Taking up space: waste and waste labor in developing South Korea

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Chapter 3. THE PEREGRINATION OF WASTE PICKERS CAMPS, 1962–1995

Figure 3-1 Work Reconstruction Camp opening ceremony 1

Source: Sŏul kirogwŏn, RG5-SR77-IT9131

Figure 3-2 Work Reconstruction Camp opening ceremony 2

Source: Sŏul kirogwŏn, RG5-SR77-IT9131

The two images depict waste pickers at the Work Reconstruction Camp, a police-run waste picker camp established shortly after the military junta seized power in 1961. The first photo (Figure 3-1) provides a close-up image of waste pickers, wearing a uniform with insignia and a hat, looked only little different from the military authorities across from them. The sartorial element was not the only military-like feature. On establishing the camp, the police demanded waste pickers be registered, prohibited unregistered waste pickers from collecting waste, and designated districts to each unit, regulations that resonated with the colonial regulation of Korean salvage/scrap dealers during the total war material mobilization.[248] The second image (Figure 3-2), taken during the same opening ceremony on May 14, 1962, shows waste pickers holding panels that read "reclaiming waste (*p'yep'um chaesaeng*)," "saving foreign currency (*oehwa chŏllyak*)," and "building self-reliance (*charip kŏnsŏl*)," slogans that reflected the proclaimed objectives of the waste picker camp. Why did the military regime control waste pickers? What changes did this onset of institutionalization have on their life and work?

This chapter examines waste picker camps between the 1960s and the 1990s. I primarily focus on the Work Reconstruction Camp (WRC, *kŭllojaegŏndae*) and the Self-Sufficiency Work Camp (SWC, *chahwalkŭllodae*), two state-led waste picker camps that ran between 1961 and 1974 (WRC) during the Park Chung-Hee era, and 1979 and 1995 (SWC) during the Chun

[248] Korean historian Kim In-ho explains the range of regulations imposed on large-scale wholesalers to itinerant junk/salvage collectors, including a mandatory licensing procedure for any scrap business, wearing an armband and badge, and using a designated collection bag to demonstrate lawfulness. Kim In-ho, "Chungil chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏn esŏŭi p'yep'um hoesu chŏngch'aek," *Han'guk minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 57 (2008), 169-235; Kim, "T'aep'yŏngyang chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏn esŏ kŭmsok hoesu undong ŭi chŏn'gae wa shilchŏk," *Han'guk minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 62 (2010), 305-374; Kim In-ho, "Chungil chŏnjaeng shigi chosŏn nae komulsang pujŏng ŭi shilt'ae (1937-1940)," *Han'guk minjok undongsa yŏn'gu* 66 (2011), 127-178. These regulations were not entirely unique to Korea. Chad Denton suggests that Imperial Japan needed to control existing waste-related occupations to maximize material mobilization for total war. It launched a control system in Japan and in annexed Korea modeled after Nazi Germany's control system for its waste collectors and dealers. Chad B Denton, "Korean kuzuya,'German-style control' and the business of waste in wartime Japan, 1931-1945," *Business History* 64, no. 5 (2022): 904-922.

Doo-Hwan era and beyond. I examine what the state or state contractors–those who ran labor camps and institutional facilities–claimed to do, how camps were run, and what long-term consequences of these regulations.[249] Based on this line of questioning, I ask why waste pickers were labeled as a category of deviants, were reconfigured through coercive, military-like camps, and gradually pushed "out of sight."

The scholarship on waste picker camps has largely focused on state violence against waste pickers, positioning these camps alongside other vagrant regulation schemes or land reclamation camps during the Park Chung-hee era.[250] Sociologist Pak Hong-gŭn asserts that the WRC and the SWC served as "a spectacle of anomalous population," and that they provided a counterexample to the "productive subjects" promoted by the military regime.[251] However, the frequent invisibility of socially excluded groups contradicts his argument waste picker camps being a "spectacle." Korean Sociologist Yun Su-jong chronicled the history of the state's confinement of waste pickers as well as the Rag Commune, an organization created autonomously by waste pickers in 1986, with membership that fluctuated between 30 and 60 individuals from the 1980s to the 2000s.[252] Yun illustrates how the Commune adapted to structural

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[249] In his analysis of 1970s vagrant regulations, Korean sociologist Chŏng Su-nam suggests that philanthropic or outsourced welfare institutions functioned as arms of the state, characterizing them as "the state-welfare alliance of repression." Indeed, in analyzing waste picker camps, the notion of the state needs to be expanded beyond a mere bureaucratic body to one that incorporates para-governmental organizations that undertook the state's role in operating institutional facilities that targeted the "deviant" population. Chŏng Su-nam, "Kŏri wi ŭi sahoeak ilso wa ŏgap kwŏllyŏk ŭi yŏksŏl: 1970-nyŏndae purangin ŭl chungsimŭro," *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 41 no. 1 (2018): 308.

[250] In her analysis of social policy and child welfare during the authoritarian period, Korean historian Kim A-ram locates the WRC as part of vagrant children regulations and settlement programs. Kim A-ram, "5·16 kunjŏnggi sahoe chŏngch'aek: adongbokchi wa 'puranga' taech'aek ŭi sŏngkyŏk," *Yŏksawa hyŏnsil* 82 (2011): 329-65.

[251] Pak Hong-kŭn, "Sahoechŏk paeje ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa pyŏnhwa: nŏngmajui kukka tongwŏn ŭi yŏksa rŭl chungsimŭro," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 108 (2016): 244-256.

[252] Yun Su-jong, "Nŏngma kongdongch'e ŭi sŏngkyŏk kwa kŭ pyŏnhwa," *Chinbo p'yŏngnon* 15 (2003): 136-162; "P'oidong 266-pŏnji: nŏngmajui maŭl kwa nŏngma kongdongch'e," *Chinbo p'yŏngnon* 29 (2006): 178-193.

changes in recycling policy such as the economies of scale in recyclable collection and improved quality of discarded materials that had higher value as used goods than scrap. Contrasting the coercive nature of state-led waste picker camps, Yun argues that despite state intervention and the removal of their autonomy, waste-pickers created their own lifeworlds. However, neither questioned the camp's relationship to waste nor the long-term consequences of its three decades of operation.

A study of Kwangju's waste pickers reveals a slightly different point of entry:[253] the role of the urban poor in the 1980 Kwangju Uprising and the undercounting of civilian casualties.[254] Korean historian Yi Chŏng-sŏn examines these two interrelated questions by focusing on three characteristics of the urban poor, particularly waste pickers: their connection to collective living in confinement facilities and camps, their lack of civil registration or next of kin, and their settlement sites on the city's outskirt.[255] Yi explains that the unregistered status of many members of the urban underclass allowed the state to deny or conceal their very presence, including their deaths, which may be one reason why Kwangju's waste pickers vanished from view after the Uprising.[256] However, the disappearance of waste pickers not only implies

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[253] Yi Chŏng-sŏn, "1980-nyŏn Kwangju hangjaeng kwa tosi pinmin: ŏdisŏ wasŏ ŏdiro sarajyŏnnŭn'ga," *Yŏksa munje yŏn'gu* 45 (2021): 49-89.

[254] The Kwangju uprising, which occurred in the southwestern city of Kwangju May 18-27, 1980, is also known as the May 18 Kwangju Democratization Movement. What began as a student protest against the imposition of Martial Law escalated into a ten-day struggle between armed citizens and military forces, which culminated in the Airborne Brigade's brutal suppression of the Citizen's Army. The uprising was an important moment in South Korea's democratization movement, shaping its broader political and social landscape. For an overview of the uprising and its contested meanings, see: Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[255] Yi indicates that shoe shiners, who did not have any family or next of kin, took part in the Citizen's Army (*simin'gun*) against the Martial Law Command on the last two days of the Uprising; that urban underclass provided additional protestors through their street networks. Yi, "Kwangju," 67-68.

