

Social Conflicts and Hegemonic Articulation on the Saemangeum Reclamation Project in South Korea*

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The South Korean government planned for the Saemangeum reclamation project to spark development in the North of Jeolla Province (NJP), it triggered vicious social conflicts that lasted for more than two decades since its inception in 1991. The impact of the project extended across ecological and social dimensions of Korean society at large, while also significantly affecting local communities in NJP. Regional or national stakeholders participated in the resultant social conflicts, and sought their particular political, economic and ecological interests within the context of a dynamic social and political context. This paper examines the reason why the project commenced and why it persists even in the face of such a socially combative environment, connecting social forces with development orientation and environmentalism. And then this paper discusses the social and ecological implications for more ecological and democratic development in Korea.

Keywords: Saemanguem, environmental movement, environmentalism, hegemonic articulation, ecological citizenship

*This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2013S1A3A2054849).

Introduction

Saemangeum Reclamation Integrated Development Project (hereafter SRP) transformed a tidal flat of 401 km² to land and lakes by building a 34 km-length sea dike. Basically, SRP consists of two parts: first the building of a sea dike, and next the building of infrastructure in the form of accompanying farmlands, related industrial complexes, and the lakes. The sea dike construction work commenced in 1991 and was completed in 2010, consuming about 2.5 billion USD (at the exchange of rate of 1,100 Korean Won). But the internal work whose aim is not yet clear is supposed to be done by 2020, and as of present has absorbed some 18-27 billion USD. As a result of these high investments and hoping to make the SRP more cost-efficient, the Korean government enacted the Special Law for SRP in 2007 and launched the Saemangeum Development Agency as an independent central government agency in 2013. Despite such efforts, the special law has been revised several times due to the impracticality of its legal validity, and the agency still suffers from an insufficient budget, lack of personnel, and limited discretionary powers when it comes to SRP.

SRP is a mega construction project that is transforming and taming nature to respond in lines with human interests, but the impact of SRP is not restricted to geographical and biological aspects. Rather, its influences have filtered into Korean society and politics infiltrating the social, economic, and political lives of local residents and local communities. A common feature of conventional mega-project developments, despite their overwhelming overhead costs, below-level projection revenue, and strikingly poor performance records in terms of economic, environmental and public support, remains their continuous growth in number and scale around the world. Mega-projects, such as SRP, normally involve great magnitudes of uncertainty, unreliable but necessary efforts at risk avoidance, and even a measure of statistical manipulation and bias aimed at convincing decision makers and the public of beneficial project outcomes in the absence of proper risk assessment (Flyvbjerg et al. 2003).

A mega-project on the magnitude of SRP reflects the dominant interests and ideologies of society, while re-arranging social relations often culminating into an incidental hegemonic articulation of social and ecological dimensions inscribed within the project (Greider and Garkovich 1994). This paper focuses on this hegemonic articulation of social conflicts over SRP. This articulation could have taken any form when considering that

the key social forces' political, social, economic and environmental interests are not inherent, but rather continually reconstructed, and that the social forces expanded or shrank through social conflicts, which in turn changed the official plan of SRP while influencing both the social force's interests and the environmental discourses taking place.

This paper aims at analyzing the social conflicts and resultant hegemonic articulation, to do this I draw on a variety of primary and secondary data from 1991-2013. The details of social conflicts were obtained from the webpage of Society of Buan-Saemangeum life and the homepage of the Integrated News System (KINDS), and several local and nation-wide newspapers. The timeline of the social conflicts over SRP is divided in three time periods: the first (1991-1998) spans the appearance of anti-project movements; the second period (1990-2003) illustrates the peak of the social conflicts between those for and those against; and the third (2004-2013) covers the appearance of alternative forces and the proactive development coalition's re-articulation of goals and objectives. I especially emphasize the socio-political context in which SRP was first suggested and persisted against strong opposition, while taking into account the regional development discourse functioning as an ideology, and the regional public sphere dominated by local-national developmentalists. In doing so, I also draw out the social and ecological implications of social conflicts over SRP.

Defining Discourse and Hegemonic Articulation

Environmental discourse and regional developmentalism

The social conflict over SRP was precipitated by environmental issues such as the destruction of a tidal flat and marine ecosystem, and the pollution of consequent lakes that would be created. Although other issues like economic feasibility and the legitimacy of such policymaking entered into the social conflict later, environmental issues remained the key area of dispute from beginning to end (Lee 2002; Park 2002; Koh et al. 2010). The environmental issues were organized in discourses in which the social forces eventually led to the definition, interpretation, and means of addressing the environmental affairs (Dryzek 1996, p. 10). Environmental discourse appeared in social conflicts over SRP can be categorized into developmentalism discourse, problem-solving discourse, sustainability discourse, and green radicalism discourse.

Here developmentalism discourse denies environmental problems per se or denies their significance. Instead, environmental problems, if acknowledged, are often interpreted as mere headaches that can be alleviated with the existing political-economic system. The idea typically presupposes the abundance of natural resources, the ability of natural systems to limitlessly and indiscriminately absorb pollutants, and a natural system perpetually balanced by its intrinsic self-corrective capabilities. Problem-solving discourse, however, takes the political-economic status quo as given but in need of fine-tuned coping mechanisms to deal with environmental problems. The tools of choice are often public policy and elaborate science and technological advances. Sustainability discourse, often in the form of imaginative attempts to dissolve the conflicts between environmental and economic value, accepts the existence of environmental limits and focuses on such issues as carrying capacities. The last, green radicalism, rejects the basic structure of the existing political-economic system and instead conceives of the environment in favor of a variety of alternative interpretations of humans, their society, and their place. It emphasizes the rights of non-human creatures with social justice (Dryzek 1996).

