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

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Chapter 4. LANDFILL AS A LIVED SPACE: SEOUL'S NANJIDO LANDFILL, 1978–1993

This chapter analyzes Seoul's Nanjido landfill as a lived space, focusing on the role of housing in organizing waste pickers' lives. Nanjido–a landfill from 1978 to 1993–has since been transformed from an "island of triple abundance" (*samdado*) (i.e. dust, odors, and flies) into an ecological park. While Nanjido was material testimony to the "rapid growth that overlooked environmental degradation,"[330] it housed thousands of waste pickers and illicit businesses related to the disposal process. All these aspects—waste piled outdoors, ramshackle shanties, gangs blackmailing garbage haulers in a city-run landfill—contradicted the image of Seoul as a modern, developed city.

The role of informality in a city-run landfill is crucial for understanding Nanjido's history. This chapter examines how these two types of informality - their labor and their dwelling - relates to each other in Nanjido. I take the 1984 construction of the housing complex as a focal point where the state intervened directly—in response to waste pickers' demands—in what it had previously categorized as informal, unlicensed housing, thereby complicated their position as laborers and residents. How did waste pickers organize their lives and labor process? What were the reasons behind the government's decision to house waste pickers and what were its consequences? What does this process tell us about the relationship between the state and the poor and how waste, both as a material object and a metaphor, interact in this process?

Previous studies on Nanjido have largely neglected the characteristics of landfill labor organization, housing history, and the role of waste. First, in describing the housing complex, waste pickers are reduced to recipients of state benevolence, disregarding their agency in claiming their right to housing.[331] Second, scholars often

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[330] Wŏldŭcŏp kongwŏn kwali saŏpso, *Nanjido kŭ hyangkirŭl toich'atta* (Sŏul: Wŏldŭcŏp kongwŏn kwali saŏpso, 1995), 13.

[331] The exception is the anthropologist Chŏng ch'ae-sŏng, whose work details the changes between the shanty town and the construction of prefabricated housing complex. Chŏng Ch'ae-sŏng, "Nanjido chuminŭi pin'gon kwa sahoejŏk kwan'gyeŭi sŏngkyŏk, "*Han'guk munhwa illyuhak* 21 (1989): 367-

portray Nanjido as an exceptional, extralegal space, for example as "an internal colony"[332] or a "Nanjido culture,"[333] without positioning Nanjido within the broader structural conditions of Korean society. Third, they do not consider waste as an object of inquiry, whether its management, symbolic associations, or material force on not just the natural environment but also the people who lived and worked around waste. Despite the precarious nature of their living and working conditions, and the unpredictability of the waste materials they handle, these circumstances were often summed up under one umbrella category of "urban poverty," which failed to encompass seemingly disparate yet interconnected forms of precarity. These studies also overlook how the lives and labor of waste pickers were critical to the city's survival.

As informal laborers, waste pickers were frequently confronted with multiple forms of precarity. Their being informal laborers is intertwined with their experiences of precarity in everyday lives. As Clara Han notes, "the notion of informal

399. Also see Yi Ho, "Nanjidowa nanjido chumindŭl ŭi chugŏgwŏn," *Tosi wa pin'gon* 21 (1996): 47-67. Architectural historian Jeong Hye Kim writes that the government "gave [waste pickers] the rights of residence," emphasizing the state's philanthropic perspective. Suggesting the influence of religious leaders on the state's decision, Kim erases the role of waste pickers in demanding and achieving their rights to housing. Jeong Hye Kim, *Waste and Urban Regeneration: An Urban Ecology of Seoul's Nanjido Post-landfill Park* (London: Routledge, 2020), 94; Pae Sang-hŭi, "Nanjido ssŭregi maeripchi ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa chaehwaryong," (Master's thesis, Seoul National University, 2020), 31.

[332] Jeong Hye Kim contends that Nanjido existed as "an internally colonised space," their settlement area "retaining the potential to threaten the norm of the modern city." Literary scholar Yim T'ae-hun suggests that Nanjido functioned as an internal colony for Seoul's destitute. Kim, *Nanjido*, 114; Yim T'ae-hun, "Nanjido ka illyuse e munnŭn kŏttŭl," *Munhwa kwahak* 97 (2019): 131.

