Taking up space: waste and waste labor in developing South Korea
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Citation
Pak, H. J. (2024, January 25). *Taking up space: waste and waste labor in developing South Korea*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3715091

Version:	Publisher's Version
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

INTRODUCTION

"My life began with trash and ended with trash," recalled Kim Ki-ha, a former Nanjido landfill waste picker, as we drove back to the city from his suburban scrap yard. Born in 1948 to southern rural farmers, Kim, along with many other rural migrants, moved to Seoul in 1974, "a time when young people sold their parent's cattle and escaped to Seoul," he added. He worked different odd jobs: candy peddler, door-to-door sales person, bill collector, and local election campaigner, until he learned about the landfill in Nanjido and moved there in 1980. Kim paid a premium to buy a district truck sector position, which required both human connections and sufficient financial resources. After a year, he became a district crew leader. In 1984, he was accused of bribery regarding the landfill housing distribution and although he was found not guilty, he was still expelled from the district group. Despite losing his position, he continued working in the landfill: he bought another position in a private truck sector where he worked with his wife until the landfill closed. After a succession of odd jobs and small businesses, he returned to waste picking, which he continues to do into his seventies. "The only thing I have learned from the Nanjido years was waste picking, that's the only thing I can do. Had I had enough money, I could have contracted with factories, which required more investment, but was more lucrative."

Yi To-il, another waste picker who is about ten years older than Kim, also drifted alongside waste for most of his life. Born in 1939, he hailed from Harbin, China where he was born, fleeing south after the liberation of Korea.[1] His mother perished on a train to Korea and his father died shortly thereafter. Orphaned, Yi sought refuge from the Korean War in 1950 in Pusan and endured street life under the thumb of a gangmaster; he stole any available goods to merely survive. Only when he was enlisted into a child protection facility at the age of 15 did he obtain an elementary school education. Endemic hunger at the orphanage eventually forced him to return to a life on the street. After the war, he continued as a shoe shiner in Seoul.

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[1] The biographical summary is based on his life story published in *Nŏngma*, the magazine published by the Rag Commune (*nŏngma kongdongch'e*). To-il Yi, "Sumkyŏchin nŏngmajui ŭi yŏksa I - Kosaeng kkŭte naki ittadŏnka?" *Nŏngma*, May 15 (1987): 10-20.

In the early 1960s, having nowhere to go, he admitted himself to a Work Reclamation Camp (*kŭllojaegŏndae*), a stint that opened up his career in waste. He collected straws (*chip'uragi*), straw ropes (*saekki*), and jute sacks (*kamani*) in nine garbage dumps in Seoul. As horse manure and straw, a secondary material used in paper manufacture were replaced by chemical pulp, Yi lost his livelihood and drifted. In the 1970s, he returned to the waste trade, this time opening a junk depot, a makeshift workshop space, but eventually was pushed out due to urban development. Two years later, he started another junk workshop, which he was forced to abandon over complaints filed by neighbors and the 1978 World Shooting Championship in Seoul. Despite these repeated difficulties, Yi turned to waste picking again in the 1980s. This time, he got caught in a police frame-up, and was sentenced to one and a half years in prison for police quotas.[2] By the late 1980s, he worked as a member of the rag commune, but his work became more precarious as recycling became a more widespread practice in households and the government established its own recycling corporation (*Han'guk chaesaeng kongsa*).

These two brief biographies illuminate the lives of two waste pickers and their entanglements in modern Korean history: the Japanese occupation and Liberation (1945), the Korean War (1950-1955), and the authoritarian Park Chung Hee (1961-1979) and Chun Doo Hwan regimes (1980-1988). These were periods of political, social, and economic upheaval as the country was liberated and divided after a bloody international conflict. The devastations of war were eventually overcome through rapid economic development, which saw high levels of urbanization and industrialization that was framed strategically as a model of success by the Korean government. However, behind

[2] Legal scholar Ossei-Owusu defines police quotas as "formal and informal measures that require police officers to issue a particular number of citations or make a certain number of arrests,", some of them pre-specify a quantity. Shaun Ossei-Owusu, "Police Quotas," *New York University Law Review* 96 no.2 (2021): 531.

successful stories of economic growth lay the social costs of that development. What is left unseen in most of the literature on South Korea's development are perspectives that come from the bottom rungs of society, not in hard quantitative data but in narratives of lived experience. The life stories of Kim or Yi, exemplars of the story that this dissertation will unfold, point to a broader marginalization that occurred simultaneously with rapid growth.

Kim used waste picking as a means to move up the ladder and later as a fallback strategy throughout his life. Kim experienced modest upward mobility in his waste career within the landfill, and with his acquired knowledge and skills returned to waste collection after the landfill's closure and eviction. Yi, who was orphaned shortly after liberation, was uprooted and drifted while mostly surviving off waste. His life on the streets made him susceptible to institutionalization in orphanages, protection facilities, and prison; his repeated attempts to climb the informal waste economy were thwarted by urban development, changes in material reclamation technology, and modern waste management.

The life stories of people like Kim Ki-ha or Yi To-il illustrate the common plight that those on the bottom rung of society, such as waste pickers, experienced in the midst of the social and political turmoil of liberation and the Korean War. As uprooted individuals and waste pickers, both experienced hardship–evictions and loss of waste work–because of rapid urbanization and changing patterns of waste generation. Invisible as they are in the literature, these are the individuals who transformed waste materials, extended the landfill's lifespan thereby enabling Seoul's expansion, and laid the groundwork for recycling, which is now an everyday practice in South Korea.[3]

"Taking Up Space: Waste and Waste Labor in Developing South Korea" examines informal waste labor in South Korea, focusing on the management of material waste, the work of waste pickers, and their social and spatial exclusion. It showshow the developing nation state appropriated this labor and, once it became redundant, how it was neglected and at times discarded. This study employs Liboiron

[3] South Korea has a recycling rate of 59 percent, which ranks second highest among OECD countries. OECD, *Environmental Performance Reviews: Korea 2017* (Paris: OECD, 2017).

and Lepawsky's concept of "discard studies," which tracks phenomena that are not necessarily related to waste; rather, it investigates the power dynamics at play, how dominant systems produce and reproduce power, and who benefits from specific wasting/discarding practices.[4] Drawing on their perspectives, this dissertation understands devaluing, wasting, and discarding of waste labor as "a technique of power" and asks "how (and why) all systems waste, as well as waste's relationship to power." It seeks to suggest how waste as both a material and a metaphor can reframe our understanding of South Korean economic development between the 1960s and the 1990s.

Focusing on the lived experiences of waste laborers in developing South Korea, this dissertation aims to grasp the social costs of economic development in South Korea. To analyze this question, this dissertation first provides a historical overview of waste management. Against this background, it moves on to the dissertation's second focus: how such changes were embedded in the material, discursive, and spatial dimensions of waste. Taking waste picker camps and the Nanjido landfill waste pickers as case studies, I investigate the organization of informal waste pickers and the formation of their communities between the 1960s and the early 1990s. The case studies shed light on how a developing nation-state created an urban underclass and brought them under its purview. Specifically, it asks why waste pickers as a social category came into being, why waste pickers were identified with waste and its material qualities, and how regulating waste pickers coincided with the rise of environmental awareness, the introduction of modern waste management techniques, and urban spatial politics.

By addressing waste picking as a form of labor and agent of industrialization and development, this dissertation makes three major contributions to the larger literature on South Korean development. First, by tracing the trajectories of waste pickers in varying locations, this dissertation adds to discussions of the South Korean development experience. Despite

[4] Max Liboiron and Josh Lepawsky, *Discard Studies: Wasting, Systems, and Power* (Boston: MIT Press, 2022).

extensive studies on South Korean economic growth, little is known about what happened beyond the formal realm. What has been overlooked in mainstream studies of South Korea's economic success are the different forms of the urban informal economy that not only sustained life on the fringes of society but ultimately contributed to the high growth era. By rereading the development of South Korea from the refuse level, this dissertation seeks to expand our understandings of the costs and consequences of South Korea's much-heralded economic development.

Second, this dissertation shifts attention to the lived experience of individuals. I bring in individual accounts of waste pickers through interviews and written sources produced by the waste pickers themselves. One benefit of this approach comes from seeing them as individuals who experienced the ebbs and flows of the waste economy throughout their life, rather than treating them as abstract/voiceless victims. While I do not suggest any individual account is representative, I contend that their life stories are an integral part of the shared experience of economic and social transformation of South Korea. By attending to these muted voices, this dissertation retrieves lived experiences of development from the margins of society as well as its unspoken cost.

Third, this dissertation brings a growing body of scholarship on waste studies to bear on the waste pickers' experiences of development. Most existing studies focus on the state regulation of waste pickers: they take waste less as a concern and rarely acknowledge waste picking as a mode of labor. My focus on waste offers a potential means to understand how waste bounded the lives and labor of waste pickers; how their labor was enmeshed in larger social, spatial, and environmental transformations; and how their proximity to waste interacted with their marginalization. Attention to waste can reveal the relationship between the inveterate presence of waste pickers, urbanization, and changes in waste management, which in turn can contribute more to the processes of marginalization than initial state regulation itself.