Another key agenda of the SRP is the regional development of North of Jeolla Province (Jeollabuk-do, hereafter NJP). Although the words “regional development” appear in nearly every social conflict in the local scene and in local development projects, the meaning has not been well analyzed nor given an academically viable descriptive account. As such, key issues related to regional development have not been absorbed or integrated well into the social sciences in South Korea. It has therefore been difficult to perceive the impact-specific differences that occur between the positive and negative spillover effects, between the areas or groups that have suffered from social, economic, and ecological damage and those that have reaped the rewards. Neither is it any less difficult to definitively say how the social conflicts that brewed between these groups simmered down in the end. Therefore, in order to analyze dynamically the concept of regional development in development projects such as SRP, the elements of regional development should be distinguished: whether the resources of the project come from inside or outside of the geographic region, whether the leading group is composed primarily of local residents linked by shared interests or elites connected to national ruling class, whether the mode of decision making is democratic or authoritative, whether the orientation of the development project is economic growth-centered or socio-cultural enhancement centered, and whether its environmental orientation is close to one of developmentalism, problem-

solving, sustainability, or green radicalism.

There are three regional developmental discourses that are mainstream in the social conflicts over SRP. The first, and the most characteristic of the SRP, is the regional developmentalism, which is characterized by external-based resources, authoritative decision making, economic-growth centered, and developmentalism as an environmental discourse. The second, the eco-friendly regional developmentalism consists of external resources, authoritative, economy-centered, and problem-solving or sustainability environmental discourse. The third, the ecological regional developmentalism consists of internal resource, democratic, socio-culture centered, and green radicalism as environmentalism (Park 2009, pp. 64-74)

Regional developmentalism has conspicuously appeared over the last several decades in underdeveloped areas such as NJP as the dominant regional development discourse in Korea. In this discourse, the local government or the local growth machine attracts huge amounts of private capital or captures large-scale national projects from outside the region to promote economic growth (Sung 1997). The growth machine that nested interest groups with common stakes in development then uses the institutional fabric, including the political and cultural apparatus, to intensify land use for profit. The growth machine with interests in growth of particular place (e.g. large property holders, financial institutions, and local newspapers) turns government into a vehicle to pursue their material goals. The local government or local growth machines do not have much interest in environmental degradation nor in the everyday lives of local residents (Molotch 1993). As a result, local residents have often grown vehement enough to voice their concerns as well as to fight for active participation in the decision-making processes. Such moments of social dissonance have often been spurred on from concerns over democratization, outsiders who frequently cause breach the social norms and life environments of the residents, negative social and ecological effects of economic growth-centered development, and environmental degradation caused by development itself. In the case of SRP, what started as regional developmentalism changed, it was forced to oscillate between a scheme of eco-friendly regional developmentalism and ecological regional developmentalism tempered primarily by social conflicts.

Social force and hegemonic articulation

Social conflicts over SRP have involved many social forces. Generally a

social force is anything within a society that has the capability of bringing about change or the capacity to encourage someone or something (e.g. a coalition or organization) to act as an agent of such change. For our purposes, a social force is interpreted as a consensus on the part of a sufficient number of members of a society to bring about social action or social change of some sort. In the plural, social forces are the basic drives or motives leading to specific types of associations and group relationships (Fairchild 1970). And social forces organize into coalitions, such as advocacy coalition, strive to translate components of their belief systems into actual policy before their opponents can do the same. In order to have any prospect of success, they must seek allies, share resources, and develop complementary strategies. Social forces will seek allies with people who hold similar core policies, and then they engage in complex but integral forms of coordination, until finally they form a coalition. Such coalitions serve as the most useful tools for aggregating the behavior of hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals involved in social conflicts, some of which last for decades or more (Sabatier and Weible 2007, p. 196).

In the case of SRP, social forces are classified into three coalitions: proactive development coalition, anti-SRP movements (hereafter ASMs), and the Alternative force. In each, the coalition members and main actors often change throughout the duration of social conflicts. The proactive development coalition is composed primarily of local governments and politicians, merchants and industrialists, local mass media, a conservative civil society closely connected to local governments that share economic and political interests in SRP public work. Here the Korea Rural Community Corporation serves as the implementing agency of SRP, while related departments of the central government such as the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, national politicians, and national-wide construction companies play passive roles. As for ASM, the first environmental groups are seen as major agents of change, groups like the Korean Federation for Environment Movements, and Green Korea raised questions on the environmental degradation associated with SRP, and took leading roles as influential ASMs. Later experts, religious groups, progressive civil society, and particularly local residents, participated in ASMs, with religious group and experts taking a more salient role in the activism. The Alternative force appeared the latter half of the second period (1990-2003), and mainly consisted of NJP-based experts and civil organizations well versed in their fields, which prevented many of the local residents from participation.

TABLE 1
TIMELINE OF SRP

Year	Details
1987	SRP as an presidential election pledge appeared.
1989	Master plan for SRP (aimed for agriculture and fisheries development of 100%) announced.
1991	Construction of sea dikes began.
1992	Economic planning board doubted economic validity of SRP.
1994	NJP announced a master plan of SRP.
1996	Ministry of Environment re-examined EIA of SRP. Social debates on Lake Shihwa opened.
1998	Environment groups in NJP and national civil society insisted nullification of SRP. The Board of Audit and Inspection of Korea announced special audit on SRP. Anti SRP movements grow rapidly.
1999	Civil-government joint investigation committee to review on SRP launched. Government decided sea dikes construction for SRP halted
2000	Next generation legal suit raised NJP's proactive development coalition for SRP set up. Religious groups organized against SRP Citizen's Declaration called for "Life and Peace."
2001	Solidarity for life and peace organized. Lake Shihwa restored to sea-water. Government decided sea dikes construction to be resumed.
2002	Sambo-ilbae pilgrimage made. Seoul district court decided SRP to be halted. Proactive development coalition re-organized in local and national wide for SRP. The Alternatives appeared.
2004	Seoul high court decided SRP to be resumed.
2005	Seoul Administrative Court decided SRP halted.
2006	Supreme Court decided SRP to resume. Completion of sea-dike work.
2007	Enactment of Special Act for SRP. Mast plan for internal development of SRP (aimed for farmland of 72% and industrial use of 28%) announced.
2008	Master plan of SRP revised (aimed for farmland of 70%, other of 30%).
2010	Master plan of SRP revised again (aimed for farmland of 30.3%, complex city of 23.8%, and others of 45.4%).
2013	Saemanguem Development Agency launched.

