

# From Decommonisation to Re-commonisation: A Conceptual Approach to the Study of Social Change Based on the Theory of the Commons\*

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*Today, commons is becoming an attractive term for more and more political and social forces to explain their political and social goals. However, there is a large gap between the use of the word commons in civil society and in academic circles. The institutional commons studies led by the Ostromians have not been a useful tool for new creation or proliferation of commons. I think changing the understanding of commons centered on resources and goods to understand it as centering on commoning as a social practice is more useful not only from a practical perspective, but also from a theoretical one. Through the understanding based on commoning, we can connect the problem of formation of commons to social change or system transition, we can examine the role of Commons movement and politics in this process. Therefore, this paper aims to develop concepts and analysis frameworks to deal with the social movements and politics of commons. To this end, the process through which commons is re-appropriated through (re-)commoning is defined as the re-commonisation process, and it is argued that commons movements play a crucial role in the re-commonisation process. The commons movements have the potential to make an important contribution to the achievement of commons-based social transformation by ecologically reconstructing local communities, expanding users' participation, and realizing self-governing norms. This paper will show the validity of these arguments with an analysis of the process of revitalizing villages through ecotourism, which is in progress in a village in Jeju.*

**Keywords:** commons, Ostrom, commonisation, re-commonisation, commoning, jeju, commons movement

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## Problem Setting: Emergence of the Commons Paradigm

Today, the concept of commons seems to be used more frequently everywhere as a political and economic concept of our times. Leftists and rightists, neo-liberalists and neo-Keynesians, conservatives and anarchists are using this term in their political involvement.

The World Bank and the United Nations appropriated the concept of commons in the early 1990s. With the ostensible cause of protecting biodiversity and global commons, the World Bank has transformed rainforests into ecologically protected areas to ensure access for those who can afford the costs of ecotourism, while driving out those who had been earning a livelihood there (Isla 2001). The United Nations has amended international laws governing access to the oceans in order to concentrate the right to use seawater in the hands of several governments, also under the pretext of protecting the common heritage of mankind (Buck 1998). On the other hand, since the Zapatistas revolted in protest against the legislation to dissolve *ejidal* land in San Cristobal de las Casas on December 31, 1993, the concept of the commons has provided a foundation for convergence among anarchists, Marxists, socialists, ecologists, and eco-feminists and gradually obtained popularity (Federici 2011).

In this global tide, several local governments in South Korea recently launched policies for urban and rural regeneration with models such as a shared economy and shared cities (Fedorenko 2017). Within civil society too, there have been increasing attempts to explain problems in agricultural, mountain and fishing village regions such as the decline of the regions due to decreases in populations and regional extinction, and also problems around urban spaces such as gentrification, with the commons theory and find alternatives. In particular, in the case of Jeju-do in the southern part of South Korea, interest in commons has been rising to the extent that it is called "The Island of Commons" because many natural resources such as village forests, village common pastures, and underground water managed as public water, which can be said to be traditional commons, remain there (Choe, Jeong and Yoon 2016a; 2016b).

Interest in commons is commonly found in the areas of academic and social movements. However, there seems to be some differences in the contents and implications of the concept of commons understood in the two areas. In the academic area, commons studies in South Korea mainly focused on methods to efficiently use existing resources or evaluated the success and

failure cases of collective actions in light of the institutional design principles proposed by Elinor Ostrom (Jeong 2016). Ostrom's research program, which is a base research project in the academic area, understood commons as resources that have subtractability and non-excludability, that is, common-pool resources (CPRs), while understanding the process of building good institutions and governance systems suitable for the sustainable management of resources as collective action (Ostrom 1990; 1994; 2005). This approach understands the existence/absence of cooperation for the sustainable use of resources among users as an important problem situation surrounding commons. However, the topography of demand for commons in progress in reality and movements around this demand are beyond the problem situation presumed by Ostrom. The anti-globalization movement, and in particular, the anti-capitalist movement, which has been heightened since the 2000s, has been centered on commons and communities such as land and indigenous villages, and has been evaluated as providing a new way of devising alternatives to the state and capital (De Marcellus 2003). As can be seen in the movements to create urban commons occurring in the center of the world system or the resistance movements to protect traditional commons in progress in peripheral regions, the emergence of social conflicts around commons or social movements that demand commons require work to theorize the principles of change in commons rather than those of continuation or maintenance of commons.

We need to start by finding an appropriate concept that can explain the various forms of commons in contemporary capitalist society. Section 2 looks at the fact that although the concept of enclosure that warned of the extinction of commons along with the development of capitalism evolved into the concept of "new enclosure," it should be supplemented by the concept of decommonisation to describe the diverse realities of commons. In Section 3, the fact that the understanding of Ostromians who grasp commons as resources given in advance for use by users cannot be an appropriate basis for the theory of change will be illuminated, and it will be suggested that commons should be viewed as a social practice from the perspective of commoning. In addition, a framework will be presented for the analysis of social movements that organize commoning as a social practice, that is, commons movements,<sup>1</sup> which form commons within the

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, 'commons movement' refers to the spontaneous movement of citizens and local residents that requires the people's rights to the Commons, and is an important branch of the contemporary social movements.

environment in reality, which is hostile to commons. Section 4 reviews the process by which the forest of a village that was a regional commons in Jeju, South Korea was designated as a national nature reserve so that the relationship between the village community and the forest was severed, but re-commoning was practiced with various ecotourism programs proposed by environmental activists so that the village recovered the forest as a commons. Finally, in section 5, the implications of studies regarding commons movements for commons theory and social movement theory will be summarized.

