

## ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS AGAINST GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT IN KOREA SINCE THE LATE 1980's\*

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*This paper examines environmental activism against the development of golf courses in Korea from 1980 to 1990. The author demonstrates that golf course development is accelerated by profit-seeking land developers or speculators and that windfall gains resulting from land value increments further the development of golf course. This study shows that in terms of golf course development the state and capitalists have almost the same interests as the developers, and that, farmers, as the victims, have organized an environmental movement against the development. In the course of the movement, the nature of the movement has changed from a reparation one to an environmental one. At the same time, the organizations have grown from the village-wide level to the province-wide level. Despite this development, the organizations at the province-wide level do not work well, and their strategies are not well-developed, resulting in a failure to mobilize. In addition, though the water pollution from golf course development can threaten the life of urban people, citizens of the Seoul metropolitan area have not actively participated in these movements; therefore, coalition between farmers and citizens has been hard to mobilize.*

*Finally, this paper emphasizes that residents and farmers should have the opportunity to plan their own sustainable development strategies, to express their views on the issues, and to define their wants. It also stresses that for environmental protection, land speculation should be curtailed and for this purpose the concept of ownership has to change.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes environmental activism against the development of golf courses. Golf course development is one of the largest land development projects in Korea. In August 1989, there were 49 golf courses comprising a total area of about 20 million pyŏng (about 2,610 acres). This means that one golf course is 400 thousand pyŏng (about 50 acres). Because Korea does not have much open space, golf course development is a likely target of public criticism. Before the 1980s, however, golf course development was not a serious issue in Korea. But since the 1980s, as more

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and more golf courses have developed, they have come to attract public attention. There are two closely connected issues involved in this controversy: land speculation and environmental disruption.

Golf course development as a large land development project has been a very lucrative business. Developers buy development land at very low prices to build golf courses. Most of the development lands are hills or mountains purchased at very low prices. The price of golf course land inevitably rises rapidly accordingly as the land is developed. Thus, developers enjoy enormous profits from land value increments. These windfall gains lead to unplanned and avaricious developments of more golf courses.

These unplanned and avaricious developments destroy the ecosystem and threaten peasant farming as a way of life. Desiring enormous profits, developers demolish hills and ridges of mountains. Consequently, many trees are cut down. As the natural system is destroyed, developers earn profits from land value increments.

Golf course development has caused many residents living near golf courses to suffer from land price increases and environmental disruption. The soaring land prices make living more expensive, especially for peasants who happened to be deprived of their farm-land. And the environmental disruption has often caused dangerous landslides and severe crop damage. Consequently, we have seen peasant movements or environmental movements of peasants against golf course development.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We can consider environmental movements against golf course developments as an instance of the self protection of society from the violences of the Market (Polanyi 1957). Also environmental movements express the peasants' right to the environment. Through these movements, peasants express their views on golf course development and environmental disruption.

Golf course development transforms the natural life of peasants. Initially, it deprives them of farm-land which is their means of living. In Korea, a golf course is developed mostly by using forest-land. However, over 10% of a golf course areas are developed by using farm-land. This acreage is not insignificant.

In land markets, peasants are inferior to capitalists (developers) with respect to buying ability. Developers generally will buy farm-land for development at prices much higher than the present use value. Land is thus

transformed from a means of subsistence into a commodity, a means of profit-seeking. Before this, for peasants, land has meant more than an object of ownership, because peasant life is inseparable from land. In the market, however, land is a commodity which is governed by the requirements of real estate markets (Harvey 1982). Here, peasants who are economically weak are forced out of land markets (D. H. Han 1992).

This transformation is enforced by state intervention in land ownership. Some peasants will hesitate to sell the means of their lives even at a price much higher than the present use value. If they sell their land, they have to leave their hometowns. It is not easy for them to decide to leave locales where they have lived so long. What is worse, it is more difficult for them to sell their small forest-land of family burial ground. To overcome this resistance, state power is mobilized to help capitalists buy development land. The state and its officials threaten peasants so that peasants will sell their land to developers. And the state leases state land or county land to developers for development. Thus land is more thoroughly transformed into real estate. This transformation<sup>1</sup> can result in great and permanent social destruction, because developers consider the environment or nature as merely an object of profit seeking. And they do not take the lives of peasants into consideration (See Figure 1). In the worst case, the construction of golf courses devastates surrounding farm-land and villages.