SOURCE.—Park (2009, pp. 124-125).

Each social coalition competed to achieve a hegemonic articulation in the conflict surrounding SRP. In order for such hegemony to exist, a particular social coalition must establish legitimate representation of the totality, a representation that may be radically incommensurable with the agent itself. The hegemonic articulation approach assumes that the present conjuncture, far from being the only natural or possible societal order, is an expression of a certain configuration of power relations (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, ix-xvi). Therefore, each social force competes for hegemony in a specific socio-political context that is not fixed, but rather dynamically changeable and malleable (at least in a long-range perspective).

In the case of social conflicts over SRP, the fight for hegemony and the consequent relations created determine the halt or resumption of SRP. Each has its unique regional development discourse, which consists of specifics of the SRP development and the environmentalism. These conflicts eventually led to changes in SRP's original plans, including its objectives, timeline, and budget, while restructuring the relations with other coalitions that it had maintained. The timeline of the social conflicts on SRP demonstrated these reconstructions and the consequent changes within its social forces.

The Rise of the Anti-SRP Movements (1991-1998)

Before the 1987 presidential election, there were several plans to use the tidal flat Saemangeum area for reclamation, but most failed due to the economic infeasibility of such efforts. Although the Saemangeum Development Agency and other members of proactive development coalition argue that the idea dates back even from the 1970s (PMO 2012, p. 208; Moon 2000), any such claim regarding SRP prior to 1987 is simply false primarily because the aims and scope were quite different. Nevertheless, such an argument is clearly a tactic to win SRP's historical legitimacy and thus garner a place in interpreting its 'true' meaning. The 1987 presidential election was a prime example, with all candidates neck-to-neck in the polls. The ruling party candidate, Roh Tae-woo (presidential term: 1988. 2-1993. 2), suddenly suggested SRP as a campaign pledge—his means of getting support from NJP, an area where opposition party candidate had strong support. He argued that SRP would lead to major developments in the region (Moon 2000). His claim proved worthy, eventually helping him to clinch the lead, but despite his success SRP remained a dusty idea on the shelf until 1991 (PMO 2012).

In 1991, then-President Roh suddenly announced SRP's start in the

name of NJP development and national balanced development without deliberative review on economic feasibility and environmental impact assessment of SRP. At that time, President Roh needed a new turn of the political situation because he faced low presidential approval ratings. He also promised to have an interim appraisal of his presidency, which was one of his presidential campaign pledges to the people; he needed the SRP as a booster and NJP's political support (Moon 2000). NJP is a regional base of political support for the main opposition party, where a strong aspiration for development and local developmentalism functioned as a sort of ideology that everyone should agree with regardless of one's political affiliation (Park 2002). In this perspective, SRP was a governmental gift to NJP and a quid pro quo to the opposition party for dropping interim appraisal. The opposition party even propagated SRP as a regional accomplishment for NJP (Park 2009, pp. 128-136).

Even though the sudden beginning of SRP had both political interest and minor doubts in terms of its economic feasibility (Moon 2000, p. 69), it had been going according to plan until 1996 when the serious pollution of Lake Shihwa provoked national concern over water pollution—including the proposed 108 km² lakes that would be constructed as part of the Saemangeum sea dike (Dong-A Ilbo 1996 December 9). The size of Lake Shihwa is nearly half of the size of Saemangeum at 56.5 km², and made by an 11.2 km sea dike. The lake was supposed to supply agricultural water, but it was severely polluted because of the inflow of industrial and domestic sewage. In 2001, central government decided to scrap it as a freshwater lake, remove the pollution and restore it as sea water lake, an effort that is regarded as a government-led mega reclamation policy failure (Koh et al. 2010). The pollution of Lake Shihwa raised doubts regarding certainty and reliability of scientific expertise, as well as skepticism in terms of administrative decision making, all of which were the grounds for the Lake Shihwa project. In fact, during the projects inception few if any took issue with government policies and decision making, assuming that the scientific and technological experts were always right. But demurring, even to scientific experts, had gained a new appeal to the people under the influence of the rapid democratization since 1987 and the peaceful change of power in 1998.

At first, civil society (including environmental movement organizations) raised mainly the possibility of the water pollution. However, the issues gradually extended to include economic feasibility and the environmental impact of SRP (Kim 2006). Nevertheless there were few national concerns and even fewer critical voices from civil society. At the national level, with the

1996 National Assembly election and the 1997 presidential election, SRP was not even on the agenda or in any platforms. However, local candidates for the National Assembly and the major presidential candidates were scrambling to commitment their presidential election pledge related to SRP shortening the timeline and securing more budgetary needs. During the elections there were no voices concerning the water pollution or feasibility of SRP from local as well as national, but only a rosy future of SRP and NJP.

But in 1998, the social context around SRP dramatically changed, caused primarily by the extension of political opportunity resulting from the change of government after the 1997 presidential election and the audit report of the Board of Audit and Inspection of Korea's (BAIK), which in 1998 brought about these drastic changes in the social atmosphere surrounding SRP (Chosun-Ilbo 1998 June 11). At the local levels, environmental groups argued for re-examination of SRP, followed by 1,000 people calling for full-scale re-examination, and a national-wide citizens' committee arguing for all-out nullification of the SRP. Kim Dae-jung (presidential term: 1998. 2-2002. 2), won the 1997 presidential election, and the new government re-assessed many mega projects launched by former governments. According to the re-assessment those projects and deficient of were economic feasibility and funds and consequently withdrawn. And then government tried to keep an amicable relationship with civil society at least first years to listen to various voices from civil society attentively.