## From Enclosure to Recommonisation

### *From Enclosure to New Enclosure*

Why is the concept of commons becoming the center of political debates in modern social movements despite the old image coming to mind when we hear the word commons? Silvia Federici mentioned two reasons (Federici 2011). The first reason is the decline of the nationalistic revolutionary model that has influenced radical movements to construct alternatives to capitalism over the last few decades. This has led many citizens and activists to yearn for a third alternative that is not a state or market-oriented solution. The second reason is that the neo-liberalistic attempts to subordinate all forms of life and knowledge to the logic of the market heighten our attention to the danger that will be faced by living in a world where we will no longer have access to the sea, forests, trees, animals, and drinking water. In addition, the neo-liberalistic logic of the market is blocking exchanges of information or creative inventions, and free access to common human knowledge even in the digital world with the establishment of intellectual property rights. This phenomenon can be said to be a 'New Enclosure' that is happening now in our modern society.

One of the key concepts that explains the relationship between modern capitalist society and commons is the concept of this enclosure or primitive accumulation. Karl Marx dealt with this historical process in *Capital Vol.1*, "Primitive Accumulation." Marx identified the process of creating modern capital relations as one of separating workers from the possession of their means of production in Chapter 26, "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation." That is, so-called primitive accumulation is nothing but a historical process of separation between producers and the means of production. Marx states

that although the process of converting producers into wage workers was one of liberating producers from subjugation as serfs and the coercion of guilds, the producers could sell themselves as wage workers only after they had been deprived of all means of production and all the means of assurance of survival provided by conventional feudalism. The core of this process was the plundering of land from rural residents. According to Marx, “the plundering of the properties of the church conducted with ruthless violence, the fraudulent transfer of state land, the embezzlement of common land, the plundering of feudal and clan ownership, and the conversion of the plundered properties into modern private ownership, all of these were idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. ... And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire” (Marx 1976, pp. 874-875).

According to the traditional Marxist interpretation, Marx's concept of primitive accumulation indicates the historical processes that gave birth to the “preconditions” of the capitalist mode of production. That is, these processes are preconditions of capitalism because enclosure or primitive accumulation existed before capitalism and these processes of expropriation formed and developed markets for labor and land. In this narrative, once primitive accumulation occurred, it could not but be separated from the logic of capital, whether theoretically or temporally. Therefore, enclosure as a process of primitive accumulation is recognized as an event that has already occurred in the past.

In *Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Karl Polanyi defined land, labor, and money as “fictitious commodities,” unlike actual commodities produced for sale in the market, and argued that if these fictitious commodities were treated with the same logic used for actual commodities, destructive consequences might result (Polanyi 1957). Polanyi explained social changes in the 19th century with the concept of “double movement.” When the laissez-faire movement to expand the horizon of markets to the realm of fictitious commodities including land has brought destructive consequences, including the Great Depression, by breaking down the market's self-regulating function, movements occurred to protect society against these destructive consequences.

Polanyi's discussion of “double movement” can be said to be a theorization of the collision between the force that forms capital relations through enclosure and commodification within capitalist society and the forces that resist the formation of capital relations through counter enclosure. Massimo De Angelis criticizes the traditional Marxist interpretation of enclosure as

limiting enclosure as an issue of genealogy in the linear model of capitalist development, while arguing that if capital is understood as a social force that has the totalizing drives to coexist with other impetuses that restrict them instead of a totalized system, enclosure as primitive accumulation can be understood as a “continuous feature of capital logic” rather than a single occurrence (De Angelis 2014). Such an understanding of primitive accumulation begins with the theoretical and political work of the Midnight Notes Collective, which restored the pair of concepts of enclosure and commons. In *Midnight Notes 10: The New Enclosures* published in 1990, they studied the debt crisis that swept Africa and South America in the 1980s and the restructuring programs of the World Bank and IMF with the concept of new enclosure. The implementation of restructuring programs by international organizations has led to the extortion of land and resources by transnational capital and has heightened the wave of resistance to it.

Though access to universal wealth is desired, the institutional forms of the world market that are using the “debt crisis” to crate the New Enclosures are physically under a self-conscious attack throughout Africa, Latin America and Asia. Not only is the money form of the New Enclosures being resisted, there has been a world-wide land war taking place in the 1980s. Up the Andes into Central America and Mexico there has been desperate and Chronic armed struggle over the control of land. (*Midnight Notes 10*, p. 5)

At the same time, the debt crisis and concern over the resultant destruction of social life and resistance remind us of the fact that commons were still operating around the world (Caffentizis 2010). Many still had collective access to commons, such as land and water, outside the wage labor market, and at the same time, many wage workers were able to survive in the period of resistance, such as strikes, through ties with the common land of villages. In short, the new enclosure made visible the world of communal properties or relationships, which were not given values or were believed to have become extinct until they were threatened by privatization. As pointed out by Federici, the new enclosure paradoxically shows that not only did commons not disappear, but new forms of social cooperation are also constantly being produced (Federici 2011).

The discovery and theorization of the new enclosure as a new strategy to accumulate capital in the period of neo-liberalistic globalization and the commons (protection and creation) movements as resistance to the strategy developed in a quite different way from the institutionalist approach chosen

by Ostrom, and the theoretical sources were also different. The point here is that the idea of commons is understood to be associated with social movements that resist new enclosure and that not only the maintenance of commons but also the creation of new commons are recognized as important issues.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in an analysis of the urban garden movement in modern America and Europe and the global occupation movement in 2011-12, Cangelosi (2014) claimed the crucial importance of social movements in the definition of urban spaces while arguing that these movements strongly shared the practical elements of commons. As such, the recent interest in new enclosure strongly indicates the existence and new generation of commons in modern society and highlights its practical aspects and its linkage with social movements as important issues.