[333] Similarly, social scientists presume a particular "Nanjido culture", whether it resonated with South Korean society at large or created a peculiar culture of poverty, or depicted the waste pickers as occupying "the bottom of the pit" (*makjang*). Chŏn Kyŏng-su, "Ssŭregi rŭl mŏkko sanŭn saramdŭl," in *Han'guk munhwaron: hyŏndaep'yŏn* (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1995), 99; Ik Ki Kim, "Differentiation among the Urban Poor and the Reproduction of Poverty: The Case of Nanjido," *Environment and Urbanization* 7, no. 2 (1995): 194; Kim Ik-ki and Chang Se-hun, "Tosibinminŭi naebubunhwawa pin'gonŭi chaesaengsan kwajŏng - Nanjido pinminjiyŏk ŭl chungsimŭro," *Han'guk sahoehak* 21 (1987): 82.

economy…shadows the notion of precarity as a bounded historical condition."[334] Recent scholarship on precarity conceptualizes it as both an ontological and labor condition.[335] As a labor condition, precarity is frequently defined in opposition to waged labor and its attendant individual subjectivities, whose values and dispositions are conducive to industrial capitalism. Waged labor is distinguished from other forms of labor, including unpaid, irregular, intermittent, amorphous labor, which are considered precarious and associated with an informal economy. One of its characteristics is that "the uncertainty of securing a livelihood bleeds into other aspects of life," which indicates the connection between precarious labor and ontological precarity.[336] Yet, these other aspects of precarity are not entirely distinct from each other. On the contrary, Patrick O'Hare argues precarity is fundamentally relational, such that individual's past experience, forms of employment, and other dimensions of lifeworlds all constitute forms of precarity.[337]

In various historical periods and geographical locations, landfills have served as a means for waste pickers to generate income by collecting recyclable materials. However, they eventually face with the municipalization or privatization of the waste disposal process. This formalization is frequently touted as a panacea for mitigating precarity through job security and facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Generally, modernizing landfills results in reduced labor force, a property right over waste, or even access restrictions to the landfill. As an illustration of this deprivation of income source in the context of a landfill in Uruguay, anthropologist Patrick O'Hare contends that waste collectors were subjected to a "hygienic enclosure of waste."[338] Likewise, in her research on the Marie Louise landfill in South Africa, Melanie Samson argues that privatization imposes "epistemic

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[334] Clara Han, "Precarity, Precariousness, and Vulnerability," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47 (2018): 334.

[335] Kathleen M Millar, "Toward a Critical Politics of Precarity," *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 6 (2017): e12483.

[336] Han, *Precarity*, 335.

[337] Patrick O'Hare, "'The Landfill has always Borne Fruit': Precarity, Formalisation and Dispossession among Uruguay's Waste Pickers," *Dialectical Anthropology* 43 (2019):31-44.

[338] Patrick O'Hare. *Rubbish Belongs to the Poor: Hygienic Enclosure and the Waste Commons* (London: Pluto Press, 2022))

injustice" on reclaimers: although it was reclaimers who initially recognized and established the value of waste materials, privatization appropriates and predicates on their expertise and knowledge.[339]

Formalization does not necessarily alleviate a state of precarity. O'Hare attends to the labor experiences of landfill waste pickers in three settings: wageless landfill work, vernacular cooperative arrangements, and formal labor contracts in a privatized recycling factory. For them, formal labor entails a range of precarious work conditions, including uncertain employment prospects, potential physical harm from unidentified substances (often contained in plastic bags), and the exchange of relative autonomy at the landfill for reciprocal responsibilities at the recycling facility. Instead, O'Hare illustrates how the availability of informal labor offers waste pickers a refuge that mitigates the precarious nature of waged labor.[340] Undoubtedly, diverse encounters with precarity have the potential to disrupt the prevailing narrative that associates formalization as a remedy for precarious labor.

