowledge that she had the worst lot among them that day. A few minutes later we cleaned up the table and got back to work.

When Editor Kim was pushing to meet a deadline, Department Leaders Jeong and Lee would often stay late so they could all go out for drinks. That Saturday, they did stay late, but only out of exhaustion. We ordered dinner in and everyone ended up sleeping at the office. Sleeping bags, mats, and blankets stored in Green Korea's office for camping trips often doubled as sleeping accommodations. These items were necessary work implements during the winter with very little heat and still necessary during long summer nights with open windows. We made some breakfast in the office kitchen on Sunday, worked some more and went out for dinner and drinks early that evening. As a couple packs of cigarettes and lighters made their way around the table, health problems seemed to vanish. Conversation turned to co-

workers, upcoming campaigns, and family stress as the drinks flowed and smoke danced around us. Editor Kim returned to the office by 7 for another night of work. Department Leaders Jeong and Lee went home to sleep. By 8 the next morning, we were all back at the office to start another week with the routine office cleaning and staff meeting. Editor Kim reported meeting her deadline while Department Leader Jeong covered for a junior who had to travel out of town for a sudden family emergency.

Green Korea's office enabled staff to be better "models" of Green living, which entailed sacrificing the comforts of air-conditioning, central heat, and prime downtown location. The home office also enabled staffers to be more comfortable while sacrificing by providing space for cooking, sleeping, and gathering. During this time, Green Korea promoted wearing warm undergarments rather than using heat in the winter, opening windows and using handkerchiefs rather than air-conditioning in the summer, and using more energy-efficient lighting in addition to their long-standing support for organic farming. Department Leader Lee added No Paper Day and Buy Nothing Day campaigns to Green Korea's proliferating lifestyle campaigns (*saenghwal kaempein*). This indexed a wider shift in activist strategy and scale, which I take up in the next chapter, from ideological concerns with systems to discursive concerns with lifestyle (e.g. Cho 2005).

#### One Working as if One Hundred

Health problems were a ready topic, but they never consumed conversation. Conversation over dinner and drinks on Sunday, for example, was more about relationships with colleagues and family. On occasions such as these, senior

staffers sized up the work of their juniors. It was not uncommon to hear negative assessments about staffers who showed up late, left early, took a lot of days off, rarely participated in social gatherings, or took on part-time jobs just for money. The refusal to do a small favor such as loaning a camera or proofing someone's press release on time would raise hackles. In one case an otherwise hard-working staffer was criticized for leaving the office exactly on time everyday and never coming in on weekends.

Senior staffers often spoke of tremendous pressure to work harder and do more. Once someone got comfortable and adept in their job, for example, they would often be reassigned to a different department. This proved especially trying for young staffers, who often got no say in their assignments. Yet the strain lessened with seniority when staffers chose whether or not to stay in the same job from year-to-year or shift to a different position. Typically, groupwide reorganization (*gaepyeon*) took place at the end of every calendar year to coincide with yearly evaluations and board meetings.

At the end of 2006, for example, when Green Korea was going through a routine reorganization a well liked staffer who had been there just one year lobbied to keep her position, but was refused. Activist Choi, the young staffer discussed in the previous chapter, found it impractical to expect staffers to adjust to and learn about a whole new job in only a month. When she shared her concerns with seniors, they assured her that it is possible and would be good for her and Green Korea in the long run. Over the next few months she put in extremely long hours and spent many nights at the office (see last section of this chapter). As she gained more respect from seniors for her long

hours and good work, I asked her how she was doing. She spoke of gaining more confidence in her work, but losing it at home. She was the eldest of four children and both of her parents had worsening health problems. While she spoke of tremendous guilt at not being able to contribute more to her family's finances, she also said that her sister had recently shared her wish to marry. This put even more pressure on her as the eldest unmarried daughter so she often avoided going home. The many nights she spent working in the home office were a reprieve from home. As discussed in the previous chapter, the double bind of family and work carried the potential for anxiety and creativity.

The double bind was particularly evident among mid-level staffers:

**Department Leader Kwon (*Kwon Gukjangnim*)<sup>20</sup>** had experience in both NGOs and NPOs because he followed the moves of his boss, Lawyer Park (see Chapter 4), in going from legal and economic reform advocacy to social welfare and philanthropy. When we met in 2006 he was volunteering only a couple days each week at the Beautiful Foundation as he prepared to pursue graduate study. Kwon was gathering information and weighing his options. He just missed the work experience requirement for a fellowship in the U.S. and was searching for other government-sponsored scholarships to overseas universities. In the end, he moved to Japan to pursue a degree in peace studies. In the middle of his degree program he received terrible news that his mother suddenly died of a heart attack. He returned home immediately and eventually dropped out of the program in order

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews with author on October 12, 2006 and January 6, 2008.

to take care of his father full-time. When we met the next year he had taken a temporary position at his boss's new think tank so that he could stay close to his family. Although he was not the eldest child or the only son, he often spoke of the obligation to earn more money and stay in Seoul.

**Activist Kim (*Kim Undongga*)**<sup>21</sup>, a former student movement activist, had held several NGO positions and loved doing direct action campaigns. She had passed on several overseas opportunities and personal relationships to stay close with her single mother. When we met, she had been settled for a couple years as an administrative assistant in a NGO Studies program. This job provided the stability and flexibility she needed in taking care of her mother while still being able to organize the kinds of activist campaigns she loved (see later this chapter). On several occasions, however, she expressed dissatisfaction with her life and often questioned her decisions—in particular not being married.

**Department Leader Lee (*Lee Gukjangnim*)**<sup>22</sup>, who I discussed in the last chapter and in this chapter as the “general hospital,” faced similar difficult decisions. One decision in particular brought into stark relief the double bind of movement families and blood families. After building an impressive portfolio at Green Korea and collaborating at UN and other Green Growth forums around the world with various government ministries, she was offered a lucrative mid-level government post

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with author on March 31, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Personal conversations with author on March 5, 2007, April 17, 2007, and July 26, 2007.

managing her own team and advising various cabinet members on international climate change issues. She was thrilled to share the news with her retired parents, particularly as the eldest child who up until then had provided little financial support to her parents. This burden fell to her younger brother, who was excited about the prospect of having some of the burden lifted from him. Lee's parents refused to tell her what to do and insisted that she do what is best for her, but she could sense their excitement boiling over. When she asked her senior Green Korea colleagues for advice, she was shocked to hear many of them urge her to refuse the job. They pointed out that it was the end of Roh Moo Hyun's term and that a conservative was likely to be elected, which may radically change her job. One of Lee's closest friends and seniors told her that if she took the government job that she should not bother to talk to her again. Lee was surprised and repeated what her senior told her to me, "If you do it, we are not friends." She reached out to other former NGO workers who had taken government posts. One of those people strongly urged her to refuse it saying that the timing almost between administrations made it too unstable. In the end she refused the government job offer and continued working at Green Korea while pursuing her Ph.D. in environmental studies. She later told me that her parents regretted her decision, particularly when the economy worsened, and that made her question it. She did not rule out the possibility of taking a government post or running for office in the future.

Lee's former boss at Green Korea also flirted with political party work:

**Secretary-General Lim (*Lim Samucheojangnim*)** was a devout Christian who prayed before every meal. He was married to a relative of Chon Tae-il, the labor activist whose suicide protest is widely credited with sparking the modern labor movement in South Korea. Yet Lim rarely volunteered this—mostly because he didn't have to—as he was a leader of the environmental movement in his own regard. Mr. Lim served as secretary-general of Green Korea for a short time before he decided to devote himself full-time to the effort of launching a Green Party in 2005. He conceived of the local problem for environmentalists in Seoul to be that few residents regarded the city as their “hometown” (*gohyang*), which accounted for the troubling lack of stewardship and community. At the moment he said this, Lim picked up some trash off the ground and shook his head. He said there were better conditions in other countries where people made a home wherever they happened to be. Lim lamented what he saw as the “limited” lineage-oriented view of hometown which still pervaded “Korean thinking”<sup>23</sup>. Soon after the Green Party folded, he also lamented the regionalism (*jibangjuui*) rather than ideology (*idollogi*) defining Korean political parties<sup>24</sup>.

Mr. Lim's critiques of the Korean conception of hometown and politics are emblematic of many I heard inside NGOs and NPOs. There was a widespread critique, particularly among former student movement activists, of the narrow definition of family and home operating in mainstream South Korea.

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<sup>23</sup> Personal conversation with author on July 13, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Personal conversation with author on June 1, 2002.

In fact, many friends inside these organizations were concerned I was getting a skewed view on these issues by only speaking with them. Several staffers encouraged me to get a wider sample if I wanted to capture “common Korean attitudes.” Ideology, a commitment to people and ideas outside of conventional filiation and affiliation, and sacrifice, the demonstration of that commitment, often worked as kinship by other means.

One prominent civil leader chuckled as he recalled his mother warning him to never go in public where more than three people gathered. This, he pointed out, was how little people trusted and associated with those outside their family. He classified his activism as an effort to overcome this narrow definition of family. The founder of a large NGO reminisced about how much his parents wanted him to be a lawyer. He slyly smiled as he reflected how similar his current human rights activism is to practicing law, but maintained that law is too “specialized (*jeonmunjeok*)”. Being an activist, he asserted, allows you to sustain many different interests if only through having to work at many different jobs within one group. Activists had to be confident multi-taskers—the kind of worker who could ably assume any job in the organization just as someone may announce that s/he can eat all of the various dishes set on a crowded table. A colleague of his explained that activists are literally “one person doing the work of one hundred (*ildangbaek*)<sup>25</sup>,” which is part of why it was so difficult for family and friends to understand why they work so hard for such little pay. She and another colleague joked one night as we were running late to one of their childhood friend’s birthday celebrations that

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with author on March 31, 2007.

they wished there were an “NGO restaurant (*NGO sikdang*)” where staffers could arrive at any hour of the night with impunity.

Gift-giving was a constant source of stress for many staffers, who often only survived on their low wages with considerable support from family and friends. I observed occasions when staffers would lie to a childhood friend about being sick in order to buy some time to scrounge money for a gift. Many of them borrowed money, particularly toward the end of the month, from family members or more financially stable friends to make ends meet. One civil leader recounted the compromise he made with his family to work as a pharmaceutical salesman in order to increase savings while his wife was pregnant. Once their son was born, however, he went back to full-time work at a NGO. The birth of a son assuaged family members for the most part, though he still heard insults about his job from time-to-time. The senior planning leader at a NGO matter-of-factly asserted that the average length of employment for men in NGOs was two years. The reason, he said, was that men face strong pressure to be the major breadwinners for their family and so most could not afford to work for very long unless their partners or families provided significant financial support (see also Yun 2003). I observed the webmaster of one NGO begrudgingly quit when his wife lost her better-paying job. Other staffers took on multiple part-time jobs (*areubaiteu*) to make ends meet and continue working. This was another sense in which activists were “one doing the work of one hundred (*ildangbaek*).”

The former student activist who used the term *ildangbaek* to describe the predicament of NGO and NPO workers delivered it as a tongue-in-cheek

judgment about why many of them get burned out and needed to take better care of their bodies. She had just come from a four-day hunger strike to protest the free trade agreement being negotiated between South Korea and the U.S. For her, *ildangbaek* highlighted how undersupported and underappreciated activists (*hwaltongga*) were despite their successes and skills (see Chapter 3 for discussion of job titles). She mentioned the large protests that had taken place in Hong Kong a couple years before to protest trade laws as an example of a successful and skillful mobilization. Activists, she said, work “for little result” and often get “exhausted.” *Ildangbaek* literally means “one versus one hundred” and implies one person overcoming an army, but it has come to be an analogy of “one doing the work of one hundred” in various situations where someone has to do many different things at once and do them quickly despite obvious constraints. NGO and NPO workers, in other words, must be super-individual human resources overcoming physical, financial, and organizational constraints. She likened it to being a doctor in an emergency room.

Like a doctor in an emergency room, an activist feels compelled to act and to do so quickly despite her own limits of knowledge and resources. Yet unlike doctors, activists often received little training, support, or reward for their work. Many described being “sandwiched” or “in the middle” of competing constituencies and demands not unlike women in patrilineal contexts (e.g., Strathern 1972). Not coincidentally, many mid-level staffers were women.

One prominent social movement analyst matter-of-factly told me that activists and now NGO workers “mediate between theorists and citizens<sup>26</sup>.” Their position is perhaps more akin to that of nurses who mediate between doctors, patients, and hospital administration in urgent, understaffed, and underfunded situations (Langwick 2008). Like nurses, NGO workers were often called upon to work despite and because of the constraints. “The challenge,” of activism in a double bind as Kim Fortun writes, “is to figure out how and when to respond, using whatever resources are available, however imperfect or insufficient” (2001:31). Annual reorganization (*gaepyeon*) kept this challenge proximate for many activists as did the recurring aches and pains.

The exemplary staffers were those who found ways to work and contribute to the organization despite the challenges; they resisted or warded off the pathologies of double binds (Bateson 1958; Traweek 1988). Activist Choi, for example, who resisted changing jobs and felt increasing pressure from her family to marry excelled as she channeled anxieties from home into becoming the point person for a major wildlife protection project along with a trusted colleague in the office. Department Leader Lee, the so-called “general hospital,” was voted best activist by her colleagues on more than one occasion for organizing innovative Buy Nothing Day and No Paper Day campaigns, starting an informal fundraising network to support like-minded NGOs in Southeast Asia, and starting an advanced degree in public policy while being the point person on U.S. military base issues.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with author on November 19, 2006.

Like individuals staffers, organizations as a whole worked on a wide variety of campaigns and issues. There was a similarity in scale between workers and organizations in terms of the number of campaigns or projects they juggled at any one time. Green Korea, for example, was explicitly environmental yet within this field had departments and/or campaigns devoted to wildlife conservation, cleanup of U.S. military bases, green transportation, anti-nuclear energy, anti-GMOs, and a variety of environmental litigation. One staffer later explained that “South Korea does not have the philanthropic foundations and social donation options that groups in other places have, so [NGOs] must appeal to more people through diverse campaigns.” Another staffer added, “Maybe someone doesn’t care about stopping the Saemangeum reclamation, but they do care about U.S. bases...we would lose their donation if we did not do both<sup>27</sup>.” The coordinator (*gansa*) of an NPO offering public interest lawyers similarly explained the approach in terms of pragmatic probabilities. She said that working on a wide range of issues was necessary, especially for newly-launched non-profits, because they had to appeal to the most number of potential donors. Despite rhetoric to the contrary<sup>28</sup>, I encountered department store (*baekhwajeomsik*)-like organizational tendencies in NGOs and non-profits in the mid-2000s.

### Green is Life

At Green Korea’s annual fundraising event in 2005, some new staff put together a comical video to show the importance of getting out and enjoying a “green” (*noksaek*) life. Green Korea’s theme that year was “green is life

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<sup>27</sup> Personal conversation on September 16, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Activists at various levels said that NGOs were moving away from the department store style (*baekhwajeomsik*) of the 1990s; interviews on November 22, 2005, March 31, 2007.

*(noksaegeun saenghwalida).*” Green was often portrayed as a lifestyle (*saenghwal*)—how people lived everyday through their work and leisure practices as well as their consumption habits rather than being a movement, political party, or ideology. The acknowledged architect of the video was Activist Choi. She and a handful of other young staffers got together late one night in the office to make the video. Like many nights, she said, they were having trouble sleeping and so stayed up late joking around and writing a script. Activist Choi said she wished they could have gone outside to shoot, but there was no time. The video’s plot and its circumstances of production provide a gentle critique of the silent sacrifices many activists undertake and what else may count in living a “green life.”

The video opens with a staffer working diligently at her desk. Captions appeared alerting the audience to the passage of time:

*That night...*

*Early the next morning...*

*Next day...*

*Next night...*

*Two days later...*

*Three days later...*

The only other mark of time is how the staffer appeared. At first she looks calm and rested sipping tea. Her hair is neat and her posture is tall. By early the next morning, she is slouching with droopy eyes and messy hair. The next day she has exaggerated dark circles under her eyes. Three days later she

looks like a strung out addict and is shown picking fights with her colleagues. The video ends with her grabbing a large backpack from the office and telling people she needs to go hiking for a couple days. Many of the staffers standing in the back of the crowded auditorium were smiling and some even applauded at the end.

The video highlighted a frequently overlooked aspect of what makes a “green life:” leaving behind work when it is most stressful to get out and enjoy nature. This was particularly poignant for the environmental activists sacrificing for, yet rarely enjoying nature as a space in their everyday lives (*saenghwal*). Similar to the activist leaving her own human rights at the door while advocating for others not to do so, this activist was sacrificing her own enjoyment of nature so that others could do so. These activists, like the humanitarians Peter Redfield writes about, face the conundrum of “designating their own sacrifice, even while opposing the sacrifices of others” (2008:197).

Just a month before this Green Korea fundraising event, I noticed how staffers were taking much less advantage of planned and socially-sanctioned group retreats generally known as “membership training (MT)” in South Korea (Lee 2007; Ruhlen 2007). Many staffers, particularly younger ones, used the opportunity to catch up on sleep rather than participate in outdoor activities. Activist Choi’s video suggested a more spontaneous enjoyment of nature. As the lights came up after the video, the event emcee and secretary-general of Green Korea said “sometimes we all need to get back to nature (*jayeon*).” After more conversations with him, I came to see this statement as deeply personal.

During a rare quiet interview in his office, Secretary-General Choi (*Choi Samucheojangnim*) shared how stressed he had become since taking over secretary-general duties. 30 percent of the staff was new and half had been there less than two years. Fundraising was also tenuous in a slowed economy; Green Korea's 2005 annual report pegged irregular membership donations the previous year to the sluggish economy. Secretary-General Choi volunteered how he had lost four kilograms from stress and that he was the lowest weight he had been since he was a student. This, Secretary-General Choi noted with a wry grin, means "I have been losing weight for 30 years<sup>29</sup>."

He shared some regrets about the sacrifices he had made with his family and some of the decisions he made as secretary-general (see also Lee 2002). Yet he remained "optimistic (*nakgwanjeogin*)" because nothing he faced at that moment was as difficult as going hungry as a child<sup>30</sup>. He matter-of-factly shared this while turning away to look out the window.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Hunger, as Judith Farquhar writes about China, is often spoken of in the past tense in genres ranging from the historiography of Maoism to the consumerism and mass media of the 1990s (2002:82). In South Korea it is similarly recalled as a past condition of the colonial and Korean War periods (e.g. Kendall 1988) and often in contrast to the widespread consumption of the 1990s (Nelson 2000). At the same time, South Koreans speak in the present tense about North Korea's hunger and famine. So hunger and its widespread eradication in South Korea is an index of economic (capitalist) success at the same time it is nostalgia for a simpler, purer (past) South Korea often likened to (present) North Korea (Grinker 1998; Nelson 2000). Some former student activists, particularly those that subscribed to the National Liberation (NL) faction influenced by North Korea's *juche* ideology during the 1980s, reported feelings of betrayal when the extent of North Korea's famine came to light during the 1990s and 2000s. In personal conversations some activists cited this betrayal as the reason for some people's dramatic shift to the conservative *Hannara* party and the growing strength of the "New Right" during the same period. This sense of betrayal may help account for the embrace and complicity some 386 generation government bureaucrats and NGO workers, particularly during the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations, demonstrated toward neoliberal policies (Lee 2007; Song 2009).

Secretary-General Choi, like many other activist leaders I encountered, credited moments of extreme physical pain such as childhood hunger, military conscription, police torture, and prison terms with hope. One leader, for example, would harken back to the nickname policemen gave him—“plastic man”—when he encountered financial or organizational constraints. The nickname pointed to a tough yet flexible response to difficult times. Other activist leaders would treat the lengths of their prison terms as expressions of their activist commitment. On one occasion a young activist showed deference to an older one by pointing out how short and easy his few months in jail was compared to his senior’s ten-year term. The same was true for military experiences. Like their counterparts in business, activist leaders often shared painful memories and reminisced about common military experiences during late nights of drinking (Janelli 1993; Nelson 2000). During one night of drinks, for example, several Green Korea staffers enjoyed introducing me to the “bomb cocktail (*poktanju*),” a drink said to originate in the military, which involves dropping a shot of whisky or *soju* (distilled alcohol made from sweet potatoes and other crops) into a glass of beer. The shot is said to symbolize the exploder of a bomb (Kwon 2000:79). They recalled songs they sang together and even the kinds of cigarettes they smoked while in the military. Secretary-General Choi spoke of the extra punishment he endured as a known activist while carrying out his military duty—his books were routinely checked and confiscated and he was pulled away from duty every Sunday for questioning. The masculinist and militaristic form of organizational life in South Korea has been well-documented (e.g. Jager 2003; Janelli 1993; Kwon 2000; Moon 2005). Jae Chung has referred to this as the “subjective space of the aggrieved Korean” (2009:53).