### *Commonisation, Decommonisation, and Re-commonisation*

However, the implications of the concept of New Enclosure for the modern way of existence of commons is somewhat indirect. Commonisation, decommonisation, and re-commonisation can be considered as concepts for thinking about social change centering on commons. For these concepts to be valid, our understanding of the changes in commons in modern society should be changed. That is, we should leave behind the notion that commons are the inherited legacy of pre-modern society, and therefore exist only within a limited scope and underdeveloped conditions. Commons should be understood as beings formed and reformed to satisfy the needs of the public in modern daily life. When seen from this viewpoint, it can be said that, as suggested by Polanyi's concept of dual movements, two opposing and continuous processes exist, that is, one through which various social groups including communities form and expand commons by creating common wealth and the other by which the common wealth created is privatized or monopolized by capital or state power so that commons are dissolved or destroyed. In short, although the tendency to monopolize, deprive, or privatize the common wealth produced by social cooperation or capitalist production exists as the dominant dynamic force in modern capitalist relations of production on the one hand, the dynamic forcer to form,

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<sup>2</sup> Interest in the formation of a new commons has two other sources, not emphasized here. One is the movement that requires a free access to Digital Commons that has been formed since the mid-1990s, and the other is the movement that seeks to achieve the goal of social transformation through the creation and institutionalization of the Urban Commons. See Ostrom and Hess (2007) for the former and the P2P Foundation (2015) and Bauwens and Niaros (2018) for the latter.

maintain, strengthen, and expand commons as a socioeconomic basis also exists centering on places where cooperative social relations or cooperative joint production activities exist on the other hand. Of course, these two dynamic forces function in remarkably asymmetric power relations, and the dominant principles of modern society are hostile to the formation and proliferation of commons. Therefore, it can be understood that the conflicts and struggles over how to distribute the common wealth formed through the cooperative process and over who will own the commons, which are the source and result of common production and use practices, will continuously occur in various times and spaces of modern society. As a result of these struggles and conflicts, the forms of existence of Commons could be very diverse.

The concept of enclosure or counter enclosure can be said to have clear limitations in analyzing these changes. Enclosure indicates only the dissolution or privatization of commons and does not show the diverse forms of existence of commons existing in modern society. A conceptual tool is necessary to pay attention to changes in commons per se and theorize the process of such changes. Prateep Kumar Nayak and Fikret Berkes proposed the concepts of commonisation and decommonisation to analyze changes in commons to see how they can be managed as commons for long periods of time. According to Nayak and Berkes, “‘commonisation’ is understood as a process through which a resource get converted into a jointly used resource under commons institutions that deal with excludability and subtractability, and ‘decommonisation’ refers to a process through which a jointly used resource under commons institutions loses the essential characteristics” (Nayak and Berkes 2012, p. 132). Using the Chilika Lagoon, the largest lagoon in India, as a case, they illustrate how resource can be commonised and decommonised.<sup>3</sup> According to their conclusions, “success of commonisation as a process depending on the close links between people and resources, not so much for economic dependence but for a more inherent and holistic relationship, which find expression in phrases such as ‘Maa Chilika (Mother Chilika)’ and fishing as ‘a way of life.’” Hence, “there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Several factors acted together to shape the formation of commons in the Chilika Lagoon: favourable resource conditions, stronger horizontal and weaker vertical linkages, customary rights and local rules recognised, minimal state control with local institutions in command, relative low population density. And their analysis shows key factors of the decommonisation in Chilika: impacts of resource degradation, stronger vertical and weaker horizontal linkages, customary rights and local rules contested, policies favourable to privatization and state control, tighter state control with centralized institutions in command, relatively high and increasing population density (Nayak and Berkes 2011, pp. 137-140).



need to deal with people and resources together, rather than each in isolation. This is a key determinant of successful commonisation; disconnection of people from their resources is thus a major driver of decommonisation” (Nayak and Berker 2012 pp. 142-143). However, since these concepts still adopt a resource-based approach, the relationship between community and resources is only explained in institutional contexts and is not clarified through the practice of those who make the relationship. So there is a leap from concepts and analysis to conclusion.

In order to deal with the change of commons in places where institutional factors are not sufficiently formed or where existing institutions are hostile to the formation of commons, it is necessary to analyze the commons movement and politics in which existing social forces and institutions conflict. In addition, the concept of Commons should be redefined around social processes and practices.

New institutions can be created from the results of Commons movement and politics, but they may be elaborated from the elements of existing institutions, as can be seen in the case of institutionalist approaches. In this respect, the process of commonisation can be said to be one of re-commonisation to some extent. Re-commonisation refers to the process through which the relationships between humans and nature and between humans and resources are reconstructed to be more cooperative and ecological so that commons are reconstructed. The usefulness of the concept of re-commonisation is to show that the commons that exist in modern capitalist society exist in various forms in terms of the relationship between people and nature, people and resources.

In Jeju-do, Korea there still remains village common pastures and farm associations made according to the instructions of the Japanese colonial authorities in the 1930s, when Korea was a Japanese colony. At that time, a total of 116 village common pastures were made, with a total area of 185.9 km<sup>2</sup>, which corresponds to about 10% of the total area of Jeju-do (Jeong 2017, p. 134). According to a survey by the Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, there were 57 village common pastures with a total area of 63.27 km<sup>2</sup> in 2014. Of the 57 common pastures, 38 were directly managed by farm associations and 17 were leased to livestock farming enterprises or other revenue-making businesses. Even among the common pastures directly managed by farm associations, not so many are used firsthand by association members for livestock farming. In short, although pastures exist as resources, there are no livestock farming activities. The changes leading to the current situation involve various aspects of modernization such as the spread of tangerine