[256] This is based on the allegation that the Martial Law Command murdered and buried waste pickers in mass graves while omitting their deaths from the official death toll, which was reported in testimonials during the National Assembly Hearings and the Kwangju Special Committee investigations, as well as in popular sources and the media. Yi, "Kwangju," 78-79.

their absence but also their invisibility—a consequence for which state violence is not the sole cause. This relative emphasis on state violence obscures the social cause: urbanites' indifference towards the harsh realities of vagrant regulation and confinement schemes, as well as the expulsion of the urban underclass from the city. Yi argues that this social violence implicitly removed the urban poor from their field of vision, and that invisibility functioned as one exclusionary mechanism.

It is noteworthy that all three scholars hint at the presence of violence of and/or around waste pickers but do not analyze it explicitly.[257] Pak discusses the homicide of a waste picker by a police officer, as well as rampant violence in the SWC camp units, implying that waste picker camps may have led to police condoning violence against waste pickers;[258] Yun notes the living environment of the Rag Commune as violent, with physical assaults and child abuse, preventing the formation of a long-lasting community.[259] However, they portray such incidents as characteristic of street populations without analyzing them in terms of victims and/or perpetrators, the relationship between the various forms of violence that occurred around waste pickers, or their perpetuation.

One way of understanding the extensive violence among waste pickers is to understand different types of violence as relational. For instance, the coercive and brutal policing of the urban underclass during the military regime was connected to confrontations with state agents and the need to establish an informal social order of waste pickers (and larger street populations), which made waste pickers both victims of state violence and perpetrators of other forms of violence, including interactions among themselves, with street population, or other citizens. The reported volatility of

[257] Although the context positions the alleged violence of waste pickers—as part of the armed citizenry—during the Kwangju uprising closer to subaltern violence, Yi argues that it merits further analysis. Yi, "Kwangju," 64.

[258] Pak, "Nŏngmajui," 242, 247-8.

[259] Yun, "Nŏngma kongdongch'e," 155, 162.

waste pickers was often deemed to be temperamental, interpersonal, and apolitical.[260] Rather than moralizing about violence, it is more useful to face the chains of violence that constitute the marginalization process. Their violence was not always a cause but one of the consequences of their punishment and confinement, which gave rise to other forms of exclusionary practices, making their marginalization more complex.

Considering this complexity of exclusion and marginalization, this chapter focuses on the specific ways in which waste pickers were excluded and analyzes this process in its social, economic, and spatial dimensions. First, waste picker camps resulted in their social exclusion. This initial institutionalization often led to further institutionalization, criminalization, and pauperization, maintaining them as an urban underclass and social outcasts. Second, waste pickers were economically vulnerable both due to their subjection to the police and the emergence of waste management, which rendered waste pickers economically vulnerable even within the informal waste economy. The police or their intermediaries frequently manipulated sales prices, leaving waste pickers precarious even within the informal waste economy, while their forced uprooting and lack of financial stability contributed to their economic deprivation. Lastly, the WRC and SWC secluded waste pickers from the urban space and rendered them invisible. After a series of relocations and displacements, they were eventually driven out of the city by a combination of accelerated urban development and outdated camp siting policies that were incompatible with the increasing competition for urban space.

This chapter draws on a variety of sources, ranging from state-produced ones such as governmental and police reports and administrative documents, to civil society archives such as surveys, petition letters, and waste pickers' newsletters that make legible the waste pickers' voices. In particular, I incorporate a new series of city-level sources that reveal eviction cases, as well as the city's guideline on the relocation of and housing assistance policies for

[260] This kind of street violence differs from subaltern violence, which was used as a weapon of the weak against domination and oppression.

the SWC units. While my analysis largely focuses on camps located in Seoul, I also incorporate reports and surveys produced nationwide and in other cities. I begin by situating waste picker camps within the social control of the 1960s, looking especially at why the state identified waste pickers as disruptive to social order and in need of reformation. I move on to examine how waste picker camps led to their social exclusion, and how this initial social exclusion engendered both their economic and spatial exclusion.

SOCIAL ORDER, PERCEIVED DEVIANCE, AND WASTE PICKERS IN THE 1960S

In the early 1960s, when the junta seized power in South Korea after the May 16th coup, the military regime established a network of camps and institutional facilities. The country had endured a great deal of social and political turmoil in less than two decades including Liberation (1945), the Korean War (1950-53), and the April Revolution (1960). Legitimacy and sovereignty were the regime's foremost concerns. Key to establishing this legitimacy was establishing social order. To this end, camps gathered together segments of the population that the regime deemed problematic under its control, reduced penal costs, and made use of their labor.

Establishing camps for specific population segments was not entirely new. After liberation in 1945, the state organized a range of settlement (*chŏngch'ak*) programs that mobilized refugees for agricultural development, providing them employment and relieving the state of the need to provide costly monetary aid.[261] During the Second Republic, the Chang administration launched the National Construction Enterprise (*Kukt'o kŏnsŏl saŏp*), which put the urban unemployed to work on major public work projects (e.g., infrastructure construction and land reclamation).[262] During the First

[261] Kim A-ram, "Han'guk ŭi nanmin palsaeng kwa nongch'on chŏngch'ak saŏp (1945-1960-yŏndae)," (PhD diss., Yŏnse taehakkyo, 2017).

[262] Initially planned as a seven-month project to make use of surplus American developmental/agricultural aid (PL480), the National Construction Enterprise did not last long due both to delayed shipments of grain and to the May 16 coup in 1961. Kim, "Nanmin," 201; Yim Song-ja, "5·16 ihu kukt'o kŏnsŏl saŏp kwa kukt'o kŏnsŏldan unyŏng silt'a,." *Han'guk kŭnhyŏndaesa yŏn'gu* 67 (2013): 900-942.

and Second Republics, these camps functioned as one part of wider social work programs, providing relief to targeted populations and settling them in local communities. While the Park regime resumed the National Construction Enterprise, historian Kim A-ram suggests that the regime used it as a means of punishment, targeting street gangs, members of organized crime groups (*chojik p'ongnyŏk*), draft dodgers (*kun mip'ilja*), orphans (*koa*), and vagrants (*purangin*).

Under the Third Republic, the state's focus turned to controlling and excluding target populations. The military regime identified segments it considered to be harmful to the social order and impressed them into land reclamation camps (*kaech'ŏktan*), refugee settlement programs, or protection facilities run under military-like discipline. Targeting whomever the regime depicted to be socially deviant, some of these programs claimed to protect the targeted population, whereas others claimed to work toward their reformation and rehabilitation.[263] Waste picker camps, such as the WRC, were among the latter.

How did the military regime define "social order"? A 1962 Ministry of Justice report, "Measures for Establishing Social Order" (*Sahoe chilsŏ hwangnip ŭl wihan taech'aek*), illustrates the state's concerns: regulation of social and educational morals (*p'unggi*); promotion of orderly vehicular traffic; suppression of violent criminality, smuggling and contraband, drug addiction, theft and burglary, and perjury; the operation of reformatory and correctional facilities; reinforcement of police investigations; and anti-communist preparedness. These categories were flexible and open-ended and encompassed various characters and identities, providing the state significant latitude to catalog what might be deviant or detrimental to social order.

Looking into one aspect of "social order" - the regulation of violent criminals - we find an example of a vague, fluid category. The report gathers different kinds of "violent criminals" (*p'ongryŏk sapŏm*) that had been rounded up during crackdowns: delinquent students, school dropouts, shoe-shiners, pimps, off-duty soldiers, gangsters, hoodlums, misbehaving disabled veterans,

[263] Kim A-ram, "5·16 kunjŏnggi sahoe chŏngch'aek: adongbokchi wa 'puranga' taech'aek ŭi sŏngkyŏk." *Yŏksa wa hyŏnsil* 82 (2011): 329-65

train thugs, and rag pickers.[264] Instead of providing a specific definition of social order or violent crime, the state generates a diffuse, expandable list of identities: some broadly falling into the category of "street labor," while others shared few affinities. What tied them together was their perceived deviance and potential harm to society. By using equivocal and overarching categories, state actors could exert their discretionary power. It allowed them to abuse the power of the state and police, defining its target populations anew as needed.