The story that follows weaves together the movement of the waste pickers, their interaction with and impact on the development of South Korea, and the waste that provided them with a living but removed their dignity. This introduction begins by situating the subject of this dissertation, waste pickers, and presenting the case studies. I bring in critical scholarship on waste and discard studies to reexamine South Korean development and show how such a perspective adds to our understanding of the other

side of development. In the final section, I explain my sources and the organization of the dissertation.

SITUATING WASTE PICKERS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY KOREA

During the 20th century, we observe the appearence, disappearence, and reappearence of waste pickers, which is intricately tied to the country's tumultous modern history. The post-1945 political disarray that ensued in the aftermath of colonialism persisted through the United States' occupation (1945-1948) and its dwindling sovereignty, as well as the three years of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the division of the country. Subsequently, South Korea's geopolitical landscape became intertwined with the power dynamics of the broader Cold War system, seeking to solidifying its standing as an independent ally of the "Free World" and a bulwark against communism.

The US's geopolitical interests explain its tolerance authoritarian regimes and their use of economic and military coercion in pursuit of the Cold War drive. Right-wing regimes in South Korea utilized anti-communism as a political tactic to instill fear and unease regarding the fictitious enemy; this ideological stance rationalized the regime's tenuous legitimacy and its violent social control. In the political milieu of postwar South Korea, post-colonial nation building and postwar recovery were intertwined, as were the internalized colonial gaze and anxieties around the Cold War competition. In the specific context of Korean division, even social unrest and postwar poverty were considered as impediments to the national development and indications of backwardness, as much as they were perceived potentially subversive to the regime that can reveal its inferiority.

Recent scholarship on the Cold War expands our understanding beyond the ideological contestation between capitalist and communist powers[5]. By showing how the establishment of a global order permeated the daily lives of individuals through

[5] See: Charles Kim, *Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017); Youngju Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee's Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

discourses and practices, these works reveal various forms and experiences of the Cold War.[6] One aspect of the Cold War that relatively unexplored is its impact on marginalized populations: especially why they were considered a threat to the social order and subject to discipline, confinement, and exclusion.[7] This dissertation will analyze the historical context of waste pickers, highlighting how the consequences of seemingly global conflicts reached the ground level, including the course of street lives. It shows how the initial exclusion and marginalization of waste pickers stemmed from an ideological standpoint, although they may not have been aware of it.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, waste pickers appeared in public view in varying forms. A photo published in *Tonga Ilbo*, a major newspaper, shows prisoners wearing masks that hide their faces collecting and hauling refuse in 1908 Seoul.[8] In another instance, a Japanese journalist reports on rag pickers in 1920s Seoul, an occupation that did not yet have a name, who lived together in a hut and sold their collected material to junk dealers.[9] These anecdotal records suggest that historically

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[6] Anthropologist Heonik Kwon demonstrates the enduring effects of the Cold War through individual experiences and kinship relationships in places like Vietnam and Korea, where ideological terrains of the Cold War and postcolonial politics tore apart villages and families. Heonik Kwon. *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[7] Namhee Lee indicates that the enforcement of the National Security Law (NSL) reveals the ongoing geopolitics of the Cold War regime in South Korea. Korean sociologist Dong-choon Kim argues that global cold war politics created a war-politics in South Korea, where the NSL, the martial law, and the emergency decrees justified the state to exert violence against civilians, including student activists and protesters, workers, and the urban poor, if the state considered them to be a threat to the anticommunist order. Namhee Lee, "Social Memories of the 1980s: Unpacking the Regime of Discontinuity," in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, ed. Sunyoung Park (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Kim Dong-choon, "Naengjŏn, pan'gongjuŭi chilsŏ wa han'guk ŭi chŏnjaeng chŏngch'i: kukka p'ongnyŏk ŭi haengsa wa pŏpch'i ŭi hangye [War-Politics in Korea under the Cold War and Anticommunist Order: State Violence and limit of the Rule of Law]," *Kyŏngje wa* sahoe 89 (2011): 333-366.

[8] "Hansŏnggwa Sŏul (6) chŏnjungi (suin)," *Tonga Ilbo*, March 11, 1972.

[9] Ak'ama Kihu, a Japanese journalist who published a book about Seoul's underclass life, *Taeji rŭl pora* (Look at the Earth), reports that there were approximately 50 rag pickers in the 1920s. Ak'ama Kifū, *Taeji rŭl pora: 1920-yŏntae Kyŏngsŏng ŭi mitpadak t'ambang* (Look at the Earth), trans. Sŏ Ho-ch'ŏl (Sŏul: Amorŭmundi, 2016). Oiginally published as *Daichi o miro: Hensō tanbōki* (Tairiku kyōdō shuppankai, 1924).

waste picking was (already) associated with criminality, implying that those on the margins of society engaged with waste collection.

Aside from records on waste picking itself, research has been conducted on the colonial period, particularly during the wartime mobilization.[10] The historian Kim In-ho outlines the material and metal/non-ferrous metal requisitions from the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 to the end of the Pacific War (1941-1945).[11] The wartime salvage drive included textiles, rubber, and paper in addition to metal and non-ferrous metals, with statues, railings, and kitchen utensils among the targeted items. Although the Government-General of Korea had direct control over secondary materials through establishing regional salvage dealers' cooperatives and a state corporation, it frequently faced low participation from Koreans as well as illicit activities. While Kim In-ho identifies the role of old material/salvage dealers and their activities during the metal mobilization, his emphasis on colonial exploitation overlooks the impact of the GGK's control over the burgeoning salvage and recycling industry, particularly how its association with fraud and theft shaped post-war industrial regulations.[12] After the Korean War, and despite little data on the wartime

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[10] Korea was not alone in material mobilization; it was a common phenomenon in both occupying and occupied countries during the World War II. I discuss this literature in detail in the next section.

[11] Kim In-ho, "Chungil chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏnnae komulsang pujŏng ŭi shilt'ae (1937-1940)," *Han'gung minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 66 (2011): 127-178; "T'aep'yŏngyang chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏnesŏ kŭmsok hoesu undong ŭi chŏn'gae wa shilchŏk," *Han'gung minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 62 (2010): 305-374; "Chungil chŏnjaeng sigi chosŏn ch'ongdokpu palp'yo p'yep'um sujip t'onggye ŭi hŏgusŏng," in *Kŭnhyŏndae hanil kwan'gyeŭi che munje*, ed. Tongbuga yŏksa chaedan, 19-59. (Seoul, Tongbuga yŏksa chaedan, 2010);. "Chungil chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏnesŏ ŭi p'yep'um hoesu chŏngch'aek," *Han'gung minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 57 (2008): 169-235.

[12] Kim In-ho reports that the number of salvage dealers increased from 18,007 in 1935 to 18,974 in 1936 to18,800 in 1937. Kim, "P'yep'um hoesu," 203. The GGK organized them into regional cooperatives and established a state corporation, the Korean Resource Salvage Control Joint Stock Company (chosŏn hoesu chawŏn t'ongje hoesa). These dealers negotiated with the GGK in developing the salvaging framework; they were also subject to strict police control, particularly for illicit activities that were punishable under the Salvage Dealers Control Act (*komulsang ch'uich'eryong*). It is unclear whether these dealers continued to be in the business after the liberation. However, this colonial legislation continued to regulate the salvage dealers with the same police control that framed waste-related works susceptible to crime.

salvage trade, colonial legislation addressing the salvage business continued to shape the legal and institutional environment surrounding scrap/salvage dealers and waste pickers, which I discuss in detail in chapter 3.

After the liberation (1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953), peoples' efforts at subsistence and survival in postwar South Korea led to the creation of a population working in waste collection. Various types of waste work, including rag pickers, itinerant scrap peddlers (*komul haengsang*), or junk depots (*komulsang*) arose due to the need to make a living. In the 1950s and 1960s, newspapers reported on juvenile delinquents and war orphans working as waste pickers, who were frequently organized by a gangmaster and belonged to street gangs. Other waste pickers, who were not necessarily adolescents, worked for junk depots who bought their salvage in exchange for room and tools. For uprooted populations without any connections or resources, whether war refugees, orphans, or rural migrants, scavenging offered the most accessible work. The state treated waste pickers, especially adolescents and those of military age, as objects of reformation and social work.[13] They were considered "curbside occupation adolescents (*kudu chikŏp sonyŏn*)" who required regulation and protection, until they found a stable means of subsistence. Rather than seeing it as a mode of labor, the tendency was to link waste picking to vagrancy and deviance.