farming as a new source of income, the supply of agricultural machinery and chemical fertilizers, and the catastrophic damage to cattle farms due to the government's wrongful livestock policies. As a result of the craze for tourism development that has struck the whole area of Jeju-do since the 1990s, livestock farms in Jeju have become targets of speculation by external capital and the farmland sold to external capital has been converted into large resorts and golf courses. In addition, the Jeju-do government has been presenting a vision of an International Free City since the 2000s while implementing policies that encourage the active investment of external capital (Jeong 2015). Because of these external political and economic changes, even in the case of remaining common pastures, many farm association members wish to sell the pastures to obtain land sales revenue. The 57 common pastures show various relationships between resources and communities. In this sense, decommodification yields various results at different levels and allows us to think of the diversity of commons existing in reality, unlike the single result of enclosure (i.e., privatization). The restoration of these relationships can be said to depend on whether village members or farm association members can reinvent a method of (re-)commoning the pastures as commons so that they can convert "commons without commoning" into "commons with commoning." The concept of re-commonisation indicates the social process to restore the relationship between commons and communities severed due to the absence of commoning.

## Social Practice Theoretical Approach to Commons and Commons Movement

### *Social practice theoretical approach to commons and commoning*

The academic interest in commons dates back to a paper titled "The Tragedy of the Commons", published in 1968 by Garrett Hardin. In this paper, he denied the possibility of voluntary cooperation among users of commons and presented the thesis that commons are eventually destroyed due to competition among "rational" users (Hardin 1968). The book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* published by Elinor Ostrom in 1990 was the outcome of conducting empirical surveys of the cases of commons throughout the world that were sustainably managed for several decades at a minimum and several hundred years at a maximum and theoretically integrating the survey results (Ostrom 1990). Unlike

Hardin's argument, she argued that resource users have a real ability to voluntarily form rules and norms, and organized the similarities among enduring, self-governing CPR institutions into eight design principles (Ostrom 1990, pp.88-102).

Ostrom, however, limited the objects of her studies to what she called common-pool resources (CPRs). She proposed this concept while participating in a debate on the classification of goods within economics with Vincent Ostrom (Ostrom and Ostrom 1977). Thanks to the contribution of the Ostrom couple, goods in economics were classified into four types: private goods, toll goods (club goods), CPRs, and public goods depending on whether they are easy or difficult to exclude potential appropriators and whether they are subtractable or non-subtractable.

CPRs are one of the four types of economic goods and mean goods with high non-excludability and high subtractability as attributes. They share the subtractability of resource units with private goods and share the difficulties of exclusion with public goods (Ostrom et al. 1994, pp. 4-8). That is, long-standing commons management systems evolve in the process of solving the problem of free riding resulting from high non-excludability and the problems of congestion, overuse, and destruction of resource systems arising from high subtractability.

However, Ostrom did not give a clear definition of commons in her studies or provide a clear explanation of the relationship between commons and CPRs. Therefore, commons and CPRs are often treated as the same things, i.e., resources or goods, by researchers who follow Ostrom's argument. This issue is described in detail in *The Drama of the Commons* published by the National Research Council. Ostrom and other researchers explain that confusion was caused by the use of the concept "common property resource," which had long been used in economics and policy literature because "common property," which is a property term, was used to refer to resources with certain natures in academic debates conducted around 1985 (Ostrom et al. 2002, p. 17).

The term "common property" implies a kind of management arrangement created by humans rather than a characteristic of the resource itself. The preferred term for resources from which it is hard to exclude users is "common-pool" resource. The term "common-pool" focuses on the characteristics of the resource rather than on the human arrangements used to manage it. Such a resource could be left as open access without rules or could be managed by a government, as private property, or by a common

property regime. ... The term *commons* is used in everyday language to refer to a diversity of resources or facilities as well as to property institutions that involve some aspect of joint ownership or access. As mentioned, analytical advantages exist in separating the concept of the resource or good valued by humans from the concept of the rules that may be used to govern and manage the behavior and actions of humans using these resources. In this view, a *common-pool resource* is a valued natural or human-made resource or facility that is available to more than one person and subject to degradation as a result of overuse. Common-pool resources are ones for which exclusion from the resource costly and one person's use subtracts from what is available to others (Ostrom et al. 2002, pp. 17-18, emphasis in original).

Two implications can be derived from the understanding above. First, unlike Ostrom, who implicitly equated commons with CPRs, in the above description, commons are revealed as a complex of resources and institutions. Nevertheless, it is understood that CPRs and property institutions are combined somewhat mechanically. In particular, property institutions, although important, represent only some of the social relations surrounding commons. Second, resources per se cannot be said to be commons yet. Understanding commons with the typology of goods with specific attributes can be criticized in that it is an underlying naturalistic and objectivist understanding. For instance, excludability does not rely on the intrinsic characteristics of goods, but on the social relations that make exclusion possible (Choe and Yun 2017; Helfrich 2012). Therefore, we should focus on the relational and constructive aspects of commons. Bennholdt-Thomsen (2012, p. 83) focus on relational aspects of commons: "Commons are far more than the material of which they consist ... They are part of a web of relationship, both concrete matter and a process in motion, all in one." Helfrich (2012) argued that even common goods per se "don't simply exist— they are created." It can be said that the process of commonisation or re-commonisation is necessary here. Therefore, the core of understanding of commons can be said to be the relationship between the relational nature of commons and commoning as a social practice that constitutes it.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, 'commons' are a subsystem of the larger social ecological system and exist as complexes with various elements. 'Resources' are natural or manmade systems that include both tangible and intangible ones. Those who are involved in using and transforming resources are often organized into 'communities' and constitute groups of users through certain