Secretary-General Choi worried that the sacrifices (*huisaeng*) former *undongwon* and *undongga* (activists) like him became known and respected for had become nothing more than “symbols (*sangjing*)” used by politicians to advance their careers. Secretary-General Choi was referring to the increasing numbers of former-student activists who were calling attention to their activist sacrifices as qualifications for parliamentary office. Secretary-General Choi claimed that about half of the MPs serving in 2007 had spent some time in jail for pro-democracy activism. He was concerned that many citizens would have trouble discerning political rhetoric about sacrifice from the sacrifices taking place inside NGOs. Secretary-General Choi worried that if activists did not learn to change more quickly and comprehensively, then they risked becoming irrelevant. He remarked, “If we don’t change then we will be replaced by politicians in ten years like what happened in Japan<sup>31</sup>.”

Yet with donations decreasing in a strained economy, Secretary-General Choi resigned himself to “just being patient.” He worried that many young hires “want to work for the environment, but are not willing to sacrifice a lot.” They “want meaningful work and a better quality of life with more free time to enjoy it,” yet “do not know what must be sacrificed<sup>32</sup>” to achieve these things. For him and many others, activism in general and environmentalism in particular required sustained sacrifice. Sacrifice (*huisaeng*) in this view is what made life (*saenghwal*) green (*noksaek*).

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> All statements from an interview with author on June 12, 2007.

Department Leader Lee lamented the “childish” behavior of some new hires that showed up late and refused to work hard. Yet she was committed to being a better senior (*seonbae*)—someone who she pointed out would sacrifice—for hard-working juniors (*hubae*). In this spirit, she held several small study groups for staffers where they read and discussed books, posted encouraging messages on the group’s intrawebsite, and counseled staffers about work and personal problems. She regularly dropped her own work if a colleague called for help no matter the time or circumstance. “Being an activist (*hwaldongga*),” she reflected one day in the office, “means being a model of sacrifice (*huisaengui mobeom*)<sup>33</sup>.” Sacrifice, as many stated and captured in dark humor, was a present reality and necessity for activists and NGO staff. At the same time, it was an ambivalent inheritance from the past and a potential alternative future to economic developmentalism and capitalism.

## Conclusion

My intention in this chapter was to demonstrate that many NGO and NPO workers who struggled against the human and social sacrifices of the Park regime constituted a movement that necessitated many of the same sacrifices. Numerous staffers drew attention to the double binds of the past and the present. Ideology, a commitment to people and ideas that are not related through blood, school, region or any other conventional linkage, and sacrifice, the demonstration of that commitment, often worked as kinship by other means, or affiliation, which at times conflicted with filiation. Many NGO and NPO workers responded by working as “one doing the work of one hundred

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<sup>33</sup> Personal conversation with the author on September 9, 2006.

*(ildangbaek)*” despite and because of the resource limits they faced. The sacrifices they made with regard to family, wealth, and well-being were often quiet and unadorned. Yet in times of crisis, as the mid-2000s were for many large NGOs and NPOs, mid-level and top staffers returned to crisis as an inheritance from the past to be replicated in the future.

### Chapter 3: Less than Theory, Smaller than Ideology

#### Units and Scale of Analysis

Studies of political processes have long been geographically-cum-morally spatialized between First World elite nationalism and Third World subaltern social movements. Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) and Sherry Ortner (1995) have described what they term a posture of “romance” toward the latter while Iris Jean-Klein (2001) points up an inverse posture of “suspicion” where the former is concerned. This “split posture” effectively deconstructs or takes apart First World elite nationalism while co-constructing or taking part in Third World subaltern movement nationalism (Jean-Klein 2001).

Many Koreanists have described a similar dynamic whereby business and government elites are widely seen as perpetrating an oppressive nationalism while students, laborers, and the middle class participate in emancipatory social movements (e.g. Abelmann 1996; Eckert 1990; Grinker 1998).

However, this dissertation has demonstrated the increasing number of critics who have revealed oppressive nationalist and colonialist practices inside social movements, which have disturbed this division over the last two decades (e.g. Cho 1994; Choi 1993; Kim 1997; Kwon 2000; Lee 2007).

Michel Foucault’s work has been a major catalyst in this critique.

Moral privilege has given way to ambivalent complicity and self-recrimination such that Foucauldian examinations of the “fascism inside us” proliferated in major journals such as *Dangdae Bipyeong (Contemporary Criticism)* during the late 1990s. Namhee Lee (2007) quotes Foucault in her description of how

the *minjung* movement replicated the power structures it aspired to overcome: “The major enemy, the strategic adversary,” Foucault writes of progressives, is “the fascism inside us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (1983:xiii quoted in Lee 2007:296). Foucault’s work helped reveal the impossibility of what Namhee Lee calls the “pure discourses of nonpower,” which is how many activists articulated their morally-privileged motivations, practices, and aspirations (2007:296). At the same time, “the objects of dissent are more dispersed and the narratives and organization of the dissent are more fragmented” (Abelmann 1996:227). Foucault’s work, which has been earnestly consumed in South Korea since at least the 1990s, has inflected these shifting moral aesthetics of activism (Abelmann 1996; Lewis 2002; Oppenheim 2008; Song 2009). His work has inflected the “social critique” which “has permeated the language of ordinary people” (Choi 2009:215). In this chapter, I approach the reception of Foucault’s work in Korea as the starting point for an ethnography of *damnon*—a shared academic and activist artifact often translated as discourse.

While in the field I was captured by *damnon* to such a degree that my advisor thought my field reports read more like discourse analysis than ethnography. This chapter is an attempt to ethnographically re-encounter *damnon*’s seductive pull. Similar to how Annelise Riles (2000) recounts fieldwork in Fijian NGO offices channeling her attention to form, I found my attention drawn to discourse. *Damnon* was not just a term of art or index of intellectual movement; rather, it was an everyday practical problem with an oftentimes insufficient solution. While smaller in scope than ideology—often shaped to

reference everyday lifeworld and lifestyle (*saenghwal*) concerns rather than systemic concerns—it was also not quite theory. In the words of one informant and friend, *damnon* is “less than theory, smaller than ideology<sup>1</sup>.”

Nancy Abelman (1996) situates her ethnography of a South Korean social movement in the new social movements (NSM) literature that had emerged in conversation with Foucault’s work during the 1980s and 90s. Foucault’s approach to power has been central to this literature and many others that have responded to his work. Abelman interprets this approach to mean that power “operates not only by obvious repression or through visible institutions but also and even more effectively through the production of human subjectivities through the spaces and grammar of everyday life” (1996:3). Abelman approaches social movements as discursive phenomena, which following Foucault’s conception of discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972:49 quoted in Abelman 1996:3). To theorize social movements, therefore, is to theorize society. Social movements, like popular media sources that have ascended in Korean Studies from the 1980s through the present, “tell us not so much what people do, but how they understand, articulate, and argue about social practice” (Kendall 2002:5). They insinuate a sense of subjectivity, in other words, which Laurel Kendall defines as “a condition whereby personal agency is both constituted and constrained by prior power relations, some of them global in scope, and is realized through social practice” (2002:15).

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<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation with author on July 8, 2006.

Foucault's work introduced not only a conceptual vocabulary, but also affected an analytical scale change. Just as subjectivity broadened the scope of personal agency, governmentality broadened the scope of state agency such that power operates at every level of scale.

Jesook Song's recent study of (neo)liberal welfare policy during the Kim Dae Jung administration draws upon Foucauldian scholarship to argue for a broad and encompassing sense of power, governmentality and social engineering "which challenges the presumption of a solid line between the state and the society" (2009:13). Her work is an effort "to explore the links between neoliberalism as a process of subjectification in daily practice and thinking and neoliberalism as a political-economic institutional regulation" (2009:138).

Song presents this view from the inside out of GO and NGO social engineering projects, which is where she locates the negotiation of activist subjectivities. Song shares a Foucauldian-inflected mourning of activist complicity and its fascism as the foundations of liberalism become every bit as contentious as those of neoliberalism. Song, following Chungmoo Choi (1993), Cho Hae-joang (2000), Seungsook Moon (2002), and Namhee Lee (2007), continues an ongoing inside out feminist grappling with the successes and failures of intellectual-cum-activist resistance movements. Foucault's work has been integral in these scholars' articulations of the changing and vexed self, group, movement, and national subjectivities emerging in the compressed shift from liberalism to neoliberalism taking place in South Korea.

As discussed in the first chapter, Nancy Abelmann (1996, 1997a, 2003) has captured activists' changing subject positions and contingent life trajectories in

a sophisticated narrative-driven life history approach. Her work demonstrates a less systematic, yet no less consequential practice than discourse—what she leaves at the level of narrative—to theorize these negotiations. Robert Oppenheim (2003) draws upon Bruno Latour’s and Anna Tsing’s respective work to specify this sense of practice as a *project* that is subject to ongoing translations rather than a systematic discourse. Oppenheim demonstrates the contingent processes of translation occurring at multiple levels of scale, which effectively captures the dynamic movement of projects “from asphalt to text” (2003:43). While Oppenheim focuses on a paradigmatic “place of projects” in the Korean imaginary—Gyeongju—and argues for the necessity of going outside Seoul to observe how governance and activism unfold, I will attempt to demonstrate how these exceptional places are more mundane just as crisis is more mundane (e.g. Riles 2000; Yarrow 2005).

Drawing ostensibly on Anna Tsing’s (1997) work and implicitly on a great deal of science studies (e.g. Haraway 1997; Latour 1993), Timothy Choy defines project as a “unit of analysis smaller than discourse” which specifies “relatively coherent bundles of practices, rhetoric, and expressive forms in everyday life that in concert can become discourse” (2003:107). The temporality of projects mirrors this relatively small and inchoate spatiality insofar as it is limited to a specific problem and moment (Riles 2010a). In this chapter I will juxtapose a government-led land reclamation project with a NGO-led Green Life project in an attempt to not only reveal a familiar entanglement between GO and NGO projects, but also to capture *damnon* in movement. Before addressing either of these projects, however, I first attempt to capture another project shared by many activists across several groups who were trying to reassess job titles

and with that what it meant to call someone an activist (*hwaldongga*) compared to a coordinator (*gansa*).

The space for what Iris Jean-Klein (2001) calls practice and Annmarie Mol (2002) calls enactment is often bookended as system and lifeworld following Habermas. Alternatively, it has been reduced to representation, discourse, and ideology with little attention to how people relate to these concepts or how the concepts themselves are connected and separated. In other words, there is a conceptual jump from “processes of knowing” to “objective reality” (Bateson 1958:281) at the same time there is an abdication of the analytical work to define key terms. In particular, Iris Jean-Klein flags how ideology and discourse have become interchangeable—particularly in studies of nationalism— such that “neither concept is usually defined” (2001:116). The aim of this chapter is to open up this space of definition as an experience of scale. In particular, this chapter and the movement of the dissertation to this point attempts to enact how one key informant and friend tellingly described discourse (*damnon*) as “less than theory (*iron*), smaller than ideology (*idieollogi*).” This description was a key ethnographic insight, which I attempt to unfold as part of a research design process (Faubion and Marcus 2009).

#### Job Title Project

One student and part-time research assistant who had never worked for NGOs or NPOs observed how people associated with such organizations often use language such as discourse (*damnon*) to “sound smart<sup>2</sup>.” Another long-time staffer, Department Leader Lee, who frequently worried about the

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<sup>2</sup> Personal conversation with author on September 17, 2005.

future of NGOs, said they had become “obsessed with *damnon*<sup>3</sup>.” She said this at the time her boss, Secretary-General Choi, was attempting to launch his Green Life project, which coincided with NGOs’ struggle over the government-led Saemangeum reclamation project. Before discussing these two projects, however, it is necessary to discuss one of Department Leader Lee’s projects. I came to appreciate it as exemplary of many projects women activists were undertaking in an attempt to destabilize the everyday discursive space of NGOs (e.g. Ruhlen 2007; Song 2009). Like many of her women colleagues, Lee conducted this project on her own time and during work time in an informal manner and on an ad hoc basis. These projects often engaged problems that for one reason or another were not a priority for the organization, yet which were seen to define the moment (Riles 2010a).

**Department Leader Lee** graduated from one of the most prestigious economics departments in Korea while writing for her university newspaper and traveling abroad to study English. She found her way to Green Korea through seniors (*seonbae*) and quickly gained respect because of her hard work and big vision. Lee envisioned combining economic and environmental studies in innovative ways to address eventual unification between North and South Korea. She pursued post-graduate studies in public policy and environmental studies at prestigious universities while maintaining at least a part-time position at Green Korea. She was critical of her predecessors who left Green Korea after completing advanced degrees and turned down research opportunities abroad and mid-level government posts in order to

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation with author on May 10, 2006.

continue her activist work. While increasingly critical of NGO leadership and burned out by the long hours, she was also compelled to forego more lucrative opportunities because of her commitment to the issues and to her colleagues. Some of her closest friends at Green Korea told her they would not talk to her again if she took a government job. Department Leader Lee cared deeply about her large network of friends, which enabled her to undertake projects such as Buy Nothing Day, No Paper Day, U.S. military base cleanup, green energy, and fundraising campaigns for other Asian NGOs.

I first became aware of her job title project in 2001 when she was solely responsible for all of Green Korea's "international cooperation (*gukje yeondae*)" work. One day during a routine email exchange with a colleague at an overseas NGO, she began wondering aloud if "coordinator (*gansa*)" sounded like an appropriate job title<sup>4</sup>. During the bus ride home that night she continued sharing her concerns about the "inactive (*bijeokgeukjeok*)" implications of the *gansa* title. The conventional English translation among those I worked with—coordinator<sup>5</sup>—bothered her more than the Korean did. She asked several questions trying to ascertain the precise uses of coordinator and kept coming back to activist (*hwaldongga*) as a preferable alternative. She shared these concerns with colleagues over lunches and late night drinks. Several of her closest friends shared similar concerns. One colleague at another NGO who had worked for many years inside NGOs told me that she divides activists into two categories: sincere (*jinsim*) and career

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<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with author on July 6, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Gansa* is also translated as administrator, manager, executive secretary, and managing treasurer in other academic, religious, and non-profit organizations.

(*jigeop*)<sup>6</sup>. She hastened to add that Department Leader Lee was a sincere activist. Different versions of this conversation were happening inside many citizens' groups during the time of my fieldwork. When I circulated a preliminary version of a survey to several friends working in these groups, many of them encouraged me to add coordinator (*gansa*) to my list of activist (*undongga/hwaldongga*<sup>7</sup>), scholar (*hakja*), and specialist (*jeonmunga*). They also thought I should ask people to identify themselves and were keenly interested in the results.

The written survey I developed in close consultation with a handful of informants and friends was one of the few times many of them paused suspicions about my research methods. Like many ethnographers working in quasi-research and research settings, I often received incredulous responses about my methodology or apparent lack thereof (e.g. Faubion and Marcus 2009). During one particularly failed exchange, a human rights lawyer and researcher politely asked, "How is *that* research<sup>8</sup>?" Many of my informants were more experienced in social science research than I was. Several had even done qualitative and quantitative kinds of fieldwork (*hyeonjang josa*) as part of their job duties. One veteran activist who had just completed a master's degree in NGO Studies wondered what an American anthropologist could possibly do that Korean sociologists had not already done<sup>9</sup>. Effectively explaining anthropological theories and methods is akin to pitching one's tent in such research-rich environments (Riles personal communication). Thus,

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with author on

<sup>7</sup> While both terms are broadly conceived as activist, *undongga* typically carries more historical gravitas as cousin to *undonggwon* and has been translated as "committed activist" whereas *hwaldongga* has been translated as "activist" (Abelmann 1996; Ruhlen 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Personal conversation with author on October 18, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Personal conversation with author on May 17, 2006.

the process of developing a survey was as much an ethnographic exercise as any results it yielded; it was the equivalent of pitching my tent. I include the final version of the survey along with a series of drafts in Appendix A.

The most common concern I heard from people who gave comments on my survey and completed it was the amount of time it took to answer some of the questions. Several friends urged me to cut open-ended questions because they thought that I would never get a significant response rate if people had to spend so much time writing. I conceded this point. My aim was never to get a significant response rate; rather, it was to get significant responses from them. This would often elicit disclaimers about them not being “representative of common Korean attitudes” or even “common attitudes in the citizens’ movement<sup>10</sup>.” The purpose of a survey, I was repeatedly told, was to get a large response pool and analyze the results. While I tried to redirect this view to something more limited and personal in quality, many informants tentatively humored me. At the end of my research period, those who originally suggested I focus on the job title issue requested a brief research summary of my results. The only comment I received was a request to circulate it among staff.

My response pool was modest at only 18, but each survey provided a great deal of material. The majority of respondents, or 6 out of 9 who completed that portion of the survey, identified as activists (*hwaldongga*). Only one person unequivocally identified herself as a coordinator (*gansa*). A couple others qualified the title by identifying as “coordinator (*gansa*) or specialized

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<sup>10</sup> Personal conversations with author on February 12, 2007 and March 5, 2007.

activist (*jeonmun hwaldongga*)” and “coordinator (*gansa*)>teacher (*seonsaeng*).” Responses fell into three major categories: 1) those who saw the distinction between activist and coordinator as purely semantic such that *gansa* is a word “designating citizens’ group activist (*hwaldongga*)” or “an activist working inside NGOs”, 2) those who saw activists as doing the abstract work of “making and presenting a direction for society apart from state/society/market” while coordinators do the personal and concrete work of “building bridges (*gagyo*) between citizens’ groups” and “planning and linking with kind-hearted will (*seonhan ujjireul gajin*)”, and 3) the majority of respondents who saw coordinators as the necessary workers taking care of “practical organizational (*jojik*) and business duties (*samu eommu*)” while activists “act to realize their values for society (*sahoee daehan jasinui gachireul silhyeonhagi wihae*)” and “do movements based on belief in an alternative society (*daeansahoe daehan sinnyeome*).” In conversations and in survey responses, there was a persistent theory and practice distinction between activists and coordinators respectively. Activists, not unlike *undonggwon* in the 1980s, were concerned with the big picture—the ideological system of how state, society, and market interact and how to go about coming up with alternatives to the status quo. Coordinators, on the other hand, were concerned with getting things done—fostering good relationships, planning, and carrying out the daily tasks necessary for any system. This division is resonant with the sentimental-practical division in unification discourses (Grinker 1998) the affect-instrumental division in gender discourses (Cho 1988; Yi 1993), and what I argue is the ideological-pragmatic division in NGOs and non-profits.

Many of those who embraced the coordinator title (*gansa*), if only partially, were practicing Christians and pointed out how devoted and hard-working *gansa* were in their churches. Some recalled how ministers or pastors first got them thinking about social issues and how working for NGOs and social welfare groups was a continuation of earlier religious teachings. In churches and other non-profit organizations, *gansa* were readily described as overworked and underappreciated. In such varied office settings, *gansa* assisted higher-ups and took care of day-to-day operations. They were accustomed to helping others realize their visions. In any given NGO or non-profit office, they were the ones answering the phones who could also tell you where to find things. Not coincidentally, they were also mostly women. These entry-level all-purpose coordinators managed the office not unlike a home in pragmatically taking care of the day-to-day organizational tasks freeing up others to work on broader strategy and conceptual questions (Kendall 2002; Kim 1992; Kim 1993; Yi 1993).

One accountant who identified as a *gansa* admitted that many of her colleagues “had no idea” what she did everyday and often “did not care” about her work<sup>11</sup>. Other *gansa* shared stories of overt hostilities between them and some of their activist colleagues. Several coordinators were frustrated by activists’ lack of organization and ignorance of basic record-keeping. One long-time accountant compared NGOs to “petty retail merchants” who “would be destroyed tomorrow if they were properly audited<sup>12</sup>.” He audited several NGOs and said that the problem with most organizations is that they “only have a brain with no one working on the bottom (*siljero miteseo ilhaneun*

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with author on December 7, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with author on October 12, 2006.

*saramleun eopda*)<sup>13</sup>.” *Gansa*, he explained, are those working on the bottom. They are akin to those who often work invisibly in the financial sector papering deals or the clerks working behind the scenes in courts (Barrera 2009; Riles 2010a).