Another characteristic of waste pickers was their informality. Waste pickers operated within an informal waste economy in which they occupied the bottom rung. It is important to recognize that the informal waste economy operated at the margins of formal industry. Waste materials collected at the ground level (waste pickers, peddlers, old material/junk depots, scrap dealers) reached paper balers or metal smelters on the upper end of the material reclamation cycle. Although not waged or employed, the labor that waste pickers provided was the basis for the resource reclamation that later serviced manufacturers. The state frequently depicted the informality of the waste trade as inefficient and outdated, and which should be integrated into or replaced by a modern, governable economy. However, positing a

[13] Idae sahoehakhoe, "Pusŏjin kkum ŭl moŭnŭn sonyŏndŭl," *Sedae* 2, no. 17 (1964): 173-183.

rigid boundary between the formal and the informal obscures the mutual constitution of both and their respective benefit to the state. It is crucial to underline how informality is embedded within what is considered the "formal" economy.

One obstacle to studying waste pickers is their mobility, which also kept them out of the state's reach.[14] After being uprooted without a family or family network, waste pickers were socially adrift, which rendered them unreliable, if not suspicious. As detailed in chapter 3, waste pickers frequently moved around, partly due to their uprootedness, partly due to the pattern of institutionalization and incarceration that marked their lives.[15] However, another characteristic of waste pickers between the 1960s and the 1980s was their collective living arrangements, ranging from street encampments to state- or private-organized camps to voluntary moves to landfill shanty towns and then settlement areas. The tendency toward collective living is, in itself, a notable trait that set waste pickers apart as other urban underclass/urban poor groups, such that it allows to track their trajectories during the country's development era. Considering such characteristics, this dissertation chose two sites that show different forms of collective living among waste pickers between the early 1960s and the early 1990s: one is waste picker camps, primarily two police-led camps, the Work Reconstruction Camp (*kŭllojaegŏndae*) (1962-1974) and the Self-sufficiency Work Camp (*chahwalgŭllodae*) (1979-1995), as well as other privately-run camps; the other is the waste picker settlement at the Nanjido landfill (1978-1993), a city-run landfill with a hybridized labor organization that included informal waste pickers, city workers, and illicit businesses.

Through the close examination of a social group that has been treated

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[14] For instance, while occasional surveys and government reports investigated the number of waste pickers housed in camps, they all estimated that the actual number of waste pickers far exceded the survey figure, indicating there were waste pickers who were outside the purview of state regulation and private institutions. I will discuss this in detail in chapter three.

[15] Many waste pickers worked alone and left little information about themselves. While some of their records could be accessible through local junk depots, they rarely left any documents.

with neglect, this dissertation seeks to reveal the dynamic between state regulation and the regulated population. On the one hand, the presence of an urban underclass and mobile population threatened the legitimacy of the military regime. The association with vagrancy and deviance not only justified the state's control over waste pickers in the guise of protection and reformation, but it also allowed the state to break up street gang groups and regulate them and their potential collective power. On the other hand, as waste pickers gathered en masse, especially in the landfill, their increased number granted them greater negotiating power as a political collective, whether in day-to-day landfill operation, the provision of prefabricated housing, or relocation and eviction procedure. The case studies highlight the relationship between the developmental state and the waste pickers on its periphery, with each appropriating and supplying cheap labor as well as propagating and partaking in developmentalist narratives and aspirations.

This dissertation focuses on household waste. One way of classifying waste is to divide it into streams, such as municipal solid waste (MSW, household waste), industrial waste (ISW), construction waste, or sewage.[16] Industrial waste is produced in higher volumes, contains more valuable as well as hazardous materials, and requires proper handling to prevent its exposure and contamination. MSW has less volume, but

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[16] Waste categories (household waste and industrial waste, or consumer waste and producer waste) are not absolute and require caution. Samantha MacBride explains that modern waste differs from its predecessors in terms of its increased tonnage and toxicity, heterogeneous material composition, and its externalization of cost. The exception is organic waste which takes up one-third of the MSW stream and has existed since the premodern era. Max Liboiron brings our attention to the rest of the MSW, which largely consists of disposable objects and is synonymous with consumer waste. The producers of modern waste give little choice to individuals (i.e., packaging) and ultimately externalize costs onto the public sector via recycling, thus shifting responsibility to individuals and governments. Zsuzsa Gille acutely criticizes the categories of producer waste and consumer waste for disguising who generates garbage in the first place, obscuring the fact that the majority of what we call consumer waste actually derives from the production stages. In this sense, Liboiron argues that MSW can be categorized as ISW, and that "recyclables are just disposables by another name." Max Liboiron, "Modern Waste as Strategy," *Lo Squaderno: Explorations in Space and Society*, no. 29 (2013): 9-12; Samantha MacBride, *Recycling Reconsidered: The Present Failure and Future Promise of Environmental Action in the United States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Zsuzsa Gille, "Actor Networks, Modes of Production, and Waste Regimes: Reassembling the Macro-Social," *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 5 (2010): 1049-64.

it is a more accessible and visible type of waste. Unlike ISW, MSW is part of our everyday landscape and reveals the ways in which each society relates to garbage. Its visibility requires municipalities to implement well-functioning waste collection and disposal systems. Its accessibility gives waste pickers a means to make a living through extracting its value: collecting and transporting, or reusing and repurposing.

Throughout the dissertation, I use the term "waste picker" to refer to people who collected waste for a living in various locations. As I will explain in chapter two, Korean terms used to refer waste pickers were social rather than occupational categories. For example, *nŏngmajui*, a Korean term that means someone who collects rags, evokes deviance; the 1962 establishment of the Work Reconstruction Camp (WRC), the official waste picker camp, changed the term "rag picker" into WRC inmates (*chaegŏndaewŏn*), which became synonymous with ex-convicts; waste pickers at the Nanjido landfill were referred to as Nanjido dwellers (*chumin*). These terms appeared within specific social contexts and power relationships, which both reflect the self-identification of the waste pickers as well as their relationship to South Korean society.[17] By using the term waste picker, I seek to foreground the labor that buttressed an informal economy of waste and urban livelihood throughout the development era.

THE CAST-OFFS OF DEVELOPMENT

Following the Korean War, South Korea was a war-ravaged and impoverished nation with a per capita gross domestic product of just $79 in 1960. Within three decades, it underwent a rapid transformation to become one of the world's most prosperous economies. A recipient of foreign aid, South Korea joined the OECD in 1996 and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2010, becoming the only country to transition from aid recipient to donor since the establishment of the OECD. South Korea's donor status allows the country to promote its growth strategy through

[17] I analyze the use of these terminologies and related discourses in chapter two.

developmental assistance programs. Whether it is the *Saemaŭl* movement in rural development or the Volume-based Waste Fee System in waste management, the South Korean government presents its development experience as a model applicable to other developing countries.[18] For the purpose of this dissertation, it is useful to ask what kinds of interventions took place in the name of development, what led to different types of intervention, and how they affected the people on the ground. Two strands of scholarship–the developmental state literature and critical development studies– contribute to examining how scholars explained different kinds of development process.

The prevailing explanation of South Korean modernization revolves around "developmental state" scholarship, which emphasizes a state-centered, top-down, elitist understanding of the development process. These studies emphasize the role of authoritarianism, bureaucracy, and capitalism in achieving rapid economic growth,[19] especially the intricate relationship between the South Korean *chaebŏl* (large conglomerates) and the authoritarian government. Historian Russell Burge criticizes the developmental state scholarship tendency for reifying rather than denaturalizing the state as "the sole provider and arbiter of development."[20] He suggests that while development may have begun as a state initiative, it elicited a variety of responses from individuals and social groups, deploying them into a developmentalist framework.[21]

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[18] Jamie Doucette and Anders Riel Müller, "Exporting the Saemaul Spirit: South Korea's Knowledge Sharing Program and the 'Rendering Technical' of Korean Development," *Geoforum* 75 (2016): 29-39; Hyeseon Jeong, "Globalizing a Rural Past: The Conjunction of International Development Aid and South Korea's Dictatorial Legacy," *Geoforum* 86 (November 1, 2017): 160-68; Kwang Yim Kim and Yoon Jung Kim, *Modularization of Korea's Development Experience: Volume-based Waste Fee System in Korea* (Seoul: Ministry of Environment, 2011).

[19] Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[20] Russell Burge, "The Promised Republic: Developmental Society and the Making of Modern Seoul, 1961-1979" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2019), 16.

[21] Russell Burge emphasizes that state-led development would not have occurred without those who shared the state's vision, which he refers to "developmental society." While he makes an important point, he also argues that social actions—protesting against the state's unfulfilled developmental promises—rarely "challenge[d] the legitimacy of the government or the notion of development itself."

Indeed, the focus on the inner workings of the "developmental state" leave us with little understanding of development experiences, whether they be of proponents for the state's vision or of those who suffered under such development paths.