Against this backdrop of social control, we can ask why the state depicted waste pickers as deviant and in need of reformation and rehabilitation. In postwar South Korea, waste picking was only one of the many odd jobs on the street, a strategy of survival for street dwellers. Often associated with war orphans or street children, or taken up under street gang oversight, it was their vagrant status—undocumented and unregistered—that turned waste pickers into a target for the regime's social control.[265]

For the state to exert indiscriminate control over its population, it needed to label them, sort them into a category, and bring them under its purview. Establishing a camp specifically targeting waste pickers delivered all three goals. The name of the WRC combines "work" (*kŭllo*) and "reconstruction" (*chaegŏn*), the two terms that illustrated how the state designed the camp. First, by deploying the term "work" (*kŭllo*) over "labor" (*nodong*), the regime sought to instill a particular work ethic and form of worker subjectivity into waste pickers. Historian Hwasook Nam explains the colonial regime's preference for the term worker (*kŭlloja*, which means "a person who works diligently") over the term laborer (*nodongja*, which means "a person who labors") was part of a wider ideological program to transform workers into "industrial warriors" who would eventually serve to build the Japanese empire.[266]

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[264] Between May 1961 and May 1962, the police rounded up 18,993 "violent criminals" or whoever it deemed suspicious. Of the total, only 3,137 were sent to work at the National Construction Enterprise sites. The report indicates that there were insufficient number of sites to put those arrested to work. Pŏmmubu, *Sahoe chilsŏ hwangnip ŭl wihan taech'aek* (Sŏul: Pŏmmubu, 1962). BA0084324.

[265] In this sense, what the regime claimed as deviant was closer to an alleged deviancy for it had not yet been established but rather remained speculative, if not purely rhetorical.

[266] Hwasook Nam, Building Ships, Building a Nation: Korea's Democratic Unionism under Park Chung Hee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 25-26.

Such linguistic shifts continued after the war and, by the 1970s, "worker" became the official term under the military regime.

Second, its use of "reconstruction" (*chaegŏn*) over "construction (*kŏnsŏl*)" indicates that the regime understood reconstruction to exceed its narrowly economic sense. Historian Yi Sang-rok suggests that the term "reconstruction" shows how the military regime denied what had been built under past administrations.[267] During the Park regime, "reconstruction" implied establishing a new nation, identity, and national subjects.[268] Subsequently established camps carried similar vocabularies in their names, such as self-support (*chahwal*), rehabilitation (*kaengsaeng*), welfare (*pokji*)—all purported to set apart and discipline waste pickers.

Waste picker camps lasted more than three decades, a period that saw recycling gradually become part of public service and civic duty, and the campsites inevitably coveted by the ever-expanding cities and their favored middle class citizens. Combined with these broader structural changes, waste picker camps prompted social, economic, and spatial exclusion of waste pickers. While these forms of exclusion occurred either simultaneously or in

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[267] The military regime claimed to be building a new nation while denigrating the previous governments, both the First (Rhee-Liberal Party) and the Second (Chang-Democratic Party) Republic, if only to justify its abrupt seizure of power. Yi Sang-nok, "Kyŏngje cheiljuŭi ŭi sahoejŏk kusŏng kwa 'saengsanjŏk chuch'e' mandŭlgi." *Yŏksa munje yŏn'gu* 52 (2010): 115-158.

[268] For instance, the National Citizens' Reconstruction Movement (*Chaegŏn kungmin undong*, NCRM), which began shortly after the coup, sought to enlighten and guide citizens as dutiful nationals (*kungmin*) subordinate to the state. The programs of the National Citizens' Reconstruction Movement regulated everyday lives of citizens and disciplined them with attributes and dispositions that would be better suited for national reconstruction. The term *chaegŏn* was attached as a prefix to otherwise vernacular words, such as chaegŏn-date, chaegŏnbok-suits, chaegŏn-exercises, or even replacing usual greeting expressions with 'chaegŏn-hapsida (Let's reconstruct),' creating the newly shared meaning of *chaegŏn* to Koreans. As a result, the military government launched the term as an overarching propaganda as well as a discourse in the 1960s. Yi, "Saengsanjŏk chuch'e," 150-153. Historian Hŏ Ŭn argues that the NCRM's moral education and disciplining programs provided an outlet for the state to intervene in people's conscience and daily lives, ultimately paving the way towards the Yushin era in the 1970s. Hŏ Ŭn, "'5·16 kunjŏnggi' chaegŏn kungmin undong ŭi sŏngkyŏk," *Yŏksa munje yŏn'gu* 11 (2003): 11-51. Also see: Charles R. Kim, *Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 185-193.

phases, the initial social isolation–the establishment of the waste picker camp itself–was the precursor to their economic and spatial exclusion.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION: HOUSING WASTE PICKERS IN CAMPS

Waste picker camps varied in terms of their size, infrastructure, and organization. While camps were mostly concentrated in Seoul, there were other smaller organizations or camps nationwide. For official camps, there were the two police-led camp networks that housed waste pickers: one was "*kŭllojaegŏndae*" (the Work Reconstruction Camp, WRC) ran between 1962 and 1974, and the other was "*chahwalgŭllodae*" (the Self-supporting Work Camp, SWC), ran between 1979 and 1995. Between 1975 and 1978, the police relegated the oversight of the WRC to the Korean National Police Veterans Association (*taehanminguk chaehyang kyŏnguhoe*, KNPVA), who renamed the WRC to the Korea Work Reconstruction Welfare Association (*han'guk kŭllo chaekŏn pokjihoe*, KWRWA) and ran it between 1975 and 1978.[269] Apart from these police-led camps, there were other waste picker organizations, from sizable ones such as the Korean Industry Central (*taehan sanŏp chunganghoe*) and the Korean Ant Association (*han'guk kaemihoe*, KAA) to small encampments of fewer than ten waste pickers.[270]

[269] In 1978, following President Park Chung-hee's order, the MHSA investigated privately-run waste picker camps with the intention of taking oversight from them. This investigation became the basis of establishing the SWC. Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae unyŏng p'yeji* (Sŏul: Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, 1995), 131-140. BA0858826.

[270] The private organization claimed that the WRC's activities overlapped with its business and that the private sector should be in charge of managing waste pickers, while the police should only intervene when supervision was required. In 1965, the Korea Industrial Central lodged a petition with the city. Although the city referred the query to the SMP twice, in July and October 1965, the SMP did not appear to answer either of the requests. Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, *P'yep'um sujibin(nŏngmajui)su e taehan chirŭi* (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi kajŏng pokchiguk, 1965), 6-9. BA0089634.

Demographic characteristics

For the state, the production of statistical knowledge primarily aimed to contain and curb social deviance. This is clear when we note that official statistics were compiled by the state's internal security departments. In contrast, the Rag Commune survey, conducted by a Commune activist, shifted the focus to individual experiences of waste picking, and asked about migration history, the number of waste picker camps individuals had been part of, incarceration records, and experiences with other welfare institutions or reeducation camps. I combine six surveys undertaken between 1964 and 1995 to attempt to reconstruct the demographic characteristics of waste pickers in different camps.[271] I do not suggest that these statistics and their comparisons are representative. In the absence of comprehensive or longitudinal data, these survey results only provide glimpses into waste pickers' lives.

At the 1962 inception of the WRC, the state required waste pickers register themselves with the city, which enabled the state to collect their birth data. As shown in Table 3-1, in the 1960s and early 1970s, more than fifty percent of waste pickers were adolescents and men in their twenties, most of military age (Table 3-1). The state claimed that by registering and acquiring a family registry (*hojŏk*),[272] waste pickers would eventually be counted as part of

[271] The data I used in this subsection come from the following: the 1964 Ewha survey; the 1972 report by the Seoul Metropolitan Police (SMP) on the operation of the WRC; the 1978 Ministry of Health and Social Affairs nationwide investigation; the 1980 survey of Kwangju's rag-pickers, including street encampments; the 1987 Rag Commune survey on Seoul's rag-pickers and camps; and the 1995 SMP report on the disbanding of the SWC. Idea sahoehakhoe, "Pusŏjin kkum ŭl moŭnŭn sonyŏndŭl." *Sedae* 2 no.17 (1964),173-183; Yim Pu-ja, "Kŭllon ch'ŏngsonyŏn t'ŭksu chŏndo yŏn'gu: kŭllojaegŏndae rŭl chungsimŭro" (Master thesis, Peroean k'ŭrisŭch'yan sinhak taehagwŏn, 1976); Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo* (Sŏul: kungmu chojŏngsil, 1978), 95-126. BA0883628; Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae unyŏng hyŏpchomun* (Kwangju: Kwangju kwangyŏksi sahoebokchigwa, 1980), 21-80. BA0160351; Song Kyŏng-sang, "Chahwalgŭllodae sŏlmun silt'ae chosa," *Nŏngma* 3 (December 1987), 15-23; Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae*, 131-140.