As mentioned above, developers defeat peasants economically and politically in land markets. And they are bolstered by the state through the

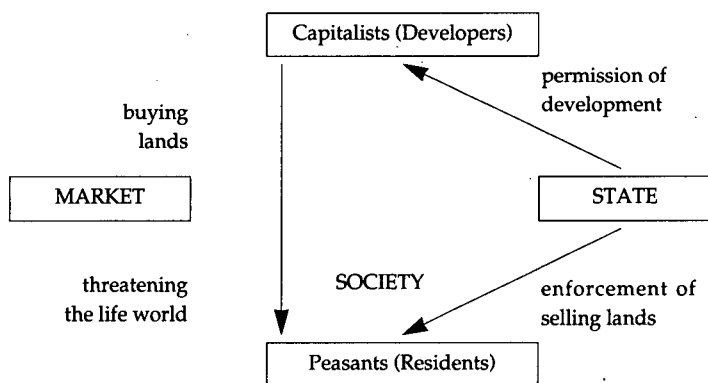


FIGURE 1. ORIGINS OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AROUND GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

<sup>1</sup>Polanyi (1957) considers this transformation as "the weirdest of all undertakings of our ancestors.

political process of getting permission for golf course development. Until 1989, golf course development required permission from high officials of the central government, the Blue House. Under the repressive state, the permission they received was a guarantee of successful development. In addition, permission to develop assures developers of high profits resulting from land value increments (See right side of Figure 1).

On this point, capitalists and the state have almost the same interests. So we can hardly expect that the state will protect the living conditions of peasants from environmental disruptions. It is naturally expected that victims will start to organize a movement to protect their own lives and social world. The state and developers try to crush or atomize organizational efforts of peasants at an early stage. Thus, in the arena of social life, social actors such as developers, the state, and peasants confront each other over contingent issues.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DISRUPTION AND LAND SPECULATION THROUGH GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Golf course development is accelerated by avaricious profit-seeking developers. Windfall gains resulting from land value increments enforce this. The avaricious activities of developers lay environmental management aside, much less environmental protection.

### *Land Speculation*

The numbers of newly built golf courses increased rapidly in the late 1980s. During that time, Korean society experienced severe land speculation. Recent land politics has showed the extent of speculation fever in the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

The land which capitalists bought for developing golf courses was usually forest-land. In Korea, the prices of forest-land were very low until the early 1980s, but after this time forest-lands began to undergo development, and their prices consequently increased tremendously. The patterns of development influencing land values are changes of land utilization and transformation of land-quality and land-forms. Transformation of forest-land into golf courses entails these changes of land

<sup>2</sup>Under the new government (1993- ), high officials have to disclose their own assets. After the disclosure in September 1993, some high officials were forced to resign, because they purchased some land in the late 1980s. That government officials bought real estate in the late 1980s aroused public resentment. This event showed that there had been severe land speculation in the late 1980s.

use and land quality. From this, land values greatly increase (D.H. Han 1992, 1993).

It is said that when lands for golf courses are developed, the land price increases two or threefold. In the case of land for golf course development of the Hankuk Powder Group, the land price increased immediately from 60,000 won (\$75) a pyŏng (about 4 square yeards) to 200,000 won (\$ 250) after land was bought for golf course development (*The Seoul Economic Daily*, November 22, 1989). This shows that golf course developments have been highly lucrative projects with respect to land value increments. In addition, by selling membership cards, most developers earned enough to cover the whole expense of investment in golf courses. Development gains and business profits resulting from golf courses have made many capitalists, including Chaebŏl, participate in golf course development.