Progressive civil society groups and the Peoples' Committee to Stop SRP contended that SRP would destroy the marine ecosystem and local fishery communities, and that the water quality of the proposed lakes would eventually deteriorate. As the voices against SRP rose, in 1998 the then-local governor proposed a civil-government joint investigation to review SRP (Dong-A Ilbo 1999 January 11). Central government accepted it several months later, and established a committee for environmental impact assessment of SRP. After one year's work, the committee consisting of the same numbers professionals who were both for and against the project submitted a report that led to no definitive answers regarding the environmental impact, economic feasibility or future possibilities of water pollution. The government's effort to resolve the social conflicts surrounding SRP through joint-investigation was based on professional knowledge, rather than on the government's somewhat haphazard management of the joint team, which also allowed the teams to effectively debate the pros and cons of SRP.

Despite the establishment of a joint committee and its achievements and effects on the government's final decision, the true key to whether SRP would

cease or proceed came down to the social forces and relations created within those forces, namely those developed between the proactive development coalition and the ASMs. Until 1996, there were only loosely connected proactive development constituents who consisted primarily of central government, construction companies, and national-level politicians, and in NJP local governments, merchants and industrialists, mass media, and development-oriented civil society. Even though NJP proactive development coalition argued that SRP would be an industrial complex area, whereas central government officially adhered to farmland centered development, all supported SRP (Chosun Ilbo 1998 July 6). The discord would not surface until later. Each side believed that the tidal flat could be useful only when humans reclaim land from the sea. The eco-system can be controlled by advanced science and technology, and reclamation megaprojects would symbolize national power. They contended and cajoled people, especially NJP residents, to believe that SRP would bring about epoch-making regional development as well as national development. And this contention was bruited by mass media to the public without any critical review of the SRP's social impact. As a consequence, few local residents, professionals, and environment activists worried about the possible risks associated with SRP (Park 2002).

With the pollution of Lake Shihwa rousing public opinion, environmental groups and local residents who had been negatively influenced by SRP joined the ranks of the ASMs. And progressive civil society and distinguished figures of all spheres of social influence such as novelists, poets, and prominent professors participated in ASMs. Establishing the People's Committee Against SRP at the national level, and NJP People's Committee Against SRP at the local level. With new participants and organizations, ASMs raised fresh issues on SRP that extended to its socio-economic impact and the disruption or degradation of the ecosystem. Although they differed in terms of their emphases on water pollution, ecological degradation, economic in-efficiency, the deficit of feasibility, and damage to local communities, all of the ASMs were against SRP, and argued for its immediate suspension and re-review.

Bipolarizing the Social Conflict (1999-2003)

With the change of government and the release of the BAIK audit, ASMs rapidly expanded its influence. These new circumstances forced the proactive

TABLE 2
TRENDS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON SRP

	NJP				National	
	August 1999	August 2000	March 2001	May 2003	May 2001	May 2003
Agree	54.8%	89.0%	81.7%	76.8%	16.8%	24.4%
Disagree	24.4%	11.0%	10.2%	19.7%	83.0%	71.7%
Others	20.8%	0%	8.1%	3.5%	0.2%	3.9%
N	1,025	1,000	1,034	1,000	1,102	1,000

SOURCE.—Park (2009, pp. 214-217).

development coalition to restructure their justification and to reassess how best to address the feasibility of SRP. The joint committee convened with the idea of isolating ASMs from the issues, replacing real people with experts. Given the deep divisions between those for and against the project, coupled with the reputations, careers and livelihoods at stake, it is not surprising that the committee was constantly at the center of political controversy. The committee consisted of scientific experts who failed to reconcile their ideas on SRP and to submit their official report to the government on time (Dong-A Ilbo 2000 August 29). In fact, the final report was suspended 3 times by the committee as a result of internal disagreement and also because of a political stalemate between ASMs and the proactive development coalitions. In a national survey at that time more than 80% were against SRP with stark differences between the local and national opinions on the subject.

During the joint committee investigation, the more people participated in ASMs the broader issues became. At the regional level, the NJP Peoples for Immediate Stop of SRP, and the Buan Peoples for Immediate Stop of SRP were set up in 2000. The Life and Peace Solidarity for the Saemangeum Tidal Flat was well-known nation-wide since its initial establishment in March 2001 (Dong-A Ilbo 2000 August 9, December 8; 2001 March 27). The ASMs consisted of a conglomeration of national and local organizations, environmental groups, religious groups, and progressive civil society. Environmental discourse within ASMs varied considerably from problem solving to green radicalism. Due to the growing influences of religious groups, green radicalism became a dominant approach to environmentalism. With social influential expansion, ASMs adopted new repertoires that improved their cohesion; items such as legal litigation, cooperation with international environmental organizations like Friends of Earth made this opposition force stronger.

The legal litigations include the future generation litigation, constitutional appeals, and administrative litigation all of which function in strengthening ASMs. The future generation lawsuit was filed in May 2000 to the Seoul Administrative Court, and called for the revocation of the Saemangeum area reclamation license and the de-authorization of all activities involved in SRP implementation. Thirty-seven children and youths living in NJP and 175 from other parts of Korea filed as plaintiffs wanting to put a stop to the project. During the trial, lawyers pointed out the iniquity of SRP and the destruction of tidal flat as a rich repository of biological diversity, claiming that the rights of the country's future generations were being infringed. Though the case set precedence, recognizing future damages and adopting the future generations as subjects under the law, it was eventually dismissed in July 2001. The constitutional appeals for cancellation of SRP were raised again in 2001, but with lack of evidence were dismissed in January 2003. Alongside the constitution appeals, 3,540 local residents and environmental activists also filed for administration litigation, a complicated but symbolically significant battle that lasted until March 2006. The key goals of the litigation were re-determination of decision-making legitimacy including changes to the original goals of the project and curtailing the spillover effects of SRP (e.g. destruction of marine ecosystem, water quality of the lakes, economic instability).

To resist ASMs, the NJP proactive development coalition set up the All NJP People's Committee for SRP, whose membership was primarily local merchants, industrialists, development-focused civil society organizations, and organized omni-directional campaigns and rallies, such as the one-million signature-seeking campaign for SRP (Dong-A Ilbo 2000 August 18). In the end, the central government found it difficult to decide on the fate of SRP because both sides of the dispute provided strong arguments for and against its continuation. This indecisiveness, however, ended in 2001 when the ruling party lost the by-election against the opposition party. The landslide lose, pushed the central government to proceed with SRP in order to turn the political tables in their favor. The official slogan of SRP changed to "eco-friendly gradual development of SRP" (PMO 2012, pp. 75-76), which is a kind of problem-solving discourse stressing intervention of more elaborate science and technology to solve the expected environmental problems. The proactive development coalition welcomed the central government's decision despite internal discord over the contents of the SRP with one group wanting an industry complex-centered SRP and the other a farmland centered one.