To understand different textures of precarity, the binary of formal and informal may not be very useful. Rather than relying on these arbitrary binary concepts, Kathleen Millar proposes to see the lives of waste pickers as "forms of living."[341] Examining the comings and goings of catadores in Rio's Jardim Gramacho garbage dump, Millar argues the conditions of wageless labor, albeit substandard, irregular, or precarious, enables catadores to accommodate the fragile circumstances of everyday lives. Catadores can thereby exercise "relational autonomy" to ensure their work is compatible to the unstable, uncertain, and disruptive conditions of their lives.[342]

In Nanjido, where a landfill served as both a place of disposal and habitation, waste pickers endured precarities due to their informal position as both laborers and

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[339] 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.

[340] O'Hare, *Precarity*, 37-42.

[341] Kathleen M. Millar. *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rios Garbage Dump* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[342] Kathleen M. Millar, "Precarious Present: Wageless Labor and Disrupted Life in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil," Cultural Anthropology,Vol.29,no.1 (2014): 47.

residents. In hindsight, waste pickers were not always cognizant of the fact that the numerous risks they encountered were tied to larger forces, including the development of modern waste management systems and urban spatial politics. For example, although waste pickers were periodically reminded of their precarious living condition via notice to vacate orders, they were not always informed of ongoing changes in the municipal disposal system that could have compounded the precarious nature of their work. As waste pickers carve out liminal spaces they were caught in between, these two dimensions of precarity were occasionally complement each other, but at other times, they were in conflict with one another.

This chapter draws on archival research, unexamined textual and visual sources, and interviews.[343] I obtained the bulk of my materials from the waste pickers themselves, such as hand-drawn maps, filed complaints, and petitions. Archival materials on Nanjido barely survive in official archives.[344] Stories of shanties or waste pickers were not typically deemed worthy of documentation in official archives. I compare hand-drawn shantytown maps with a series of aerial photographs of waste picker settlement areas made by the city from 1980 to 2000.[345] I retrieve their muted voices and weave them into the official narrative to establish a more nuanced portrait of Nanjido's history.

I start by providing an overview of the Nanjido site and the autonomous organization of labor. Based on these, I follow the trajectories of waste pickers: their entry into Nanjido and the formation of a shantytown in the early 1980s; the housing improvement project and the 1984 construction of the prefabricated housing complex; and the relocation and eviction that lasted from 1993 (the closure of the landfill) to 2001 (a year before the World Cup).

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[343] I conducted interviews with fourteen city workers of both "blue-" and "white-collar" backgrounds, three religiously affiliated volunteers, and six former waste pickers/Nanjido dwellers.

[344] While the record preservation period led to the loss of various documents, the absence of documents relating to Nanjido is noteworthy. Since Nanjido was managed on a district level, it can be inferred that most of the documents were not likely transferred to the National Archive.

[345] I consulted the National Geographic Information Platform (http://map.ngii.go.kr), which blocks access from foreign IP addresses. Outside of South Korea, aerial images may not be used or reproduced. Instead of citing specific photos, I provide the aerial image number.

Situating Nanjido's housing history within Seoul's urban redevelopment and disposal policy, I argue that formalizing unlicensed housing placed waste pickers in an interstitial space where their dwelling was recognized but their labor was not. This liminality made them vulnerable to other mechanisms of marginalization, ones that were not always intentional but incidental, which further dispossessed waste pickers.

THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF NANJIDO

Nanjido was an island on the Saet stream (Saetkang), a branch of the Han River on the outskirts of Seoul (Figure 4-1, 4-2). Before the landfill, Nanjido was well-known for its natural and pastoral landscape, filled with orchids and reeds as well as peanut and sorghum fields, which provided a picnicking and leisure site for Seoulites.[346] Yet, located in the lowlands, floods often hit the 200 islanders and their crops. There was no connection to Seoul apart from a resident-run ferry to the mainland. In the late 1960s, Nanjido was still "a remote island in the modernizing city."[347] The establishment of the landfill in 1978 changed Nanjido's fate. When the city completed the breakwater and reclaimed 2.9 million square meters (878,280 *pyŏng*) of land in January 1977,[348] the real estate market reacted by doubling the price of land. When the city announced Nanjido as a waste disposal facility, the land's value immediately plummeted,[349] along with its once flourishing natural life.

Nanjido began to receive waste from Seoul in the early 1980s and quickly became the city's principal landfill. Began by filling the lowlands to sea level, a method

[346] The name Nanjido comes from *Nanji*, a combination of the words "orchid" and "fragrant plants," and *do*, or "island." Filled with orchids and reeds, as well as peanut and sorghum fields, Flower Island (*kkotsŏm*) was one of its names in earlier times.