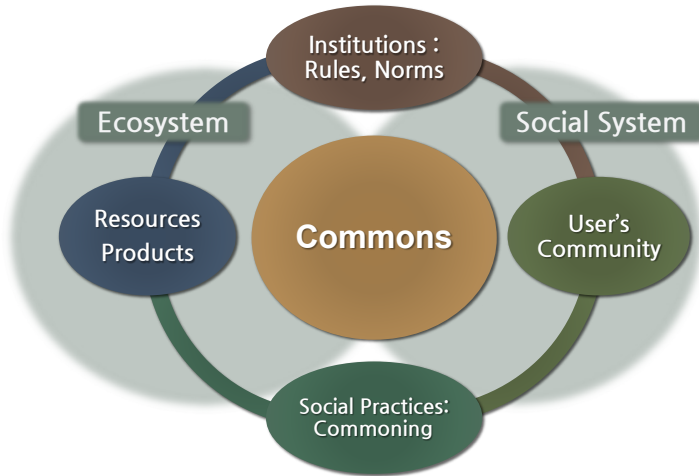


FIG. 1.—Composition of Commons

boundaries. These user groups form ‘institutions’ such as rules and norms in the process of using resources. Therefore, “traditional commons” appear as complexes of resources, communities, and rules (commons = resources + community + rules). Here, social practices are routinized rather than being creative and transformative. However, in the case of “emerging commons,” which are newly created in an environment hostile to commons, dominated by the control logic of the state and the profit-making logic of capital, the boundaries between user groups are often open or unclear, and the boundaries of resources are also uncertain. Institutions, including rules and norms, emerge in conditions that can hardly operate stably. For this reason, Stefan Meretz, who conceptually distinguished between traditional commons and emerging commons, argued that the concept of emerging commons should be understood as “commons = resources + commoning + products” (Meretz 2012). This idea, which included in the composition of commons not only resources that are to be used and consumed, but also products that are produced, can be said to be an important development. By the way, not only products but also new types of relationships among humans mediated by commons, including institutions, are regarded as being produced by commoning. In short, what is important in emerging commons is the fact that various elements including resources and products are combined, formed, and reformed through the practice of commoning.

Unlike Meretz, which overlooks the importance of institutions in emerging commons, Acksel et al. (2015, p. 134) describe commons “as an

institutionalized, legal, and infrastructural arrangement for a practice-commoning.” However, it is important to distinguish between the two elements: First, it is something that is supposed to be the commons, some tangible and/or intangible matter(resource/product)<sup>4</sup>. Second, there is some sort of social infrastructure, some specific institutional arrangement. The latter could be said to be part of the social form of that matter. According to Euler (2018, p. 11), “A social form shapes the materiality of the matter. It is the shape that a matter becomes if people interact (e.g. modify) with it in a specific manner. Hence, it can be said to be shaped by the social practices, the way of doing things and relating to each other. The social form is what people perceive when they see, feel, think about that matter. ... The Social form is what gives the matter its specific way of being (and becoming). ... The way people relate to something depends heavily on what they are relating to. And this does not only have to do with the materiality of either the humans or of what with which they interact. ... Hence, our dealing with something also affects that just as we are affected by whatever we interact with (and to be precise, also what we do not interact with).”

Although Figure 1 indicates that user groups or communities make tangible/intangible beings called resources/products obtain their meaning as commons through the practices of humans, it is important that the practices also change the users or their communities. The community should be understood as a network between people who are formed and reformed through the commoning process, rather than fixed entities that existed before these interactions.

To sum up, commoning can be considered the social practices that make commons what they are. Vice versa, the commons is the social form of matter that is determined by commoning. Hence, a matter only becomes a commons if people predominantly relate to it by commoning. In reality, commons and commoning cannot but be affected by and have relationships with various logics and powers of the state or markets. Therefore, it is necessary to examine whether or not the aspects of commoning are dominant among the various aspects of social practices and movements in actual progress. These understandings, however, raise additional questions as to how specific aspects of commoning in reality can be defined. Euler (2018) integrated the

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<sup>4</sup> “Resources shall be defined as those tangible and/or intangible objects that are mostly subject to use or consumption whereas products are those things predominantly referred to as being produced. The former can become the latter and the latter can become the former, depending on how people relate to them. “Matter” shall serve as umbrella term and include both, products and resources” (Euler 2018, p. 11).

views of many authors who studied commoning to define four essential features of commoning, which are activities as (re)produsage,<sup>5</sup> needs-satisfaction and voluntariness, peers and self-organization, and inclusiveness and mediation.<sup>6</sup> That is, commoning can be conceptualized as “voluntary and inclusively self-organized activities and mediation of peers who aim at satisfying their needs” (Euler 2018, p.12). This understanding helps to understand that commoning has features that are clearly distinct from the logic of the state or capital in the sense that it constitutes the social relations surrounding matter.

### *An analysis framework for studying commons movements and commons politics*

Many scholars argue that the logic of commons is positioned on the opposite side of the logic of capital, which is a dominant principle in reality, and the logic of commodities, which is a basic component of capitalism (Bollier and Helfrich 2012). For example, Euler (2016, p. 108) conceptualize commons as being the logical counterpart of the commodity, as tangible or intangible products embedded in self-determined institutions of commoning. Similarly, Meretz (2010) asserts that “the Commons has the potential to replace the commodity as the determining form of re-/producing societal living conditions.” However, “Such a replacement can only occur, if communities constitute themselves for every aspect of life, in order to take ‘their’ commons back and to reintegrate them into a new need-focused logic of re-/production.” In short, substitution from commodities to commons requires the practice of re-commoning, and it cannot but have a strong political nature in a society dominated by the logic of commodities.