In this period, local residents took on more critical roles in both the

proactive development coalition and in the ASMs. Those most exposed and vulnerable to the adverse effects of SRP were often poor and marginalized people living in Saemangeum's neighboring areas. Realizing that SRP would strongly affect their economic activities and everyday lives, they became more proactive in the movement (Ham et al. 2011; Ku and Hong 2011; Kim 2007). Local residents who were against SRP from the start were usually those who had experienced the spillover effects caused by the degradation of the tidal flat and marine ecosystem, which they often saw in the form of income decline resulted from drastic decrease of fish and shellfish catch. Basically their attitudes on environment remained obscure or they were dominated by economic interest. However, a few recognized the independent value of the tidal flat creatures and that of the marine-eco system. These remote few eventually joined the ranks of the green radicalism. On the other hand, local residents who had joined the proactive development coalition (and who also primarily lived on the neighboring islands) saw this as a well-needed investment that would give them a chance to live and prosper on the mainland (Chonbuk-Ilbo 2000 July 13).

Before 1999, the possibility of the lakes' pollution was a key issue, but in this period (1999-2003) the value comparisons between the farmland and tidal flat, the destruction of the tidal flat and the marine ecosystem, the validity of the internal work of SRP, and the legitimacy of decision making entered into a state of serious political and social debate. Through the heated arguments, it became apparent that the ASMs insisted on the protection of tidal flats, the marine ecosystem, and the creatures living regardless of human interests. The new acknowledgement of non-human creatures as salient beings with rights reflects the expansion of environmentalism in Korea.

As for regional development discourse, the notion that NJP was a mystical and thus was not challenged by local residents living in Saemangeum area and by the local civil society. They argued that the official aim of SRP was based less on improving the entire NJP, but rather benefiting only the local construction complex, and especially the land owners, construction companies, and regional elites. The local residents, and particularly those living in fishery communities would be exposed to ecological and economic repercussions despite their isolation from the active decision-making organ. But the local proactive development coalition covered up the issues by stigmatizing people to take issue with the mass media's unilateral spreading of the positive effects of SRP as being evenly distributed throughout the NJP area (Park 2002). In this period, the dominant regional development discourse was one of eco-friendly regional developmentalism, which consisted

of external resources, primarily economy-centered, and inclusive of the problem-solving environmental discourse. At the same time, ASMs embraced green radicalism in lieu of problem-solving environment discourse, and harbored critical attitudes on authoritative, economic-centered SRP development.

Restructuring the Proactive Development Coalition's Hegemony (2004-2013)

The social conflicts over SRP continued relatively quiescent after the central government decided to continue SRP in a more environmentally-safe and gradual process in May 2001. But in March 2003 Catholic, Protestant, Buddhists and Won Buddhist clerics organized the Sambo-ilbae (three steps then one bow) pilgrimage from Saemangeum area to Seoul, a 305 km distance, praying for life-peace of the world and of the Saemangeum tidal flat. It took 65 days to complete, with five to six hundred citizens participating in Sambo-ilbae consequently revitalizing the ASMs and further curtailing the proactive development coalition's efforts. In reaction, the NJP proactive development coalition organized large-scale campaigns calling for greater support of SRP in June 2003 (Hankyoreh 2003 June 2). The intensified social conflicts between those for and those against lasted until 2004 when the Seoul Central District Court ruled against SRP.

Disgruntled by the court's decision, the local proactive development coalition took more organized countermeasures, by reorganizing existing local committees to a form of league with stronger cohesion and more comprehensive membership at the local level (Hankyoreh 2003 July 17). They also set up a national committee in July 2003 calling for SRP's earlier completion. They organized a national-wide signature campaign and several rallies to garner support of the SRP. Ironically after Sambo-ilbae and the court's decision, the ASMs' driving force dissipated quickly and membership dried up, leaving behind a few litigation experts and local residents neighboring the Saemangeum area. They also transformed the Life and Peace Solidarity for Saemangeum Tidal Flat to the National Council for the Reconciliation and Reciprocity of Saemangeum in December 2005, and organized several press conferences and rallies (though these activities did not receive as wide attention and media coverage as the Sambo-ilbae in 2003).

The intensified conflicts between those for and those against SRP

continued in 2003, leading to a third-social coalition, the Alternative force, as they coined themselves. The Alternative force reflected the construction of dikes that had nearly been completed. The ASMs' radical insistence on nullifying SRP could not fully accommodate NJP's strong aspirations for development, and did not mobilize enough national support to stop SRP. The central government's eco-friendly SRP development plan was seen as a policy that could destroy the eco-system and was also viewed as impractical. The main arguments of the Alternative force combined the modification of SRP with the partial conservation of the tidal flat and marine ecosystem. The main participants of it were experts and activists based in NJP, as well as the Regional Committee for the New Plan for Real Regional Development consisting of 55 local organizations (SaeJonbuk Sinmun 2004 February 18).

At first the Alternative force was criticized by the ASMs and also by the NJP proactive development coalition, but later some of both sides began to accept this approach. Although the Alternative force's influences were relatively weak, they led to important changes in the social conflicts over SRP. First, there was the necessity of social learning particularly in the form of coming to a consensus. As those for and those against modified their stances they were also pushed to embrace certain parts of one another's arguments. And second, a window of opportunity opened in local public sphere through which the local construction complex's political-economic interests could be unilaterally expressed. Actually the feasibility of the Alternative force's approach was abundantly discussed in the local public sphere without strong oppression from the local construction complex.