[347] "Hŭkt'angmul sok changmul kŏdwŏonŭn nanjido chumindŭl," *Tonga Ilbo*, July 30, 1975

[348] "Sŏulsigyesim nanjidojebang ch'ukcho sŭngin," *Maeil Kyŏngje*, December 29, 1976; Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Ssŭregi chonghap chongmal ch'ŏrijang hwakpo kyehoek* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1977).

[349] "Chebang ch'ukcho kkŭnnaen nanjido ssŭregi ch'ŏbunjang kosi," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, August 3, 1977.

known as *trench landfilling*,[350] 70% of the quarry's available landfill space had been filled by 1983.[351] Facing the exhaustion of its capacity, both the city and the Office of the Environment (OoE, *hwankyŏngch'ŏng*) looked into future disposal options: a new sanitary landfill, a waste treatment plant, and the mounding landfilling of Nanjido. First, the search for a new, large-scale, regional landfill site took longer than Nanjido's remaining capacity allowed, as was confirmed in 1987. Second, the waste treatment plant,[352] a Danish technology that combined both manual and automated sorting, incineration, refuse-derived fuel (RDF), and composting, never became fully operational due to excessive food scraps, vinyl, and plastics. Lastly, following an unsuccessful attempt to build an incineration-based waste treatment plant[353] and the delay in selecting a new landfill site,[354] the city turned to mounding landfilling in 1985.[355] Despite recommendations for sanitary landfilling,[356] Nanjido continued as an open dump collecting mixed refuse. At the time of its closure in March 1993, it left behind a former quarry and two garbage hills 90 meters above sea level.

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[350] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, Nanjido maeripji anchŏnghwa kongsa kŏnsŏlji (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 2003).

[351] "Ssŭregi munjeŭi simgaksŏng," *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, January 24, 1983.

[352] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, Sŏul-si tosi kohyŏng p'yegimul ch'ŏrijang kŏnsŏl kibon kyehoek e kwanhan yŏn'gu (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1983).

[353] "Nanjido ssŭregi ch'ŏrijang kadong mot hae," *Tonga Ilbo*, April 11, 1987.

[354] The city secured a new landfill site at Kimp'o in 1987. "Kimp'o haeane ssŭregi maeripchang," *Tonga Ilbo*, June 2, 1987.

[355] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, Sŏul-si Nanjido p'yegimul ipch'e wisaeng maerip saŏp kibon kyehoek pogosŏ (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1985).

[356] In 1983, the Han River Basin Environmental Master Plan, one of the first coordinated long-term environmental conservation plans, concluded that converting Nanjido into a sanitary landfill using the mounding method would be the most cost-effective and dependable option. Hwan'gyŏngch'ŏng, Enjiniŏring saiŏnsŭ, Hyosŏng kŏnsŏl chusikhoesa, *Han'gang yuyŏk hwan'gyŏng pojŏn chonghap kyehoek saŏp: kohyŏng p'yegimul pumun pogosŏ* (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1983); Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), *Master Plan and Feasibility Study on Seoul Municipal Solid Waste Management System in the Republic of Korea* (Tokyo: JICA, 1985).