Activists, particularly those who identified as *undongga* more than *hwaldongga*, were suspicious of coordinators’ (*gansa*) commitment. Many coordinators’ disinterest or distaste for taking part in late night political discussions or weekend cram sessions where activists engaged in the work of making alternative visions was treated as a cause for concern and suspicion. If *gansa* did not care to participate in these kinds of activities then some *hwaldongga* were never sure if their colleagues actually shared the same commitments and were willing to sacrifice for them. While commitment to ideology was no longer overt, many of ideology’s hard edges persisted. The “rules, lack of charity, and hard edges” still reigned for many activists where personal decisions were routinely judged and people were made to feel bad for “selfish (*igijeogin*)” actions (Abelmann 1997a:272). Veteran activists such as the three women discussed in the previous chapter often sized up their juniors: those who worked hard, but did not show any initiative or willingness to engage in social activities where sincere and critical discussions occurred were regularly questioned or mocked. Yet they would cover for a hard-working and sincere junior. A *gansa*, like a bureaucrat, could just be going through the motions—biding time as a “professional activist (*jigeop simin undongga*)” till something better came along—while a “sincere (*jinsim*)” activist was in the movement for the long run. New staff had to prove their activist commitment and willingness

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with author on October 12, 2006.

to sacrifice through late nights, weekends at the office, and flexible response to reorganizations (*gaepyeon*).

*Undongga* and *hwaldongga* were preoccupied with uncovering and living truth while *gansa* were much more ambivalent, ironic, or uninterested in truth. Activists frequently spoke of truthfulness and sincerity (*jinsim*) when evaluating the work of other activists and the “selfish (*igijeogin*)” and “careerist (*jigeopjeogin*)” aspirations of some colleagues. The relation between activists and coordinators was not unlike the one Alexei Yurchak (2005) describes between activists (as well as dissidents) and “normal” people in late socialist Russia. Both activists and dissidents read official state discourse “as a description of reality” and evaluated that description for truth whereas “normal people” deterritorialized truth from official state discourse (Yurchak 2005:104). Yurchak describes how “normal people” performed an internal, relatively invisible shift on authoritative discourse that appeared to reproduce it while subtly shifting, building upon, and adding new meanings to it. However, in the case of NGOs and NPOs, activists were the “normal” people. They constituted the aging leadership and their history of critique to reveal the truth of authoritarianism served as the default position for NGOs vis-à-vis government and business interests. The Saemangeum reclamation project discussed later in this chapter provides a stark reminder of this history. Coordinators (*gansa*), on the other hand, conformed to admittedly authoritarian conventions such as job title and rank while quietly redefining NGO and NPO work away from activism and toward financial accounting, legal advocacy, and social welfare. These were the staff calling for legal, budgetary, and policy-making training rather than general movement history and social

theory training (Jeong 2006). Coordinator Mo (*Mo Gansanim*) exemplified this kind of staffer.

**Coordinator Mo** graduated from a highly respected law school in the United States and returned to Korea to be close to his family and begin to return the investment they had made in him. Like many new hires, he was stifled by Korea's highly competitive job market and confessed to only taking the Green Korea job because nothing better was available at the time. He bought a book about NGO law anticipating work in this area, but was surprised to find that he was assigned to the green transportation department where he said he never used his legal training. Coordinator Mo made several friends inside Green Korea during his first few months as he eagerly learned, participated in after work gatherings, and joined the group of veteran activists who took smoke breaks several times a day in the office garden. He described "doing his own thing"<sup>14</sup> while he got along well with colleagues. Yet when several colleagues including the secretary-general began questioning his work style and making it difficult for him to take vacation, he became more openly critical, pulled back, and accepted outside part-time jobs. These jobs took him away from most informal Green Korea gatherings. One of his part-time jobs teaching English raised the hackles of several activists because it was said to reveal compromised commitment. Coordinator Mo openly disagreed with several colleagues including Secretary-General Choi and Department Leader Lee. He questioned Choi about his opposition strategy to the Saemangeum

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<sup>14</sup> Personal conversation with author on January 11, 2006.

reclamation project and his tendency to use “*damnon* language<sup>15</sup>” instead of simpler and clearer language. I noticed Coordinator Mo sigh and pull away from strategy discussions as many Green Korea colleagues ignored his calls to reform lobbying laws rather than organizing protests. At the same time, he disagreed with Department Leader Lee by supporting *gansa* rather than *hwaldongga*. He thought *gansa* should be translated as “program officer” rather than “coordinator.” In the end, he left Green Korea after less than three years and was widely seen as a career (*jigeop*) rather than sincere (*jungsim*) staffer.

Coordinator Mo was neither religious nor socially conservative, but he continued to support *gansa* because of its “practical (*siryongjeogin*)<sup>16</sup>” connotations. Activists such as Department Leader Lee, who expressed concerns about the *gansa* title, did not overtly have a problem with the practical, gendered, or hierarchical connotations of the term. She did however repeatedly share concerns about those who exhibited zealous religious behavior. Raised in a non-practicing Buddhist household, Department Leader Lee was sensitive to what she would point out as “scary” Christian evangelicals and the increasing power they exercised in South Korea. She worried that South Korea was following the United States with its ascendant religious right (e.g. Jones 2003). She was horrified to discover that one of the new hires in Green Korea whom she respected was exhibiting worrying religious tendencies. Department Leader Lee recalled this colleague repeatedly inviting her to attend church and when she finally did agree out of

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with author on July 29, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation on August 6, 2006.

curiosity, was frightened to see how it worked and never resumed quite the same level of friendship with this colleague after that experience<sup>17</sup>. Other activists, particularly those that had worked for feminist groups, overtly critiqued the *gansa* title on human rights and patriarchal grounds. Some feminist groups and academic associations had effectively done away with language conventions such as title and rank altogether. In one group, for example, everyone went by first names only instead of the conventional name plus job title. In this case, the secretary-general was known by simply her first name instead of “*Kim Samuchojangnim*.”

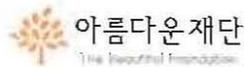
Most NGOs, however, conformed to language conventions even if they acknowledged the authoritarian roots of such practices. Green Korea was one such group. Yet even within these ostensibly conventional groups, people such as Department Leader Lee were undertaking disparate projects. By 2005, the *gansa* title was nearly absent on formal business cards and in everyday terms of address inside Green Korea. Even if higher level titles were retained such as department leader (*gukjang*) or team leader (*timjang*)—not to mention secretary-general (*samuchojang*)—*gansa* was mostly phased out in favor of activist (*hwaldongga*) or responsible person (*damdang*). In 2007, Department Leader Jeong stopped me after lunch one day to inquire if “community organizer<sup>18</sup>” in the Saul Alinsky tradition would be a viable replacement for both coordinator and activist. At the same time, I learned of another activist who was undertaking her own project to remake job titles. She disagreed with the hierarchy of most titles and advocated that every staffer go by the title the executive director had coined: social designer (*sosyeol dijaineo*).

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<sup>17</sup> Personal conversations with author on December 19, 2004 and September 22, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation with author on April 7, 2007.

This was the title printed on everyone's business card above their name. Yet below their name was the conventional job title, which was how colleagues often referred to one another. Several *hwaldongga* and *undongga* expressed concern or disappointment with their groups' continued adherence to such patriarchal and authoritarian conventions while I rarely if ever heard *gansa* mention these things.



Social Designer  
★ 박원순  
상임이사  
wspark@makehope.org

110-140 서울시 종로구 수송동 5번지 동일빌딩 2,3,4층  
tel. 02-3210-0909 fax. 02-3210-0126  
www.makehope.org

Illustration 3.1: Scanned image of the think tank's executive director's business card.

### Land Reclamation Project

Laura Nelson (2000) begins her ethnography of South Korean consumer nationalism with an ordinary retelling of the nation's economic miracle story and its social costs. Yet she ends with an extraordinary argument. Nelson begins by detailing South Korea's meteoric rise from one of the world's poorest nations in the early 1960s to one of its exemplary economic

successes by the early 1990s. Drawing on a great deal of seminal scholarship, she draws attention to the illicit history of governmental and large conglomerate relations constituting the developmental state, ghastly labor conditions, and authoritarian governance propelling the miracle (e.g., Cumings 1997; Lie 1998; Woo-Cumings 1991, 1999). Nelson concludes by writing, “the people were asked to make great sacrifices, to work long hours for poor pay for unelected governments that offered rich rewards to large corporations owned by a small number of opulently wealthy families, and to expect little for themselves” (2000:18). She briefly rehearses the conventional Foucauldian argument vis-à-vis Anthony Giddens. Giddens (1987) draws attention to direct state violence as well as the disciplinary power of surveillance. Nelson acknowledges the “well-articulated structure of surveillance and more subtle forms of Foucauldian discipline” yet goes on to write:

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to argue that the many millions of hours of labor that lifted the South Korean economy to its position of prominence and comfort were motivated by fear alone, even propped up by an industrial habitus. I will argue that in fact in large part the accomplishments of [the 1960s through the 1990s] were motivated by a potent elixir of nationalism and hope that was widely held throughout the population (2000:18).

Nelson pivots from previous scholarly preoccupations with the nexus between history and nationalism to the relatively understudied nexus between the future and nationalism. With a nod to Benedict Anderson’s seminal work, Nelson writes that “the idea of the future shares with the idea of the past the potential

to join people in an imagined community...” (2000:186). “The past,” however, “situates [this potential for an imagined community] in experience and authenticity, while the future bonds people in hope and hopeful action” (Nelson 2000:186). Nelson theorizes a future-oriented “national utopian imagination” which “had helped to secure two generations’ cooperation in the project of building a nation” at its retrospective moment of crisis during the 1990s (2000:188). The period before consumption is inherently future-oriented and even “utopian.” Nelson describes a temporality of consumption taking its place in the 90s in which “each act of consumption is the end of a period of anticipation” (2000:185). Under Park Chung Hee’s dictatorship, state projects evoking images of collective prosperity insisted that people not judge their policies in the present, but rather at some future point.

People sacrificed present enjoyment—the moment of consumption—for future enjoyment. This was a “modernist future” predicated on sacrifice socially reproduced through at least two generations, which was foundering in the 1990s when Laura Nelson conducted her fieldwork.

Hiro Miyazaki (2004) theorizes a similar hopeful moment in Fijian gift-giving practices during which time the gift-giver has just presented a gift and waits for the receiver’s response. This moment, as with the moment before consumption, is future-oriented and hopeful. At the same time, both moments are also uncertain and anxious. The future, unlike the past, is open and unguaranteed (Butler 2004; Grosz 2000; Wiegman 2000).

Timothy Choy (2003) opens his dissertation with an example of some of the broader concerns emerging from this post-foundational uncertainty. Choy

describes environmental NGOs in Hong Kong mobilizing against a development company's plan to build a golf course, country club, and low-density housing on protected park land in the New Territories. The NGO mobilization occurred in 1990 and won important concessions from the Hong Kong Environmental Protection department, which effectively delayed construction because the existing environmental impact assessment was found to be inadequate. While a new assessment was conducted, scientists found the land to be home to more than 65 percent of Hong Kong's dragonfly species—two of which were unique to Hong Kong—and so the Town Planning Board designated the land a site of special scientific interest. In turn, construction was delayed. However, the development company had secured local residents' permission to build on the land over a decade before. Long before the proposal was submitted to the government for approval and thus subject to NGO scrutiny, the development company had approached and received the approval of a handful of men who were recognized landowners under colonial law by virtue of their status as indigenous inhabitants. When environmental NGOs won their important delay, these residents protested in turn. As indigenous residents, they argued, they had a right to develop the land as they wished. Their frustration came to a head in 1997 when some of the residents manned bulldozers and purposefully leveled a tract of land that environmentalists were trying to protect. The questions that emerge from this situation—for example, who does one side with when the conventional equation between indigenous land stewardship and environmental conservation is disturbed—exemplify “the more abstractly framed concerns that have emerged in recent political theory about the viability of post-

foundational politics” (Choy 2003:3). Specifically, what do politics look like without absolute moral imperatives?

Environmental groups in Korea have practically and analytically grappled with these questions as the “moral aesthetics of activism” shifted during the 1990s and 2000s (Abelmann 1996; Lewis 2002; Oppenheim 2003). Grand ideological narratives built on self-righteous and sacrificial defiance such as the “three *mins*” of common people (*minjung*), nationalism (*minjok*), and democracy (*minju*), have fragmented and receded as victims of their own apparent success (Abelmann 1999; Kendall 2002; Lewis 2002). The ideological struggles which animated the *undongwon* of the 1980s came to seem “pedantic, divisive, and debilitating” (Lee 2007:255). In their place there is no one replacement; rather there are many possibilities “marked by a widespread growth of the middle class, the celebration of consumer capitalism epitomized by increasingly visible upper-class enclaves, and the extension of personal and political freedoms” (Abelmann 1997a:251). Nancy Abelmann describes the widespread post-80s fatigue with military authoritarianism and anti-state activism (1997a:250). With this fatigue and the apparent success of democracy, the “national utopian imagination” has also become “more difficult to sustain” (Nelson 2000:186). Many activists recounted distressing encounters with cab drivers, which they took to be an index of these changes. Several activists shared variations of a similar story: where cab drivers used to offer free or reduced fares when they found out they were activists, they now wondered what NGOs were doing after democracy had been achieved. Like the Hong Kong residents that Choy (2003) describes, some local residents

saw environmental activists working against the poor and marginalized—the same people (*minjung*) that these activists were supposed to represent.

The Saemangeum land reclamation project has been a touchstone of these shifting moral aesthetics of activism in South Korea over the last two decades. Saemangeum is a carryover of the large-scale government-led development projects of the 1960s through the 80s. One key difference, however, is that the project is located about 270 kilometers *southwest* of Seoul in North Jeolla province. This is the same province where Nancy Abelman (1996, 1999) conducted her fieldwork of the Koch'ang Tenant Farmer's movement during the 80s and 90s. Tellingly, when she returned to the area in 1993 one of the local activists chuckled about the ironic fortune of the region: "although the northwestern coast was impoverished because it missed out on state development programs, it was spared the environmental destruction of the rest of South Korea—'How lucky we are to have been excluded'<sup>19</sup>" (Abelman 1999a:271). Environmental activists expected to encounter this sentiment among local residents as they mobilized against Saemangeum during the 1990s and 2000s. They were right to a certain degree—local groups with ties

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<sup>19</sup> The Gyeongsang (southeastern) region was disproportionately industrialized during the colonial period given its proximity to Japan while the Jeolla (southwestern) region remained relatively agrarian. The disparity and enmity between the regions grew during military dictator Park Chung Hee's rule between 1961 and 1979. Park's development policies consistently favored his home Gyeongsang region over the Jeolla region. Jeolla had one large-scale industrial complex to Gyeongsang's eight, more than half of the largest conglomerates (*jaebeol*) were owned by people born in the Gyeongsang region; and corporations with at least 1,000 employees owned by people born in Gyeongsang region accounted for 61.3 percent of total sales in South Korea while a string of presidents hailed from the region up until Kim Dae Jung's election in 1997 (Lee 2007:49). At the same time, a number of stereotypes disparaging the dialect and intelligence of people from the Jeolla region were fostered and evident in various popular media (e.g. Abelman 1996, 2003). However, Jeolla people are widely seen as superior cultural practitioners of various traditional arts, music, culinary, and medicinal forms as well as modern literature. The Jeolla region, in other words, carries many of the same attributes within South Korea that Euro-Americans have long associated with indigenous people, e.g. cultural and environmental stewardship.

going back to the *minjung* movements such as the Catholic Farmers' Union (Abelmann 1996) supported the activists—yet there was also local opposition.

During my first trip to Korea in 2001 I had the opportunity to go near the construction site of the seawall dyke and surrounding estuarine tidal flats. Once completed, the seawall dyke would stand as the longest of its kind in the world and the reclamation would be the largest in Asia after Hong Kong's airport opened in 1998. The 33-kilometer seawall was initially conceived to add about 400 square kilometers of land for rice production along with a freshwater reservoir for irrigation. The multi-billion dollar project broke ground in 1991 amid growing concerns about surging rice prices and an agricultural sector left behind inside a region long left behind during the nation's compressed development (e.g. Abelmann 2003; Chang 1999). Saemangeum was a rare fixed and slowed process during a time of compression. The estuary near the mouths of the Mankyong and Geum rivers was not only prime fishing grounds for people, but also for hundreds of thousands of birds<sup>20</sup>. Many species of birds, including the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank, Great Knot, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper, were counted and photographed in the area during their annual migration routes between Northeast Asia and Australia. Birders from the UK worked with NGOs to document the waterfowl and their deterioration as construction progressed during the 1990s. The project was put on hold for two significant periods of time to conduct additional environmental and economic impact assessments. A number of NGO workers and experts presented damning recommendations, which in the end were put

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<sup>20</sup> Environmental groups substituted "bird (*sae*)" for "new (*sae*)" in the Saemangeum name. This move underscored the environmental commitment to reclaiming a prior "natural" resource such as birds while government planners ostensibly spoke of reclamation as transforming the land into something "new."

aside by the Ministries of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, and ultimately the president. In 1999, for example, Kim Dae Jung had put a hold on construction and invited many citizens' group representatives to serve on the newly-formed Presidential Commission for Sustainable Development (PCSD). Once on the commission, civil leaders, economists, and scientists alike recommended an immediate stop to seawall construction so that the initial plan could be significantly revised, if not scrapped completely. There was a growing list of grievances with more data to back-up them up as time went on: the initial plan for more rice paddy fields appeared anachronistic against the backdrop of South Korea's trade policy changes (Nelson 2000), local fishing outcomes were already seriously depressed as water quality indicators plummeted, and a number of flora and fauna species were showing signs of disappearance. Environmentalists and the experts they mobilized consistently argued that the estuarine tidal flats were already more of an economic and environmental resource than the newly projected farmland ever could be.

When I accompanied a group of Green Korea staffers to the area for a typical fieldwork (*hyeonjang josa*) trip in 2001, they were shaking their heads in disbelief at the environmental changes already afoot—water levels were permanently receding, water quality showed signs of long-term toxicity, and waterfowl counts were plummeting. When Kim Dae Jung announced his decision to go forward with the project in May 2001 with only “complementary measures” to improve water quality, citizens' groups were up in arms. Green Korea and other environmental groups closed their offices for a week to organize a number of protest events while 54 PCSD commissioners resigned in solidarity. Mr. Lim, Green Korea's secretary-general at the time, was

among those resigning. He said, “We civil organizations joined the research process as the government promised to respect our opinions, but they totally reneged on their promise.” A coalition of citizens’ groups issued a statement calling Saemangeum “the most environmentally destructive project in the world” and vowed that “if the government does not stop the plan immediately, we will launch an anti-government movement to drive the Kim Dae Jung administration out of power<sup>21</sup>.” Three months later, Green Korea and other NGOs filed suit with the Seoul Administrative Court demanding immediate project nullification. The suit would go through a series of delays and reversals over the next few years as NGOs leveraged international pressure. In 2003, for example, Catholic priest Moon Gyu Hyun, Buddhist monk Soo Gyoung, and Christian and Won-Buddhist clerics organized the “Three Steps, One Big Bow (*Samboilbae*)” campaign, which attracted strong statements of solidarity from international NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund. Their dramatic trek lasted 65 days with those opposing the reclamation walking and bowing head to the road every third step from Saemangeum to Seoul. The campaign asked for atonement on behalf of all people for their destructive acts toward nature and appeared to bear fruit as the Seoul Administrative Court ordered a temporary suspension on construction in July of that year. Seven months later, however, the Court ordered the project to continue as planned. Environmental lawyers pressed on with an appeal and in 2005 the Court reached another decision. The Court rejected the plaintiffs’ petition for an immediate halt to the project, but ordered the government to reconsider the project. The Court’s ruling forced the

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<sup>21</sup> All quotes in this paragraph are drawn from my first assignment as volunteer at Green Korean United—research and reporting for their English newsletter, e.g. Levine, Amy. 2001. “Saemangeum Project Opposition Movement Responds Powerfully to Government’s May 25 Decision,” *Green Korea Report #8*, July 11.

Ministry of Agriculture to consider three options: discard the project, alter the project's aim of creating farmland and a reservoir, or appeal to a higher court. The Court wrote, "The project inevitably needs to either cancel or change the authorization for development, as it has no economic accountability and a high possibility of wreaking havoc on the environment" (Na 2005). Government lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court citing the nearness of the projected completion date and won. The seawall formally opened in April 2006.