In this period (2004-2013), the proactive development coalition consisted of the local construction complex, the Department of Agriculture, and the local residents. They shared the problems-solving environmental discourse, while emphasizing the management of environmental problems using scientific-technology and sea-dike construction. But there was disaccord in this case as well. For example, many disputed whether SRP was an industrial complex-centered or farmland-centered project. The ASMs, consisting of civil organizations, religious groups, and local residents, insisted on stopping the dike construction and nullifying SRP. Yet they maintained subtle differences in how they addressed green radicalism and sustainability. As for environmental discourse of the Alternatives, they accepted a mixed problem-solving and sustainability discourse. All the while, the Alternatives insisted on the completion of the sea-dike construction with partial seawater circulation and a contained industrial complex-centered development.

The key social issues of the period were seawater circulation and the

specifics of the SRP. In the case of seawater circulation, the proactive development coalition was steadfast against such an idea, whereas the ASMs and the Alternative force were dead set on them. As for the direction of SRP, the ASMs were obviously in favor of nullifying it, while the proactive development coalition maintained their promotion of eco-friendly gradual development. The Alternative force insisted on the curtailing any further developmental efforts. The proactive development coalition adopted the regional development discourse, while also pushing for a move toward an industrial complex-centered problem-solving environmental discourse. But the Alternative force and ASMs called such a path into question, and argued instead for the participation of local residents, the possibility of socio-cultural centered development, and an adoption of green radicalism and the sustainability environmental discourse. The issue on the region, NJP, was also discussed. If SRP was for the region as a whole or in part, the question remained in terms of geographically defining the territorial boundaries and providing a clear understanding to the public as to what constituted regional residency. In hindsight, the ASMs and the Alternative force tried to re-construct the NJP to make the geographic area more clearly delineated, yet the proactive development coalitions repeatedly insisted on an abstract conceptualization of the NJP geographic locale.

In the end, questions on SRP eventually evaporated, leaving no definitive social agreements. The power of the ASMs drastically declined after the Supreme Court overruled the 2004 municipal ruling and found in favor of continuing SRP in March 2006. As the legal litigations played more central role in ASMs, other movements' repertoires like rallies and Sambo-ilbae, which could mobilize the direct participations of local residents and citizens have been ousted.

After the court's decision, the sea dikes work quickly resumed, causing irreversible social-ecological changes of Saemangeum area. The artificial control of seawater circulation eventually caused the lakes to deteriorate and fish and shellfish died en masse. Bare-hands-fisheries quickly followed, dying off just as fast as the rapid decline in their stock. The physical and mental health of local fishermen had become a social crisis of large magnitude (Ku and Hong 2011). The court's decision led to a return to the proactive development coalition's regional development discourse dominated by eco-friendly regional development and an environment without strong oppositional forces. The Supreme Court's decision left SRP progress to the central government's discretion, yet the project made little to no real progress due to lack of a definitive plans and insurmountable budget limitations.

Social and Ecological Implications

Privatization of the regional public sphere

What became clear is that the development of SRP and its related industrial complexes would not only lead to redundancies with the Gunjang National Industrial Complex (another complex in the vicinity), but would also lead to mismatches in terms of the comprehensive national territorial development plan. Despite these challenges, however, SRP's strong political and economic interests saved it from a quick death. Many politicians rely heavily on supporters from NJP and were forced to buttress many of their promises and campaign ideas on SRP. In addition, economic stakeholders investing in the local construction complex had everything to lose had the developmental process been halted. To them, economic feasibility and/ or the prosperity of the local community serve as secondary concerns.

Regardless the central government enacted national projects several times and the local development invited local large-scale manufacturing companies to invest, which have paid off noticeably. Still NJP suffers from continuous falls in residential population and decreasing financial stability. Residents with high aspirations towards development were motivated to unite less proactive local residents for development. This new developmentalist view in the region led to a highly mobile yet critically-deficient atmosphere when it came to social and economic discussions. NJP proactive development coalition called residents out to support development, even to the point of exploiting them. Working for the SRP as a regional development strategy, the proactive development coalition was really only vested in the process of construction itself including large-scale reclamation and land development (Park 2009, pp. 136-140). As a result, those political and economic stakeholders who actively pushed for SRP are deemed profiteers who have little regard for the damage that the transformation of physical space could cause society.

NJP construction complex was a strongly cohesive one, because all of its members were of the same political party and shared economic interests.¹

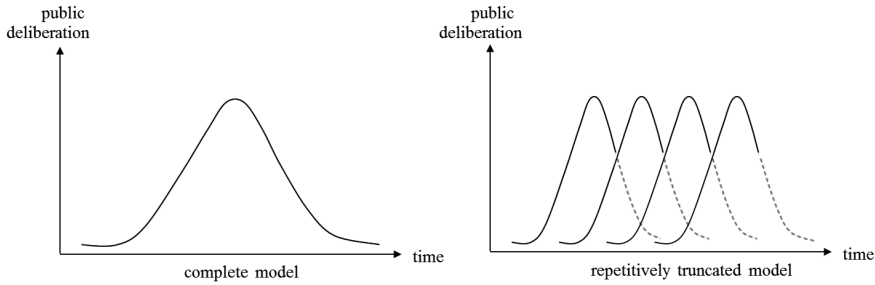
¹ This NJP construction coalition is a localized Korean version of Japan's construction state, *doken kokka* whose mode of operation is opaque, unaccountable, and therefore hard to reform. Essentially, it enables the country's powerful bureaucrats to channel the population's life savings into a wide range of debt-encrusted public bodies—those in charge of highways, bridge-building, dams and development initiatives, for instance—in which many of the same bureaucrats look forward to enjoying lucrative, post-retirement sinecures. For local politicians, the *doken kokka*

The construction complex eventually made the regional community believe that its private interests were reflective of the common interests. It privatized the local media and dominated the local public sphere, which led to the suppression of critical voices in civil society. Most of the regional media were run by members affiliated with the construction complex, and were highly defensive of local governments. As a result, the construction complex easily managed the regional public sphere and public opinion by muffling any and all voices of difference, often whitewashing social debate on the SRP. As expected, few privatized local media outlets play the role of magnifying voices from the bottom to be heard and discussed, and instead often engrain the public with a particular dogma that represents its own unilateral goals—in this case, those of the proactive development coalition. This explains why the results of the national versus the region-based public opinion survey about SRP were so sparse (Park 2009, pp. 107-111).