To discuss commons movements and commons politics, it is useful to start with the distinction between traditional and emerging commons by Stefan Meretz (2012). If traditional commons have been maintained for a certain period of time while developing systems for the sustainable use of

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of (re) produsage emphasizes the holistic characteristics of commoning. When explaining communing, feminist researchers such as Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Silvia Federici emphasize the crucial aspects of caring and reproduction, unlike existing views that have emphasized use and production (Bennholdt-Thomsen 2012; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999; Federici 2011). (Re) produsage means social practices in which usage, production, and reproduction are integrated.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, these features may also appear in some capitalist firms. However, it can be examined whether the above features are means or are pursued as goals in themselves in certain social practices.

resources through conflicts and compromises with external political and economic conditions so that the focus is now placed on the internal relations of commons, in the case of emerging commons, the relationship with hostile external environments will be regarded as a vital issue. Therefore, differences in social practices come to exist between the two types of commons. That is, whereas traditional commons use their production as an important aspect of their reproduction, in the case of emerging commons, reproduction becomes an important issue of production per se. According to Meretz, a new feature of emerging commons in comparison with traditional commons is the possibility to be universally connected. The products of one commons often become the resources for other commons, and this enables us to imagine social structures based on commons. I think that these relationships among commons can be called an “ecosystem of commons.” Among commons, positive relationships can be made not only with the transfer of products and conversion of products into resources, but also by the learning of experience in institutional and community compositions, solidarity for institutional changes, and the creation of political spaces for institutional generalization. Therefore, the “ecosystem of commons” can be said to be cyclical relational networks among self-proliferating commons.

However, existing discussions did not sufficiently point out the fact that commoning cannot but have the nature of social movements in order for the processes of commonisation and re-commonisation to progress in the political, economic, social, and cultural environments hostile to commons. The role of social movements is crucial not only in the commons movements that resist new enclosure, but also in the composition of ecosystems of self-proliferating commons. Not only the local residents who resist the extortion of commons, but also those users or residents who demand resources or spaces as commons as needed may voluntarily appear as the main agents of social movements, and they may band together or combine with existing movements.

If so, how can we understand and study the politics and social movements of commons that demand the creation, maintenance, and expansion of commons? Fig. 2 shows a hypothetical analysis framework constructed as a starting point of such analysis. First, political spaces in which “the politics of the commons” are conducted can be postulated as spaces where many actors with various interests at different levels conflict, compete, and compromise with each other over the methods of production or distribution of common wealth and rights to commons. Capital needs the commons in order to deal with the crisis as much as social movements need to confront not only



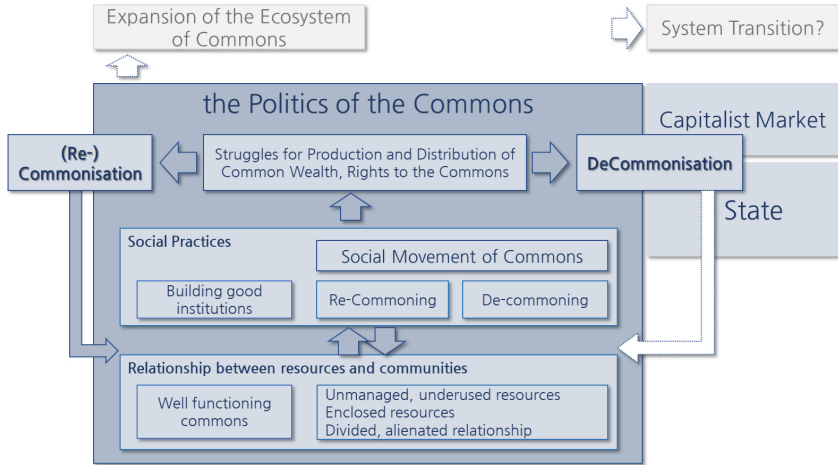


FIG. 2.—An Analysis Framework for Studying the Politics of the Commons and Social Movement of the Commons

capital's enclosure of commons but also its attempts to co-opt commons, and to create new and non-capitalist worlds on the basis of commons. De Angelis and Harvie (2014) thus understand commons as a crucial terrain of antagonistic struggle, not as a resource that may or may not be depleted by the actions of competing individuals, but as the site upon which alternative value practices clash. Therefore, the power of the state or capital and the potential of commons are not separated, but rather interpenetrating.

Although the processes of commonisation or decommissionisation will progress depending on the results of political struggles conducted in political spaces of commons where alternative values collide with each other, the two processes are not necessarily exclusive. Both may progress simultaneously depending on various social practices surrounding commons. The fact that the process of decommissionisation is dominant means that the logic of profit-making in capitalist markets has deeply penetrated into the politics of commons or the efforts for collective action by the user group have failed. The political and economic environments brought about by the state or capitalist markets and various relationships between resources and user groups form the initial conditions of the politics of commons. Against this backdrop, social practices such as building good institutions and governance systems, re-commoning, and creating new commons progress. And the commons movements that progress in such practices, or in combination with these practices, becomes a powerful force to drive the politics of commons.

Now, using the analysis framework, the case in which a process of re-commonisation is in progress will be analyzed and the characteristics of social practices implemented in the case and the effects of commons movements will be discussed.