[272] In the 1964 Ewha survey and the 1975 SMP investigation, more than half the respondents had no living family members; in the 1979 Kwangju survey, 36% of waste pickers did not have civil registry records.

the "nation" (*kungmin*).[273] However, obtaining birth data better suited the needs of the state, allowing it to detect possible draft dodgers,[274] or capture those who otherwise would be itinerant and untraceable, likely remaining outside of its control.[275]

Table 3-1 The age of the inmates, 1963-1995

	1964 (Seoul)	1975 (Seoul)	1978 (Seoul)	1979 (Kwangju)	1987 (Seoul) 2)	1995 (Nationwide)
under 20	32.5% (26)	16.2% (58)	15% (NA)	19.1% (37)	17% (NA)	NA
The 20s	75% (60)	54.9% (196)	73% (NA)	35.2% (68)		3.3% (18)
The 30s	17.5% (14) 1)	21.6% (77)		33.1% (64)	38% (NA)	27% (147)
The 40s		7.3% (26)	12% (NA)	12.4% (24)	45% (NA)	69.6% (378)
The 50s						
Above 60						

Note: 1) The scale used in the source indicates others; the oldest age scale used in this survey is '22-26'. 2) The scale used in the source indicates the year of birth, and consists of three categories: 'Before liberation' (-1945), 'after the liberation until the end of Korean war' (1945-1953), and 'After the Korean War' (1954-), When calculated, these are equivalent to 'above 42', '34–42', and 'under 33'. These scales did not correspond to any of the other surveys; despite the vagueness, I located each data into above 40s, 30s, and under 30s for comparability.

The nationwide distribution of waste picker camps shows a concentration in urban areas, reflecting the characteristics of waste generation.[276] Among the 110 waste picker

[273] "'Nŏngmajui' edo in'gwŏn ŭn itta," *Chosŏn Ilbo*, December 13, 1961. Family registry would make those who otherwise would have remained outside the state system comply with certain civic duties, particularly military service. Confining, registering, and keeping track of men of a certain age suited the state's needs, serving to provide a labor reserve and a productive workforce. For the modern Korean household registration system and its role in wartime mobilization, citizenship, and population control, see: Kyung Moon Hwang, *Rationalizing Korea: the Rise of the Modern State, 1894-1945* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 195-219.

[274] Kyŏngsangnam-do stated that detecting draft dodgers and others avoiding duties related to military service, such as physical examinations and the training of reserve forces, formed part of the guidance for confining waste pickers. Kyŏngsangnam-do, *Kŭllo chahwaldae chŏnggi pogosŏ songbu* (Kyŏngsangnam-do: Kyŏngsangnam-do sahoegwa, 1975), 302-335. BA0177447.

[275] James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 51-52.

[276] Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalkŭllodae*.

camps nationwide with 7,357 inmates counted in the 1978 MHSA survey, half (3,093) were located in Seoul.[277] The size of waste picker camps varied. Some had hundreds of inmates, whereas others consisted of groups of as small as three;[278] some were organized by social welfare or religious organizations, others resembled small street encampments, usually organized by an experienced waste picker.[279] In the WRC, there were 1,380 waste pickers in the mid-1960s, which increased to 3,510 in 1975 when it was disbanded. The SWC started with 4,431 inmates in 1979, then gradually decreased over time: 2,367 in 1983, 1,474 in 1988, 855 in 1992, and 543 in 1995 when it was disbanded. These figures, however, fall short of the actual number of waste pickers. In its 1978 investigation, the MHSA estimated the actual number to be closer to 30,000, an estimate four times larger than its survey figure.[280]

[277] Other regions included South Kyŏngsang (794), Kyŏnggi (722), and North Kyŏngsang (618).

[278] In Kwangju, a city in South Chŏlla Province, there were six waste picker groups in 1978, with 193 inmates spread over fifteen encampments. Each encampment housed three to twenty-five waste pickers, and the leaders of each encampment were long-term waste pickers. Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae*.

[279] In 1974, in Taegu, a city in North Kyŏngsang Province, there were 826 waste pickers in 46 encampments run by two private organizations. Kim Chong-bok, "Puru ch'ŏngsonyŏn (nŏngmajui) taech'aek: kyŏngsangbukto p'yŏn," *Chibang haengjŏng* 25, no. 274 (1976), 86-90; In Masan, a city in South Kyŏngsang Province, the city housed waste pickers in street encampments under a registered organization in 1973. Since, the city had managed 488 waste pickers spread over five encampments, run by five managerial staff. Kyŏngsangnam-do, *Kŭllojahwaldae*.

[280] Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*, 95-126.

Table 3-2 Education level of waste pickers

	1963 (Seoul)	1975 (Seoul)	1978 (Seoul)	1979 (Kwangju)	1987 (Seoul)	1995 (Nationwide)
No education	10.0% (8)	24.2% (86)	68%	53.4% (103)	21%	32.0% (174)
Elementary school	48.8% (39)	63.2% (225)	27%	34.7% (67)	36%	50.1% (272)
Middle school	25.0% (20)	9.3% (33)	5%	9.8% (19)	30%	13.3% (72)
High school	13.8% (11)	2.8% (10)		2.1% (4)	11%	4.4% (24)
University	2.5% (2)	0.6% (2)		0.0% (0)	2% (1)	0.2% (1)

Related to the lack of civil registration, waste pickers had received little education. As shown in Table 3-2, the 1978 MHSA survey (68%) and the 1979 Kwangju survey (53%) showed particularly low education levels. While the 1986 Rag Commune survey shows 84% of the respondents received vocational training, such training was mostly done in prisons. Reflecting the low education levels, literacy rates were also low, with only 47% of the respondents able to read a newspaper.[281] With little education and without civil registration, finding a regular job was not a viable option.[282]

[281] Nŏngma kongdongch'e, *Nŏngma 1* (Sŏul: Nŏngma kongdongch'e, 1986).

[282] The 1978 MHSA survey presented three categories to choose from: "difficulties of making a living" (61%), "no skills" (33%), and "family trouble" (6%); the 1980 Kwangju survey presented four categories: "no education" (97), "convict" (14), "physical disability" (7), and "others" (75). The 1980 Kwangju survey asked about prior employment, with these responses: "no occupation" (137), "day labor" (11), "orphan" (47), "office worker" (0). Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*, 114; Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 21-52.

Table 3-3 Number of years spent at the current camp

Number of years spent at the current camp	1979 (Kwangju)	1987 (Seoul)
Less than a year	10.9% (21)	18%
1-2 years	14.5% (28)	10%
2-3 years	23.8% (46)	
3-4 years	20.7% (40)	12%
5-10 years	30.1% (58) 1)	29%
10-15 years		14%
More than 15 years		17%

Note: 1) The scale used in the source indicates more than 5 years.

It is then no coincidence that many waste pickers undertook the work as a long-term income source, with many doing it their whole lives. Table 3-3 shows that waste pickers had done their work for a relatively long time. In Table 3-4, the 1979 Kwangju survey and the 1987 Rag Commune survey show that more than thirty percent of waste pickers spent more than five years in their current camp. In the aftermath of the Korean War, and during the waves of urban migration, waste picking might have been merely a survival strategy. But when individuals picked for more than a decade, it was no longer just a means to subsistence: it was their job.

Camp Operation

Looking into the management of the WRC and the SWC, the police authorities in charge reveal how the camp itself criminalized waste pickers. At the WRC, the Information Division in local police stations oversaw the WRC, appointing the head of each unit (*chidaechang*).[283] At the SWC, the Crime Prevention Division in local police stations managed the units and the head of each Crime Prevention Division, working as the head of each unit, dispatched additional police superintendents (*chidogwan*)

[283] In each unit, there was: a mid-level leader (*chungdaejang*) selected by the inmates; a leader (*sodaejang*) for each bunkhouse (*ch'ŏnmak*); and externally-hired administrative staff. The designated police authorities were given military-style titles.

across them.