In addition, the privatization of the local public sphere made political and economic interests of the local construction complex that kept SRP going into non-issues. In fact, the political and economic interests of the NJP construction complex did not come to be seen as a social issue at all. In the local public sphere did SRP maintain a symbolic image rather than a specific process that could significantly alter people's lives. As a result, none of the issues discussed, or in this case, not discussed, reached a substantial agreement or compromise that could be socially accepted. Privatization of the public sphere prevents any opinions against the local construction complex, and if and when any opinion appears on the social agenda, it would not be fully discussed if it risked interrupting or hampering progress on the local construction complex. Therefore, the agenda cannot follow the complete model of agenda life-cycle model in which topics enter the public sphere relatively easily without resistance and oppression, and seriously and reflectively discussed how to address the relevant issues is very carefully and thoroughly sought. Conversely, as shown figure 2, SRP related issues entered the public sphere very quickly and came into the spotlight, but the social discussion was neither thorough nor complete. The issues were eventually buried in what many see as a media-led cover up. This process was one of repeated truncation (Park and Chang 2001, pp. 219-226).

In the public sphere where local construction complex dominated media access and where local civil society was very weak, all the issues regarding to

means promising new public-works projects—viable or not—in their constituency, in return for funds and votes (McCormack 2002, p. 11).



SOURCE.—Park and Chang (2001, pp. 200, 223).

FIG. 1.—Agenda life-cycle

SRP suddenly showed up on the social agendas, but were not addressed strongly enough to reach any agreement or solution, and instead, in a cyclical manner, often fell to the wayside.

The emerging of new environmentalism

The SRP transformed the tidal flat and marine ecosystem, eventually leading to the destruction of nature and the environment. Clearly, environmental change caused by SRP led to serious change of local residents' subsistence and local community thus making social conflicts over SRP also environmental conflicts. We can therefore say that SRP culminated in the interaction between environment and society. In this process, there were decision-makers like as politicians, bureaucrats, and experts who had derived benefit from SRP on the one hand, while on the other there were local residents who took little to no roles in decision making, but were instead forced to change their lives as a result of the SRP. The social conflicts over SRP included the legitimacy of the SRP decision making as well as environment issues, yet the key issues were still environmental issues such as the possibility of lake pollution and the value of the tidal flat and marine ecosystem. For these reasons, environmental movement organizations mobilized, eventually playing essential roles in the newly created or dormant ASMs.

Social conflict over SRP was a turning point in Korean environmental movements in terms of expansion of environmentalism as a social issue and in terms of the diversification of their organizational redirections. The expansion of environmentalism is also represented symbolically in the labels "Future generation litigation" and "Solidarity for Life and Peace of Saemangeum

Tidal Flat.” These two cases expand the issue of environmentalism to include both youth as well as non-human subjects as endowed with rights and future rights protection. Currently, the green radicalism stressing the life and peace of all living creatures is a notion accepted by many Koreans.

The future generation litigation pointed out clearly that the Saemangeum tidal flat and marine ecosystem cannot be owned exclusively by specific regions or even by specific generations. It not only extended the meaning of environmentalism but also the prospects of future debates. It raised a critical question about who are ‘we’ when it comes to conflicts such as those over SRP. This is unlike previous environmental controversies, many of which were based on the present or near future without a concern for the distant temporal effects. The litigations on SRP including the future generation’s litigation were possible thanks to democratization and the maturation of the judiciary and improved expertise of legal advisors who were much more interested in environment, and diversification among relevant experts supporting the trials.

The litigation could be seen as an efficient means of resolving the conflict by carrying out claims and refutations based on scientific expertise within the judicial system before any physical confrontation. In the case of SRP, the central government was a disputing party who tried to keep SRP going and at the same time the dispute settlement body could help to resolve potential areas of serious conflict. The judiciary intervention as a result of the litigation could help tone down the conflict by order of the court, which would have binding force. Indeed, while the case was tried in the court, confrontations between the proponents and those against SRP noticeably decreased, because the disputes on SRP were reenacted in the court through testimonies given by experts. Most of the key participants in the conflicts included local residents and members of the local construction complex, all of whom attended the trials as witnesses and as part of the audience. However, the conflicts between participants, experts, and judge panels failed to reach unanimous agreement on any one of the issues. For one, verification using science-technology was problematic, and the court took the political rather than judicial stance based primarily on central government and national public opinions. It is noteworthy that in spite of the litigation route taken by the ASMs, while the case was being tried in court, the ASMs failed to organize a noticeable campaign against SRP. On the contrary, the ASMs that spread across civil society shrank to include only legal experts, scientists, and related professionals

The public support for the green radicalism’s life and peace was

increased by religious groups, which began to play stronger roles in the ASMs. Religious groups' participation spelled the broadening of the scope of participants, pushing people with various backgrounds to join ASMs to put environment first. These religious groups stressed life and peace, while also attempting to reframe the social conflicts over SRP from human's interest to all living creatures. The dominant discourse of the ASMs moved from sustainability to green radicalism, a direct assault on the industrialism and on the contemporary liberal capitalist transformation causing environmental problems. Of course, there were several streams of green radicalism in ASMs even prior, however the shift to green radicalism modified the boundaries of debate from an anthropocentric frame to emphasis on the tidal flat itself and recognition of all the living creatures. The most symbolic campaign remains, however, the Sambo-ilbae. We cannot exactly say whether these changes in environmentalism and the related critical reflections on the socio-political structure alone were the causes that kept SRP and conflicts over it going.