## A Case Study on Commons Movement and Re-commonisation: *Seonheul* Village on Jeju Island

The case that will be examined here is changes in the relationship between *Seonheul-ri* Village (*Seonheul* Village), which is a small village in the northeast part of Jeju-do, and *Dongbaek-dongsan* (“camellia hill”), which is the village forest. The name of the village, “*heul*,” means “deep forest,” and it is adjacent to *Dongbaek-dongsan*, which is part of Jeju's deep primeval forest. Around 770 residents in 350 households lived there as of 2017.<sup>7</sup> According to a survey of historical sites around the area conducted in 2012-13 led by the Korea Forest Research Institute, more than 100 remains such as charcoal kilns and agricultural ruins were found in village forest. The existence of these ruins, which have histories ranging from 50 years to several hundred years, shows that the residents of *Seonheul* Village have been engaged in production activities such as agriculture, livestock farming, hunting, and charcoal baking in the forest for a long time. Until the 1960s, *Dongbaek-dongsan* has functioned as a subsistence commons that provides drinking water, firewood, charcoal, and herbs essential to the survival and livelihood of the village residents (Jeong 2017).<sup>8</sup>

During the period from 1910 to 1945 when Japan annexed and colonized Korea by force, an important process occurred in Jeju-do and this village. From the 1910s, Japanese colonial authorities conducted surveys and set ownership of land and forests. In doing so, the forests, which had been village commons, were registered as being owned by some villagers who were capable of paying taxes. Those who were illiterate or unable to pay taxes were excluded from the registration process. The ownership of pastures adjacent to

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<sup>7</sup> For information on the history of *Seonheul* Village and *Dongbaek-dongsan*, please refer to the data posted on the village homepage (<http://ramsar.co.kr>).

<sup>8</sup> See Jeong (2017) for a study that addressed the relationship between *Seonheul* Village and *Dongbaek-dongsan* as historical changes in the relationship between commons and the community. Although the historical facts mentioned here follow Jeong's work, whereas Jeong (2017) focused on historical changes in the relationship, the focus here is on the roles of commoning and social movements.

forests was also set in the same way. The discrepancies between the actual user group and the nominal owner group became a source of ongoing conflicts thereafter.

After the liberation of the nation in 1945, political conflicts over whether a unified state or divided states should be established were exploding. In the Jeju April 3rd Uprising and Massacre, which lasted from 1947 to 1954, the U.S. military government and the South Korean government, which were pursuing the establishment of an anti-communist divided state, designated Jeju as “Red Island” and committed large-scale massacres of around 30,000 people, corresponding to 10 percent of the population. In the case of *Seonheul* Village too, around hundreds of the village residents who fled to *Dongbaek-dongsan* were shot to death in the forest by the army and police. The army tortured the residents to search for other residents and even burned bodies in the places where the residents were shot. *Dongbaek-dongsan* became a “nightmare forest” and “trauma forest” for survivors and the bereaved, and the mechanism of such symbolic oppression often made the use of the forest difficult.

The relationship between the village community and the village forest, which was closely incorporated while *Dongbaek-dongsan* was functioning as subsistence commons until the 1960s, changed drastically in the 1970s. Modernization policies were implemented in earnest in South Korea and the Jeju region around that time so that tangerine farming was expanded as a new source of farm income and chemical fertilizers and agricultural machinery were supplied. In particular, in 1971, *Dongbaek-dongsan* was designated as a cultural heritage protection area of Jeju-do and its economic use for residents’ livelihood was prohibited. On the other hand, since this time, water supply has been set up at *Seonheul* Village so that the residents no longer needed to enter the forest to get water. *Dongbaek-dongsan* became a symbol of the government’s wrongful environmental policies for the villagers and the target of resentment in that development projects could not be implemented there, unlike other regions in Jeju. In addition, as some residents sold land registered in their names, conflicts among the village residents intensified. Some residents complained, saying that they “would like to burn up the forest” every time they saw it, and it was a source of discord among the residents and was taken away by the government. This situation lasted for 40 years. The relationship between the village community and the village forest was severed and *Dongbaek-dongsan* became just an alienated object.

Catalysts for change appeared in 2010. The Ministry of Environment of

South Korea designated *Dongbaek-dongsan* as a wetland protection area and re-designated (first designation in 2007) *Seonheul* Village as a village with excellent natural ecology in 2010. *Dongbaek-dongsan* was designated as a Ramsar wetland protection area in 2011. In 2012, *Seonheul* Village was designated as an ecotourism pilot project site by the Ministry of Environment. The environmental activists who had been turning their eyes to ecotourism while carrying out environmental movements in Jeju for a long time did not miss this opportunity and proposed village regeneration projects through ecotourism to village leaders while starting to cooperate with the Jeju-do government and the Ministry of Environment. The ecotourism programs that began at that time have continued up until now in 2018, and *Seonheul* Village and *Dongbaek-dongsan* are considered to be the most successful cases among ecotourism programs in South Korea.

Then, how could the ecotourism program in *Seonheul* Village achieve such success, and what does it imply to commons and the commoning theory? Existing studies mention various factors such as the existence of a beautiful forest that can be an ecotourism resource, the preparation of environmental activists in the region, the active participation of village leaders, friendly government policies such as ecotourism destination pilot projects, and the appropriate use of experts such as policy advisory groups and artists (Choe 2017; Jeong 2017). I think three factors were the most crucial ones.

The first factor is that the realization of grassroots democracy, which determines various policies and visions in residents' plenary sessions, has enabled the *Dongbaek-dongsan* ecotourism programs to gain a popular support base. Environmental activists and young village activists attended the meetings of various groups in the village for more than three years to introduce the meaning of ecotourism and the programs in which residents could participate, and listened to their opinions. In particular, starting from 2013, plenary sessions were held every year to let the residents make their own decisions on the vision and strategies of ecotourism with careful consideration so that the ecotourism programs would not be affected by the caprice or replacement of some village leaders. With these residents' plenary sessions, *Dongbaek-dongsan* and the animals and plants living there were designated as symbols of the village, and the villagers could positively identify their community. In addition, a declaration of the life promise that the village would protect and cultivate the forest and the construction of a social cooperative that would promote the village restoration project using the forest were decided in the plenary sessions, and the residents also decided not

to distribute the economic gains obtained through the cooperative activities to individuals but to use them for village welfare projects and to care for the weak.