State policy has supported golf course development. Moreover, the central government leases state forest-land to developers at low prices. From 1972 until 1990, the total area of leased state forest-land was 204 ha for 11 golf courses (Choe 1991). County forest-land is also leased. Counties which lease county land to developers are Kosŏng of Kangwŏn Province, Sŏnsan of Kyŏngbuk Province, and Yŏngdŏk of Kyŏngbuk Province (YMCA 1991).

Additionally, the central government was responsible for granting permission for the development until 1989. From July, 1989 on, the right to issue permission was transferred to local governments. After that, it became much easier to get permission for golf course development. While from January, 1988 to June, 1989, there were 38 newly issued permissions for golf courses, there were 49 from July, 1989 to December, 1989 (M. R. Han 1992).<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, local governments helped developers acquire development land at low prices, by persuading peasants to sell their lands to developers. Many officials and ex-officials of local governments did likewise. They were preoccupied with developmentalism, not taking environmental protection into account. For example, in Sŏnsan, Yŏngchŏn, Yŏngil counties of Kyongbuk Province, the chief magistrates of subcounties stood at the head of buying land for golf course development (Antipollution Campaign Coalition 1991).

Thus developers could buy development land at low prices as early as

<sup>3</sup>On top of that, Kyŏnggi Province newly issued permissions for ten golf course developments simultaneously, as soon as the investigation of state affairs by the national assembly ended (*The Chosŏn Ilbo*, October 14, 1989). It turned out that the local government tried to escape from the investigation of those permissions, which shows the interests of local governments in golf course development.

they needed. And they could earn windfall gains with the help of government. These conditions aroused golf course development fever in the late 1980s. While 21 golf courses were developed from the 1960s to 1970s, 156 golf courses were developed or under construction from 1980 to 1991 (T. D. Kim, 1991). This fever, closely related to land speculation, threatens the surrounding ecosystem.

### *Environmental Disruption*

We can classify damages resulting from the environmental disruption of golf course development into several types: destruction of forestry, landslide, loss of farm-land, crop damage, contamination by chemicals of golf courses, and so on.

Because there was little open space for building golf courses in Korea, the developers had to blow up hills or ridges of little mountains with dynamite. They transformed the scenery of the rural area in order to develop golf courses. Many trees in the areas were cut down. Though it takes a long time and much effort to take care of good forest, golf course development destroys forests in a short time. This destruction is very dangerous for the surrounding people in the rainy season.

Yongin of Kyönggi Province, the county which has the most golf courses in the province, has suffered from this destruction. In September, 1990, many houses and rice fields were demolished by landslides of golf courses under construction (See Table 1).

But in Yongin, the loss of 1990 was much less serious than that of 1991. In July, 1991, in the villages near golf course construction, 32 people were killed, 26 people were wounded, 3,500 people lost their homes, and 1,451 ha of farm-land were lost or buried under landslides (Hanguk Christian Presbyterian Association in Kyönggi Province 1991). This is the most serious disaster caused by golf course development.

The disaster mentioned above destroyed the natural and social world of

**TABLE 1. LANDSLIDE DAMAGE NEAR GOLF COURSES (Septembers 1990)**

Golf Courses	Area (county)	Damages
Ech n Country	Kyönggi Echön	Houses 12, field 130,000 pyöng
Taeyöng G C	Kyönggi Yongin	Houses 20, field 47,000 pyöng
Hanil G C	Kyönggi Yöjoo	Field 90,000 pyöng
Jayou G C	Kyönggi Yöjoo	Field 30,000 pyöng
007 G C	Kyönggi Yöjoo	Field 30,000 pyöng

Source : *The Minjoo Ilbo*. September 21, 1990.

**TABLE 2. CONVERSION FROM FARMLAND INTO GOLF COURSE LAND (ha)**

Year	rice-field	dry-field	total	Year	rice-field	dry-field	total
1985	30.1	51.1	81.9	1987	22.1	24.9	47.0
1986	54.2	33.8	88.0	1988	696	41.8	111.4
				1989*	51.6	49.8	101.4

\*The year 1989 is based on the data of August 1989.