### Illustration 3.2: Online satellite images of the Saemangeum area.

Relations between environmental activists and Jeolla residents grew strained in the mean time. There were several instances of vandalism and counterprotests at activist-organized “Save Our Saemangeum (SOS)” events. Opinion polls showed majority local support for the reclamation, particularly during the 1990s. Jeolla residents had witnessed Gyeongsang provinces and areas around Seoul prosper for decades; Saemangeum was one of their few chances to enjoy the nation’s growing wealth after decades of hard work and thrift. Many residents saw Saemangeum as a fragile opportunity to cash-in after decades of deferred gratification and anticipated prosperity (Nelson 2000). Democracy was achieved, residents would say, so why were these activists from Seoul standing in the way of their long-denied piece of the pie?

Kristin Peterson writes of the transition from military to civilian rule in Nigeria that “the hope and hype of ‘democracy’ was “interchangeable with ‘civilian rule’ in everyday discourse (2009:47). Many people have said the same thing in the ongoing transition between military and civilian rule in South Korea (e.g. Kwon 2000; Lee 2007). Yet as Peterson writes, “democracy was also about social redemption,” or “...the hopeful means to alleviate suffering and to retroactively cash in on a social contract...” (2009:47). This sense of democracy as social redemption was evident in local residents’ support of Saemangeum. The first president who hailed from the Jeolla region, Kim Dae Jung, ran on a platform calling for more “balanced development” and Saemangeum was part of this vision. More importantly, even if some of the environmental points were conceded about the initial ill-advised aims of the

project, it was nearly complete. The reclamation was a stepping stone to further development of the Yellow Sea coast, which was widely seen as a key site for South Korea's economic future. In 2005, for example, South Korea was well on its way to becoming China's single largest trading partner as Yellow Sea shipping routes between the two nations steadily increased (Chung 2009). Saemangeum propelled a familiar "national utopian imagination" about securing the nation's future through massive development at the same time it revealed the potential exhaustion of that imagination in a region long known for its sacrifices rather than its development or consumption (Nelson 2000). Environmental groups demanding a nullification of the project without any alternative plan for existing development were seen as backward-looking, ideological and impractical. Unlike the high-speed rail dispute in Gyeongju, no coherent alternative plan emerged (Oppenheim 2003). In the words of Scholar Lee from the first chapter, "activist "belief in only what is right and wrong" failed to "breakthrough the complex real world and present concrete alternatives."

Green Korea and many other leaders of the SOS movement remained focused on what was lost with the reclamation and how they could go about recovering that prior natural state. Several activists drew parallels between Saemangeum and Shihwa Lake, a government-led tidal power plant project undertaken outside of Seoul largely regarded as a failure, while treating Saemangeum as a larger scale and outmoded manifestation of the government-led "development first (*gaebaljisangjuui*)" strategy. For environmentalists, the reclamation did not promise any future resources—economic or otherwise—where China was concerned; rather, it reclaimed a

familiar past of developmentalism and destroyed natural resources. That the project took place in North Jeolla province, an area known for its relatively undeveloped landscape, was all the more emboldening to both sides. The Jeolla provinces were largely a “blank page in a crammed notebook” (Choy 2003)—a rare natural resource amid runaway development for environmental activists and an equally rare untapped economic resource for developers. Secretary-General Choi, Green Korea’s leader through the final stages of seawall construction and court fights, emphatically claimed that NGOs could not “give up any more land<sup>22</sup>” where Saemangeum was concerned. They had effectively staked their reputations on stopping the project through their participation in and resignation from the PCSD.

Saemangeum exemplified a sense of crisis where conflict-resolution is concerned: project supporters pushed rapid construction and extreme development targets while project opponents dug in their heels as equally extreme and uncompromising protectors of nature (e.g., Abelman 1996; Grinker 1998; Snyder 1997). Roy Richard Grinker (1998) describes the precipitation of crisis as a common pattern of conflict-resolution “in a place such as south Korea, where communication across hierarchical boundaries is constrained by linguistic markers for respect and status...” (191). Relations between landlords and peasants, parents and children, and students and the government reveal a pattern of moralistic conflict-resolution whereby communication often only follows from an extreme and urgent crisis. Grinker argues that the violent clashes that sometimes ensue between these groups around a crisis are “to some extent necessary for communication” (1998:191).

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with author on March 6, 2006.

In many ways, Saemangeum was this crisis for environmental groups and the government during Kim Dae Jung's and Roh Moo Hyun's terms from 1998 to 2008.

Green Korea and other NGOs frequently spoke of the long history of enmity and distrust toward the government. Kim Dae Jung's decision to go forward with the project in 2001 despite the findings of the PCSD was a confirmation of activists' worst suspicions: in the end, even the nation's first undisputed democratically-elected president with widely respected dissident credentials and ties to the Jeolla region sided with the status quo economic development-first strategy. Environmental leaders did not hide their disillusionment and sense of betrayal in resigning from the PCSD and vowing to drive the Kim administration from power. Kim Je-nam, a founding member and secretary-general of Green Korea during a critical time in the Saemangeum struggle, reflected that NGOs "need to be patient because the government has been pursuing a development-centered strategy for a long time<sup>23</sup>." She, like many of her colleagues, was deeply disappointed at the environmental policy-making of the Kim and Roh administrations. In 2003, for example, a coalition of environmental groups proclaimed Roh's environmental policy to be "dead (*jukeotda*)" and in "crisis (*wigi*)" (Levine 2004a). While Kim Dae Jung envisioned the PCSD as a "neutral arbiter" and Roh attempted to continue this policy, environmental groups effectively withdrew from the commission or tried to push the PCSD to assume a more critical role vis-à-vis government development plans (Lee 2007). When Roh appointed a marine biology professor with pre-existing opposition to Saemangeum as secretary-general of

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<sup>23</sup> Interview quoted in Yujin Lee's 2007 report.

PCSD, many environmental groups expected this to bring an end to the Saemangeum project. However once in office, the professor pointed out how he was obliged to be “neutral.” Several activists openly questioned how the PCSD could call itself “neutral” when it continued to fight the Saemangeum lawsuit while others wondered if the PCSD could ever be a fair “umpire” in such conflicts (e.g. Lee Y.J. 2007). Many other activists privately and publicly balked at government officials’ sincerity (*jinsim*) in listening to NGOs (e.g. Song 2009).

One self-described scholar (*hakja*) exemplified the shifts occurring in NGOs and in government commissions like the PCSD. Scholar Lee (introduced in chapter 1) thrived on contradictions: he was a widely respected “sincere (*jinsim*)” senior activist who also leveled unrivaled criticism on activist failures. He worked for several years in small environmental groups before completing a PhD in environmental studies from Seoul National University. He focused on the Shihwa Lake case in his dissertation and sought a more “practical<sup>24</sup>” application for the lessons from that case to the Saemangeum case. He appeared to find this application in 2004 while serving as a policy director on the PCSD, but left the job a couple years later disenchanted with Roh Moo Hyun’s “incompetence (*neungnyeogi eopda*)<sup>25</sup>.” When we met the night before the presidential election in 2007 he had just come from the PCSD office. He said it was the third such trip he had made in recent weeks ahead of the administration change. Several colleagues were preparing “white papers” at

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with author on September 20, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with author on September 20, 2005.

the request of their former boss to “document what they had tried, even if higher-ups stopped them<sup>26</sup>.”

Back in 2004, however, Scholar Lee could not wait to tell me he was working on the “new frontline” for citizens’ groups (*simin danche*) when we caught up over dinner. For him, the “new frontline” was the PCSD. Scholar Lee said he had grown “cynical” while working for environmental groups and completing his doctorate. He became animated as he described the difficult, yet satisfying impact he was having on policy while working at the PCSD. He extended the military metaphor into a “battle line” between government officials and non-governmental people such as himself. Scholar Lee described government commissioners inviting non-governmental representatives to serve on the PCSD not out of respect, but because they could appear cooperative while being able to “predict” their recommendations. With obvious anxiety, Scholar Lee said these commissioners would praise NGOs “front stage” while laughing at them “backstage<sup>27</sup>.”

Yet he reserved his strongest criticism for so-called “professional citizen activists” (*jigeop simin undongga*). These activists emerged as his main object of critique for putting personal career ahead of public advocacy. An activist at another NGO used the same term to distinguish dubious activism from what she termed authentic, sincere, and devoted (*jungsim*) activism. Scholar Lee suggested that “professional activists” only worked for NGOs as a means toward a government job—a common critique of the 386 generation—and that some would go so far as to use government project funds toward personal

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with author on December 18, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> All statements in this paragraph from interview with author on July 28, 2004.

salary. This charge had been repeated so many times that some activists were preemptively defensive about it. Scholar Lee, like many others in NGOs, worried that these “professional activists” were giving all activists a bad name. In particular, they were endangering activists’ moral authority. Local opposition to the Save Our Saemangeum activist coalition was also threatening this authority. While these public erosions of moral authority occurred, NGOs were engaged in internal moral discussions about job titles, activists (*hwaldongga/undongga*), and coordinators (*gansa*).

### Green Life Project

In the weeks leading up to the Supreme Court’s decision on Saemangeum in 2006, Green Korea’s office went into crisis mode. They closed regular office operations and held candlelight vigils in solidarity with five other cities for ten straight days ahead of the court ruling. Green Korea’s secretary-general was leading the uncompromisingly optimistic campaign to keep the two small openings in the seawall open. The wall stood over 30-kilometers, yet Secretary-General Choi was interested in the two openings amounting to about two kilometers. He took out a pen and piece of paper to illustrate the seawall with a line and drew circles to indicate the two openings<sup>28</sup>. He continued to retrace the circles in order to emphasize them as he explained that the case was now in the Supreme Court’s hands. Those two openings could stay open, Choi continued, if the Supreme Court ruled in their favor or they could delay a decision for a few more weeks. Choi reasoned that a small delay could buy them even more time given weather and construction conditions.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with author conducted March 6, 2006.



Illustration 3.3: Saemangeum seawall in April 2005 (Photo by Nial Moores)

Choi did not even want to entertain the possibility of compromise. He insisted that NGOs “could not give up any more land” and that the phrase sustainable development was an oxymoron. While he conceded that the activist strategies (*jeollyak*) to protest, issue press releases, hold press conferences, and file lawsuits were failing<sup>29</sup>, he insisted that activists could not change beliefs (*sinnyeom*). Activists, Choi matter-of-factly said, “feed on belief (*sinnyeomeul meogno*)” while scholars “feed on knowledge (*jisikeul meogno*)<sup>30</sup>.” He used the example of nuclear energy. If Green Korea decided to reverse its position on the government’s plan to expand its nuclear energy program, he argued, they would certainly have it easier. Government and private sector money to fund nuclear energy would come their way, but the moral costs would be too

<sup>29</sup> At one exasperating point, Choi said that Green Korea would have been more effective fighting Saemangeum if they had just closed their offices during the last couple years rather than doing any of the activities they had done.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with author on November 22, 2005.

high. Without belief, Choi argued, what would be the point of life? I read this as an explication of commitment outside any strategic or pragmatic calculation of effects (e.g. Riles 2000; Snellinger 2007).

Secretary-General Choi had begun to formulate his own project—the “Green Life Theory Project” (*Noksaek Saengmyeong Iron Peurojekteu*)—when he became the sole secretary-general of Green Korea in 2006. Choi saw NGOs losing the Saemangeum battle because they failed to offer a “grand theory”<sup>31</sup> anywhere near as complete or convincing as capitalism or neoliberalism. Choi saw capitalism using people as “means (*sudan*)” for the “goal (*mokjeok*)” of money<sup>32</sup>. He thought NGOs needed more theorists who could write position papers on their behalf and begin to put forward a coherent alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism (e.g. Song 2009). They did not need a specific alternative to Saemangeum, but to all such projects. Choi was thinking on the order of ideology—a system large and coherent enough to counter the logic of development. He referenced a much talked about debate between an eminent professor and the mayor of Seoul about another high-profile reclamation project on the MBC television program *100 Minutes*. Lee Myung-bak, who was mayor of Seoul at the time, began to solidify his reputation and his successful run for the presidency in 2007 with the success of the Cheonggye stream reclamation project. Lee came across as a plain-spoken, straightforward businessman who knew how to appeal to people’s pocketbook interests while the professor appeared vague and unimaginative by merely criticizing Lee’s vision without offering an alternative in its place. One Green Korea staffer joked that the professor spoke ten words for every one that Lee

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with author November 22, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with author February 22, 2006.

spoke. Most Green Korea staff agreed that the professor not only lost the debate, but unduly helped Lee in the process. Secretary-General Choi did not disagree, but he saw the problem as bigger than either the professor or the mayor. He thought citizens' groups were relying too much on a small group of scholars for the work of publicly debating and presenting alternatives to government and business development plans. Secretary-General Choi thought activists could do more than just implement theory or mediate between theorists and citizens; he thought activists needed to get engaged in the work of making theory and presenting alternatives to the public. The Green Life Theory Project was his way to begin this work.

Choi personally footed the bill and prepared bimonthly informal meetings during which time a handful of leaders from about ten environmental groups in Seoul would get together and discuss recent academic and popular press books of interest. They periodically met for about a year leading up to Green Korea's fifteenth anniversary commemoration events in June 2006. This was to be the stage for the project launch to the broader NGO community. At the same time, other members of this informal group associated with the largest environmental NGOs in the country, KFEM, were preparing to launch a new environmental think tank—the Eco-Horizon Institute (*Saengtae Jipyong Yeonguso*)—“where field and theory meet (*hyeonjanggwa ironi mannaneun*).” I gathered from Choi's off-handed comments that he was highly aware of and competitive with his KFEM colleagues.

When I shared a bus or cab ride with Secretary-General Choi during the months leading up to the launch, he would recount all the emergencies and

distractions he had to deal with that week which took him away from what he really wanted to do—work on the project. The conversations we would have in the office kitchen and stolen in transit between events seemed to return him to his days as a university student activist (*undonggwon*). He would fondly recall reading certain books and being on “study break” (*hyuhak*), which afforded him the time and the space to imagine things as big as ideology<sup>33</sup>. Yet he did not wish to return to those days of ideological struggle and torture in the military. Instead, he wished to recapture the imagination that time and space as a student afforded him. Choi longed for the version of theory he first imagined as a student in jail, yet did not wish to go back to ideology in a similar way that Adam Reed (2004) describes released prisoners in Papua New Guinea longing for the version of freedom they first imagined in captivity, but not wishing to return to prison. *Damnon* was something “less than theory, smaller than ideology.” Choi offered this definition of *damnon* during a conversation with Coordinator Mo, who had become increasingly vocal in his criticism of Green Korea’s strategies. Before getting to this conversation, however, it is necessary to review what became of Secretary-General Choi’s Green Life Theory project.

The informal reading group of civil leaders and professors Choi had assembled to discuss environmental theories and strategies in 2005 and early 2006 became the more formal Green Life Committee (*Noksaek Saengmyeong Wiwonhoe*) ahead of Green Korea’s 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary events in June 2006. They met to discuss ways to bring humans and nature together, both of which share life (*saengmyeong*). Notably, this term for life differs from the term

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with author on May 8, 2006.

Green Korea used in its theme during the same time: “green is life (*noksaegeun saenghwarida*).” *Saenghwal* is a conception of life akin to lifestyle as in *ilsang saenghwal*. It connotes everyday routine and consumption habits, which is what Green Korea had long been targeting with its Buy Nothing Day, Let’s Wear Warm Undergarments, and organic food campaigns. *Saengmyeong*, on the other hand, is a conception of life which all living things share—it is not only human lifestyles, but the critical survival of all living things at stake. Choi’s decision to shift from *saenghwal* to *saengmyeong* pointed up the heightened urgency of environmental discourses with the Saemangeum reclamation project and more generally with climate change. *Saengmyeong* cast environmentalism in the stark register of life and death where previous Green Korea campaigns appealed to lifestyle (*saenghwal*) changes.

Choi attracted some of the biggest names in the NGO sphere to launch the commission and its large scale alternative to development at all costs: Greenism (*Noksaekjuui*<sup>34</sup>). One of these big names was the same professor who told me that activists “mediate between theorists and citizens.” He presented a Foucauldian-inflected history of “Korean resistance discourses (*Hanguk jeohang damnon*),” analyzed classism in Western Europe, and offered a few recommendations on what Green discourse must include. Choi’s Greenism placed “humanity (*ingan*)” and the “value of life” (*saengmyeongui gachi*) at the center of economy and development. Echoing Kim Dae Jung’s discourse (Song 2003), the committee’s press release (GKU 2006) argued for

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<sup>34</sup> The shift from Green Life (*Noksaek Saengmyeong*) to Greenism (*Noksaekjuui*) is significant for removing the urgent notion of life. In addition, Green Life carries the charge of a campaign slogan or project whereas Greenism conforms to the familiar form of ideologies such as socialism (*sahoejuui*) and regionalism (*jibangjuui*).

“quality of life” as an alternative to South Korea’s historical development first approach (*gaebaljisangjuu*). It went on to proclaim Greenism as “the new *damnon* necessary for making this society,” which would “make direction and content together” and embrace “contention” (GKU 2006). Choi’s alternative synthesized many of the pillars of post-*minjung* Leftist thought in South Korea—particularly in trying to combine the “form (*hyeongsik*)” and “content (*naeyong*)” of democracy—so as to foster a more humane, tolerant, and socially-minded development.

The public launch was advertised as a discussion panel (*toronhoe*), which is exactly what Secretary-General Choi treated as a mundane aspect of his job at the beginning of the chapter. In the end, Choi’s big launch to get activists engaged in the work of theory and alternative-making did not meet expectations. It resembled an academic conference more than an experimental space inviting activists, academics, and coordinators to work together toward refining Greenism’s broad precepts.

Coordinator Mo joked that he and several new staffers stayed up late the night before trying to understand just the first dense sentence of one professor’s paper<sup>35</sup>. Two of the panelists were university professors and the other was director of a research institute. Coordinator Mo and several other staffers sitting in the outer circle of tables surrounding the panel spent much of their time texting, passing notes to each other, and yawning. While nearly all of Green Korea’s staff made an obligatory appearance at the event, few spoke and no outsiders attended. Choi picked a small centrally located conference

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<sup>35</sup> Personal conversations with author June 27, 2006.

room for the event and strongly encouraged all Green Korea staff and supporters to attend. He took special care to rearrange the tables and chairs into concentric circles<sup>36</sup> so as to encourage more intimate discussion. However, when staff members did speak it was often only to clarify panelist terms. The one notable secretary-general from another citizens' group that Choi invited as a discussant was very critical of the decision to propose Greenism as separate from existing alternative *simin* (citizen) *damnon*.

When I asked Choi how he thought the event went a few days later, he said that he had a lot to think about and changed the subject. This was a marked contrast to Choi's excitement in the previous months. His optimism turned into defensiveness as stacks of Green Life Commission materials collected dust under the office stairs. A couple weeks later, Secretary-General Choi and Coordinator Mo ended up in a testy exchange as they helped me understand *damnon*. Choi promised before the launch to help me understand some of the difficult language from the event and so he began our weekly class asking me to share questions. When I brought up *damnon*, Coordinator Mo said that he did not know its meaning because he hardly used the word. However, he paused and wrote out the traditional Chinese characters (*hanja*) for *damnon* on a piece of paper and asked Choi to confirm if it was correct. Choi confirmed it as Coordinator Mo parsed the Chinese characters (談論) to mean "discuss theory." Choi then matter-of-factly defined *damnon* as "less than theory, smaller than ideology<sup>37</sup>." He referred me to one of the papers from the panel which documented the changes in Green *damnon* over the last three

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<sup>36</sup> "Circles," a term borrowed from English, were common modes of gathering among *undonggwon* during the 1980s (Lee 2007). Students would often attend these "circles" in lieu of classes during which time they circulated texts and debated ideological strategies.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with author on July 7, 2006.

decades (Koo 2006). Choi agreed that the term had shifted from referencing ideologies such as socialism in the 1970s and 80s to referencing a variety of talk (*iyagi*) in the 2000s. University students poured over cultural theory (*munhwa iron*) as Foucault became the most translated author into Korean during the 1990s and *damnon* was widely translated as discourse. By the 2000s, however, *damnon* became a term that meant little more than the person using it wished to “sound smart.” When I mentioned this description of *damnon*, both Choi and Mo agreed. Sensing the irony, Choi half-jokingly added that he did not use the term more than ten times per month. Mo did not miss the chance to make the irony explicit by reminding Choi of the Green Life Commission event. Choi quickly amended his statement with “except for this month.” Mo seized on the opening to recount his frustration with another recent workshop he attended where “it was all *damnon* language.” This, he implied, is why he had left early and did not participate in Secretary-General Choi’s Green Life project. The normally placid Choi surprised us both by immediately shooting back, “but it’s important!”