Critical scholarship within the developmental state approach demystifies celebratory narratives and shifts focus to the actual causes and consequences of state-led development. The historian Park Tae-Gyun emphasizes the seemingly strong South Korean state's political weakness and lack of legitimacy.[22] The sociologist Hee-Yeon Cho argues that the growth of oppositional forces coincided with the maturation of the developmental state, resulting in the eventual diminution of state forces.[23] Another sociologist, John Lie, suggests that the success stories tend to overlook the costs of South Korea's abrupt transformation.[24] As these critiques show, rapid economic growth and repressive autocracy undermined labor rights and democracy. Additionally, it introduced the tenacious struggles of workers, evictees, and activists; geographically uneven development and a widening urban-rural divide; growing inequality and social polarization in the absence of welfare and social protection; and pollution and ecological degradation.[25]

Another body of scholarship on the development era shifts perspectives from a state-centered understanding to the experiences of those affected by state policy. Critical examinations of South Korean development have identified a range of subjects whose lives were shaped by development: for instance, the rise

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However, such a view precludes the possibility of alternative visions of development that were unheard, unrecorded, or erased. Burge, "Promised Republic," 15.

[22] Pak T'ae-gyun [Tae Gyun Park], "Pakchŏnghŭi chŏngbu sigirŭl t'onghae pon paljŏn'gukka tamron e taehan pip'anjŏk siron." *Yŏksawa hyŏnsil* 74 (2009): 15-43.

[23] Hee-Yeon Cho, "The structure of the South Korean developmental regime and its transformation-statist mobilization and authoritarian integration in the anticommunist regimentation," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (2000): 408-426; Hee-Yeon Cho, et al., eds. *Contemporary South Korean Society: A Critical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[24] John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[25] Yi Pyŏng-ch'ŏn, ed., *Kaebal tokjaewa Pak chŏng-hŭi sidae* (Seoul: Changbi Publishers, 2003).

of the *Minjung*,[26] the consolidation of the working class,[27] military sex workers,[28] and women workers.[29] Despite their significant contributions, these studies still limit themselves to institutionalized labor and organized forms of resistance. When we shift our focus away from formal, organized labor, we discover other types of work: informal labor and mobilized labor. First, various forms of self-employed, informal labor flourished on the fringes of cities. The range of informal work not only provided income-generating opportunities but also replaced or supplemented insufficient public services. Second, there is mobilized or forced labor, which supplied essential labor

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[26] Namhee Lee, The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[27] Hagen Koo, Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Seung-Kyung Kim, Class Struggle or Family Struggle?: The Lives of Women Factory Workers in South Korea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[28] Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

[29] Sociologist Kyung-Sup Chang notes that women's labor not only generated profit for their employers but also sustained the agricultural economy by supporting family members. Yet they were rarely treated as real workers, and were rather considered temporary, inferior, and supplementary to capitalist production. In contrast, Kim Wŏn shows how the labor of women existed in a continuum across the public and private spheres, in the home and on the shop floor, which rendered their labor and struggles for rights as laborers invisible. Ruth Barraclough argues that the vulnerability and susceptibility of women workers led to new female working-class subjectivities, whose narratives inserted themselves as agents of larger social forces such as late industrialization and militarized modernization in South Korea. These works bring women's labor into the realms of the political. Kyung-Sup Chang, *South Korea under Compressed Modernity: Familial Political Economy in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2010); Kim Wŏn[Won Kim], *Yŏgong 1970, kŭnyŏdŭr ŭi panyŏksa (Sŏul:* Imaejin,2005); Won Kim, "Between Autonomy and Productivity: The Everyday Lives of Korean Women Workers During the Park Chung-hee Era," in *Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 202-217; Ruth Barraclough, *Factory Girl Literature: Sexuality, Violence, and Representation in Industrializing Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012). Anthropologist Nancy Abelmann, on the other hand, attends to the stories of women, many of them housewives, who navigated social, economic, and structural changes throughout their lives. Abelmann reveals how their experiences shaped the lived sense of South Korean transformation, especially the inner class distinction and class mobility during the period of rapid development. Nancy Abelmann, *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

power for industrial infrastructure projects such as road construction or land reclamation. This labor was poorly compensated and its exploitation was excused in the name of reformation. The informal and mobilized labor sectors, into which the work of waste pickers is classified, have received little attention in studies of South Korean development. Rarely has this labor been understood in relation to the economic growth model or viewed as having any structural relevance to the historical characteristics of South Korean growth.

Life on the urban margins shows how South Korean modernization coincided with what the sociologist Hagen Koo describes as "compressed processes of proletarianization."[30] Current scholarship, nonetheless, overlooks the voices and experiences of those who struggled and suffered under rapid industrialization: outcasts and outsiders whose records rarely reach the archives, people who did not attract the attention of either activists or scholars but nonetheless underpinned the era's development. They remain peripheral to stories of South Korean development.[31] This erasure is due in part to the prominence of the working class in the social movements of the 1980s, which tended to overshadowed other subclass groups, particularly the urban underclass. Their work, which did not typically involve waged labor, was not considered as labor either.[32] As a result, waste pickers encountered no awareness or solidarity as fellow members of the oppressed class, confirming their miserable social position and utter marginalization. Put differently, this erasure indicates who received

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[30] Koo, Korean Workers, 24.

[31] The kind of workers that are considered outcast or outsider often reflects dominant norms. In *Service Economy*, the literary scholar Jin-kyung Lee brings together four marginalized forms of working-class labor: military labor in Vietnam, domestic sex work, military prostitution, and immigrant labor. This labor articulates what she calls the "proletarianization" of sexuality and race, one that occupied center stage in South Korean development. By reading practices that were not considered to be labor, she shows how an array of ideologies - nationalism, anticommunism, developmentalism, and masculinism - constituted the proletarian workforce. Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[32] Examining how wageless life under capitalism is deemed wasted, Michael Denning argues that wageless labor or unemployment should not be treated as refusing labor, urging us to decenter wage labor in conceptualizing life under capitalism. Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 79-97.

attention and visibility as an agent of development, and who did not.

Whether it is the developmental state scholarship or critical studies of South Korean development, there has been little engagement with the development studies literature (largely anthropology of development) that has emerged since the 1990s. I examine three monographs that opened up the critical scholarship of development by putting the very idea of development—the dominant development "paradigm"—into question. Frequently employing a Foucauldian framework of knowledge, discourse, and power, these studies focus on developmental interventions in the Third World since the end of World War II, analyzing international aid schemes and development assistance programs. Ethnographic accounts of development programs aim to understand how the development apparatus manifests in practice, locating development not as a constellation of globally applicable ideas and practices but a mode of producing specific knowledge on development.

In his landmark study analyzing repeated failures of Lesotho's development programs, the anthropologist James Ferguson argues that development, which is comprised of institutions, agencies and ideologies, produces a machine-like depoliticizing effect: it fails to improve socioeconomic conditions but succeeds in reproducing itself through unanticipated, unplanned consequences that arise beyond the intentions of the actors involved.[33] Similarly, Arturo Escobar demonstrates how development programs convert social life into a technical problem, one for which a team of experts developed idealized blueprints for progress and modernity. Underdeveloped countries were expected to adhere to these models, producing typologies of underdevelopment that may be effectively addressed at the political and technical levels but failed to address the fundamental problems of underdevelopment.[34]

[33] James Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

[34] Arturo Escobar analyzes the historical conditions that gave rise to development since Harry Truman's 1949 inaugural address. These developmental discourses and strategies lend themselves to myriad policies, institutions, and practices that built on North American and Western European perspectives of development. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

These two themes—the production of development-specific knowledge and the failure of developmental interventions—inform Tania Li's book, *The Will to Improve*, in which she traces the history of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia over the past two centuries.[35] Both colonial improvement schemes and contemporary development efforts attempted to enhance the lives of Indonesians but invariably failed. Nevertheless, these failures encourage new interventions to overcome previous failures. Li refers to this tendency as "the will to improve," which consists of identifying problems that need solving and rendering these problems into technical ones. These dual processes, "problematisation" and "rendering technical," convert problems into quantifiable, specifiable, and correctable (e.g., being poor, unproductive, or backward) ones, thereby making them visible and amenable to the governing authority.

While all three scholars explain development's failures and its self-referential characteristics, their positions show subtle differences. Ferguson casts the development apparatus as a series of unintended effects that imply a form of autonomous agency, without considering how other actors affect such processes. Escobar's emphasis on hegemonic discourse and a monolithic development apparatus reduces the very material realities of development into a discursive effect, precluding the possibility of resistance and counter-movement, or alternative representations and practices. For both, developmental interventions seem to operate as a self-serving system. Li, on the other hand, incorporates the reaction of the actors and how their interpretations of "unintended effects" reshape development plans, how people mobilize against "the will to improve," and the often-devastating consequences of development's impact on their lives and landscapes.

The developmental state scholarship primarily turns our attention to the source of power, whether it be authoritarian regimes or large conglomerates, and portrays development as a state- and elite-centric process. In contrast, the

[35] Tania Murray Li, The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

critical development studies literature shifts our attention to the processes that rendered development "antipolitical" or "apolitical"—mechanisms that obscured the structural predicaments of inequality. For both, it is worthwhile to rethink the questions we ask when studying development. Development necessitated chemical and heavy industries to manufacture advanced consumer and industrial goods, and elevate the general living standard of a country. Similarly, it became necessary to determine how to dispose of industrial and post-consumption waste, as well as other byproducts of the development process such as excess labor and surplus populations. Such decisions were more political than technical, and a question that has received considerably less attention. This is the inquiry that I turn to next.