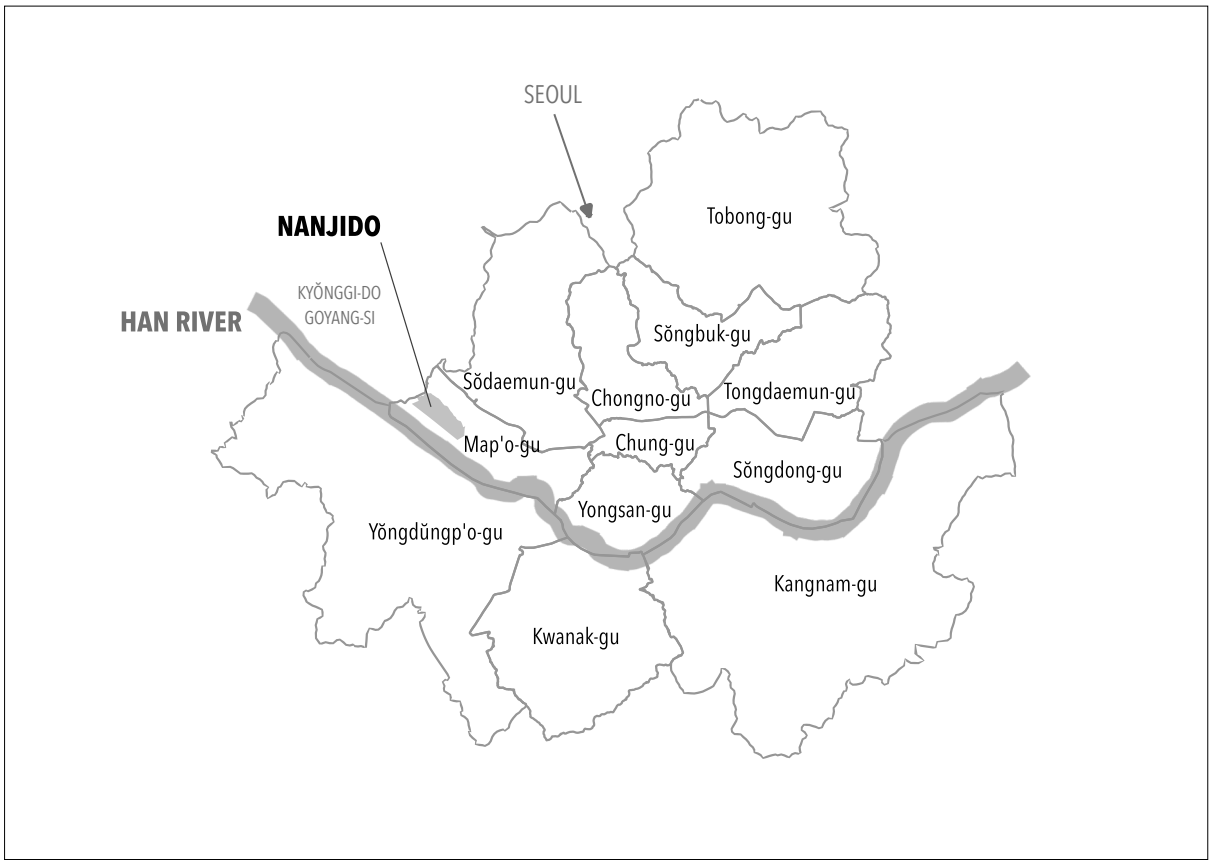

Figure 4-1 The location of the Nanjido Landfill, Seoul

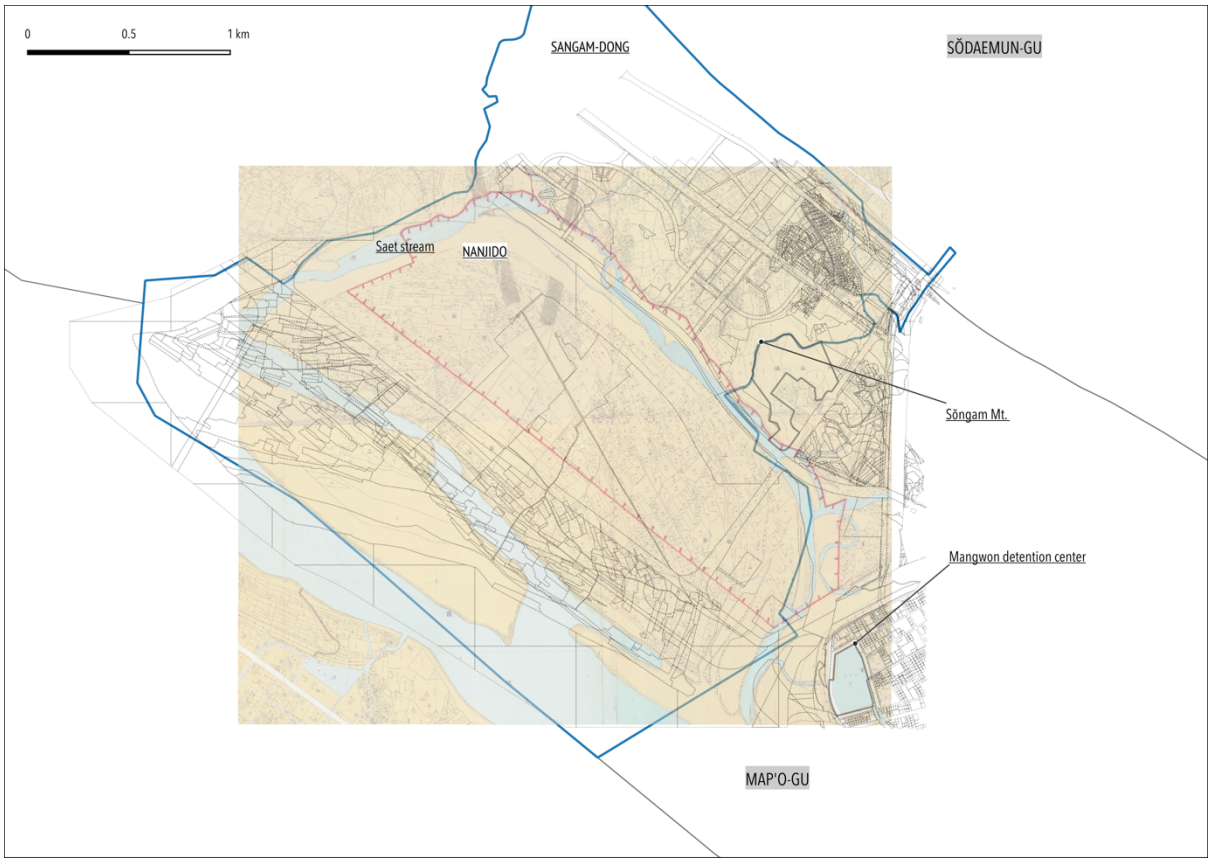

Figure 4-2 A Digitized cadastral map of Nanjido with Saet stream
Source: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi Sisŏl kyehoekkwa (August 3, 1977)

The variety of waste deposited in Nanjido reflected all facets of city life. In the late 1970s, more than 80% of the landfill's content was coal ashes, which the city focused on recycling. Waste generation rapidly shifted to combustible waste rather than ashes, and nearly doubled on a per capita basis.[357] While Nanjido was a household waste disposal site, it also received construction debris, soil from housing and infrastructure (subway) projects, waste from factories, and sludge from the city's sewage treatment facility. As illustrated in Figure 4-3, different waste streams–municipal, district (household garbage), industrial, and construction waste–occupied distinct sections within the landfill, which were organized and maintained by different types of workers. I now turn to this labor organization.

[357] The primary reason for decreased ash waste was the change to household heating sources. Kukt'o t'ongil yŏn'guwŏn, *Tosi kohyŏng p'yegimul ŭi hyoyulchŏk sugŏ pangan yŏn'gu* (Sŏul: Kukt'o t'ongil yŏn'guwŏn, 1983), 7.