Even a fellow activist (*hwaldongga*), Department Leader Lee, had grown weary of *damnon*. At the height of Secretary-General Choi’s Green Life project, she sighed during one late night at the office and said that NGOs had become “obsessed” with *damnon*. It was not only Green Korea, she insisted; rather, it was a widespread problem plaguing many groups. They had come to “sound more like professors than citizens,” she continued. Department Leader Lee frequently spoke of the need for “real (*siljero*)” and “practical (*siryongjeok*)<sup>38</sup>” approaches with straightforward language. She did not see

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<sup>38</sup> All statements in this paragraph from personal conversations on May 16, 2006 and June 30, 2006.

the utility, for example, of a professor's long and complicated explanations during the aforementioned TV debate about the Cheonggye stream reclamation project. She also did not see the *use* of Choi's Green Life project. In these instances *damnon* manifested the worst aspects of ideology (*idieollogi*)—abstract and rigid thought systems holding people back. However, Department Leader Lee's *damnon* project to quietly and informally reexamine the everyday (*saenghwal*) conventions of job titles proved to have more traction.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the multiple entanglements of activists and academics. Foucault's scholarship has provided a conceptual vocabulary for these entanglements, fallen sense of moral authority, dispersed power, hidden complicity, and multiple fragmentations. Discourse (*damnon*) has worked as a placeholder (Riles 2010a); it is in the words of Secretary-General Choi "less than theory, smaller than ideology." Yet what his project accomplished, in the words of one of his staffers, was another discourse without use. The job title project she conducted, on the other hand, was smaller in scope and more pragmatic. This job title project was an example of a discourse inside many NGOs and NPOs during the time of my fieldwork. Both Department Leader Lee and Secretary-General Choi were social movement analysts engaged in the way "language convinces" (Riles 2000:66) through discursive projects. In juxtaposing these projects against the larger government-led Saemangeum reclamation project, I demonstrated the ascent of pragmatism at various levels of scale.

## Chapter 4: Designing the Agenda with Hope

Good design tells us that, though the world at large may be challenging and dangerous, there are solid means of engaging it. And beyond this, good design speaks to us of the quality and joy of the engagement.

--- Robert Grudin, *Design and Truth*

### Introduction

“We cannot just criticize,” one department leader noted. She said NGOs and NPOs had to “propose alternatives (*dae-an*) and recommendations (*chujang*)” to be taken seriously by government and business colleagues in the post-1990s era of increasingly cynical neoliberal governance in South Korea. This was particularly true during the Roh Moo Hyun administration, which sought alternatives and solutions rather than critique. While some critiqued this pragmatic demand, others took it as an invitation to pragmatically change. Lawyer Park (*Pak Byeonhosanim*) is an exemplary figure of the latter. He necessitates a chapter rather than a short history because of the scaled up figure he cuts in Korean law and politics.

Lawyer Park is a prominent “first generation<sup>1</sup>” civil leader who elicited deep passions and large aspirations among the NGO, NPO, academic,

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<sup>1</sup> Some of his staff referred to him and founders of other major NGOs and non-profits in this fashion. One scholar said that Lawyer Park is part of the “6.3 generation (*yuk sam sedae*),” which protested normalized relations with Japan in 1965. Park himself identified in 2006 with the “386 generation (*sam bal yuk sedae*),” a much sullied term during the mid-2000s referring to people who were in their 30s during the 1990s, went to university and identified as *undonggwon* during the 1980s, and who were born in the 1960s. In 2010, however, Park much more finely specified his generation as “emergency decree (*gingeupjochi*)” referring to the period between 1974 and 1979 when Park Chung Hee issued nine emergency decrees. Namhee Lee (2009), following other mass dictatorship scholars, has called Park’s regime during this time a “crisis’ government.” These decrees kept an emergency or crisis mode

governmental, and semi-governmental circles in Seoul. There was an ever-present buzz about whether he would accept the latest cabinet offer or run for president in the next election. Lawyer Park was at the center of nearly all discussions about Korean politics during the time of major fieldwork from 2005 to 2007. He was sometimes cast as a radical from the past and other times as a pioneering social entrepreneur of the future. Among his own staff, Park razed stark disagreements about whether he was an audacious reformer, a moderate appeaser, or both. According to his staff, he “inspired” and “used” people, particularly activists to achieve his vision<sup>2</sup>. Lawyer Park attempted to personify and objectify hope, both with his record of legal and legislative successes and with his latest venture, the Hope Institute (*Huimang Jejakso*). His career trajectory was treated by many colleagues as if it were the trajectory of South Korean civil society more broadly. He channeled resources as well as attention and upholds the linear and progressive temporality of the nation-state (Escobar 1995; Greenhouse 1996; Yarrow 2005). Lawyer Park was at the center of human rights advocacy in the 1970s and 80s, anti-corruption and transparency campaigns in the 90s, and had turned to social welfare and community-building along with what he calls social design in the Hope Institute in the 2000s.

Lawyer Park has attempted to “set the agenda,” in his own words, with the NGOs and non-profits he has led over the past couple decades. The agenda, I argue, is an artifact of pragmatism (Riles 2003; Riles 2004a). Lawyer Park is

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constant during most of the 1970s when the Vietnam War was escalating (Lee 2007, 2009). The decrees made it illegal for citizens to criticize Park’s regime, opened universities to military occupation, and in some cases closed universities after large anti-government demonstrations. See Janelli and Janelli (1982) and Nancy Abelman (1996, 2003) for more on generational dynamics in South Korea.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with author on June 12, 2007 and January 11, 2008.

pragmatic in his efforts to constructively hope in the wake of the destructive effects of some of his previous work. Park has tried to selectively mobilize the “near past” of dictator Park’s “nation design” with the “near future” of his “social design” (Guyer 2007). In this chapter, I put pragmatism and hope on the research agenda as shared legal and anthropological artifacts ripe for critical and post-critical ethnography (e.g. Faubion and Marcus 2009; Miyazaki 2004; Riles 2003).

Anthropologists (e.g. Geertz 2000; Latour 1999; Rabinow 2003; Rosen 1999) and socio-legal scholars (e.g. Silbey and Sarat 1987; Trubek 1984; Unger 2007; Valverde 2003) alike share commitments to pragmatism. Following the PoLAR symposium on pragmatism (Riles 2003), this paper aims to treat pragmatism ethnographically. In particular, it examines means-ends reasoning through time, which brings transparency and social design into view as part of an agenda. As socio-legal scholars and anthropologists put pragmatism on their respective research agendas, does hope in another kind of motion appear as we turn out faith in linear progress inside out (e.g. Deneen 2003; Kennedy 2004)? The question becomes how to maintain an agenda and hope. In other words, how can we keep the future open while planning and designing it? The answer, this chapter suggests following the work of Hiro Miyazaki (2004, 2005) and Annelise Riles (2004a), is to imagine a means to another means rather than any end.

### Approaching Pragmatism

Annelise Riles (2003) has highlighted the widely shared “pragmatic grounds” from law to science studies and anthropology. She suggests that William

James's deambulatory theory of truth, which "is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences," as uniting at least the political left and right in the legal academy (James 2000:194 quoted in Riles 2003:1). Riles describes how "thinking pragmatically" is what American lawyers self-consciously export under the guise of American-style rule of law," which is taken up by lawyers, regulators, and activists alike around the world (2003:2). This notion of "thinking pragmatically" or "being practical" is emblematic of the United States more generally (Desautels-Stein 2007).

Yang Sung-hee (2007) wrote in the editorial that I discussed in the introduction, "There is a close correlation between pragmatism and contemporary America. Pragmatism is nearly the only philosophy that the United States follows." Yet pragmatism has also been "the philosophy that the Korean people have pursued all of the last century" as "the nation experienced industrialization and democratization during the last six decades" (Tak quoted in Yang 2007). Many informants and friends reiterated this view over the course of my fieldwork. They frequently said "practically doing (*siljero hada*)" was the only way to negotiate the demands of the work and that many of the crises their organizations faced were the result of not enough pragmatism (see Chapter 1).

### Practical Roots of the Hope Institute

Lawyer Park's latest venture, the Hope Institute (*Huimang Jejaksso*), sought to harness this pragmatic spirit and "democratize knowledge production<sup>3</sup>" so that any person could act as a "social designer (*sosyeol dijaneo*)." The Hope

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<sup>3</sup> Statements from an article posted on the Hope Institute's website entitled "The Democratization of Knowledge Production is 'Hope Production (*Jisik saengsanui minjuhwaga got 'huimang jejak'*)," posted April 7, 2006.

Institute (2006) set as one of its tasks “to change the huge intellectual energy in Korean civil society into collective wisdom for the whole community.” In order to do this, they could not “limit ‘tank’ in think tank to a few elite classes;” rather, they had to “expand it to all citizens who have specialized experience and knowledge<sup>4</sup>.” Lawyer Park gave a press interview in 2005 in which he said, “We need to discover wisdom in the life of the general public that scholars or theorists do not have in their mind and connect it to policy. I think that will be the driving force of social development<sup>5</sup>.”

The Hope Institute aimed to get citizens involved in policy-making by conceiving of them as “social designers” who had “social inventions” to cultivate. The Institute’s Social Invention Center (*Sahoe Changan Senteo*) has already implemented: small badges expectant mothers can use to access priority seating on public transportation and varying handle heights on the subway, both of which had been implemented in Japan, a discount system so women do not pay for certain days they cannot use swimming pools each month, and a confectionary mark that contains the production date along with the expiration date.

Lawyer Park and the Hope Institute staff conceived of themselves as the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the “practical study movement (*sirhak undong*).” Like these scholars, Park and his staff sought to systematize “wisdom and experience from the bottom by listening to the voice of marginalized places<sup>6</sup>...” The Hope

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<sup>4</sup> See supra 3.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations from a December 12, 2005 *OhMyNews* article entitled “Can We Say the Roh Administration is Progressive (*No Muhyun jeonbureul jinborago hal su itnayo?*)?”

<sup>6</sup> Quotation from August 5, 2008 *Hankook Ilbo* article, “Lawyer Park Won Soon, ‘It is ‘Experience from the Bottom’ that Captures the Voices of Marginalized Places (*Pak Wonsoon byeonhosa ‘sooehyeonjang moksori dameun ‘araerobuteo gyeongheom’ ijo.*)”

Institute has published a large number of books addressing a wide range of issues from local energy to education reform. They do so from a practical study (*sirhak*) and praxiological (*hyeonjang*) perspective.

Big words (*godamjunron*) are still prevailing. Korean government employees are working at their desks, reporters are reporting in pressrooms. Members of the National Assembly should take a bus or taxi instead of their cars. It is the same story for the civic group (*simindanche*). The actual place (*hyeonjang*) is important. When you go to the place (*hyeonjang*), you will know the problem (*munje*) as well as the alternative (*daean*)<sup>7</sup>.

Practical use (*siryong*) and on-site experience (*hyeonjang*) are two of the Institute's founding principles as they aim to "actualize small change and possible ideas more than comprehensive discourse (*damnon*)<sup>8</sup>." Lawyer Park and his organizations differed from other NGOs and non-profits in this regard. As discussed in the previous chapter, other civil leaders sought "grand theory" and "discourses (*damnon*)."

Lawyer Park worked hard during the launch of the Hope Institute to ally his work with practical study scholars. Park said in a 2008 press interview that every time he goes abroad he reads books by *sirhak* scholars such as Dasan Jeong Yak-yeong, Seongho Yi Ik, and Yunam Park Ji-won<sup>9</sup>. The Hope

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<sup>7</sup> Quotation from August 11, 2008 INews article, "When We Dream of Hope and Put it into Practice, there will be Hope"...Lawyer Park Won Soon (*Huimangeil ggumggugo silcheonhae nagal ddae, huimangeun saengginda'...Pak Wonsoon byeonhosa*)."

<sup>8</sup> Quotation from the Hope Institute's website at their founding in 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See supra 7.

Institute (2006) cites the Confucian and *sirhak* axioms of giving practical benefit to the world, improving people's lives by conveniently using what's at hand, and seeking truth based on facts. According to the Hope Institute website in 2006:

[Practical study scholars] have practical (*siljejeok*) and realistic (*hyeonsiljeok*) life problems (*gwaje*) and clear goals (*mokpyo*) instead of being ideological (*inyeomjeok*) and abstract (*chusangjeok*). The spirit of pragmatism does not mean judging objects by their appearance. Pragmatism means being devoted to detailed problematic situations (*guchejeok munje sanghwang*) that makes us 'compelled to think' of something. Pragmatism is therefore a practical sense of purpose (*silcheonjeok mokjeokuisik*)<sup>10</sup>.

In my first interview with Lawyer Park, he used an anecdote squibbed<sup>11</sup> from history to explain how he approached the Hope Institute's role in Korean society. He said there was a "serious debate" among Korean Confucianists in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century about how many years the king should wear a robe for his dead mother. Some said one year and others said three, he continued, so as to point out how "silly" and "abstract" the debate was. Practical study scholars (*sirhakpa*) set aside this debate, Park explained, by going to China and "practically learning how to change society." "[The Hope Institute]," Park continued, "should be another *silhakpa* by changing and designing society<sup>12</sup>."

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<sup>10</sup> See supra 3.

<sup>11</sup> Annelise Riles describes squibbing as "the standard practice of excerpting, summarizing, or restating the facts of a case or the point of an academic article so as to render these relevant to another analytical problem" (2004a:791). She demonstrates how squibbing conventionally occurs in American law schools.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

The Hope Institute's founding declaration proclaims that it will "change despair into hope" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as practical study scholars did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when aristocrats (*yangban*) were captured by "moral obligations and stereotypes" and the *Joseon* dynasty was an "abstract country" sticking to empty formalities and causes<sup>13</sup>."

Lawyer Park fashioned himself as a practical scholar who would similarly set aside the ideological and abstract debates plaguing politicians and activists. Like the previous practical scholars, he traveled abroad to learn and practically apply lessons inside South Korea. When he was a visiting professor at Harvard Law School in the early 1990s, he was said to have read all the books in the law library except those on business law. According to a Hope Institute feature, Park "collected and copied all the information needed to change the world. He had spent a year like this<sup>14</sup>." He scrapbooked what he learned from foreign countries and "changed his life." Park's "head was full of ideas, 'I would like to change South Korea like this,' 'I would like to work for alternative things that would change Korean society instead of participating in a demonstration<sup>15</sup>.'" Following Hiro Miyazaki (2004), I conceive of Lawyer Park's and by extension the Hope Institute's hope as a replication of inheritances from *silhak* pragmatism and Dictator Park Chung Hee's "national utopian imagination" (Nelson 2000). In order to appropriately capture Lawyer Park's dynamic aesthetic, which is foundational to his method of hope (Miyazaki

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<sup>13</sup> Quotations from March 27, 2006 *Yonhap News* article, "Private Think Tank 'Hope Institute' is Founded (*Mingan singeutaengkeu 'Huimang Jejakso' chulbeom*)."  
<http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=001&aid=0001255487>.

<sup>14</sup> Quotation from Hope Institute website feature, "Now Let's Change Our World (*Ja ije uri, sesangeul hanbeon baggweoboja*)."  
<http://www.makehope.org/2414>.

<sup>15</sup> See supra 14.

2004), I juxtapose it with that of Bruno Latour. I see Latour's work as exemplary of what Miyazaki (2004) calls the "aesthetic of emergence," which is predicated on a kind of pragmatism as well.

### Aesthetic of Emergence

Hiro Miyazaki describes Clifford Geertz's (2000) pragmatist rapprochement between philosophy and anthropology whereby the former came closer to the latter in its socially-based knowledge claims. Geertz cited Wittgenstein and William James as forebears to his own efforts to relocate knowledge from the cerebral to the social practice of interpretation and "thick description." Geertz approached anthropology and philosophy as "parallel efforts to understand the emergent world of which both forms of knowing are part" (Miyazaki 2004:133). Miyazaki (2004) also includes George Marcus's (1998) multi-sited world system approach as part of an ongoing American anthropological engagement with the pragmatist philosophical tradition (e.g. Riles 2003).

One major effect of this engagement is what he names an "aesthetic of emergence" pervasive in anthropology since the early to mid 1980s (Miyazaki 2004). This aesthetic is predicated on a rapidly changing world in which anthropologists are perpetually behind. Korean Studies, particularly the anthropology of South Korea, has been an exemplary area of this aesthetic. As discussed in the introduction, ethnographers have long found themselves beset by "emergences" (Janelli and Yim 2002) and perpetually behind compressed changes in the field (Abelmann 2003).

As an exemplary articulator of this aesthetic, George Marcus (1999) has diagnosed anthropology with chronic belatedness to the “substantial changes” taking place in the world. According to Miyazaki (2004), this belatedness or gap between anthropological knowledge and the emergent world has become a hopeful method for anthropologists. At the same time, it has brought into view a “shared ground” from which anthropologists, philosophers, and their subjects can explore the emergent world (Miyazaki 2004:136). This “renders not only the world but also its analysis provisional, indeterminate, and open-ended” (Miyazaki 2004:137).

Yet while “pragmatist concepts of ‘emergence’ enable a more dynamic, nondeterministic, complex understanding of social life” (Riles 2006b:18), they also determine knowledge in a particular way. Miyazaki observes how the aesthetic of emergence forecloses any end point of analysis while embedding the failure to achieve temporal congruity between knowledge and the world within the shape of knowledge itself (2004:138). Miyazaki writes:

In the aesthetic of emergence, as currently practiced in anthropology, the world is rendered open-ended and indeterminate from beginning to end. Yet by its very open-ended nature, the pull for knowledge comes from the emergent world and it does not leave room for hope and its method, that is, radical reorientation of knowledge. What worries me most about the aesthetic of emergence, in other words, is the way this analytical strategy seems to have taken away the driving force of knowledge from hope by giving too much credit to the so-called emergent world. Where knowledge does not seek its own radical

reorientation, hope ceases to be the engine of knowledge (Miyazaki 2004:139).

Miyazaki argues that keeping hope alive requires the “inheritance of a past hope and its performative replication in the present (2004:139).” The aesthetic of emergence forecloses this replication because its prospective momentum comes from anthropologists’ relative belatedness to the emergent world rather than any conscious effort to reorient knowledge to the future. Miyazaki writes:

The aesthetic of emergence would seem to enable anthropologists to maintain prospective momentum without changing the temporal orientation of their knowledge any more. In this scheme, anthropologists’ task becomes simply to trace or track the world as it emerges. Here knowledge itself is rendered emergent in order to mirror an emergent world (2004:138).

Although Miyazaki does not directly address Bruno Latour’s work, it is exemplary of what he calls the aesthetic of emergence. For Latour, as for those Miyazaki (2003) describes, there is a pragmatist<sup>16</sup> engine to the aesthetic of emergence.

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<sup>16</sup> In a 2007 response paper the *Social Studies of Science*, Latour affirms John Dewey’s view of politics as “not some essence; it is something that moves; it is something that has a trajectory” (2007:814). He proposes a pragmatist redistribution of politics in STS such that the political is not an adjective, a sphere, activity, calling, or procedure, but “what qualifies a *type of situation*” such that “we focus on the objects of concern and then, so as to handle them, produce the instruments and equipment necessary to grasp the questions they have raised and in which we are hopelessly entangled” (original emphasis, 2007:814).

In 1999, Latour described his work as an empirical version of William James's "deambulatory theory of truth." In the course of a debate with David Bloor published in *Studies of History, Philosophy and Science*, Latour (1999a) allies himself with James's playful response to epistemologists "who, after having cut an abyss between words and world, imagined no other way to relate them than a 'salto mortale' above the yawning gap." Just as James did to the epistemologists of his day, Latour playfully responds to Bloor as an accomplished, but obsolete scholar. Following James, Latour seeks a pragmatist-inspired dynamic accounting of each movement between "words and world." Latour writes:

...I am probably the one in the discipline who has proposed most terms to make this transition, this deambulation, observable, realistic and documentable: inscription, visualisation, translation, trials, mediation, names of action, black-boxing, historicity of things, etc, and I am of course not the only one: the whole field is about making the transition visible (1999:115).

Latour's pragmatist impetus to reveal empirically each transition in the deambulation of truth became the oeuvre for science studies. Documents, for example, are one way Latour reveals each deambulatory step, or network, by replacing "the distance between documentary practices in the world and critical analysis of those practices that some social scientists take for granted..." with "a series of chains of artifacts—our documents, their documents, each capable of being manipulated into ever further forms of one another" (Riles 2006b:13). Latour expanded upon this vision in his 1999

collection of essays entitled *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*:

...reference is not something that is added to words, but that it is a circulating phenomenon, whose deambulation—to borrow, once again, William James's term—should not be interrupted by any saltation if we want words to refer to the things progressively packed into them.