REFUSE AND REFUSAL

This section builds on scholarship in waste studies and in the history of waste and recycling, a prolific emerging field that has not yet been introduced to the history of South Korean development. I provide an overview of historical scholarship on waste and recycling and their legacies during the immediate postwar period and the emergence of modern waste management systems. I discuss how waste studies provide conceptual tools to think about how surplus population and surplus matter are entangled and how labor and infrastructure are intertwined around waste, thereby reframing our understanding of industrialization, urbanization, and development.

What makes something "waste" provokes a series of questions. One might ask how it was created, and whether it was at a particular place or evolved over different periods and scales.[36] One might also ask how we define and classify waste, or how we measure its value and utility. The anthropologist Mary Douglas's seminal work

[36] Sociologist Zsuzsa Gille coined the concept "waste regime" to investigate "the changing materiality and discourses of waste," which consisted of "representations, practices, and politics of waste." A prevailing waste regime can give to another, whether triggered by pollution or contamination outbreaks, changes to the domestic economic regime or global political economy, or the rise of new technologies. Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 34-35.

provides useful insight for examining *rejectamenta* of any sort.[37] Douglas explains that ideas about dirt - and waste - revolve around symbolic associations with disorder and impurity. Rather than having distinct qualities, dirt is "matter out of place," which suggests a system that renders it worthless. In his book *Rubbish Theory*, another anthropologist, Michael Thompson, similarly explains that rubbish is neither static nor has a fixed value, and that its "worthlessness" is ascribed according to an ongoing social process.[38] Indeed, various waste-related practices and institutions are typically based on and tied to certain ideas or concepts on waste in different moments and locations. The indeterminate, liminal characteristics of waste, according to sociologist Zsuzsa Gille, lead to "classificatory practices and struggles" in conceptualizing waste.[39] Since waste has no inherent value, it tells us less about its inherent quality but more about its ordered contexts—a variety of social practices that define and categorize waste materials and reveal power relations. Similarly, historian Anne Berg sees waste as "a category of the past, a fossil of the dominant social order in which it was produced, recycled, and cast away." [40] Its spatially and temporally specific meanings and practices are well-illustrated in the historical scholarship on waste and recycling.

Wartime Recycling

Examining the politics of waste and recycling in Britain, Timothy Cooper notes that the prewar development of professionalized and municipal waste disposal (the "refuse

[37] Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

[38] Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory*: *The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[39] Gille, *Waste*, 23.

[40] Anne Berg, "Waste's Social Order: A Historical Perspective," in *Perspectives on Waste from the Social Sciences and the Humanities: Opening the Bin*, eds. Richard Ek and Nils Johansson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2020), 8.

revolution") did not entail much understanding of waste itself, whether its material composition or its utilities. Instead, it highlighted the need to dispose waste quickly and hygienically.[41] However, as wartime material needs arose during the First World War, the emphasis on rapid disposal made it difficult to promote reusing and recycling, that is, holding on to waste piles longer to extract any residual value. Contrary to the contemporary association of recycling with conscious environmental practice, the British experience suggests that waste-related practices, such as salvaging and repurposing waste materials, were not necessarily tied to notions of scarcity and frugality, value and order, pollution and conservation.

We see more organized salvage operations during WWII. In Germany, based on the success and failure of previous salvage operations, the Nazi regime centrally planned their recycling system: in Germany and its occupied territories, the main waste labor force consisted of women and children, volunteers, and forced and slave labor including prisoners, foreign prisoners of war, and Jews in concentration and extermination camps, whose participation varied from cooperation to collaboration or coercion.[42] In Britain, Hitler's invasion posed a threat to social boundaries and order that was greater than that of material waste, which allowed the government to mobilize wartime recyclers to contribute to the frontline war effort.[43] In contrast, the collaborationist Vichy authorities in France obscured their emulation of Nazi salvage

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[41] Timothy Cooper, "Challenging the 'Refuse Revolution': War, Waste and the Rediscovery of Recycling, 1900-50," *Historical Research* 81, no. 214 (2008): 710-31.

[42] Salvaging, frugal housekeeping, and the urban rag-and-bone trade predate the World Wars. While they were certainly not an Imperial German invention, both Heike Weber and Anne Berg argue that Nazi Germany turned these old practices into an ideological and political vehicle. Particularly striking are its main concepts, such as total recycling and zero waste, the closed-loop economy, and circularity, both for their contemporaneous familiarity and resonance as well as their lesser-known genocidal implications. Berg, *Waste*, 9; Berg, "The Nazi Rag-Pickers and Their Wine: The Politics of Waste and Recycling in Nazi Germany," *Social History* 40, no. 4 (2015): 470-72; Heike Weber, "Towards 'Total' Recycling: Women, Waste and Food Waste Recovery in Germany, 1914-1939," *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 3 (2013): 371-97; Weber, "Unmaking the Made: The Troubled Temporalities of Waste" in *The Routledge Handbook of Waste Studies*, eds. Zsuzsa Gille and Josh Lepawsky (London: Routledge, 2022), 89.

[43] Mark Riley, "From Salvage to Recycling: New Agendas or Same Old Rubbish?," *Area* 40, no. 1 (2008): 79-89.

policy in the early 1940s during the occupation (1940-1944).[44]

In May 1938, following the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 and the growing urgency of war material needs, imperial Japan introduced a "German-style" control system. Modeled on the Nazi scrap practice, it placed the professional scrap trade under district control and police surveillance; rather than actively relying on volunteer collection through neighborhood associations, women's groups, or party organizations, as was the case in Germany, the Japanese approach opted to incorporate existing scrap businesses by establishing centralized unions/cooperatives. Chad Denton indicates that this measure, which prioritized the national duty of waste mobilization, temporarily eliminated the stigma attached to the waste trade and assigned its workers (*bataya* rag pickers and *kuzuya* scrap dealers), which included migrant Korean laborers. Denton also suggests that this inclusion of Korean waste workers, who were seen as "potentially disloyal colonial subjects," reveals the relative lack of political or ideological foundation in the Japanese system.[45]

Japan implemented similar strategies in annexed Korea. The Korean historian Kim In-ho argues that the Government-General of Korea utilized quasi-state scrap cooperatives and, subsequently, state corporations not just for total war mobilization but also for what appeared to be voluntary or locally-initiated early collection movements.[46] Nonetheless, many local scrap merchants exploited the wartime economy and resulting price volatility for their own financial gain, jeopardizing the GGK's requisition efforts and resulting in stricter regulation over their operations. Material mobilization, particularly of copper, also changed the everyday lives of Koreans through reconfiguring material culture, such as brassware. Michael Kim demonstrates that the GGK had to develop a ceramic industry to better requisition brassware from Korean households; he argues that it ultimately transformed everyday material culture, such as dining and ritual practices, by substituting ceramics for traditionally

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[44] Chad B. Denton, "'Récupérez!' the German Origins of French Wartime Salvage Drives, 1939-1945." *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 3 (2013): 399-430.

[45] Chad B. Denton, "Korean Kuzuya, 'German-Style Control' and the Business of Waste in Wartime Japan, 1931-1945," *Business History* 64, no. 5 (2022): 904-22.

[46] Kim, "P'yep'um hoesu."

valued brassware.[47]

Once the political and economic need for recycling dissipated and post-war austerity gave way to prosperity after the Second World War, wartime waste practices began to disappear. The particular wartime circumstances for salvage and recycling not only did not lead to a substantial recycling scheme, but arguably impeded its post-war development. In France, it destroyed the prewar scrap business networks,[48] and tainted recycling with Nazi association[49]; in Japan, the brief upward mobility and inclusion of Korean migrant workers and other minorities was short-lived as they were pushed out of the trade by large-scale Japanese dealers as well as by post-1945 discriminatory measures.[50] Instead, wartime recycling demonstrates that the coercion of the colonial authority was insufficient to achieve their goals. Many warring nations succeeded in reframing salvaging as a patriotic act and integrated it into domestic duties. However, once outside the household, this process confronted conflicting interests in the different distribution channels, particularly due to the need for a labor force for extraction and infrastructure, mainly stockpiling and transportation, obstacles that reflected waste's characteristics as a secondary resource.[51]

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[47] Michael Kim, "The Brassware Industry and the Salvage Campaigns of Wartime Colonial Korea (1937-1945)," *Business History* 64, no. 5 (2022): 923-45.

[48] Apart from the scrap industry, in Imperial Japan, occupied China, and annexed Korea, Paul Kreitman notes that "the unforeseen pressures of total war" resulted in near destruction of local networks of the night soil trade. Combined with the lack of urban infrastructure and sewer systems, nascent municipalization, the privatization of cleaning services that repeated trial and error, and urbanization decreasing suburban farming populations and their fertilizer needs, the manual collection of feces as well as the use of organic manure in farming gradually disappeared. Paul Kreitman, "Attacked by Excrement: The Political Ecology of Shit in Wartime and Postwar Tokyo," *Environmental History* 23, no. 2 (2018): 342-366; Joshua Goldstein, *Remains of the Everyday: A Century of Recycling in Beijing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 34-44; Ho-ch'ŏl Sŏ, "Sŏur ŭi ttong ojum sugŏ ch'egye ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa pyŏnhwa: 1890-nyŏndae huban put'ŏ 1930-nyŏndae chŏnban kkaji," *Sŏulgwa yŏksa* no. 93 (2016): 175-220.