Source: The Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Fishery. 1989. *Report for the Investigation of State Affairs.*

the peasants in a flash. Conversion of farm-land into golf courses, however, transforms the life world of the peasants slowly but surely. The loss of farm-land by conversion rapidly increased in the late 1980s. Until August, 1989, conversion of farm-land into golf courses amounted to 633.9 ha, but from 1985 to August, 1989, it amounted to 429.7 ha (See Table 2). This shows that living conditions of peasants are increasingly influenced by golf course development. Besides the loss of farm-land in the conversion, there is indirect influence as well: the rapid increase of farm-land prices. Through conversion, the price of farm-land near golf courses increases so much that peasants are defeated by other classes in the land markets.

Besides loss of farm-land, peasants suffer from bad harvests. Muddy water caused by run-off from golf course construction damages commercial crops such as mushrooms. Explosive sounds from golf course construction sites lower productivity of livestock. (Antipollution Campaign Coalition 1991).

What is even worse is the contamination of the environment by chemicals. It is necessary to spray much insecticide on the grasses of golf courses. In 1990, 118 kinds and 66 tons of agricultural chemicals were sprayed on grasses of golf courses throughout the nation. Of them, 17 kinds and 5.4 tons were virulently poisonous according to WHO standards (Choe 1991).

Polluted water of streams flowing from golf courses is very harmful to crop and fish farming undertaken by peasants. In addition, employees of golf courses are exposed to dangerous insecticides which cause occupational diseases<sup>4</sup> Some women, having worked as caddies, have given birth to deformed babies (Antipollution Campaign Coalition 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Poison by agricultural chemicals is still found after considerable time. After seven or more years has passed, poison can still be found in the human system. Symptoms of poison are difficulties in breathing, chronic headache, vomiting, stomachaches, diarrhea, dizziness, peripheral nerve paralysis, blunting of nerve sensibility, cramps, lethargic condition, birth of deformed child, etc. (Antipollution Campaign Coalition 1991).

Contamination by chemicals is likely to bring about water pollution. More than half of the golf courses of the whole country are in Kyōnggi Province. And more than half of those in Kyōnggi Province are in the areas that are responsible for the water supply of the capital region (Choe 1991). That is, the contamination of water by chemicals used on golf courses is likely to cause water pollution in the Han river. In 1989, when golf course developments increased very rapidly, the Office of Environment planned to announce seven counties of Kyōnggi Province as the special management areas for clean water in the capital area. But the local governments strongly opposed it, on the grounds that the measure would restrict land development in the designated areas (*The Dong-A Ilbo*, October 11, 1989).<sup>5</sup>

### DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

In the late 1980s, the above mentioned environmental disruption aroused peasant protests. Peasant movements against golf course development, however, were so isolated in the late 1980s that they were unable to attract much public attention. But from 1990 on, these movements have been organized and expanded rather widely, and, they are supported by other civil environmental movements in urban areas.

#### *Reactions of Peasants against Environmental Disruption*

Considered as a whole, movements against golf course development are especially vigorous in Kyōnggi and Kyōng buk provinces. These provinces have their own Joint Committee of the movements at the province level.

Kyōnggi has more than half the golf courses in the whole country. In Kyōnggi, the movements of Pochōn county and Yongin county are most active. In 1989, peasants of Pochōn county stood at the head of the environmental movements against the Nasan golf course development. When the Nasan golf course obtained permission from the local government of Kyōnggi Province, peasants set up a counterplan committee to protest. As a part of this protest they submitted a petition to lawmakers. Meanwhile, they were supported by the Antipollution Campaign Coalition (M. R. Han 1992).

In Yongin county, in June, 1989, peasants organized a movement to

<sup>5</sup>The Office of Environment planned to designate these areas in February, 1989. But the local governments of the areas in question objected to the plan. Instead, in September, 1989, they newly issued the permission of six golf courses in the area which the Office of Environment wanted to designate as the special management areas (*The Dong-A Ilbo*, October 11, 1989).



oppose the golf course development of the Taegwang Country Club (in Gihŭng- subcounty) and the Osan Country Club (in Namsa-subcounty). In 1990, peasants of Echŏn county also resisted development. In June, 1990, Yongin county peasants broke into the county office and the office of golf course construction to protest against the development.