The transition from the Information Division to the Crime Prevention Division reflected not just the different demographic composition of waste pickers, but also the state's perception of them. As noted, in the early 1960s many waste pickers were of military age, uprooted without civil registration or next of kin, and lived and worked on the streets, which justified the state's identification and regulation. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, as waste pickers aged past draft age, their identity became less relevant. Instead, based on documented misdemeanors and felonies, the state defined their deviance and criminality, which warranted their confinement and rehabilitation.[284] For instance, the SWC's objectives included managing biographical information (*shinsang kwalli*) and preventing crime, demonstrating the criminalization of waste pickers.

While both the WRC and the SWC were administered by the police, each claimed different objectives. The WRC claimed to make waste picking an occupation and to rehabilitate waste pickers. Accordingly, the police organized its own sales system, but it is questionable whether this system benefited waste pickers. In contrast, the SWC demanded that waste pickers find legitimate employment, claiming to facilitate their "job transition" (*chikŏp chŏnhwan*). Their programs reflected the relative difference in their emphases. For instance, the WRC oversaw a reformation committee (*kyohwa wiwŏnhoe*) responsible for the "moral education" (*chŏngsin kyoyuk*) of waste pickers.[285] The SWC prioritized skills training, job matching, and self-sufficiency guidance (*chahwal chido*). However, it is unclear whether these programs were run regularly. Other waste picker organizations, especially those led by

[284] Initially, the WRC consisted of a high proportion of men in their teens and twenties. Over time, the average age increased significantly between 1963 and 1995. In 1995, when the SWC was abolished, nearly 70% of the inmates were older than forty and 29.3% above fifty. Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae*.

[285] The General Provision of the WRC (*kŭllojaegŏndae saenghwal kyubŏm*) reveals how the camp intended to instill moral norms (honesty, diligence, self-reliance), ways of living (working regular hours, saving one's income, tidying one's surroundings), and discipline to prevent potential criminal behavior (those who were prone to thievery and assault, recalcitrant to labor, or avoided military duties). Yim, "Kŭllojaegŏndae."

the government, ran similar guidance and reformation programs.[286]

Neither the WRC nor the SWC had a fixed funding source. Budgetary records reveal that the police department relied on donations to cover operating costs. While there is no budget information available for the WRC, it received donations from various sources.[287] For the SWC, local governments covered the majority of the operational costs (81%), most of which came from the donation fund for the needy (*puru iut topki sŏnggŭm*) as well as security and welfare donations (*Anbo bokji sŏnggŭm*).[288] Similarly, several groups of waste pickers sought support or donations, whether to physically improve their living environments or food and other material support.[289]

The housing provision indicates that waste picker camps lacked a long-term vision. In both the police-led and private waste picker camps, pickers suffered from substandard living conditions. In the WRC, waste pickers were housed in a handful of canvas bunkhouses shared by forty to one hundred waste pickers.[290] For the SWC, local governments provided the infrastructure, including bunkhouses and work yards, while the use of prefabricated structures allowed the police to relocate the units easily if necessary.[291] In Kwangju, most

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[286] Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae*; Kyŏngsangnam-do, *Kŭllojahwaldae.*

[287] The camps received donations of various kinds. Protestant missionaries donated and built a bunkhouse for the WRC inmates, and several newspaper articles reported on various donations to the camp, ranging from donations from the general public to a contribution from the First Lady. "Kŭllojaegŏndae e maksa kidokkyododŭri," *Tonga Ilbo* November 25, 1966; "Yuk yŏsa tŭng chaegŏndae ch'aja onŭl ch'usŏk, kak kyesŏ onjŏng" *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun* September 29, 1966.

[288] Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae.*

[289] Petition letters written by waste picker camp leaders asked for more attention and support. Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Han'guk kŭllo chaegŏn pokchihoe chiwŏn yoch'ŏnge taehan hoesin* (Sŏul: Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, 1976), 226-249. BA0185302; Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 113-152.

[290] "Uridŭri sŏl ttangŭn itta: ŭmji sŏ yangji ro nŏngmajui ŭi saenghwal paeksŏ," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, September 16, 1963.

[291] After the SWC's inauguration, between October 1979 and early 1980, local governments introduced their own regulations, the "Rules on the Management of the SWC Housing" (*chahwalgŭllodae sukso unyŏng kwalli kyuch'ik*). They then began to build accommodation and work yards for the SWC camps so that waste pickers could be relocated there. Songt'an-si, *chahwalgŭllodae sukso unyŏng kwalli*

of the city's encampments were shanties that consisted of plywood or galvanized iron sheets and occupied private- or city-owned land.[292] Many of these organizations lacked even the most basic management, let alone the means to achieve their alleged goals, such as protecting waste pickers and fostering self-sufficiency.

The budget shortage and absence of long-term prospects were reiterated by the siting policies of both the WRC and the SWC. Both organizations located their units on vacant lots of land, with comparable ratios of state-owned and privately-owned land.[293] When establishing the SWC, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Naemubu*, MIA) advised local governments to initially seek out state- or city-owned vacant land for campsites; if this was not possible, the MIA advised that they "look for support from benefactors."[294] By temporarily siting the camps in vacant lots, the police anticipated the camps' eventual displacement or banishment, leaving waste pickers vulnerable to the prospect of eviction. As I will discuss later, housing waste pickers in urban areas was incompatible with the speed of urban redevelopment or the transfer of land ownership.

The design of waste picker camps, whether state-led or privately-run, was concerned more with the social control of waste pickers rather than their welfare or labor. Camp infrastructure, siting guidelines, and budgetary records all demonstrate

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kyuch'ik (Songt'an: Kyŏnggi-do Songt'ansi, 1981). BA0049054; Tongduch'ŏn-si, *chahwalgŭllodae sukso unyŏng kwalli kyuch'ik* (Tongduch'ŏn: Kyŏnggi-do Tongduch'ŏn-si, 1981). BA0138357.

[292] Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae*, 53-85.

[293] In 1975, of the seventeen WRC units, eight units were sited on privately owned land. Yim, "Kŭllojaegŏndae," 16. For the SWC, 59.7% of the living quarters and 59.4% of the workspaces were located on state- or city-owned land. According to the SWC Reorganization Plan (*chahwalkŭllodae chŏngbi taech'aek*), the SWC occupied 107,534.26 square meters (1,157,489 square feet) of land in Seoul. Of this, 63,155.51 square meters (679,800 square feet) were on state- or city-owned land and 44,378.75 square meters (477,688 square feet) were on private land. Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Chahwalkŭllodae chŏngbi taech'aek (Sijang pangch'im che 1461-ho)* (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1987).

[294] Naemubu, *Saemaŭl chaegŏnhoe silt'ae chosap'yo chaksŏng yoryŏng* (Sŏul: naemubu, n.d.). This document, produced by the MIA, was an appendix to the Kwangju-si investigation reports. Although the Instruction document was undated and lacked a description of its production, it can be inferred that it commissioned an investigation into waste picker camps nationwide so as to reorganize them into an official camp network. Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 54-61.

that the state substituted needed welfare with the self-supporting labor of the waste pickers, if it was not extracting their surplus labor. As Ch'u Chi-hyŏn, a Korean sociologist suggests, waste picker camps functioned as an "an alternative to incarceration," allowing the state to control what it designated a "problematic" population at a reduced cost.[295]

Institutionalization, Criminalization, and Pauperization

The state saw waste pickers as suspect due to their itinerancy as many lacked a stable job or fixed residence. Ironically, state regulation of vagrancy led to their recurrent institutionalization, which perpetuated the mobile population. How did this institutionalization affect waste pickers on the ground? Individual waste pickers experienced institutionalization or incarceration throughout their lives. The 1986 Rag Commune survey shows that approximately 60% of respondents had criminal records; 29% had been arrested or incarcerated as many as five times; 28% had been to the Samch'ŏng reeducation camp (*samch'ŏng kyoyukdae*). Individual life stories reveal that waste pickers had been enlisted in other labor camps and welfare facilities, such as Sŏsan reclamation camp (*sŏsan kaech'ŏktan*), the *Sŏn'gam* school (*sŏn'gam hakwŏn*), or the Brothers (*hyŏngje pokjiwŏn*), all of which were state-sponsored and infamous for their atrocious violence and exploitation.[296] Institutionalization's onset often resulted in additional institutionalization, which uprooted waste pickers, criminalized them, and left them vulnerable to other forms of state violence.