Instead of the *vertical* abyss between words and world, above which the perilous footbridge of correspondence would hang, we now have a sturdy and thick layering of *transverse* paths through which masses of transformations circulate (original emphasis; 113).

Instead of vertical movement, or scale, in other words, ANT aims to trace networks or “transverse paths” of persons, things, and practices to reveal each movement between knowledge and the emergent world. Latour's (1999b) meticulous study of the Boa Vista is illustrative of this body of work, which “does not focus on making claims about the state of the world, but instead on documenting the process, networks, and actors through which the world is constantly being assembled” (Levi and Valverde 2008:808). The world, in other words, is not a static object of knowledge; rather, it is a dynamic process which requires dynamic analysis. Like the aesthetic of emergence, ANT “renders not only the world but also its analysis provisional, indeterminate, and open-ended” (Miyazaki 2004:137). For the purposes of this dissertation, I take the aesthetic of emergence and ANT as exemplary forms of pragmatism as transition (Koopman 2009) and assembly (Oppenheim 2008)..

In my view, Miyazaki (2004) brings into view the limits of pragmatism vis-à-vis “the aesthetic of emergence” when considering how to keep hope alive. This insight is central to my effort in this chapter to ethnographically approach how Lawyer Park and the Hope Institute attempt to pragmatically make hope. Before addressing how I encountered this in the field, however, it is necessary to return to Bruno Latour’s effort to achieve a more hopeful practice. Considering Latour’s pragmatically-conceived personal and analytical aesthetic of emergence will bring into focus a similar aesthetic I encountered in the field.

Latour sets and keeps analytical categories—such as subject and object, nature and culture, global and local, and person and thing—in perpetual motion because the world is in perpetual motion. Like both analysis and world, he sets himself in perpetual motion. In the aforementioned debate with David Bloor, Latour writes:

I have changed continuously my topics, my field sites, my style, my concepts and my vocabulary –and indulged in too many Macintosh doodles! David has not moved an inch and his paper reiterates word for word, what was already so forcefully written in his first book. On the one hand, this simplifies my task, since I can take his article against me as perfectly representative of his own thought, but, on the other hand, it renders my defense more difficult since I would be at great pains to say which paper, chapter or book is representative of my position. I would be tempted to say that the only sources to quote and to dispute are the articles or books I am presently working on, but that would be, I agree,

a poor answer! Compared to David, I feel very much like a fly dancing ceaselessly on top of the Edinburgh Rock...Empirical work has this unsettling quality of forcing you to move heaven and earth in order to try to follow what happens in practice. It makes me a moving target (1999:127).

Latour maintains an empirically-driven emergent aesthetic. This aesthetic is both personal and analytical as he repeatedly demonstrates “politics by other means” (Latour 1988:229). Lawyer Park maintains a similar aesthetic.

#### Lawyer Park’s Emergence

Unlike many other activists in his generation, Lawyer Park was known for his ability to adapt to the changing times and reinvent himself. One friend and colleague described it as Park’s ability “to taste the shift beneath society<sup>17</sup>.” Rather than appearing ideological or dogmatic, Park appeared committed, yet practical. One staffer who had worked for him at PSPD and who continued to work for him at the Beautiful Foundation marveled at Park’s ability to change. He said Park was known for being a “hard-nosed workaholic” at PSPD, but that inside the Foundation and the Hope Institute he is “more understanding and flexible<sup>18</sup>.”

Lawyer Park (*Park Byeonhosanim*) asked that I call him that even though he had not practiced law in several years. He could have gone by executive director or social designer, both titles on his current business card (Chapter 3), but he preferred lawyer. Park leaned forward over his black leather day

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with author on July 24, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with author on January 11, 2008.

planner and grew animated as he recounted his legal background during our first formal meeting in 2006. He was instrumental in the founding of Lawyers for a Democratic Society (*Minbyeon*) and People’s Solidarity for a Participatory Democracy (PSPD, *Chamyeoyeondae*) (e.g. Kim 2008; Rho 2007). Both of these organizations are iconic in the citizens’ movement (*simin undong*) and civil society more generally in South Korea (e.g. Armstrong 2002; Dezalay and Garth 2007; Kim J.W. 2007). Park treated the “Great Democratic Uprising” in 1987—the crowning success of the movement— as an accomplishment, but hastened to add that “democratic change could be realized in one day while the legal system remained unchanged<sup>19</sup>.” He explained that “under a dictatorship, law is a weapon of dictators but in a democratic society [law] is the weapon of activists<sup>20</sup>.” PSPD sought to turn law from a tool of dictators into a tool for citizens (Rho 2007). Law’s open potential—being a means toward any number of ends (Riles 2004a; 2006a)—was what he and other activists treated as their starting point for democratic reform inside South Korea. From the beginning, Park (Hope Institute 2009) dreamed of “an alternative movement not a demonstration<sup>21</sup>.” As a lawyer, he “dreamed of ‘changing the world from one event<sup>22</sup>.’”

Soon after Park took the secretary-general job in 1994, he modeled PSPD after Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen in the United States (Rho 2007). The Citizens’ Alliance for the 2000 General Elections (CAGE, *Nakseonnakcheon undong*), was one of the most controversial actions undertaken by NGOs in

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> See supra 18.

<sup>21</sup> See supra 14.

<sup>22</sup> See supra 14.

the post-*minjung* era. Lawyer Park is closely associated with the movement for better and for worse.

## CAGE

Soon after Park became secretary-general, PSPD began collecting and uploading comprehensive information about the National Assembly on the internet. PSPD frequently updated information about representatives' attendance rates, property holdings, and the bills they supported and opposed. CAGE consisted of an unprecedented coalition of around 500 NGOs and non-profits taking up Lawyer Park's agenda to publicly shame politicians by investigating corruption charges and publicizing them through blacklists posted on an internet site during both the nomination and general election phases (Choi J.J. 2000). When the media publicized the lists, there was a large outpouring of voter discontent and cynicism (e.g. Kim H.R. 2004).

CAGE is widely credited with reforming election laws and stopping almost 70 percent of targeted candidates from winning seats in the 2000 parliamentary elections (e.g. Choi J.J. 2000). 59 out of 86 blacklisted candidates were defeated while overall, 94 out of 207 incumbent representatives were not re-elected (Shin 2006). The most dramatic effects were evident in the Seoul metropolitan area where 10 out of the 11 blacklisted candidates were defeated while 5 out of 6 blacklisted candidates at the provincial level were also defeated (Shin 2006). Seoul and Gyeonggi province "were relatively free from voting behavior based on regionalism" whereas 45.5 percent, or 19 out of 35 blacklisted candidates, won election in the Gyeongsang region (Shin 2006:20). This relatively low percentage reflects the success of CAGE on its own terms.

CAGE is an index of the ongoing zero-sum contention between “political society (*jeongchi sahoe*)” and “civil society (*simin sahoe*)” in Korean Studies. Koreanists have approached political society as not only elected politicians and the media, but also members of “elite cartels” going back to military-industrial patronage during Park’s dictatorship (e.g., Choi J.J. 2000). “Civil society,” on the other hand, includes not only NGOs and NPOs from the *minjung* tradition, but also those who cite only a citizens’ (*simin*) tradition and a vast array of state-sponsored (GONGOs), quasi-state (QUANGOs), and religious organizations. CAGE effectively mobilized many of these disparate factions with the formation of a Buddhists’ Alliance, Christians’ Alliance, and Catholics’ Alliance for the 2000 General Elections along with Lawyers for a Democratic Society (*Minbyeon*) after the movement led election law reforms (Choi J.J. 2000). CAGE was the largest, most effective, and most controversial example of civil society “politics by other means” (Latour 1988).

Choi Jang Jip, a prominent scholar and activist who constitutes an exemplary social movement analyst, has articulated the gap between military authoritarian reality and liberal democratic ideals in the “multi-level” terms of “democratic transition” and “consolidation.” Choi (2000) cites Wolfgang Merkel’s (1999) “The Consolidation of Post-Autocratic Regimes: A Multilevel Model” in his analysis of “levels” of democratization from institutional consolidation of democratic elections and constitution to the internationalization of democratic behavior norms. According to Choi, South Korea “has not yet reached the second level of democratization, the consolidation of the representative system,” which is precisely what CAGE

exposed (2000:31-32). Choi argues that there is still an autonomous political society, a vestige of “elite cartels” from the dictatorship period, who “seeks its own power and interests” while “ignoring demands for changes” both from the state and civil society (2000:29). It is largely the persistent “hegemony” of this political society that explains the relative weaknesses in terms of party organization, human resources, and “immature” state management in the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations (Choi J.J. 2000; Kang 2008). The intransigence of this political society has produced a “gap” between political and civil society to replace the historical “clash” between the state and civil society (Choi J.J. 2000:27).

Cho Hee-Yeon, another prominent activist and social movement analyst, describes this “gap” as a “huge discrepancy” (2005:12). He calls the “gap” and “discrepancy” a “special situation of political lag” because “people demanded a driving force and momentum from social movements for a strong democratic reform of politics” even though they “distrusted” political parties (2005:12). In this characteristic double bind, civil movement organizations filled the vacuum by undertaking “the role of not only watchdog, but also that of a kind of proxy-party” (2005:12). CAGE was the “climax” of this “proxy representation,” or “politics by other means” (Cho H.Y. 2005:12; Latour 1988). In Choi Jang Jip’s words:

The political reform advocated by the CAGE movement was initially included within the government’s agenda for reform. However, the government failed to achieve this goal not only because the government was incapable of implementing political reform but also

political society refused to accept it. The CAGE movement held the government accountable for what it did not do, and thus performed the function of political reform in its place (2000:55).

CAGE, in other words, marked a moment in the ongoing “clash” and “gap” between civil and political society over the democratic reform agenda. “The success of the citizens’ movement and the failure of institutional politics were two sides of the same coin of Korean democratization in the 1990s” (Shin 2006:20). CAGE was blamed for jump-starting a precipitous decrease in national voter turnout and for cementing the growing criticism of NGOs and NPOs as backward-looking and negative (Choi 2000; Kim 2004). One veteran activist argued that CAGE is the cause of another widely lamented NGO problem: declining media coverage. CAGE’s corruption allegations created a media firestorm, which subjected the media to closer examination and more criticism, which in turn changed the relationship between NGOs and the media. Several activists claimed that newspapers do not even respond to many press releases anymore, let alone devote a full page to NGOs as they previously did. One activist said that many media organizations were doing better investigative work than most NGOs and as a result were attracting more talented college graduates, which contributed to the “citizen movement reproduction crisis (*simin undong jaesaengsan wigi*)<sup>23</sup>.”

Lawyer Park and several other human rights lawyers had been conducting research into the blacklisting strategies of previous Korean authoritarian regimes since at least the 1970s (e.g. Kim and Choi 1998). CAGE effectively

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<sup>23</sup> Personal conversation with author on August 8, 2006.

turned an authoritarian tool of suppression—the blacklist—into a democratic tool of accountability and transparency. Politicians were unprecedentedly called out and punished for a multitude of indiscretions. CAGE was so successful that the following year a group of feminists released a blacklist of labor and civil activists accused of sexual harassment or assault and similarly announced their names on the internet. Nicola Anne Jones (2003) quotes Cho Hyo-je, a prominent social movement scholar and colleague of Lawyer Park, on the blacklisting approach:

...Sometimes people do not change voluntarily, and something must be done to change their behavior forcefully if necessary...the creation of some atmosphere of fear is necessary sometimes: 'if you don't change, we will change you'--...a kind of proactive stance... (149).

In a related development, one of the founders and former secretary-general of Green Korea United was accused by a woman volunteer of sexual harassment around this same time. The man stepped down from several posts and ostensibly cut all ties with Green Korea. I only heard about this the following year when one of Green Korea's members told me about it and seriously suggested that it may have been retaliation by a group of candidates who lost in the general election because of CAGE<sup>24</sup>. These were the kinds of ripple effects that NGOs faced, or imagined they faced, in the wake of CAGE's success.

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<sup>24</sup> Personal conversation with author on June 30, 2001.

Lawyer Park became synonymous with this tough blacklisting approach, which PSPD employed under his leadership. One of his friends and business associates joked that Park became a “[mafia] don<sup>25</sup>” after the movement because government and business leaders suddenly realized how powerful NGOs had become. He practically turned an authoritarian tool, the blacklist, into a democratic accountability tool. Counter to David Kennedy’s (2004) critique<sup>26</sup>, this was a case of a humanitarian embracing pragmatic means and fashioning a position of power out of it. He faced many critiques-- some Foucauldian of the progressive-turned-fascist discussed in the previous chapter and some pragmatic that CAGE effectively increased cynicism and depressed voter turnout while stunting future media coverage of NGO campaigns (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Lawyer Park did not explicitly dispute many of these critiques. In an article posted on the Hope Institute’s website, Park reflects:

Looking back on it now, I doubt whether the anti-campaign was the right way to completely change politics. But I believe that it gave us an opportunity to see the hope for change that voters can bring down the members of the National Assembly when they gather together<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Personal conversation with author on July 30, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy writes, “It is as if [humanitarian] commitments can only be articulated—must, in some sense, remain rebukes to those in power, external measures of their legitimacy, rather than guides for action. Or as if pragmatism must remain something humanitarians can only hope to achieve in the future—in the meantime, we will have to settle for being savvy about the power of others” (2004:332).

<sup>27</sup> See supra 14.

Park and his staff at the Hope Institute were skillful at turning past “negative” campaigns into “positive” analogs of hope for the present and future. I will discuss this reorientation from past to future and negative to positive which was so prevalent for Lawyer Park and Hope Institute staff. Before getting to that, however, it is important to see CAGE and blacklisting as a means to another end.

Park has sought to reform the Korean legal system by applying relevant lessons from his studies abroad. Park recalled his decision to study abroad at the London School of Economics and Harvard Law School during the early 1990s as a way to go about refreshing himself and gathering ideas about how to change the Korean legal system. He mentioned interning at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as a time of intense learning when he began to formulate “a way of thinking to establish another civil group [in South Korea]<sup>28</sup>.” PSPD became this other group, which “from its beginning...had decided to pursue tangible solutions to specific problems rather than chase grand, unachievable ideals” (Rho 2007:14). Park described PSPD’s approach as a “concrete way to change society based on legal means<sup>29</sup>.” Han Kyun Rho (2007) concludes that a “pragmatic disposition” united the group’s disparate constituencies of practicing lawyers, leftwing social theorists, and young social activists. Many early supporters spoke of the need to be a part of a “winning social movement” (Rho 2007). Park was insistent that PSPD “focused on anti-corruption through legal means” as they achieved “hundreds of legal changes in one decade during Korea’s transition from a dictatorship to a diverse civil society (Beautiful Foundation 2006).” CAGE and blacklisting were legal and

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

political battles that elevated Park and PSPD to another level of public prominence. Lawyer Park said the notoriety he enjoyed as a result of CAGE's success enabled him to implement another vision for a civil organization he had begun to formulate while at Harvard Law School.

As an Eisenhower Fellow in the early 1990s, Park visited the Council on Foundations, The Make a Wish Foundation, and the Triangle Community Foundation. He also recalled being impressed by Oxfam and other non-profit organizations while studying in London. Yet it was at Harvard in 1992 that Park began to conceptualize what would later become the largest community foundation and second-hand stores in South Korea—the Beautiful Foundation (*Areumdaun Jaedan*) and Beautiful Stores (*Areumdaun Gage*) respectively. Park recalled reading an article in the university newspaper one day: “the most beautiful words are ‘check enclosed’” (Hope Institute N.d.). This sense of the beauty of donation lingered in his mind because “in Korea it is impossible to work for changing the world without making money separately, which requires double work” (Hope Institute N.d.). Park wanted to support “one doing the work of one hundred (*ildangbaek*)” by raising money for people so that they could carry out their dreams of changing Korean society without worrying about money (see also chapter 2). However, he put those plans on hold while working at PSPD. In an interview published in *Alliance Magazine* Park said:

In 1994 I was only 38 and [PSPD] was heavily criticized for attacking business groups and the government, so fundraising was difficult. But when I started the Beautiful Foundation, I was in my late forties and my

friends had been promoted to high positions in government and business<sup>30</sup> ... Also, I was already well-known by then (2006:20).

Lawyer Park made a name for himself through campaigns such as CAGE. He also effectively managed and capitalized on his elite connections. Yet as an activist, Park also had to manage and forego these connections and privileges like other student activists during the 1970s and 80s (see Chapters 1 and 2).

#### Lawyer Park's Emergence Continued

Like many other former student activists, Lawyer Park often drew attention to the sacrifices and struggles of his university days as well as the challenges in the early years of democratic reform. He recalled being expelled from Seoul National University and jailed for four months in 1975 for activist organizing. Park fondly recalled his time in jail as a time of “suffering, but also a good opportunity to think. The talk inside and outside prison was motivation to think about what should be next for Korean society<sup>31</sup>.” When he was barred from returning to university after prison, Park said it was a “good time to read books and travel around the country.” Park went on to complete a degree in history from another university and self-studied to pass the bar exam in 1980. He worked as a public prosecutor for one year before resigning to practice human rights law. Park was part of a small, but increasingly powerful activist group of former Seoul National University Law School students who went on to found

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<sup>30</sup> Park was born in South Gyeongsang province, graduated from Gyeonggi High School, and attended Seoul National University law school. At the time he attended, Gyeonggi High School and SNU law school were the two most exclusive schools in the country (Dezalay and Garth 2007; Kim and Yu 1996). Lawyer Park said that high school memories and friends had drawn him to open the Beautiful Foundation and Hope Institute offices in the downtown Insa-dong area of Seoul during the early 2000s.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

*Lawyers for a Democratic Society* (e.g. Kim 2007). During this time he served as one of a group of human rights lawyers who represented Insook Kwon in her landmark sexual harassment lawsuit (see Chapter 1). He spearheaded human rights research into Korea's sordid history during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Park argued in 1995 that the government was trying to pay off victims of the 1980 Gwangju Massacre rather than acknowledge that the government had acted illegally (Lewis 2002:172). He told me that he had "dedicated" himself to the organization for seven years, but that "seven years is too long in one organization<sup>32</sup>." Not long after CAGE, Park began to reinvent himself with the founding of the Beautiful Foundation.

One Beautiful Foundation staffer recalled Park's confession in a taxi one day not long after becoming the full-time executive director that "he could understand the mind of a CEO<sup>33</sup>." This was a stark contrast to PSPD's various investigations into CEO misconduct during the 1990s. During this time, PSPD adapted strategies from Ralph Nader and Saul Alinsky to introduce minority shareholder activism to several large Korean business conglomerates (Rho 2007). The result was a series of high-profile scandals during the 1990s. Park named the financial crisis and the election of Kim Dae Jung in the late part of the decade as major catalysts for PSPD's anti-corruption investigations, particularly the CAGE movement in 2000. He said it was a "good chance" to push for transparency, but that the current moment—2006—was no longer a "fresh" or "interesting" time for transparency<sup>34</sup>. Park shared an anecdote to

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with author on September 22, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

explain what he meant by this, which was when the agenda first came into view as an artifact of the pragmatic effort for liberal-democratic reform..

### The Agenda

Lawyer Park recalled a case during the 90s when he was secretary-general of PSPD. At that time, PSPD requested that the Seoul mayor disclose the extra-salary expenditures of his staff. According to Park, the mayor agreed to reveal the amounts but refused to disclose any names. Unsatisfied with this offer, PSPD took the mayor to district court and won. However, the mayor appealed to a higher court where he won. During the time between the initial suit and the appeal decision, the mayor became Kim Dae Jung's prime minister and helped introduce legislation that called for the very disclosure PSPD requested in the first place. This was the height of the financial crisis and the new prime minister went on to become one of the most visible supporters for transparency reforms by allying with organizations such as Transparency International (TI). PSPD, on the other hand, rejected TI's initial queries about the group becoming a local chapter. Lawyer Park and a couple others involved in the discussions at the time cited TI's foreign status and charter restriction on blacklisting as reasons for PSPD's decision to not serve as the Korean chapter<sup>35</sup>.

Lawyer Park offered this anecdote not to criticize how the former prime minister used transparency to advance his own career, as many activists did; rather he used it to explain why transparency was no longer as "fresh" or "interesting" an agenda for NGOs and NPOs in the mid-2000s as it was during

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<sup>35</sup> Personal conversations on March 17, 2006 and August 18, 2006.

the late-90s<sup>36</sup>. Park went out of his way to point out how he maintained good relations with both TI and the former prime minister through their cooperative work on integrity pacts. Lawyer Park, like the former prime minister, was using transparency for his own ends. Some accused Lawyer Park of being no different than the prime minister given the higher profile and increased fundraising capacity his organizations enjoyed after movements such as CAGE. Park was accumulating the kind of power he used to criticize others for wielding. For some activists, Park's status as a "don" was not a joke; rather, it was an example of the progressive-turned-fascist Foucault (1983) had identified "inside us all" that came to be emblematic of many former activists who acquired positions of power (Lee 2007; Song 2009). In the interest of being part of a "winning social movement" (Rho 2007), some appeared to value "results" over "process," or ends over means, which was precisely the critique of the military authoritarian regime (see Chapter 2).