In August, 1990, the Joint Committee of Kyŏnggi Province Against Golf Course Development was formed. Peasants from eight counties, such as Echŏn, Gapyŏng, Yongin, etc., participated in it. In September, 1990, Yongin county suffered from severe flood damage (See Table 1). Asking reparation for the flood damages, the joint committee staged a rally against golf course development. This rally was supported by other social movement organizations, such as the Antipollution Campaign Coalition and the National League of Peasants Association.

In September, 1991, the movement became much broader. In July, 1991, peasants living near golf courses under construction suffered from great flood damage. This damage aroused public criticism against golf course development. Because of the flood damage, the anti-golf movement often became increasingly violent (Hanguk Christian Presbyterian Association in Kyŏnggi Province 1991).

In Kyŏngbuk, the movement is currently violent and forceful. Before the development, the rural society in Kyŏngbuk province had a social and cultural world that was less destroyed by the Market Economy than was the rural sector of Kyŏnggi Province. But now golf course development threatens the peasants' life world. For example, in Sandong subcounty of Sŏnsan county, 1,121 tombs are about to be moved because of the development (YMCA 1991). Moving tombs of ancestors symbolizes destruction of the hometown.

In June, 1989, peasants in Sandong subcounty set up a death committee against the development. Their movement was so fierce that in August 1989, it was one of the law makers' main issues during the regular investigation of Kyŏngbuk provincial affairs. In December, 1989, ten peasants were wounded because of a confrontation with police (*The Hangyŏre Shinmun*, July 20, 1990).<sup>6</sup>

In May, 1990, peasants of Sandong subcounty broke into the provincial office court of Kyŏngbuk. In November, 1990, however, the developer repeatedly tried to start construction of golf courses. From that time on, peasants set up tents to resist the development. And, because of the clash

<sup>6</sup>The paper outlines environmental movements of 1989 and 1990 against golf course developments.

between policemen and protesting peasants in December 1990, fifty people were wounded and fifteen people were hospitalized (*The Kookmin Ilbo*, December 25, 1990).

Besides Sandong subcounty of Sönsan county, there have been movements in other counties such as Uljoo, Yögil , Yöngdük, and so on. In June 1990, at the province level, peasants organized the Kyöngbuk Joint Committee Against Golf Course Development, and in September, 1990, the Kyöngbuk Support Committee for Struggle Against Golf Course Development (YMCA 1991). These organizations mobilized peasants more effectively and gained active support from other civil movements in Kyöngbuk province.

#### *Organization and Value Orientations of the Movements*

In rural societies of Korea, small villages where about 100 families live, are located at considerable distances from one another. Naturally the movements start at the village level. And at first, their orientation has been to demand reparation for the damages. In local politics, local governments do not have the ability to institutionalize the conflicts between peasants and developers. Rather, local governments have tried to crush the organization of peasants. Therefore it has been very difficult for peasants to effectively organize movements.

However, as environmentally disrupted areas expand, the movements initially isolated at the village level have begun to collaborate with each other. Thus, many village organizations have grown into local federations at the county level. This development of organizations is natural, for a golf course covers more than a single village. The organizations work more effectively at the county level than at the village level. At the same time, they get helpful support from other movement organization, such as the Antipollution Campaign Coalition, the National League of Peasant Associations, student leagues, and so forth.

In accordance with the development of movements, their orientation has changed from a reparation movement to an environmental one. Their principal interest is to stop the development of golf courses. In some cases they have asked developers and local government to leave their hometowns and life world intact. In other cases, they have asked them to construct apartment complexes on the development land instead of golf courses.

Coalitions, or joint committees, at the province level are also organized. Now in Kyönggi and Kyöngbuk, there are joint committees independent of each other. But the organizations at the province level are not as effective as

those organizations at the county level. This means that organizations and value orientations of the movement are not active enough to collaborate at the province level.