Frequently, waste pickers' criminal records were directly tied to their

[295] Ch'u argues that several camps under the authoritarian regime reduced penal system expenses, mobilized the labor of the inmates, and increased the efficiency of the criminal system. Ch'u Chi-hyŏn, "Pakchŏnghŭi chŏngkwŏn ŭi 'sahoeak' homyŏng: hyŏngsa sabŏp ŭi hyoyulsŏng hwakpo chŏllyak ŭl chungsimŭro," *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 117 (2018): 201-35.

[296] One member of the Rag Commune recalls his experience in the Brothers: Pak T'ae-ho, "Naega kyŏkkŭn hyŏngje pokchiwŏn saenghwal", *Nŏngma* 2 (May 1987), 21-26. Recently, these three cases have been investigated for their human right violation and abuse. Kukka in'gwŏn wiwŏnhoe, *Sŏn'gam hagwŏn adong inkwŏn ch'imhae sakŏn pogosŏ* (Sŏul: Kukka in'gwŏn wiwŏnhoe, 2018); Kŏmch'al kwagŏsa wiwŏnhoe, *Hyŏngjebokchiwŏn sakŏn chosa mit simŭi kyŏlgwa* (Sŏul: Pŏmmubu, 2018); Sŏsan-si, *Sŏsan kaech'ŏktan sakŏn p'ihaesanghwang silt'ae chosa* (Sŏsan: Sŏsan-si, 2019).

living and working conditions on the street. They were compelled to move around for work, which exposed them to police raids and increased the likelihood of being arrested. Further, due to the association between waste pickers and deviance, waste pickers were often falsely accused or subjected to harsher penalties. For example, once enlisted in the Samch'ŏng reeducation camp, former inmates reported that having been a waste picker and having a previous criminal record led to more severe charges and punishment.[297] In other instances, individuals were relocated from juvenile detention centers or rag picker camps to harsher camps, which suggests that the state authorities saw these facilities as carceral sites.[298] Such conviction records precluded them from securing formal jobs, leaving them few alternatives save the street life.

Waste pickers were forced by police, the state, or other agents to move between numerous institutional facilities: juvenile detention centers, orphanages, prisons, and protection facilities, among others. These involuntary moves uprooted their lives. Once institutionalized, their prison or reformatory camp records prevented them from leading normal lives, creating a vicious cycle of criminalization and pauperization. While this mobility was largely imposed by the state, which labeled them "vagrant" and "deviant," the state's narrative, with its seeming corrective focus, obscures its role in their institutionalization and their social exclusion.

ECONOMIC EXCLUSION: STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS FOR WASTE PICKERS

The labor of waste pickers was informal and irregular. Nonetheless, their submission to the police exacerbated their precariousness. Due to the police's role in mediating the collection and sales process, waste pickers were frequently relegated to an even lower position in the informal waste economy. Additionally, the emergence of public sector

[297] Waste pickers at the Rag Commune wrote about their experiences in the Samch'ŏng reeducation camp: "Naega kyŏkkŭn samch'ŏng kyoyuktae", *Nŏngma* 3 (December 1987), 25-34.

[298] As recounted in his essay, a member of the Rag Commune, Pak In-su, was displaced from the Seoul juvenile detention center to the *Sŏn'gam* school. Pak In-su, "Naŭi ŏrin sijŏl," *Nŏngma* 4 (May 1988), 38-43. Another waste picker, Yi To-il, moved from a rag picker camp to Sŏsan reclamation camp. Yi To-il, "Sumgyŏjin nŏngmajuiŭi yŏksa: kosaeng kkŭt'e nagi ittadŏn'ga," *Nŏngma* 2 (May 1987), 15.

waste management, particularly the institutionalization and domestication of recycling in the 1980s and 1990s, redefined the labor of waste pickers: recycling became a civic duty as much as a business one. Waste pickers were deprived of fair compensation for their labor, of economic opportunities, and of their very source of income.

Due to the varying quantity and quality of waste materials, waste pickers faced unpredictability and irregularity as informal laborers. Waste pickers at the WRC scavenged street litter, using tongs and a wooden basket (*ch'urŏng*) on their backs. Typically, curbside waste generated low-quality materials that fetched a lower price. In 1975, waste pickers collected ten to thirty kwan (37.5 to 112.5 kilograms) per day, sold their materials every ten days, and made 24,000-30,000 wŏn per month.[299] However, street scavenging rarely provided sufficient access to waste and a reliable income. Superintendents of the WRC or SWC units requested that other governmental institutions dispose their recyclables with them but to no avail.[300]

Access to waste caused conflicts among different waste picker camps. Either there were too many waste picker camps within a single jurisdiction or the monopolization of local waste generation caused friction between camps.[301] Yet neither the police nor the local authorities intervened or mediated to resolve the situation. Between 1977 and 1999, Kim Ch'ang-su, a leader at Kwangju's

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[299] They separated recyclable materials into paper and other categories. There were three categories of paper quality. Other materials included vinyl, glass bottles, aluminum cans, rags, leather, metals, rubbers, woods, bones, plastics, straw ropes and bags, burlap bags, and shells. Animals were fed bones and shells, while straw ropes were used to make paper. Some of the materials, such as straw bags and burlap sacks, were sold as-is. Yim, "Kŭllojaegŏndae," 19-21.

[300] In 1974, Masan's WRC units were denied permission to collect waste from the city's five institutions, including public schools and municipal garbage collection trucks. Kyŏngsangnam-do, *Kŭllojahwaldae*. In 1980, the police superintendent of Kwangju's SWC units sent a request to the city's thirty-five institutions, including government institutions, hospitals, universities, and other firms and businesses, asking them to donate their waste items or to negotiate an exclusive collection or contract. Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae*, 2-3.

[301] The MHSA investigation reported that the KWRPA had fifteen work spaces, and the KAA had nine within the authority of Seoul's West (*sŏbu*) police station. Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*, 1975: 16-25.

Hyŏpsinwŏn camp, reported the monopoly on local transfer stations and waste collection trucks and asked that the city authorities evenly divide access to waste. Kim suggested to city officials that the city facilitate contractual relationships between the camp and public institutions or municipal garbage trucks.[302] The city showed a reluctance to intervene either by prohibiting waste picker groups from monopolizing waste from municipal garbage trucks or by granting them access to more stable income sources such as the right to collect waste from public institutions.[303] Regardless of whether they resided in state-run camps or were members of private organizations, waste pickers were forced to rely on street scavenging as their primary source of income, unable to pursue better economic opportunities.[304]

Second, at the WRC and SWC the police and intermediary buyers controlled the sales system, which disadvantaged and even exploited waste pickers. At the inception of the WRC, the police set a series of rules, including: assigning a designated collection area to each camp unit; selling collected materials directly to factories; assigning intermediary buyers via a public bidding process; and having a police superintendent organize the sale of collected materials.[305] This exclusive intermediate buyer arrangement, however, led to the mistreatment of waste pickers. In 1974, *Tonga Ilbo* reported that exclusive intermediary buyers paid lower prices to the WRC than to other junk depots in the city, and that the police appeared to conspire with these intermediaries, condoning their physical abuse and manipulation.[306] As a result, approximately five hundred WRC inmates left the camp in 1973 alone.

Similar economic exploitation occurred in private waste picker camps. The

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[302] Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 113-152.

[303] Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 72-73.

[304] "Chaegŏndae unyŏng sich'aek chŏnhwanŭl," *Tonga Ilbo*, March 29, 1974; "Sidŭrhaejin p'yeji hwaryong," *Tonga Ilbo*, October 16, 1974; "Mulcha chŏryak kwa p'yegi chawŏn ŭi hwaryong," *Tonga Ilbo*, March 15, 1979; Kwangju kwangyŏksi, *Chahwalgŭllodae,* 117-118.