[49] Denton, "Récupérez," 428-429.

[50] Denton, "Kuzuya," 916.

[51] Denton and Weber note that exploiting waste materials required "reverse logistics" of collecting, disassembling, and reclaiming, with each stage reverse-traveling from households, small scrap yards and

Legacies of the War and Postwar Period

Starting in the late 19th century or early 20th century, waste disposal and recycling changed from the private practice of households into public services. The most notable change was the municipalization and privatization of waste services such as collection, recycling, and disposal, which replaced the work of households (especially women and children), scavengers, rag-and-bone traders, and junk/scrap dealers. David Pellow, Carl Zimring, and Chris Hurl have documented this process in the USA and Canada, illustrating how minorities in each society took up the work of waste handling, and how they mobilized themselves to claim their access and rights to waste.[52] The struggles continue to this day in different parts of the world. Another trend was the professionalization of waste management: various technologies for waste treatment and material recovery were developed, stirring contentious politics surrounding how to define waste and what were considered to be proper disposal methods.[53] Formalizing waste practices created new ways of ordering, classifying, and governing waste, which repositioned waste as an object of techno-scientific intervention and brought changes—largely informal and invisible— to the previous arrangement of waste labor.

During the second half of the twentieth century, waste issues

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collection centers, balers, and smelters, to the site of new production. Chad Denton, and Heike Weber, "Rethinking Waste within Business History: A Transnational Perspective on Waste Recycling in World War II," *Business History* 64, no. 5 (2022): 12.

[52] David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Carl Abraham Zimring, *Cash for Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Chris Hurl, "From Scavengers to Sanitation Workers: Practices of Purification and the Making of Civic Employees in Toronto, 1890-1920," *Labour / Le Travail* 79 (January 2017): 81-104.

[53] Analyzing the transition from tipping (dumping) to destructors (incinerators) during the last decade of the nineteenth century in Torquay, England, John Clark (2007) argues that destructors constituted "municipal modernity" that represented the "refuse revolution." While tipping represented the unsanitary past, destructors, with their large-scale technological solutions, embodied the ideology of progress. J. F. M. Clark, "'The Incineration of Refuse Is Beautiful': Torquay and the Introduction of Municipal Refuse Destructors," *Urban History* 34, no. 2 (2007): 255-77.

encountered three inflection points. First, mass production and consumption led to a sharp increase in both industrial and post-consumption waste generation in the developed countries. In the developed world, affluence altered people's relationship with material objects. In the USA, Susan Strasser indicates that the "stewardship of objects" was replaced by disposability and a throw-away culture.[54] In post-war Japan, Eiko Maruko Siniawer suggests that the abundance of waste also posed moral challenges. Its responses include "affluence of the heart," which turned its material affluence into a pursuit of affluence in immaterial things and values, or Toyota's lean production which equated waste minimization with scientific management of the workplace.[55] Second, the rise of environmental consciousness, and the 1972 Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth*, not only brought greater attention to finite resources but also to the growing problem of pollution. The British government's 1974

[54] Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999). In the socialist Chinese context, Joshua Goldstein indicates that the stewardship of objects, thrift, and frugality all stemmed from the valuation of labor: while value generated from labor is a social product, this social dimension is lost when disposability dominates the recycling experience. Joshua Goldstein, "The Remains of the Everyday: One Hundred Years of Recycling in Beijing," in *Everyday Modernity in China*, eds. Joshua Goldstein and Madeleine Yue Dong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 260-301.

[55] Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Waste: Consuming Postwar Japan* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 2018), 156-157. Siniawer's presentation of postwar ideas and practices are centered on middle-class Japanese perspectives. While Siniawer briefly offers anecdotes of rag pickers (78-79), their presence was soon swept away by international events, increased consumption level, and a surge of waste. Siniawer does not connect the perception of waste work and its laborers to the wartime period, especially the total war material mobilization, its impact on the ethnic discrimination; or the relationship between post-war poverty, social work, and rag picker communities, as well as their contemporaries, such as homeless men. Denton, *Kuzuya*; Koji Taira, "Urban Poverty, Ragpickers, and Ants' Villa in Tokyo," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 17, no. 2 (1969): 155-77; Taira, "Ragpickers and Community Development: 'Ants'' Villa" in Tokyo." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 22, no. 1 (1968): 3-19; Tom Gill, "Failed manhood on the streets of urban Japan: The meanings of self-reliance for homeless men," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1-21. For detailed criticism of Siniawer's approach isolating the post-war experiences from the prewar/wartime one, especially the relationship between the contemporary resource-poor narrative in Japanese policy, the wartime military expansion, and the Japanese empire's prewar resource preoccupation, see: Peter Wynn Kirby, "Waste: Consuming Postwar Japan by Eiko Maruko Siniawer (review)," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 47, no.1 (2021): 163-67

white paper, "War on Waste," illustrates the governmental responses to the global environmental critique. Timothy Cooper criticizes it, however, for failing to challenge high consumption levels and argues that it ultimately catered to the economic imperatives of industry, neutering the political demands of the pressing environmental concerns.[56]

Third, the 1973 Oil Crisis triggered a global resource crisis, initiating a revival of waste recovery and recycling, however temporarily. It also reorganized waste labor under new geographies of waste. Examining the emergence of waste trade markets from the late 1970s through the Basel Agreement in the early 1990s, Emily Brownell argues that the Oil Shock eventually facilitated international waste dumping, in which environmental harms and toxic hazards were legitimately commodified and exported as an international trade, frequently to developing countries. The Oil Crisis prompted a new economic order of waste that justified a new international division of waste processing labor: rising labor costs in the developed world were incompatible with tedious, high-risk, and labor-intensive waste labor. Waste reclamation, whether it is toxic, hazardous waste or more mundane plastic or electronic waste, was displaced to regions with inexpensive labor and laxer environmental regulations, reflecting how historically-constrained unequal relationships reiterated with the geopolitics surrounding natural resources, commodity production, and waste dumping after the 1970s.[57]

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[56] Timothy Cooper, "War on Waste?: The Politics of Waste and Recycling in Post-War Britain, 1950-1975," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 20, no. 4 (2009): 53-72.

[57] Brownell argues that the transnational waste trade exemplifies how international relationships in post-World War II and postcolonial contexts are reaffirmed or renewed in relation to newly emerging environmental concerns, whether between the colonizer and the colonized, developed and developing nations, or the Global North and South. However, it is misleading to view the global waste trade as a repetition of colonial ties or to emphasize just the unequal relationship between exporters and importers. This perspective disregards exchanges that occur outside of such ties, especially the inter-regional trades. See: Josh Lepawsky, "The Changing Geography of Global Trade in Electronic Discards: Time to Rethink the e-Waste Problem," *The Geographical Journal* 181, no. 2 (June 1, 2015): 147-59; Josh Lepawsky and Chris McNabb, "Mapping International Flows of Electronic Waste," *Canadian Geographer* 54, no. 2 (2010): 177-95.

Informality, Invisibility, and Infrastructural labor

Both historical and ethnographic research show that waste labor occurs in both the public and private sectors as well as the formal and informal sectors, albeit in different forms. However, the dichotomy between legal and illegal, or formal and informal, overlooks the mutual constitution of both and their respective benefits to the state. Due to the characteristics of waste—geographically dispersed in small quantities, unstable supply and demand, and labor-intensive collection and logistics—unorganized informal workforces are ideally suited for the initial stage of waste collection, and their work eventually feeds into formal waste management. Ananya Roy, an urban studies scholar, argues that informality should be seen as "a series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another," emphasizing the embeddedness of informality within what is often considered "formal" economy.[58] Viewed in this manner, informal waste workers operate within the continuum of the formal waste economy, bridging the formal and informal sectors.