Lawyer Park was acutely aware of these critiques. He resisted numerous lucrative job offers both in government and business. One of the reasons his name was often raised at election time was to see if he was going to go the way of many other "first generation" civil leaders to join political society, or if he was going to continue "politics by other means" (Cho 2000; Cho 2005; Latour 1988).

Park joked how he left behind a comfortable life practicing law to work for a fraction of the salary most of his friends enjoyed. He matter-of-factly said that if someone's salary was too high, then it was impossible to "have pride in the

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

work<sup>37</sup>.” In 2003 he gave a lecture at the Judicial Research and Training Institute (JRTI), the elite and mandatory training institute for all lawyers in South Korea, in which he “tempted” the students to start public interest careers<sup>38</sup>. He (2009) said, “there are lots of things to do when ridding oneself of money and honor<sup>39</sup>.” One law student took Park’s message and a few years later established *Gonggam*, a public interest law group supported partially by Beautiful Foundation funds. The group has grown to seven full-time lawyers with numerous volunteers and interns.

#### Lawyer Park’s Transparency

Park maintained a personal commitment to certain kinds of transparency. He made his personal schedule available to staff in his organizations and like all Beautiful Foundation staff, published his personal salary online. Park did not have his own car or driver; rather he used taxis and proudly pointed out how many taxi drivers refused to charge him full fare once they found out who he was<sup>40</sup>. Several activists said that taxi drivers often did this for activists a few years before, but that now they often wondered what these people were doing after democracy had been achieved. Park was visibly doing many things that had “no direct relationship with politics or other socially sensitive issues” (2006:20). As one of his staffers explained, he now attracted donors and supporters based on “culture” rather than “the shared ideology of the past<sup>41</sup>.”

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> See supra 14.

<sup>39</sup> See supra 14.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with author on September 26, 2006.

Park fashioned himself as a “social designer” charged with “regaining the hegemony in initiating the social agenda<sup>42</sup>.” He saw his task as “setting the agenda” to the next “fresh and interesting” thing rather than raising socially or politically sensitive issues<sup>43</sup>. When I asked him about charges from some NGO workers that the Hope Institute was copying their campaigns and agenda, Park responded:

There may be some ideas which are similar with items dealt by other civic groups. However, I make it a rule not to deal with any idea or project which others are doing similarly or are doing well. The Hope Institute is not another civic group. It is a think tank which is inventing new agendas to distribute to others<sup>44</sup>.

Civil leaders had long conceived of their role as leading government and business organizations while approaching government and business officials as obstinate adversaries to this task. Lawyer Park’s anecdote illustrates how his view of the GO-NGO relationship had changed. He tells the story to highlight how the former prime minister reinvented politics before many NGOs even recognized it. Park claimed that media, government, and business organizations had come to accept many of the issues activists had championed in previous decades such as transparency. For Park, this meant that NGOs and non-profits had to become more “practical” and “precise” in the future if they wanted to regain their ability to set the agenda<sup>45</sup>. When I

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Email sent June 24, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with author on February 5, 2007 and June 12, 2007.

arranged my first meeting with someone from the Hope Institute, I received a visual sketch of Park's career and agenda.

### Park's Career as Civil Society Agenda

Vice President Yoon, one of two such vice-presidents at the Hope Institute, had known Park since their days of writing for Korea's largest Left-leaning daily, *The Hankyoreh*, during the late 1980s. When I asked about Lawyer Park's "vision" (*bijeon*) for the Institute, Yoon began to draw as well as talk<sup>46</sup>. He began by writing "86" and then drawing a horizontal line almost to the other end of the paper and writing "2006," the year it was at the time of the interview which was also when the Institute was founded. "86" became "history" (*yeoksa*) on the paper as Yoon explained Park's research into Korea's colonial and authoritarian history. Yoon next drew an arrow from "history" and wrote "PSPD (*Chamyeyoenda*)," the group Park helped found and served as secretary-general of for seven years. He explained how PSPD was a watchdog that criticized corrupt government and business practices. Yoon then drew an arrow from PSPD and wrote "areum (beauty)" for Beautiful Foundation (*Areumdaun Jaedan*). Before describing the Foundation's work, Yoon drew another arrow from PSPD and wrote livelihood cooperation (*saenghyeop*), which he wrote in parentheses just above Beautiful Foundation.

Yoon filled in the last gap between Beautiful Foundation and 2006 with an arrow and wrote "huimang (hope)" for Hope Institute (*Huimang Jejakso*). After doing this, he wrote "positive" underneath Hope Institute and went back to write "negative" underneath PSPD. Yoon then complemented the "history"

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<sup>46</sup> All quotations and statements in this section come from an interview with author on June 9, 2006.

written under “86” with “future (*mirae*),” which he wrote under the “positive” he had just written under Hope Institute (which were all written under 2006). With this last addition, Yoon emphasized the significance of the progression. These generic bookends—history and future—along with the one-way arrows between them effectuated a progressive temporality rather than a reorientation.

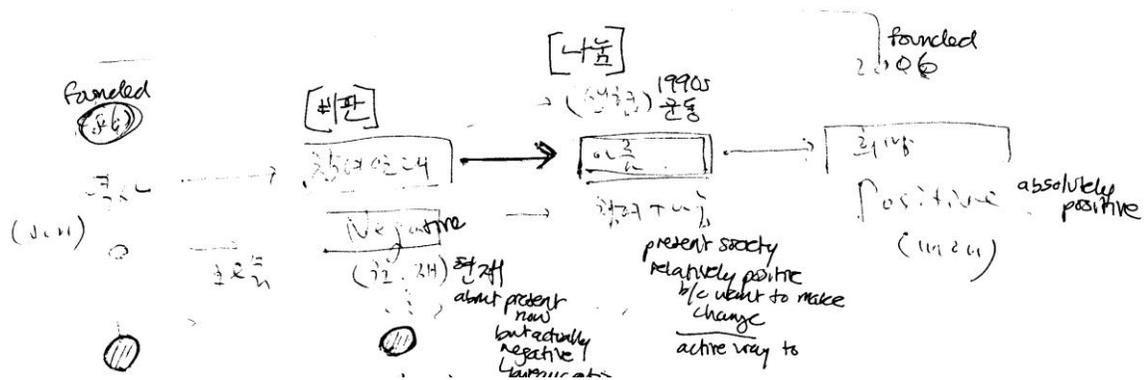


Illustration 4.1: Yoon Suk-in’s sketch with my notes added in subsequent discussion (Note: Yoon’s sketch appears lighter and often with shapes)

Yoon took evident care and pleasure in demarcating each box, and particularly each forward-pointing arrow. What was remarkable about Yoon’s aesthetic choices were how measured, incremental, and linear they appeared. He described Park’s “vision” as a trajectory of organizations moving forward from “negative” to “positive” and from “history” to “future” “not with a network of words but with words in linear series” (Bateson 1958:3). The Hope Institute was the latest, positive, and future-oriented movement in Lawyer Park’s progressive career and the history of South Korea’s civil society. Lawyer Park appears as a representative figure for South Korean civil society not unlike

how Im Kwon-Taek has appeared vis-a-vis South Korean cinema (e.g. James and Kim 2002). Both men's careers come to stand in for compressed and dynamic national(ist) progress in political and cultural spheres similar to the kind of rapid progress long praised in the economic sphere. The progressive temporality of Park mirrors that of the nation-state (Greenhouse 1996). The temporality of Park's career dictated the temporality of NGO and NPO work in South Korea (Traweek 1988). Thomas Yarrow writes of Ghanaian activists':

own sense of agency—of their capacity to act on the world and bring about social and political change—was defined not in opposition to historical 'structure,' but through and in relation to it. To tell of their 'lives' was to tell of historical developments in the country and political movements they were part of (2005:72).

Lawyer Park was self-consciously a student of history having majored in it and having taught a course on South Korean civil society history while working as a visiting professor at Stanford University. He spoke as much of being acted upon by the movement of history as he acted upon it. Lawyer Park often self-consciously appeared not as an individual agent, but as a movement agent—legal, political, social, national, and international. In speeches to social designer audiences, Park frequently reviewed his own biography as evidence of how one person can “change the world” and demonstrate that “another world is possible.” At the Fourth Annual Social Designer's School in Seoul, for example, Park told the crowd:

There is an empty place in everything and a way where no one has gone. If you have a dream and passion, so that you have power to withstand long periods of time, you can develop your ability to look at good ideas in the world. You can become a social designer who makes a better world (Hope Institute N.d.).

Lawyer Park (Hope Institute N.d.) “described the process he experienced from a self-styled ‘prominent lawyer,’ to People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, to the Beautiful Foundation, to the Beautiful Shop, to an attorney with public interest, and to a ‘social designer’ who founded the Hope Institute one after another...<sup>47</sup>” The Hope Institute website said, “His life story was unfolded this time in the lecture hall” (Hope Institute N.d.). Lawyer Park happily engaged in self-promotion and the collapse of his own narrative into South Korea’s civil society narrative when addressing “social designers who have a dream of changing the world” (Hope Institute N.d.). Park self-consciously instrumentalized his own story as a means for social design.

Even Park’s critics conceded his importance in shaping the direction of the movement and civil society. One New Right scholar and former advisor to Kim Dae Jung challenged Park’s patriotism in one breath and then admitted his deep interest in the outcome of his current venture in the next<sup>48</sup>. An activist who questioned his commitment to small NGOs when the Beautiful Foundation first started, began to praise Park and the Foundation for raising operational awareness inside NGOs and NPOs when they offered capacity-

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<sup>47</sup> See supra 14.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with author on April 18, 2007.

building and fundraising workshops<sup>49</sup>. A well-known civil leader unequivocally called Park an “asset to any movement<sup>50</sup>.” Another civil leader likened Park to a bird who could “see the big picture” and “set the course,” but who often “already changed course by the time everyone else caught up with him<sup>51</sup>.”

Lawyer Park told me matter-of-factly and without a bit of regret when I asked permission to take a picture of his office, “I have no privacy<sup>52</sup>.” As a person, Park was transparent insofar as he appeared as an organization or movement (John 2010). Park sought to make his life into his career, which in turn became the movement and agenda of South Korean civil society.

#### Leader Park

The Hope Institute claims that Park is the first person in South Korea to use the term “social designer (*sosyeol dijaineo*).” Park claims inspiration from Japan where Rikkyo University has a department of social design and Italy where Ezio Manzini, Professor of Industrial Design at Milan Polytechnic, has expanded the limits of design. Park and other Hope Institute staff often gave me the example of the light bulb being an invention, but that lighting a whole street or neighborhood is a social invention.

Just as the effects of social design are broad, the possibilities of who is one are similarly broad. Lawyer Park and all Hope Institute staff called themselves social designers and had it printed on their business cards. They similarly encouraged others to take on the title. The argument was that the

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<sup>49</sup> Personal conversation with author on October 20, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with author on January 11, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with author on May 10, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

“democratization (*minjuhwa*) of knowledge production is ‘hope production (*huimang jejak*)” (Hope Institute 2006). During my fieldwork period, a group of staffers tried to apply this “democratization” to everyone who worked at the Institute. In their own job title project (chapter 3), they formulated an Excel spreadsheet with everyone’s title in order to update the website. The project was ostensibly fueled by the need to translate job titles into English. One staffer suggested using all lower case letters to “equalize” titles in English<sup>53</sup>. Many others thought it would look strange or like an unintentional mistake. In the end, the Institute decided on conventional titles, but unconventionally visualized the relations between departments or centers as the roots and stems of plants.

The Hope Institute (2006) imagined its role as facilitator and collaborator with citizens:

In Korea, many private or government-led ‘think tanks’ were introduced during the past 10 years. They certainly gave vital support to improve Korean society, but many of them put their energy into analyzing the past and the present and identifying the problems. In fact, it was the government, the political world, and political intellectuals who had to find the ideas to solve the problems. At this point, the original purpose to solve problems took a back seat, and social issues became the subjects of partisan power struggle between parties and of political intellectuals ‘making arguments’ ... Although it is no longer possible to ignore the problems, it is still hard to encourage and collect creative

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<sup>53</sup> Email sent on December 19, 2006.

ideas to solve the problems while Korean society only focuses on figuring out the cause and responsibility for the problem. What lacks in Korean society is an active design, creative plan for the future, and 'bilateral benchmarking (*ssangbangjeok benchimaking*)' that creates co-production by drawing reasonable elements from everyone's experience and opinions.

Manager Yoo (Hope Institute 2009) goes on to distinguish social design from revolution:

Why did we come across the term, social design, not revolution nor reform? Among the several characteristics of the attempts being made in front of the term 'social design', isn't it the fusion of imagination, active utilization of social media, commercial, nonprofit, government, business, civil society, or activities that transcend the boundaries that looked irrelevant or hostile, rather than get angry or lament?

This "fusion" and "transcendence" of boundaries in the face of anger or lament speaks of a post-utopian hope (e.g., Tanuma 2007). In a 2007 email exchange, Park likened the NPO responsibility to not accept funds that present a conflict of interest to that of the government. He wrote:

I think it's up to nature or character of the each NGO. For example, my former organization, PSPD, had never accepted any money from the conglomerates because PSPD is a strong advocacy group which is always criticizing and monitoring such business groups. However, the

Beautiful Foundation or Hope Institute do no work with which it has sensitive relations with the business community. On the other hand, they should explore alternative relations with businesses for partnerships. I think it is the same for government bodies<sup>54</sup>.

The Hope Institute (2009) asks:

Is Park a government employee, or is he not? According to the Japanese Nikkei, company and NPO are united, and NPO is becoming progressively commercialized. Since the executive director is working for the public interest, isn't the executive director both a government employee and CEO? He worked in the Beautiful Foundation and the Beautiful shops, crossing borders of different areas, and through such experience, he was said to have his identity as social designer.

Lawyer Park (Hope Institute 2009) has put forward "Ten Commandments (*Gyemyeong*) of World-Changing People." This short, self-help form compresses his leadership philosophy:

1. Give up everything. Then you will be given everything. (Leadership of Sacrifice (*Huisaeng*))
2. Get ideas even in hell. And crisscross the site (*hyeonjang*). (Vision, On- Site Experiencism (*Hyeonjangjuui*), Action)
3. Get people. Teamwork saves the world. (Main agent, People, Friendship)

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<sup>54</sup> Email sent June 24, 2007.

4. Go knock. And ask. Don't get hurt even though you get rejected.  
(Fundraising, Money)
5. Copy (*Kap'i*) changes the world. (Copy, Slogan)
6. Study everyday and innovate yourself. (Creation and Innovation)
7. Small things are beautiful. (Leadership of Delicacy)
8. There is nothing you can do by yourself. Gather people and embrace them. (Beauty of an Important Title)
9. Nothing is easy. Changing the world is Sisyphus' destiny. (Hardship-Enjoying Heart)
10. Life is endless wandering and traveling. Always venture out.  
(Philosophy of Love and Farewell)

#### Dictator Park

One of the first jokes I heard about Lawyer Park from his staff was that he was a "dictator (*dokjaeja*)" that ran a non-profit "*jaebeo*<sup>55</sup>" (a large, family-owned conglomerate like Hyundai or Samsung). Nearly everyone who worked under him said that he demanded more of his staff than any other boss they ever knew and that "no one works as hard as him<sup>56</sup>." Many said that Park "inspired" and "motivated" them more than anyone else, but that "getting burned out was part of the job description<sup>57</sup>." One former staffer even said of NGO and NPO workers in general that they "leave their human rights at the door<sup>58</sup>." Several staffers said no major decision was made without Park and that the organization would cease to run without him.

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<sup>55</sup> Personal conversation with author on April 24, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with author on September 22, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with author on May 18, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with author on January 5, 2007.

Lawyer Park had protested Park Chung Hee's regime as a student. He came of age during one of the most nakedly brutal periods of Park's rule—the so-called “emergency decree (*ginjo*)” period from 1974 until Park's assassination in 1979—which was known as a “crisis government” (Lee N.H. 2009). Lawyer Park said of Park Chung Hee that he is “fundamentally a dictator” but that “citizens still see him as a great leader because he built the economy<sup>59</sup>.” He went on to say that Park took and kept power by “oppressing democracy and violating human rights.” Lawyer Park said that “it is not good to sacrifice [democracy or human rights] for [economic growth]<sup>60</sup>.”

During my last long interview with Park, he said that he had “inherited Korea's tragedy” from his parents and that his own experience of Park Chung Hee's authoritarian policies during the 1960s and 70s had made him a “critic<sup>61</sup>.” In the next breath, however, he said that he had also “inherited Korea's optimism.” This optimism—what he later called hope (*huimang*)—has enabled him to see that “through economic progress Korea became the 12<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world” which made “many things possible<sup>62</sup>.” Lawyer Park acknowledged the “tragedy” of Korea's rapid development while also trying to recover the “national utopian imagination” which sparked it (e.g. Nelson 2000). Lawyer Park sought to mobilize the scale of Park Chung Hee's design without repeating its social costs.

Park self-consciously called upon South Korea's miraculous economic progress as inspiration for the kind of social progress he hoped to lead with

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<sup>59</sup> Email sent April 18, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Email sent April 18, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with author on June 12, 2007.

the Hope Institute. He conceived of the Hope Institute as a Hope Factory. The Institute's Korean name *jejakso* connotes a factory, or place of manufacturing, which evokes a major site (*hyeonjang*) of national economic development (see Chapter 3). One day over tea in his office he explained how the Institute's name combines "abstract hope" with "concrete factory" in a "fresh" and "interesting" way while still being "practical (*siryongjeok*)"<sup>63</sup>. Park chose the name so that people would want to ask about—which many did—and so that it captured the imagination in a hopeful way. Lawyer Park's previous venture, the Beautiful Foundation had done this with *areumdaun*. He smiled as he recalled many people's assumption that the foundation had "something to do with cosmetics," but that now it appears in everything from city tourism slogans to electronics advertisements. Foundation literature talks about its work "to rebuild a Korean giving culture which had been shaken by tragedies such as the Korean War and 40 years of colonization by Japan then left behind during the dizzying process of overnight industrialization (2008:6)."

Park often gleaned hope from South Korea's rapid and compressed experience of development. Secretary-General Choi, like many other activists and civil leaders, treated Japan's present as Korea's destined future unless major changes were made. In particular, he foresaw the obsolescence of NGOs and NPOs in Korea like he observed in Japan. Lawyer Park, on the other hand, borrowed many ideas from Japan and saw tremendous hope in Korea's relatively quick ability to change. For example, Park took on the case of a Seoul National University teaching assistant suing her professor for sexual harassment in 1994. He had previously served on the team of lawyers

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

that represented Insook Kwon, the student activist discussed in the first chapter who brought a lawsuit against a police detective for sexual harassment in 1986. There were no laws against it and “nobody knew how the law could solve this problem” (Hope Institute 2009). Lawyer Park not only saw how to use law as a means for social change, but also how quickly such change happens in South Korea. Park was successful in getting a new provision making sexual harassment a crime in 1999. He recalled:

When I visited a bar association in Japan before working on this case, there was a legal advice center for sexual harassment. But there is no law against sexual harassment in Japan until now. I am confident that there is hope in South Korea. Korea has been dynamically changed compared to other countries and it will be changed. One event changes the world (Hope Institute 2009).

Park said that unlike intellectuals, activists, and social designers in other countries, South Koreans “are optimistic<sup>64</sup>” about making change because they have experienced so much of it (e.g. Abelmann 2003). He could dream of “one event to change the world (*sageon hanaga sesangeul baggumnida*)” because South Korea is a place where one event has changed the world (Hope Institute N.d.). This was Lawyer Park’s hope and social design, not his fear. Like Dictator Park’s nation design, Lawyer Park’s social design confidently and hopefully draws upon the past to realize a better future. Lawyer Park’s planned legacy, like that of Park Chung Hee’s, is an “ethical

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with author on February 5, 2007.

injunction to South Korean citizens to look back in wonder, look inside themselves, and then realize the future” (Oppenheim 2008:28).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the tragedy of one event changing the world, a historical reality for Korea that can refer to anything from national division to authoritarianism, has been turned into a pragmatic and hopeful means for one person changing the world. As a student of history not opposed to borrowing ideas and assuming power, Lawyer Park has recovered a legacy going back to Confucianism and the practical study movement (*silhak undong*), the *minjung* movement, as well as Park Chung Hee’s regime (Oppenheim 2008), on which he has built a NGO and non-profit network which some liken to business conglomerate (*jaebeol*) or empire. Lawyer Park’s career was presented by him and many colleagues as if the history of South Korean civil society (Greenhouse 1996; Yarrow 2005). He has repeatedly rendered his life into his work and his work into a movement; he has been an instrument of legal reform, anti-corruption, transparency, community foundation, and social design. Along the way he maintained commitment through sacrifice (*huisaeng*). His work to “set the agenda” and undertake “social design” invited my effort in this chapter to juxtapose Lawyer Park and Bruno Latour.