[305] Kyŏngch'alch'ŏng, *Chahwalgŭllodae*.

[306] "Nŏngmajui yŏngsemin pohodaech'aek ashwiwŏ," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, February 20, 1974; "Kyŏngch'al chijŏng komulsang hoengp'o chaja ŭngdal sŏ sidallinŭn chaegŏndae nŏngmajui," *Tonga Ilbo*, March 6, 1974.

MHSA's 1978 investigation reported that some waste picker organizations colluded with junk depots and manipulated the actual weight of the materials collected, depriving the waste pickers of extra earnings; others sought a premium from waste pickers who had reliable and lucrative access to waste such as dumpsites or buildings.[307] The MHSA criticized the "commercializing tendency" of private waste picker groups, which had transformed the camps into profitable businesses.[308]

Third, while waste picker camps continued to operate, the waste management system began to take shape, further marginalizing waste pickers. The 1973 Oil Crisis and the resulting resource crisis prompted institutional recycling schemes and a nationwide material saving movement.[309] In 1979, the government established the Korea Recycling Agency (*Han'guk chaesaeng kongsa*, KRA), which initially focused on agricultural vinyl waste before expanding its operations to encompass a broader variety of recyclable materials. In the 1980s, household recycling programs developed in response to a lack of landfill space, ever-increasing household waste generation, and a growing awareness of environmental problems. The KRA, voluntary recycling efforts, and city's pilot recycling schemes all compromised the livelihoods of waste pickers.

What effect did these economic exclusions have on waste pickers? The combination of waste picker camp schemes and broader socioeconomic changes placed individual waste pickers and their ways of life in a precarious situation. The life history of Yi To-il, the waste picker we encountered in the introduction, illustrates such a predicament through his various waste picker positions.[310] Yi began his career in the early 1960s when he joined the WRC. Yi

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[307] The KWRWA, for instance, charged a collection premium (20,000 wŏn). Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*, 21

[308] Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*, 115.

[309] Ch'ongmugwa, *Chongi sobi chŏryak undong chŏn'gae* (Sŏul: Ch'ongmuch'ŏ, 1973), 502-525. BA0139631

[310] This life story is based on the essay he published in the Rag Commune newsletter, *Nŏngma*. The editor reported that he combined Yi's own writing, retaining misspelling, and interview recordings into the essay. Yi, "Nŏngmajui," 10-20.

soon became a middleman, collecting straw (*chip'uragi*), straw ropes (*saekki*), and jute sacks (*kamani*) from nine Seoul garbage dumps and selling them to a paper manufacturer's supplier, until horse manure and straw were replaced by chemical pulp. In the 1970s, he opened a junk depot, a makeshift workshop space formed simply by erecting fences along the riverbank, which he soon vacated due to encroaching urban development. Two years later, he opened a second junk workshop, but was compelled to close due to his neighbors' complaints and the 1978 World Shooting Championship in Seoul. In the 1980s, Yi worked as a waste picker in the Rag Commune, only to discover that his work had become more precarious. His numerous attempts to climb the ladder within the informal waste economy were thwarted by technological advances in manufacturing, centralized recycling policy, and urban development, changes that Yi, as a waste picker, could not foresee or navigate.

Waste picker camps did not necessarily provide waste pickers with better economic opportunities or protection against economic exploitation. Rather, one form of exploitation (e.g., extortion by a gangmaster) was replaced by another (e.g., abuse by police or intermediary buyers). At the same time, emerging waste management and recycling policies directly affected their work and further marginalized them. Nor was this coincidental: waste picker camps were premised on treating waste pickers as deviants with little value as laborers. As I will show in the next section, waste pickers' economic exclusion coincided with their removal from urban space.

SPATIAL EXCLUSION: EXPELLING WASTE PICKERS FROM THE URBAN SPACE

By design, waste picker camps produced a spatialized form of exclusion. In the 1960s, when it was first established, the WRC served as a reformatory site where the state separated and disciplined social outcasts. WRC guidelines illustrate this corrective focus: it advised a code of behavior when outside the camp unit, such as dressing neatly, wearing a name tag, and avoiding slurs, explicitly differentiating its inmates from the general population.[311]

[311] Yim, "Kŭllojaegŏndae," 17-19.

Since the state had already segregated waste pickers into camps, it could effectively exclude them from urban space as needed. For the state, waste pickers risked exhibiting the country's backwardness, and this internalized foreign gaze was projected onto waste pickers.[312] This spatial order, which erased not just waste pickers but also a range of urban underclass and shantytown dwellers, was most pronounced during the Asian Games (1986) and Olympic Games (1988).[313] By removing the unclean and unsightly elements of the urban environment, such as junk depots, waste picker encampments, or waste pickers themselves, the state sought to establish control over urban space.

Over time, the SWC itself developed into a violent and quasi-carceral space. Former waste pickers from one SWC unit, commonly known as "P'oi-dong 266," reported being subjected to frequent police surveillance, raids, and frameups.[314] Whenever a burglary occurred in a neighboring area or the police made a show of force and the SWC units became a target. In one case, the police tortured up to sixty waste pickers—or anyone carrying a rag picker basket (*mangt'ae*)—in an effort to frame them. Once segregated, the police criminalized them into a pool for police quotas.

The 1979 establishment of SWC coincided with the unprecedented economic growth and urban development of the 1980s. Not surprisingly, the

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[312] Kungmu chojŏngsil, *Nŏngmajui sŏndo*,19.

[313] A former SWC inmate recalled his P'oi unit was put under house confinement by their police superintendent during the 1988 Olympic Games because, in his words, "the state might have been ashamed of us [the SWC]." For evictions prior to the Olympic Games, see: Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Disposable People: Forced Evictions in South Korea* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1988), 14-15; The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, *Evictions in Seoul, South Korea*, *Environment and Urbanization* 1 (1989): 89-94.

[314] Scholars and activists who investigated the case produced a report titled, "The Polarization of Seoul from the point of view of Poi-dong 266" (*P'oi-dong 266 pŏnji ro ponŭn Seoul ŭi yanggŭkhwa*). My analysis draws on this report and other investigative articles. *P'oidong 266-pŏnji pogosŏ: p'oidong 266-pŏnjiro ponŭn sŏur ŭi yanggŭkhwa Pogo taehoe charyojip* (Sŏul: saram yŏndae, 2006). Also see: Yun Su-jong, "P'oidong 266-pŏnji: nŏngmajui maŭl kwa nŏngma kongdongch'e," *Chinbo p'yŏngnon* 29 (2006): 178-193; 2013, Sin Hŭi-ch'ŏl, "Hwajae wa haengjŏng p'ongnyŏk e kurhaji ank'o chaegŏnhan p'oidong chaegŏn maŭl," *Chinbo p'yŏngnon* 50 (2011): 148-161.

SWC's siting policy, taking vacant land owned by the state or city, proved to be anachronistic. Seoul's Kangdong-gu unit, which housed waste pickers in March 1980, faced eviction after only two years: the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education designated the SWC site as a public school site in 1982 and sent a notice to vacate.[315] In Seoul's Sŏngdong-gu unit, the police did not extend free land-use approval for the SWC camp sites in 1988, causing waste pickers there to become illegal squatters.[316] Other SWC sites also became targets of major urban development projects beginning in the mid-1980s: road construction for the Olympic Games;[317] the closure of the Nanji Landfill and the construction of World Cup Park in the late 1990s;[318] and the restoration of Ch'ŏnggye stream (*ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn*) in the 2000s;[319] the last record of eviction occurring in Nowŏn-gu in 2013.[320] The conflict over land use, particularly eviction proceedings, lasted from the 1990s into the 2000s.

When examining the SWC sites that survived into the 1990s and 2000s, we find that they had become more than just waste picker camps, evolving into reserves for the residual, the surplus, and the dispossessed. In the Tongdaemun-gu unit, the district office indicated that occupants ran junk depots, car repair shops,

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[315] Kangdong-gu, *Chahwalgŭllodae ijŏn taech'aek e ttarŭn hoeŭi kaech'oe* (Sŏul: Kangdong-gu,1984), 55-57. BA0025909.