Whether the wartime recycling of housewives, scrap processing of immigrant or ethnic minority workers, or scavenging of the urban poor, waste work was often rendered invisible without gaining necessary rights or recognition as a mode of labor. Historical accounts of informal recycling illustrate how this erasure operates over time. In his study of a century of recycling in Beijing, Joshua Goldstein indicates that the numerous attempts to eliminate informal waste pickers—hukou (household registration) restrictions, state regulations over scrap and recyclables, crackdowns on informal markets, and, most recently, rising housing prices—perpetuated the

[58] The informal economy or informal sector is typically understood in relation to the formal sector, one that will ultimately be transformed or integrated into a modern, formal, and manageable form. Rejecting the dichotomous notion of the formal and informal, Roy defines informality as "a mode of urbanization", highlighting continuity as opposed to viewing them in parallel. On informality and its connections to the formal system, see: Ananya Roy, "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005): 147-58; Barbara Harriss-White, "Formality and Informality in an Indian Urban Waste Economy," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 37, no. 7-8 (2017): 417-34; Melanie Samson, "Accumulation by Dispossession and the Informal Economy: Struggles over Knowledge, Being and Waste at a Soweto Garbage Dump," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 5 (2015): 813-30.

informality, precariousness, and marginalization of waste pickers, resulting in the erasure of their history.[59] Informal recycling practices, despite being treated as embryonic or transitional, have often survived the introduction of formal municipal waste management and maintained a tenuous but tenacious coexistence with the formal system. In this sense, it might be more useful to study social and political strategies that keep informal arrangements well-organized and operational. [60]

The invisibility of informal waste labor often stems from the association with waste that renders either people or places worthless or equal to waste itself. Working with waste not only impairs workers' laboring bodies but also their self-image and identity,[61] which makes them subject to the language of waste such as disposability or humans-as-waste.[62] The anthropologist Kathleen Millar contends that the vocabularies of waste—whose use stretches beyond strictly waste-related work—may indeed affirm the existence of "disposable people."[63] One way of "surfacing the invisible work" of waste pickers comes from reassessing their labor.[64] Recent ethnographic studies of waste illustrate how human labor

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[59] Goldstein, Remains of the Everyday.

[60] Dana Kornberg, "Competing for Jurisdiction: Practical Legitimation and the Persistence of Informal Recycling in Urban India," *Social Forces* 99, no. 2 (2020): 797-819.

[61] Robin Nagle, Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013); Joshua Reno. Waste Away: Working and Living with a North American Landfill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

[62] Waste-related metaphors are not limited to waste work alone but illustrate the degrading conditions of work in general. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's *Wasted Lives* uses waste metaphors to critique deteriorating conditions of surplus populations. Disposability also captures the characteristics of a contemporary labor market that displaces migrant laborers, enforces deportation, and disenfranchises laborers from their means of production. Zygmund Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (London: Polity Press, 2004); Michelle Yates, "The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism," *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011): 1679-95.

[63] For a critique of this use of the waste metaphor, see Kathleen Millar, *Reclaiming the Discarded: The Politics of Labor and Everyday Life on Rio's Garbage Dump* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 6-8.

[64] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist*, no. 3 (1999): 385.

replaces or supplements insufficient or absent infrastructure, whether it is in municipal solid waste management process or waste disposal sites.

One such approach draws on "people as infrastructure," a notion that Abdoumaliq Simone coined to emphasize the significance of the labor of those "marginalized from and immiserated by urban life."[65] Geographer Rosalind Fredericks shows how municipal waste management in Dakar, Senegal functions as a mode of governing through disciplining people with different corporeal burdens and the stigma of working with waste; for the laborers, it simultaneously creates "participatory" waste infrastructures where their labor practice becomes a terrain for citizenship struggles.[66] Anthropologist Amy Zhang suggests that everyday waste infrastructure in China is comprised of waste pickers, workers at scrap workshops, and sanitation workers, whose labor practices are less embedded in the socio-technical system but more so in the workers themselves.[67] These studies understand infrastructure not simply in its physical form but in a wide array of things, practices, and relations that make up the provision of urban services, with laboring bodies crystallizing the social and material dimensions of infrastructure. [68]

Another approach draws on Marxist political economy[69] to see infrastructure as

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[65] Abdoumaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407-29.

[66] Rosalind Fredericks, Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

[67] Amy Zhang, "Invisible Labouring Bodies: Waste Work as Infrastructure in China," *Made in China Journal* 4, no. 2 (2019): 98-102.

[68] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (2013): 327-43.

[69] Scholarship in Ecological Marxism outlines how environmental circumstances contribute to capitalist production, and how excessive production degrades natural conditions (e.g., species loss, acid rain, soil erosion, deforestation). For instance, John Bellamy Foster argues that Marx's concept of the capitalist labor process reveals how large-scale industry and agriculture under capitalism impoverished nature (soil fertility) and worker labor power, breaking the social-ecological metabolism between humans and the environment. John Bellamy Foster, "Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 2 (1999): 366-405.

one of the "conditions of production."[70] Geographer Vinay Gidwani expands the conditions of production to include "the labor that underwrites the production of capital's 'general' and 'external' infrastructure in urban and non-urban contexts."[71] In this vein, he conceives of the informal economy of waste transformation as an "infra-economy" and its labor as "infra-structural labor." "Infra-economy" carries two connotations: it is frequently an economy hidden or erased by state and civil society, and it is an economy that produces urban space and infrastructure (e.g., facilitates the movement of waste) conducive to capitalist conditions of production. Similar to how capital deals with its ecological dilemma by commodifying or producing nature,[72] Gidwani and Maringanti argue that capital "'solves' its waste problem through a 'spatial fix'" that moves waste to different locations, a strategy that entails the subsumption of informal waste labor as urban infrastructure, granting "infra-structural labor" to the work that transports and transforms waste.[73]

Rather than treating the invisibility of waste labor as a given condition, infrastructural labor focuses on what rendered waste labor invisible and

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[70] James O'Connor indicates that Marx identified three conditions of production: the labor power of workers (e.g., personal conditions of production); the communal and general conditions of social production (e.g., the means of communication and transport); and the "natural condition" or "external physical condition." Conceptualizing the ecological crisis under capitalism, O'Connor argues that capitalism's pursuit of surplus value and profit deteriorates its "natural condition," destroying the basis of production; in response to the crisis, O'Connor explains that capital seeks to reorganize production conditions to propel greater production and accumulation, with strategies such as land use and resource planning or the commodification of nature. James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 144-177.

[71] Vinay Gidwani, "The Work of Waste: Inside India's Infra-Economy," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40, no. 4 (2015): 577.

[72] For production of nature under capitalism, see Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 32-65; Noel Castree, "Marxism and the Production of Nature," *Capital & Class* 24, no. 3 (2000): 5-36.

[73] Vinay Gidwani and Anant Maringanti, "The Waste-Value Dialectic: Lumpen Urbanization in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 1 (2016): 114-5.

unrecognized.[74] It also illuminates how waste labor as infrastructure is closely related to state power, particularly what Michael Mann has called the infrastructural power.[75] The sociologist John Lie contends that the Park regime lacked both political legitimacy and "infrastructural power"—the actual means to achieve its authority.[76] In the case of waste management, the absence of physical infrastructure was frequently compensated for by varying forms of waste labor that might be considered infrastructural labor, ranging from municipal sanitation workers toiling with daily collection and transportation with little equipment to informal waste pickers mustering the city's refuse for recycling to citizens engaged in domestic recycling practices. In South Korea, infrastructural gaps opened up spaces for informal waste labor forces; they have also served as a means for the state to manage this population directly or indirectly through waste picker camps or waste picker settlement sites.

Throughout the 20th century, waste was framed as a sanitary and

[74] Rather than seeing invisibility as an inherent characteristic of infrastructure, Larkin suggests that we understand the invisibility of infrastructure as "a range of visibilities that move from unseen to grand spectacles and everything in between." Larkin, "Infrastructure," 336.

[75] While not discussed in detail in the above studies, it is useful to examine infrastructural labor alongside Michael Mann's notion of the infrastructural power of the state. Mann defines infrastructural power as "the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm," one of its characteristics being territoriality: creating and maintaining territorial boundaries as well as establishing territorial bounds to social relations. We may consider the territorial reach of functioning municipal waste service as an example, boundaries that demarcate inside and outside, center and periphery, and urban radius. Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 25, no. 2 (1984): 185-213; Mann, "Infrastructural Power Revisited," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43, no. 3-4 (2008): 355-65.

[76] John Lie, "Rethinking the 'Miracle'—Economic Growth and Political Struggles in South Korea," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 23, no. 4 (1991): 69. During the postwar period, other examples included refugee settlement and land reclamation projects to build infrastructure, such as houses, villages, roads, or arable land, as well as a shantytown legalization project to provide shantytown dwellers materials to improve their tenements by themselves. Yim Song-ja, "1961-nyŏn 5·16 ihu kukt'o kŏnsŏl saŏp kwa kukt'ogŏnsŏldan unyŏng silt'ae," *Han'guk kŭnhyŏndaesa yŏn'gu* 67 (2013): 900-942; Kim A-ram, "Han'guk ŭi nanmin palsaeng kwa nongch'on chŏngch'ak saŏp, 1945-1960-nyŏndae" (PhD diss., Yonsei taehakkyo, 2017); Burge, "Promised Republic," 94.

hygienic threat, a national resource, as well as a moral resource and moralizing object. New disposal technologies associated waste with ideas of modernity and progress.Simultaneously, “dirty work” was devolved to invisible laborers in largely informal arrangements. At the same time, waste pickers demonstrate their refusal to being excluded, the significance of their work diminished, and their dwelling spaces and labor practice discarded by modern waste management system and urban spatial order. On the one hand, waste’s materiality, such as its known or unknown risks, treatment technologies, or its management, constituted the conditions of waste work; on the other, it was political changes, industrialization, urban (re)development, and international environmental governance that affected waste labor on the ground level. The attention on labor illuminates the social and spatial conditions in which waste labor was embedded: how waste evoked metaphors that devalued its labor and laborers or carried associations with reformation and rehabilitation, or how material forces of waste resulted in overusing or depleting laborers’ bodies and their labor forces.