I treat Latour as an appropriate analog to Lawyer Park insofar as both cultivate a personal aesthetic of dynamism, agenda-setting in their respective fields, and in the recent past have turned to progressive hope. Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, however, is that both recover forms of

pragmatism in order to articulate their hopeful agendas. Latour's ANT legacy in a wide variety of scholarship has been to empirically demonstrate, not unlike William James, each transition between knowledge and the world. His chosen metaphor for this work of "opening the black boxes of scientific facts," has been opening Pandora's Box in order to find hope (Latour 1999:23). One of the arguments of this chapter has been that this science studies work can be read as an example of what Hiro Miyazaki (2004) has termed the "aesthetic of emergence." The legacy of Lawyer Park's work, though on a vastly different terrain, has been similar insofar as he opened up some of the dark corners of sexual harassment and high-level corruption. Both Latour and Park have fashioned hope in their vision of an open, verging on better (progressive) future. Latour writes of the postmodern "paranthesis of progress" coming to a close and that "in the forward movement of time's arrow... the future settlement can do better than the modernist one" (1999:298-299). Lawyer Park speaks and writes of social development not unlike previous economic development where the modern Korean past guarantees great change such that "one event changes the world." While their views on the modern are different, their hopeful resolve to put forward agendas on the basis of an unknown and perhaps progressive future is similar. Both Latour and Lawyer Park help move the dissertation toward the conclusion, in which I attempt to articulate a similarly hopeful role of ethnography as means to another means.

Conclusion: Hope is Figure, Crisis is Ground, Pragmatism is Placeholder

### Figure-Ground Reversal

This final chapter reenacts the major findings of the dissertation and makes explicit some of the premises that have been floating in the background. Lastly, it takes up a concern I share with many colleagues in the field, which on my own terrain is to articulate a hopeful role for ethnography. Many of my informants were engaged in the work of refiguring a hopeful role for advocacy.

The overarching premise of this dissertation is a figure-ground reversal. The figure-ground reversal is an artifact of Roy Wagner's (1987) ethnographic engagement with the Barok of New Ireland. When the Barok perform the *kaba*—their culminating mortuary feast—they reverse feast and tree, which Wagner shows are images of gender, moiety distinction, and all social categories in Barok culture (1987:61). Whereas the tree typically contains the feast, during the *kaba* the feast contains the tree. The *kaba* is therefore a figure-ground reversal.

The figure-ground reversal is not just an inversion, but rather a methodical negation of (Barok) society (Strathern 1991, 1992; Wagner 1987). The power of the figure-ground reversal is that it demonstrates that the reversal makes as much sense as the order it reverses and thus renders social and cultural categories arbitrary (Wagner 1987:61-62). The figure-ground reversal respecifies the common anthropological trope of relativism. The effect of the reversal is that the figure of sociality “moves” while people and relationships remain grounded (Strathern 1991:113-114). This dissertation has attempted a

similar effect with history and ideas moving between ideology, field, sacrifice, discourse, project, agenda, and social design. Ideas and imaginations about the past, present, and future have tremendous agency in my fieldsites.

The figure-ground reversal works by privileging the “ground behind or underneath the more commonly, explicitly, powerfully, or otherwise more prominent figure in the foreground” (Jean-Klein 2003:559). Crisis, as this dissertation has shown, is the conventional figure in my fieldsite, Korean Studies, and in anthropological and social theory more broadly. However, I have approached crisis as the ground and pragmatism as the figure so as to refigure ethnographic analysis as an anticipatory process rather than a pragmatic response to an always already emergent world. This reorientation (Miyazaki 2004) enables me to make more evident a hopeful role for ethnography by approaching pragmatism as placeholder (e.g., Riles 2010a), much as some informants did with discourse (*damnon*), which was a means to keep the future and scale of agency open.

### Rescaling Agency

South Korea is an exemplary, at times literalizing, field for modern, postmodern, liberal, and neoliberal imaginaries (e.g. Abelman 2003; Song 2009). In this dissertation I have embraced the compressions that often vex ethnographers in my own compressed writing style. I have omitted conventional, often contextualizing, features of many dissertations as well as life histories in an effort to replicate the spatial and temporal movements of my fieldsites. In another demonstration of compressed scale and movement, my ethnographic subject regularly moved between people of various title,

movement (*undong*), group (*danche*), organization (*gigu*), think tank, and civil society (*simin sahoe*). At the same time, crisis regularly shifted scale between moral, epistemological, disciplinary and organizational. I have replicated this movement in the scale of agency between ideology, field (*hyeonjang*), sacrifice, discourse (*damnon*), project, agenda, and social design.

In the first chapter, ideology's scale of commitment and imagination is systemic. The pleasures associated with ideology around solidarity, system, and utopia foreground relational and structural agency rather than individual or personal agency. Going to the field, or historical site of importance (*hyeonjang*), for many of my informants was about recovering historical and personal agency through a sense of praxis. At the same time, it specifies time and place and puts limits on the scale of imagination and agency. Many NGO and NPO workers, particularly former student movement activists, measured their own commitment and that of their colleagues according to sacrifice. Sacrifice was a necessary and potentially alternative demonstration of commitment because it rendered people into human resources (*jawon*) on a larger scale. Chon, Tae-il and his sacrifice, for example, have been an active legacy rendering future generations of people into similar agents. In the third chapter, discourse (*damnon*) was a middle ground or placeholder which did not achieve the goal of theory, but also did not fall back to ideology's scale. In the words of one informant, it is "less than theory, smaller than ideology." Project and agenda are pragmatic artifacts of work with great flexibility in scale from Saemangeum to job titles. They also foreground personal agency. I will take up the openness of social design and its implications for agency a little

later. Before doing so, I need to return to the double binds that often entangle agency.

Many NGO and NPO workers, like pragmatists, have tremendous faith in human agency (Koopman 2009; Rorty 1999). Yet the crisis many of them faced was a crisis of agency in determining who can be effective agents of social change amid so much social change. I encountered this crisis of agency repeatedly in the field. Green Korea's staff often faced the limits of their agency against the growing scale of the Saemangeum reclamation. Secretary-General Choi wondered if Green Korea would have been better off closing their offices completely instead of doing any of the activities they had done to oppose Saemangeum. There was a constant self-doubt about the advocacy methods NGOs and NPOs could assume during the Roh Moo Hyun administration.

One of the most basic and recurring lessons this project has taught me is that agency is not only about action or doing something; it is also about suspending or putting agency in abeyance (e.g., Battaglia 1997; Gell 1998; Miyazaki 2000). This move is analogous to recent moves by anthropologists with respect to knowledge in positing "unknowledge" and foregrounding faith, hope, and affect (e.g., Coles 2006; Maurer 2005; Miyazaki 2000, 2004). There is an increasing sensitivity in the anthropology literature to the limits, self-imposed or otherwise, and attendant ambivalence of experts, semi-experts, and aspiring experts (e.g., Ballesteros 2010; Barrera 2009; Elyachar 2005; Fortun 2001; Langwick 2008; Miyazaki 2006; Redfield 2006; Riles 2010a).

Many of my informants were acutely aware of the answers they did not have and the expertise they could not claim even as they felt compelled to act in response to one crisis or another. This was a double bind that I often empathized with as an American working in Korea. One informant wryly joked just before the official commemoration of the Gwangju massacre, which is a landmark event that negatively affected the views of many South Koreans toward the U.S. government (Lee N.H. 2007), “The United States gives [Korea] disease and sometimes cure<sup>1</sup>.” The long history of colonization, division, war, dictatorship, and economic development that the United States has been involved in to varying degrees on the Korean Peninsula was implicitly and explicitly active in many interactions. I have also tried to replicate the scale and agency of this past, along with its double binds, throughout the dissertation.

#### Exhaustion, Design and Scale

The exhaustion I encountered in the field paralleled that which I encountered in anthropology. My colleagues in the field had exhausted the single, totalizing *minjung* imaginary and needed to redefine their roles as people, movements, and organizations amid fragmenting, disciplined, and co-opted possibilities. Jae Chung (2009) has theorized this condition as “ethnographic remnant,” which is predicated on the problem and possibility of number in which we can imagine more than one and less than many (Moi 2002; Oppenheim 2008; Strathern 1988).

The parallel exhaustion I encountered in anthropology has been the legacy of

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with the author on May 18, 2007.

the reflexive turn (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986; Strathern 1991). George Marcus (2009) reflects on anthropology feeding other disciplines and interdisciplinary projects to the detriment of its own discipline. The return to this kind of discipline, unlike Foucauldian discipline, is what Iris Jean-Klein and Annelise Riles (2005) argue for and what elicited this dissertation in many ways. Many anthropologists, especially Marcus (1999, 2003), have put forward projects and agendas to articulate a future hopeful role for ethnography. As discussed in the last chapter, Bruno Latour and Lawyer Park do something similar for science studies and Korean civil movements respectively.

Neither project nor agenda, however, is the most comprehensive way to describe the problem or the solution for the post-reflexive exhaustion in anthropology. In a similar way, neither ideology nor theory is the most comprehensive way to describe what anthropologists need to anticipate or replicate from their subjects. Are anthropologists confined to positing agendas, rearticulating discourses, and completing projects or can we hope for something in terms of scale (Bateson 1958; Strathern 1991)? And can anthropologists do this without repeating the past costs and mistakes from functionalism to structuralism, structural-functionalism and Marxism? This is analogous to the situation civil leaders such as Secretary-General Choi and Lawyer Park faced and the impetus for their work discussed in the third and fourth chapters.

A restatement of this exhaustion or crisis came from a fellow Koreanist and anthropologist while I was doing fieldwork. When I updated her on my

research she wondered if my subjects had found an “ethical alternative<sup>2</sup>” to the neoliberalism that she saw pervading South Korea. There was a search for something imaginatively bigger, as with Choi’s Green Life Theory and Lawyer Park’s social design. At the same time there was a growing appreciation of the past and its mistakes. Green Life Theory became another unfinished project leaving behind another ideology (Greenism) in its wake. However, the future of social design is as yet unknown. Social design does not posit a revolutionary role. In fact it explicitly resists that; rather, it is more akin to the facilitation or redirected agency coordinators (*gansa*) have inside NGOs and non-profits.

Many anthropologists have similarly turned to design for inspiration in searching for their own refigured agency in the post-modernist and post-reflexive moment (e.g., Faubion and Marcus 2009). Both anthropologists and many of my colleagues in the field lamented their narrowed and irrelevant work in the present, which was evident in their postmodernist and movement reproduction crises respectively. I approach my colleagues in Korea as well as in anthropology as trying to reimagine the scale of what is possible. In our efforts to do this I have to answer my colleague: does social design, an artifact from the field and a model for how other anthropologists might find something analogous (Riles 2010a), constitute an alternative? In a parallel way I hope I am answering the question from the human rights lawyer in the third chapter asking me how what I was doing constituted research as opposed to the work of the many other historians, sociologists and political scientists working in Korean Studies.

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<sup>2</sup> Email to author on November 7, 2006.

My response to the first question is no insofar as social design's openness to the future and refigured agency resembles previous alternatives, in particular what Annelise Riles (2000) calls networking. Networkers, like social designers, did not imagine themselves as activists so much as try to incite or facilitate others to act. Social design is not something new or unknown just as networking was neither new nor unknown. Instead social design and my effort in this dissertation are about making explicit what is already known. The Hope Institute describes the present for NGOs and NPOs and looks back to the practical study movement (*sirhak undong*) as well as the authoritarian legacies of Park Chung Hee in order to rescale the future and to reimagine what is possible. I similarly look back to the inspiring work in Korean Studies, particularly around movements, to capture the present of pragmatism and rescale the future for ethnography.

My model for this hope is Marcel Mauss's (1967) essay *The Gift*. Mauss (1983) did not conceive of his work as the search for something new or as yet unknown; rather he disdained the pretension of such a search and instead sought to make what is already known evident. In *The Gift*, Mauss revealed the shared gift-giving practices of socialism and capitalism and at his best obviated the distinction between socialism and capitalism altogether. Marilyn Strathern (1991) posits a similar starting point when she describes the endpoints of analysis as already known and the search for questions or means as the work of analysis.

The Hope Institute reoriented from the past to the future and redrew the

boundaries between government, NGO and business. In a similar fashion, Park moved between lawyer, social designer, dictator, leader, and CEO as he borrowed from movements in Japan and other places. He also actively used his own biography as a hopeful means to inspire others to take on similar social design work and to demonstrate that one person can change the world just as one event can change the world. Anthropology inherits a similar legacy from people such as Margaret Mead. I was inspired as an undergrad, for example, by Mead's famous quote about a group of people changing the world and her own biography as well as that of Gregory Bateson and Ruth Benedict. Mead's biography continues to change and inspire anthropologists (Lutkehaus 2008; Newton 2000). At the same time, Mauss's essay *The Gift* continues to be an example of how one work can change a discipline (e.g., Douglas 1990; Levi-Strauss 1987). There are numerous analogs in other fields from the *Gettysburg Address* to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. All of these efforts turn to the past to reapproach the present and reimagine what is possible in the future.

### Hope and Ethnography

So what is hopeful about ethnography? I argue that it apprehends the present by making evident the "transparent matrix" (Bateson 1979). In other words, ethnography makes what is so well known to be hidden from view evident through such devices as the figure-ground reversal. As Hiro Miyazaki (2004) writes, we can only hope by reinheriting the past in order to more precisely apprehend the present and reimagine what is possible in the future. Social design with its similarities to both the social engineering of neoliberalism (Song 2009) and the progress of pragmatism and development may similarly reignite

the exhaustion of imaginaries.

Hope, as Hiro Miyazaki (2004) theorizes, is predicated upon an open future. Miyazaki (2004, 2005) goes so far as to argue that a known future or defined end can “occlude” hope insofar as it renders hope into a problem, subject, or resource rather than keeping it an open and replicable means. Richard Rorty articulates the pragmatist hope as “not that the future will conform to a plan, will fulfill an immanent teleology, but rather that the future will astonish and exhilarate” (1999:27-28). Elizabeth Grosz locates a similar starting point in the French pragmatist tradition—in particular Henri Bergson’s conception of virtuality—which allows scholars “to think the radical openness of the future” (1998:52; 2000:214-234). Judith Butler, like Richard Rorty (1999), calls upon scholars to keep “our notion of the human open to some future articulation...” (2004:36). Robyn Wiegman similarly approaches the future as “itself the excess of productive time: elusive, unmanageable, and ultimately unable to be guaranteed or owned” (2000:822). Annelise Riles has called this modality of the future, in particular Wiegman’s (2000) effort, an exploration of “alternatives to the heteronormative temporality of utopia” (2010b:21). My own demonstration of kinship by other means—idea, ideology, sacrifice, discourse, agenda and many other affiliations—is a similar exploration.

This dissertation suggests that sacrifice and (social) design, particularly in relation to the linearity of progress, development, utilitarianism, instrumentalism, and pragmatism, has served as an alternative temporality and basis of hope for many of my colleagues in South Korea and in anthropology. The transition between the utopia of ideology, the ambivalence

of sacrifice and discourse, and the pragmatism of agenda is often as recursive as it is linear. The temporal incongruity between the recursivity of sacrifice as well as transition and the imagined linearity of progress, development, and pragmatism has helped sustain hope for many movement participants, analysts, and social designers (e.g., Miyazaki 2004). In conclusion, it is not only that the future is unknown and open, but also that it is scalar and subject to reorientation and reversal in relation to the past, present, and transitions in-between. Hope is generated and sustained not only from reorientation or reversal, but also from the rescaling of agency and (social) design.

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## Research Survey

### ***Educational Background***

1. What university, if any, did you attend?
2. What year did you enter and what year did you graduate?
3. What was your major?
4. Do you have any post-graduate degrees? If so, what are they and in what field?

### ***Work***

1. Did you receive any training for your current job? If so, what kind (e.g., NGO or NPO Studies)? Describe your current job (daily tasks, planning, fundraising, etc.). How long have you held your current job? \_\_\_\_\_(months)/\_\_\_\_\_ (years)
2. What previous jobs have you held and for how long?

### ***Reflections***

1. What is your strongest memory from the:  
1970s?  
1980s?  
1990s?  
2000s?
2. Define in your own words:  
'activist'  
'scholar'  
'specialist'

3. Define and approximate what percentage of the following your current work requires:

1. 'expertise' ( %)
2. 'experience' ( %)
3. 'knowledge' ( %)
4. 'belief' ( %)
5. 'intuition' ( %)
6. 'other' ( %)

4. Do you have any opinion of the so-called '386 generation'? If so, what is it?

5. What is the current state of the 'civil movement' in Korea?

6. What is the current state of 'ethics' in Korea?

7. Do you think that the 'civil movement' needs to change in Korea? Why or why not?

8. Do you think that 'ethics' need to change in Korea? Why or why not?

9. Is change, or dynamism, a defining characteristic of Korea? Why or why not?

10. What is your:

Personal hope?

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Hope for society?

Thank you for your participation. You may contact Amy Levine if you have any questions.

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### 설문 조사

#### 교육 배경

\* \*석사졸업자는 학사 전공에 대해서도 기술 바랍니다.

1. (대학을 다니셨을 경우) 대학명:
2. 입학/졸업연도: \_ \_\_ (입학) \_\_ (졸업)
3. 전공:
4. 학부 졸업 이후 학위가 있습니까? 어느 분야의 무슨 학위입니까?

#### 일

1. 현재 활동하고 있는 분야에 대한 교육을 받은 경험이 있습니까? 있다면 어떤 교육을 받았습니까? (예, NGO, NPO에 대한 교육)
2. 현재 맡고 있는 업무에 대해서 간단히 기술해 주세요. (예, 일상 업무, 기획, 기금 모금, 캠페인 등)

3. 언제부터 활동을 시작 하였습니다까? (예, 월/년부터~현재까지)
4. 현재 직업을 갖기 전에 다른 곳에서 근무하신 경험이 있습니까? 어떤 일을 얼마나 오래 하였습니다까?

## 의견

1. 한국 사회의 시기별 상황에서 가장 강하게 남는 기억을 기술해 주세요.

1970년대

1980년대

1990년대

2000년대

2. 한국 사회에서 통용되는 각각의 낱말에 대한 본인의 정의는?

‘운동가/활동가(activist)’

‘간사(coordinator)’

‘학자(scholar)’

‘전문가(specialist)’

사람들이 당신을 어떻게 부르길 원합니까?

3. 아래 용어에 대한 정의를 기술하고, 본인의 현재 활동이(업무가) 아래 각 항목을 얼마나 필요로 하는지 %로 나타내 주세요. (0~100%, 단위 10%)

전문성 (expertise, %)

경험 (experience, %)

지식 (knowledge, %)

신념 (belief, %)

인간관계 (intuition, %)

기타의견(위에 열거된 것 이외에 필요하다고 여겨지는것)

4. '386세대'에 대해서 어떻게 생각하십니까?

5. 한국 사회 '시민 운동'의 현 주소(상태)는 어떻다고 생각하십니까?

6. 한국 사회 '윤리 의식(도덕성)' 수준은 어느 정도라고 생각하십니까?

7. 한국 사회 '시민 운동'에 변화가 필요하다고 생각하십니까? 그렇다면 (그렇지 않다면) 이유는 무엇입니까?

8. 한국 사회 '윤리 의식'에 대해 변화가 필요하다고 생각하십니까? 그렇다면 (그렇지 않다면) 이유는 무엇입니까?

9. 많은 사람들이 한국사회의 대표적인 특성으로 “역동성”을 제시합니다. 이러한 의견에 동의하십니까? 동의 한다면(동의하지 않는다면) 그 이유는 무엇입니까?

10. 개인적인 희망은 무엇입니까? 당신이 사회에 바라는 희망은 무엇입니까?

참여해주셔서 감사합니다. 답변한 내용에 대해 염려되는 부분이 있거나 질문이

있으면 에이미 레빈 **Amy Levine**에게 연락하시길 바랍니다.