[316] Sŏngdong-gu, Chahwalgŭllodae puji tosi kyehoek saŏp sihaeng mit chŏngbi chiwŏn yoch'ŏng (Sŏul: Sŏngdong-gu, 2005). July 8, 2005.

[317] Sŏngdong-gu, Chahwalgŭllodae chŏngbie ttarŭn chugŏ taech'aek chiwŏn yoch'ŏng e taehan hoesin (Sŏul: Sŏngdong-gu, 1988). June 24, 1988.

[318] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi ŭihoe, 1995-nyŏndo haengjŏng samu kamsa: saenghwal hwan'gyŏng wiwŏnhoe hoeŭirok (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi ŭihoe, 1995). November 29, 1995; 1997-nyŏndo haengjŏng samu kamsa: saenghwal hwan'gyŏng wiwŏnhoe hoeŭirok (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi ŭihoe, 1997). November 22, 1997; 1998-nyŏndo haengjŏng samu kamsa: saenghwal hwan'gyŏng wiwŏnhoe hoeŭirok (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi ŭihoe, 1998), November 21, 1998.

[319] Tongdaemun-gu, *Sŏngbukch'ŏn (ku) chahwalgŭllodae isŏl ch'okkue taehan hoesin* (Sŏul: Tongdaemun-gu 2004), November 16, 2004.

[320] "Chungnangch'ŏn nŏngmajui 'chaegŏndae' ch'ŏlgŏdwae saengt'aegongwŏn chosŏngdoenda," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, November 10, 2013.

parking lots, and food stalls, to name just a few.[321] In the P'oi unit, it was the Kangnam-gu office that displaced additional evictees: in 1989, the Kangnam-gu office displaced fourteen evicted households and sixteen disabled veterans' households, and in 1996, it displaced thirty-six evicted households.[322] The SWC sites grew from the initial SWC unit to accommodate different inhabitants and their livelihoods. The city's demolition and eviction records portrayed the inhabitants and their settlements as impediments to urban development projects. Yet, it is important to recognize that waste pickers became illegal occupants and faced eviction threats while remaining in the same spaces to which they had been forcefully relocated and confined.[323]

It is unclear whether the police foresaw the city's burgeoning development needs. What we do know is that Seoul City prepared for the organization's relocation well before the police officially abolished the SWC.[324] The Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) produced the SWC Reorganization Plan (*Chahwalgŭllodae chŏngbi taech'aek*) in 1987 in preparation for relocating Seoul's SWC units.[325] The plan provided relocation or repair instructions for district offices on the existing SWC

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[321] Tongdaemun-gu, Sŏngbukch'ŏn (ku) chahwalgŭllodae hŏngbiwa kwallyŏn ŭigyŏnsahang (Sŏul: Tongdaemun-gu 2005). March 2, 2005.

[322] The district office also changed the zoning for the site without informing its inhabitants, rendering them illegal occupants subject to the land reparation fee. Dwellers at the P'oi site have since been subjected to repeated demolitions, police brutality, and hired thugs, all while being unable to register.

[323] Sŏngdong-gu, *Chahwalgŭllodae*.

[324] Incidentally, in late 1988, the police also had the SWC inmates sign a resignation document. A former inmate recalled that the police had inmates sign (or thumbprint, for illiterate inmates) a resignation document that stated, "I am leaving the SWC effective immediately." The inmate also reported that that the police stopped providing supplies - such as rice or coal briquettes - around the same time. PSTW, *P'oi-dong*. It is unclear whether the police and Seoul City worked together on the SWC relocation and reorganization or whether the police collected this resignation document from other units. However, it is worth noting that by the late 1980s the city's need to vacate SWC units and police neglect coincided. Kil Yun-hyŏng, "Chahwalgŭllodae, purangadŭrŭl chitpapta," *Han'gyŏre 21* no.573 (August 17, 2005).

[325] Seoult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Chŏngbi taech'aek*. This document, produced by the SMG as the Mayor's Policy No. 1461, was attached as an appendix to the compensation request produced in Seoul's Sŏngdong district. It includes short-term and long-term plans for relocating or abolishing (when relocation was not a viable option) the SWC units.

site.[326] There is no available record of the plan's implementation. However, in 1990, the city increased the amount of financial compensation and granted SWC inmates access to public housing, indicating that the relocation had not gone as planned.[327]

Facing either relocation or eviction, district administrators were the first to indicate that the proposed sum of compensation was unrealistic if not infeasible. In 1989, the Kangdong-gu unit sought to evict 230 inmates and 79 households. District administrators suggested to the city that monetary compensation be increased to the same level as relocation aid for Seoul's general redevelopment evictees.[328] Given that the SWC inmates were "destitute, living in extreme poverty, and without any living blood ties," and belonged to a "socially excluded group," it suggested that the increased amount would help them to lead a "normal social life." Most importantly, it brought to the city's attention the origin of the SWC: it was the government that had "forcefully displaced and settled (*kangje iju chŏngch'aek*)" the inmates at the current site in the first place, and as such owed them extra compensation.[329] Regardless, the city declined the proposal: it indicated that waste pickers were ineligible for the same relocation assistance provided to general redevelopment evictees, distinguishing SWC units from other eviction cases.

The city's refusal placed waste pickers in a position parallel to other evictees, differentiating waste pickers from other groups at the bottom of society. However, it is important to recognize that the longest-lasting SWC units were all inhabited by

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[326] Among 65 units with 1,068 inhabitants in Seoul, 12 units with 207 inhabitants (73 lived alone and 134 lived with cohabitants) required urgent relocation. Seoult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Chŏngbi taech'aek*.

[327] "Chahwal kŭllodae e ap'at'ŭ ipchugwŏn," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun* January 9, 1990. Relocations and evictions often took several years to resolve. In some cases, the city forcibly evicted the occupants with hired thugs and wrecking crews from private security guard companies. Tongdaemun-gu, *Chahwalgŭllodae*; Sŏngdong-gu, *Chahwalgŭllodae*.

[328] The district referred to "[T]he guideline on the special distribution of public housing to Seoul's evictees" (*Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi ch'ŏlgŏmin e taehan siyŏng ap'at'ŭ t'ŭkpyŏl punyang chich'im*). It suggested the increased financial compensation equated to three-month's rent and access to public housing.

[329] Kangdong-gu, Chahwalgŭllodae chŏngbi chich'im kaejŏng kŏnŭisŏ pallyŏ (Sŏul: Kangdong-gu, 1989). August 10, 1989.

various members of the urban underclass. While waste picker camps began as receptacles for social deviants, they eventually became a reserve for other dispossessed populations. In this sense, waste picker camps reveal how the state control of "deviant" population not only creates but perpetuates certain underclasses, and how waste pickers, as the current incarnation of a disposable section of the underclass, were erased when their value had been finally extracted.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the two official camp networks, the WRC and the SWC, and other private camps as case studies, I have shown how the establishment of waste picker camps categorized waste pickers as a deviant social group and reinforced their marginalization. This marginalization process occurred at the intersection of the state's institutionalization of waste pickers (social exclusion), the introduction of household recycling and alienation of waste pickers from the sources of their labor (the economic exclusion), and urban development (the spatial exclusion).

Institutionalization and ensuing social exclusion brought about their economic deprivation, spatial segregation, and eventual eviction. Economic exclusion coincided with the institutionalization of waste management. Waste might have been only tangentially related to the actual inception and operation of waste picker camps. However, their subjection to the police, combined with the unpredictable and irregular nature of collecting and selling recyclables, confined waste pickers to the lowest position in the informal waste economy. Spatial exclusion occurred alongside urban development. As redevelopment and gentrification of urban areas gained steam, the confinement of waste pickers was no longer compatible with the changing use of urban space.

The establishment of the WRC and subsequent camps was concerned less with their work than their vagrant status and potential deviance. While waste picker camps were but one type of camp among many that the military regime established, their trajectory differed for three reasons: their long duration over more than three decades; their location in cities; and their association with waste. Although waste picker camps may have seen varying

degrees of coercion, from voluntary admission to confinement, their long-term operation nonetheless had consequences for the individuals who lived under police control. Lastly, the association with waste, both materially and symbolically, provides an allegory for how surplus, cast-off populations, including, but not limited to waste pickers, are marginalized and excluded from the wider society.