SOURCES AND ORGANIZATION

The data on which this dissertation is based were collected through archival research and interviews between 2014 and 2015. Archival materials are divided into public and private sources.[77] I collected official documents from public archives and other documents from individuals, including waste picker camp surveys and reports, petition letters submitted to the central and local governments, eviction records of waste picker camp sites, research reports, as well as minutes and audit records from Seoul Metropolitan Council and the National Assembly. Administrative documents include published and unpublished records produced by both the central government and local

[77] I consulted the following archives: the National Archives of Korea, the Document Depository of Seoul Metropolitan Government, the National Library of Korea, the National Assembly Library, Seoul Library, the Environment Digital Library in Ministry of Environment, and the Korea Democracy Foundation Archive.

districts, particularly eviction-related records, which reveal contradictions between relevant bureaucratic instances. While most of the data are concentrated on Seoul, I juxtapose data from other cities and regions where available. I also draw on newspapers, magazines, fiction, and non-fiction, as well as newsletters published by the Rag Commune and the Nanjido landfill volunteers.

Official archives and administrative agencies adhere to a limited record preservation period, which leads to the loss of many documents.[78] Filed complaints and petition letters are a particular case in point. Landfill waste pickers collected most of the exchanges they had with the local government and the district office; these data shed light on the interaction between the state and waste pickers. Apart from formally archived data, I obtained invaluable sources through interviews with informants and the numerous documents they provided. The resident survey reports, private memos, diaries, and resident committee records preserve the muted voices of the waste pickers and provide snapshots of landfill life from the perspective of its inhabitants.

Aside from written sources and interviews, I reviewed a large number of photographs held by the Western Park and Management Office, the majority of which have never been published on the office's website. These photos were captured by city workers while on duty at the landfill, but they lack specific information such as dates, locations, categories, or captions. These images depicted the landfill and its settlement in specific ways: a ramshackle shack built from a patchwork of metal plates and plywood; dilapidated tenements and living quarters; or a notice to vacate and a red mark in the shape of a letter x attached to each house, images that more resembled specimen. Even without a caption, these photographs revealed the organizing frames of the city's landfill management that erased the lives of people.

In contrast, photographs taken by waste pickers and volunteers, which were often retrieved from informants' wardrobes, revealed how individuals improvised their daily lives in the landfill. While I do not use photographs of waste pickers to protect

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[78] Enforcement Decree of the Public Records Management Act (Article 26) designates the preservation period of records, which is classified into permanent, semi-permanent, 30 years, 10 years, 5 years, 3 years, and 1 year. Filed complaints and related correspondence between ministries or districts are categorized as records produced from daily administrative works, which is classified and preserved for one to three years.

their anonymity, these images contradicted the denigrating gaze projected on the landfill shantytown, demonstrating it was no different from any other villages and neighborhoods: children on the playground, church gatherings, women in *hanbok*, the traditional Korean dress, celebrating special occasions, and a Christmas mass in a crowded nunnery. This contrast is also reflected in the city's aerial images and a hand-drawn map of the shantytown by waste pickers. Aerial photographs were taken to control unlicensed housing, which served as a means of eradicating these shacks and their dwellers. The shantytown map, in contrast, served as the sole evidence for waste pickers to prove the existence. Where the city authorities see deprivation and the need for control measures, locals cultivate their lives and grow a village together, enriching the human geography of landfill life.

In addition to written and visual sources, I was able to document the lived experience of the landfill through interviews. Former landfill workers - twenty city employees and six waste pickers - and three religious volunteers shared their stories. Interviews with landfill employees lasted between one to four hours, based on semi-structured interview questions; some of them served as gatekeepers, introducing me to former colleagues and helping to access unarchived government documents. I conducted a life history interview with six waste pickers; each session lasted two to four hours, which was repeated three to four times for each informant. All the names of informants are anonymized. Brief life histories of the interviewed landfill waste pickers can be found in the appendix I.

In recruiting former city workers, one former landfill worker became a gatekeeper for most of the interviewed city workers.[79] I got to know him via his personal blog, where he mentioned his landfill experience through his photo in Nanjido. He worked for ten years at the Nanjido Landfill, starting his career in functional services (a blue-collar position) before being promoted to general services (a white-collar position). The duration of his landfill duty and his

[79] With the exception of three cases recruited via snowball, he introduced all the city employees interviewed for this dissertation.

affinities with both blue- and white-collar workers greatly aided my access to former landfill workers. Not only did he remain in contact with many of his former colleagues, but his introduction, in some cases as his niece, allowed me to record very candid recollections of landfill experiences, ranging from inveterate frustration with the day-to-day landfill operation to illegal dumping and bribery to fatal accidents.

Access to former waste pickers began through a pastor who volunteered at the Nanjido Landfill. After his initial introduction to two informants, I relied on them to introduce their acquaintances. However, snowballing was not very successful in recruiting landfill waste pickers, whether their family members or friends. For some, Nanjido was implicitly a forbidden topic among family members. For others, the memories and traumas of the landfill still stirred their suffering. At the same time, personal ties from the landfill days often disintegrated after they moved out of the landfill and relocated. During the interviews, a few informants recalled how they had run into former Nanjido acquaintances but mutually avoided and ignored each other. While all the interviewees helped to contact their friends or acquaintances from the landfill, in most cases their attempts were rebuked.[80]

The text that follows is organized into four chapters. The first chapter examines how waste management in South Korea evolved from a largely informal and labor-intensive practice to a public service with widespread citizen participation. I propose three significant changes that occurred during this process: the institutionalization of waste management, professionalization of disposal methods, and domestication of residential recycling. Each process involved competing claims about waste, waste labor, and what constituted a modern waste management system, which resulted in 1) changing waste's ontological status from a threat to the human environment to a resource, and 2) redefining waste labor from a subsistence activity of the urban poor to a civic, environmental, and moral duty. I argue that the state was able to domesticate recycling because of this shift in the perception of waste and waste labor.

[80] On one occasion, at the end of the interview, the informant called a friend she had not seen in several years; after briefly catching up, she mentioned the Nanjido interview. The moment she pronounced Nanjido, the other person on the phone shouted at her, and I could hear the anger and irritation even without eavesdropping. The informant switched the subject, continued catching up, and then attempted again, provoking an even angrier response.

The second chapter investigates the discursive sphere that was built around waste pickers. I examine how and why distinct classifications and meanings became associated with waste work; what prompted the appearance and disappearance of terms; and how different actors - ranging from state bodies and their administrators, social reformers and middle-class citizens, to waste pickers themselves - responded to such discourses, whether by reproducing and reinforcing, or resisting and reclaiming. I show how state discourses, which established the perceived deviance of waste pickers, brought subsequent, intertwined discourses at the vernacular level in both popular and literary interpretation. Waste pickers, on the other hand, resisted prevailing representations of their lives and sought to reclaim their agency.

Against this background, the third and fourth chapters examine how waste work–waste-picking–was organized outside of formal waste management, both coercively (chapter three) and autonomously (chapter four). In chapter three, I look closely into waste picker camps, including police-led, official camps and various rag picker groups and encampments, tracing their more than thirty years of operation before their final disbandment and eviction. Their initial submission to the police and placement in the camps resulted in social and spatial exclusion, while the camp structure exposed waste pickers to the exploitation and violence of the police and intermediary buyers, leading to their economic vulnerability. Over time, the camp's siting - occupying vacant lots on the city's margin - became incompatible with urban redevelopment. The introduction of household recycling domesticated parts of their labor into civic duty, which resulted in their economic isolation. I demonstrate how the state regulation of waste pickers, an intervention that purported to prevent and guide vagrancy, instead rendered them more mobile and unstable.

In chapter four, I examine Seoul's Nanjido landfill as a lived space, using housing as a lens to grasp how waste pickers organized their lives and labor. I take the 1984 construction of the housing complex as a focal point where the state directly intervened—as a response to the demands of the waste pickers—in what it had previously categorized as informal, unlicensed housing. Through a combined reading of sources at different scales, aerial photographs from above,

and hand-drawn shanty town maps from below, I ask how this state intervention to upgrade and regulate waste picker settlements affected the nature of their dwellings and labor practices.

In conclusion, I provide a summary of each chapter's findings and then illustrate the new waste and recycling landscape in contemporary South Korean society, focusing on institutionalized recycling and the emergence of elderly waste pickers. While discourses have become predominately empathetic and the new term has no derogatory connotations, the focus remains on who performs the work without questioning the underlying cause and how to eliminate waste pickers from view. The findings of this dissertation imply diachronic connections with the history of waste pickers, demonstrating how waste work and its workers are socially dependent and historically contingent.