Second, environmental activists organized resident representatives, local NGOs, the bureaucrats of the Jeju-do government and the Ministry of Environment, ecotourism agencies, scholars, and artists into a framework called an ecotourism council and strived to have this council establish concrete strategies for the visions determined in the plenary sessions. This governance model has been spreading to other ecotourism cases in Jeju.

Third, any resident can participate in the ecotourism council, which has developed and successfully operated various practice programs for them to obtain an ecological sensibility. The elderly of the village can participate in storytelling programs to talk about their lives and publish their stories as picture books, collections of poems, and storybooks. In consideration of the village residents, environmental activists operated programs to train forest commentators so that the residents could work firsthand as commentators. In particular, programs for elementary school students were also operated so that the children in the village could become 'child commentators' to speak directly to child tourists in their language. Among the economically active population, the members of a women's association operate traditional food-making experience programs and a team consisting of residents from various age groups has investigated the wetlands in the village forest and published the results as reports. In addition, the residents are investigating, protecting, and restoring rare animals and plants in *Dongbaek-dongsan* and are making efforts to inform the details to ecotourism program participants to promote the ecological value of the forest.

From the 1970s to 2010, a hostile environment for the commons persisted in *Seonheul* Village and Jeju. Forests were magnified as symbol of oppression due to the tragedy of the past, the rights of the residents to use the forests were denied by the state, and disputes over ownership acted as a factor that made collective action in the local community difficult. These de-commoning factors intensified and sustained the decommonisation process, and in doing so, the relationship between the village and the forest was severed. The intervention of local environmental activists in 2011-12 played a crucial role in transforming this cyclical process into another cyclical process. Fig. 3 shows this process well visually. Although the state's policy shift was made first, if the environmental activists had not invented creative ways and developed participatory programs, it is highly likely that the case of *Seonheul* Village would have been one of the numerous failures of South

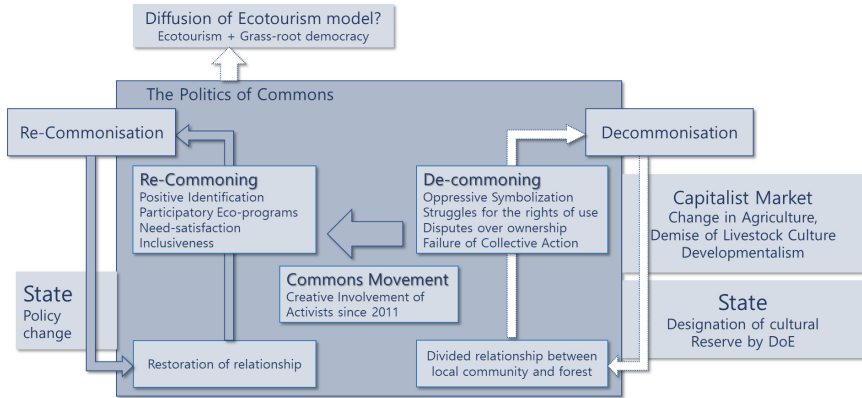


FIG. 3.—The shift of historical process from Decommissionation to Re-commissionation by involvement of Commons Movement

Korea. The creative intervention of environmental activists strengthened the participatory nature of the ecotourism program and in doing so, the residents became proud of their villages and forests and became responsible for cultivating them into the village’s precious commons, protecting them, and handing them over to future generations. This practice of re-commoning transformed the *Dongbaek-dongsan* forest into commons and restored the relationship between the village and the forest, and the process of re-commissionation continues cyclically.

Finally, local environmental activists and the ecotourism council provide consultation and human support to other villages in Jeju-do so that ecotourism programs that fit the actual states of the areas of the villages can be formed. Furthermore, they are preparing to combine various villages around Seonheul Village to apply for a Ramsar wetland city program. I believe that this is the self-proliferation process of commons and at the same time the process of forming the ecosystem of commons. Of course, since this process is now in its beginning stages, the results should be constantly investigated, and furthermore, the question of whether it can lead to a system transition ensuring Jeju's sustainability remains open.

### Conclusion

Commons have been emerging as an attractive concept in the civil society of South Korea and Jeju over the last three years and has been used as a concept

to indicate alternative societies in disputes over the resources and space of rural and urban areas. However, as with the world's academia, there is also a great gap in South Korea and Jeju between mainstream academic research and the language used in the field. The achievements of Ostrom and her colleagues, who have dominated the discussion of commons in academia, are becoming increasingly mainstream concepts, as can be seen from the fact that she won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2009. However, her understanding of commons is quite limited and does not go much further than the understanding of economic resources and goods. Ostrom's concept of CPRs has naturalistic limitations, and her problem situations are limited to the presence/absence of cooperation within user groups. Above all, the fact that the existence of commons and communities is treated as something given in advance for use by individual actors can be said to be a very inadequate understanding to deal with social change. They should be treated as variables that should be explained rather than explanatory variables. In short, the issue of how commons and communities can be constructed and reconstructed is an important question and problem situation that must be addressed not only because of needs in reality, but also for theoretical development.

The analysis of the restoration of the relationship between *Seonheul* Village and *Dongbaek-dongsan* discussed in this paper demonstrates well the importance of the practice of re-commoning with various ecotourism programs in the re-commonisation process while enabling us to identify the importance of social movements in the creation and execution of re-commoning. This case has limitations in that its background is not a city, which is the center of the commons movements, but a rural area, and that it deals with the progress of commons movements based on historically formed ties between a forest and a village, and the limitations are also the advantages of the present study. In this case, the aspect of conflicts in commons politics was not sufficiently highlighted. This is a point that requires follow-up studies.

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to identify the possibility of constructing concepts and frameworks for the analysis of important problem situations in modern society. Commons politics, movements, and studies should be more closely integrated not only from the aspect of reality, but also from that of theories.

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