Compromised environmentalism

There was no environmental consideration of SRP before 1996, when opposition movements commenced. Although the proactive development coalition acknowledged that the large-scale reclamation work inevitably caused the change and damages to the tidal flat and marine ecosystem, they still claim that the side effects are manageable by science and technology. However, critics who have delved deeper into the environmental degradation have serious doubts as to whether the water quality is manageable or whether the restoration of the tidal flat and marine ecosystem neighboring Saemangeum area pan out according to the SRP prospected outcome. As the conflicts between those for and against SRP grew, the proactive development coalition considered the environmental issues more seriously though they remained partial to how they would address the possibility of the lake pollution and how they would assess the value of the tidal flat. However, they still believed that the environmental problems SRP might cause could be solved with elaborate technological advances and systemic scientific interventions. These perfunctory changes to environmentalism surfaced throughout the official developmental discourse.

As critics' claims received more and more attention, support against SRP grew. This heightened social attention eventually pushed the central government toward consideration of adopting an eco-friendly gradual development plan for SRP in 2001. The key element of the eco-friendly gradual develop-

ment was the management of river water quality. This new direction led to an increase of about 1.5 times the original plan, leading to the launching of countermeasures to ensure water quality and the steady maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. In 2001, the Saemangeum Environment Committee, the Conservation Committee for Water Quality in NJP government, and the Sluice Gate Operation Committee in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry were set up to drive SRP's eco-friendly plan while monitoring and evaluating water quality and the marine environment.

Even though the ASMs failed at nullifying SRP, they were able to compel SRP to change its environmental direction. Though SRP started off from developmentalism, with little to no serious concern of the environmental consequences, the eco-friendly development became an issue that specifically focused on an environmental problem-solving discourse in the end. This discourse recognizes the existence of ecological problems, but treats them as tractable within the current political-economic system. It also emphasizes the role of experts rather than citizens, and puts scientific and technical expertise organized into a bureaucratic hierarchy first (Dryzek 1996, pp. 61-76). This discourse was accepted not only by bureaucrats and politicians, but also by most residents of the region. The eco-friendly development of SRP's official discourse had the effect of preventing critical debate on the underlying developmentalism and socio-political structure that made SRP possible in the first place.

This eco-friendly development scheme addressed the environmental problems on a superficial level, but did not address the essential socio-political issues at all. Items such as the political-economic interests of the construction complex, non-democratic policy making processes, problems regarding low economic feasibility, and the possibility of the development not benefiting the local residents (as argued by the ASMs) were all but ignored. This new compromised environmentalism imposed limitations on social discussion of SRP.

Conclusion

SRP commenced in 1991 and the sea dikes were completed in April 2010. A special act on SRP was amended in 2012 in the name of the balanced national development and the enhancement of national competitiveness, turning SRP into an eco-friendly, cutting-edge industrial complex. The special act may not be the end of the social conflict and controversy over SRP,

but rather another beginning to a new controversy. The aims and action plan of SRP remain unclear, a situation that has lapsed for nearly twenty years.

The arguments between the national agriculture policy and the national developmental policy, the insufficient economic feasibility, and the serious debates between the ASMs and local residents, the national civil society (including religious groups and environmental organizations) and the various other groups were not enough to block the SRP.

The conflict over SRP not only involves political, social and environmental aspects, but also complex structure and a diverse set of participants that make it more complicated than those of other Korean environmental conflicts. The complex social and environmental problems surrounding SRP also accurately portrays a new conflict-oriented environment that Korean society is currently facing.

The under-developed NJP, the local residents' strong aspirations for development, the politicians seeking political support throughout the region using SRP, the economic interests of local-national construction complex, the common interests of proactive development coalition (regardless of the real prosperity of the region), the privatization of the public sphere, and the lack of responsibility of political system were all undeterred. Although the conflict over SRP appeared as an environmental conflict, it is better characterized as socio-political one. Agreement on the economic feasibility of SRP or on the scientific expertise of tidal flats and marine environment is not enough to solve the problem; we need to change our socio-political system.

The democratic system is vital to resolve the heated environmental conflicts regarding the SRP. But the democratic system does not necessarily ensure an ecologically sound and sustainable society. As Eckersley (1998) pointed out that even the advanced liberal democracy faces the ecological failings, the ecological inadequacies of liberal democracy arise from the representative deficiencies, the time horizon deficiencies, the knowledge deficiencies, the political deficiencies, and the implementation deficiencies.²

² The representation deficit is the limited scope of formal representation on behalf of the 'new environmental constituency', namely, future generations, non-human species and persons living outside the territory of the polity. The time horizon deficit means the narrow time horizons of political deliberation, which create a pressure for expedient rather than prudent political decisions in relation to many ecological problems. The knowledge deficit is limitations in knowledge and understanding of complex ecological problems. The political rationality deficit is the partisan and competitive bargaining processes of democratic will formation, which are not conducive to the protection of collective interests such as environmental protection. And the implementation deficit is the compartmentalized and discretionary nature of much environmental law and administration, which impede a concerted and integrated response to ecological problems (Eckersley 1995, p. 348).

Of course, a democratic system without these deficiencies does not automatically ensure ecologically sustainable collective decision-making. However, if we acknowledge these deficiencies and complement them, at least, we will be able to avoid the vicious cycle of 'social conflict- collective decision that socially fails to obtain legitimacy – social conflict, which was obviously shown in the case of SRP.

The social conflict over SRP eventually promoted a green radicalism that emphasized life and peace, which was widely accepted as the strongest resistance for the ASMs, and the proactive development coalition which used to consider environment only as a means or tool for regional development adopted an eco-friendly development scheme to avoid further conflict. But, if the discourse of life and peace emphasized in the personal and spiritual aspect, instead of addressing socio-structural factors that make life and peace impossible, and if the discourse of eco-friendly development, which the proactive development coalition promoted, leads to more elaborated interventions in environment with science and technology, such actions may spur more mega development projects similar to SRP and anti-movements that appeal only to personal ecological sensitivity. The complexity of social and environmental conflict that was shown from SRP confirms that it is necessary to create an ecologically sound and sustainable society that strives to realize both democracy and ecology, and also create more ecological and democratic citizen, that is, the actor of ecological citizenship.

(Submitted: August 20, 2014; Reviewed: November 4, 2014; Accepted: November 27, 2014)

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