### *Role of Central Government and Local Government in the Movement*

Environmental movements against golf course development are affected by the central government and local government. Governments have the right to zone land utilization, of the regions in question, according to the National Land Utilization and Management Act. And, they have the responsibilities of supervising environmental disruptions of the area.

In the central government, there are mainly two parties who are connected with these environmental movements. One includes the Ministries of Transportation, of Construction, and of Sports and Youth.<sup>7</sup> The other is the Office of Environment. The former party is mostly in favor of golf course development, and though the latter has rights to supervise environmental disruption of golf courses, its political influence in the central government is very weak.

When the Ministry of Transportation had the rights to issue permission for the development, developers had to receive informal permission from the Blue House. But the informal nature of these permissions for extremely lucrative development has been subject to political corruption, and consequently, has been severely criticized by lawmakers of opposition parties and critics (T. D. Kim 1991; Choe 1991). When the formal right to grant permission and control was transferred from the Ministry of Transportation to the Ministry of Sports and Youth in 1989, this Ministry announced its intention to make golf a popular sport (*The Jungang Economic Daily* June 9, 1989; November 22, 1989). From the time this policy was announced, golf course developments became a fever.

Local governments have been active in this policy in order to collect more rates from more golf courses. And they have tried to help developers by arguing that golf courses would contribute to community development. So, when environmental movements against golf course development appears, it tries to persuade peasants not to participate in the movements. Or, it tries to crush the movements at an early stage. Under these conditions, developers who have received permission from governments do not take the interests of peasants into consideration.

Therefore, environmental movements against golf course construction have attacked governments as well as developers. In the provinces of

<sup>7</sup>This ministry is reorganized under the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Kyönggi and Kyöngbuk, many clashes between local governments and peasants have broken out.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS: MARKET, SOCIETY, AND STATE

From the above analysis, we can see peasants, who have the initiative of the movements, do not have access to the decision-making process over golf course development. On the contrary, the requirements of real estate markets are what govern the decision making process.

This structure of decision-making is bolstered by government interests. Though it seems that the government makes an effort to protect the environment for the well being of people, the analysis shows that the government in Korea is overwhelmed by developmentalism. Under a repressive state, the governments have tried to crush environmental movements at an early stage and people have been afraid of defying the development decisions of developers and the government. But the state has not been successful in protecting society from the Market. Thus, there are no desirable checks over golf course developments, as proven by the golf course development fever that has taken hold since the late 1980s.

To overcome this defect in environmental protection, society has to stand up to protect itself from the Market. Though not always successful, society does help its members to resist environmentally destructive development projects.<sup>8</sup> However, from the above analysis, it can be seen that the participants in the environmental movement against golf course development are mostly peasants. Though some civil movement organizations have supported them, the support has not been enough. It appears that despite the water pollution which threatens the life world of urban people, citizens of the capital area have not actively participated in the movements.

Instead, the society or community in counties and subcounties is more active in environmental protection. So they must be activated and be independent from governmental control. And people living near golf courses should be given the right of access to the developments and to the environment. It is not enough to express their opinion after the decision of development has already been made. Nor is it enough to receive reparations after environmental disruptions have occurred. Rather, residents should have the opportunity to plan their own sustainable development strategies, to express their views on the issues, and to define their own needs and

<sup>8</sup>Of course, it cannot be said that their movement started with an overriding concern to protect the environment, but rather, they started to get reparations (Vivian 1992).

desires in order to more actively participate in environmental protection (Lee 1992; Redclift 1992). Since they have experience of the subsistence ethic of rural society (Scott 1976), residents are motivated to protect their community from environmentally destructive profit-seeking.

This participation of people in decision-making about development will change the traditional concept of land-ownership or property. Until now, the owner has exercised his property right at his own will. He has taken advantage of the natural environment only for his own profit. However, if people have the opportunity to plan how to develop their living area, the owner's right is severely restricted. It becomes more like a measure that removes nature and environment from the Market. It entails the concept of common property (Daly and Cobb 1989). In the long run, society need not allow unearned incomes from the property titles to increase.

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