THE LABOR ORGANIZATION

Demographic Overview

Official data on Nanjido dwellers are scarce. The Nanjido Saemaŭl Committee (Nanjido saemaŭl wiwŏnhoe, NSC), one of the residents' organizations, undertook an investigation in 1984 that provides a glimpse into Nanjido's demographic characteristics. Most residents arrived between 1978 and 1982 (57.7%). The majority of residents (45%) were in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, with children and adolescents (43%) making up the majority–a reflection of the physically demanding labor. Two-thirds of the residents were rural migrants, most often from the poorer Chŏlla province (36.4%), with most moving to Nanjido after having attempted other occupations first.

Table 4-1 Population trend of Nanjido dwellers, 1980–1990 [358]

Year	Number of Waste Pickers	Number of Residents
1980	550	1,000 (300)
1981	1000	N/A (300)
1983	N/A	2,000 (600)
1984.1	N/A	2,534 (640)
1984.3	N/A	3,200 (802) *
1984.12	N/A	3,973 (958)
1986	N/A	3,500 (958)
1987	N/A	N/A
1988	1,800	4,000 (958)
1989	2500	3,257 (957)
1990	800	4,000 (957) (City); 6,000 (1,500) (Residents)

[358] The population data is combined from the follows: *Tonga Ilbo*, July 15, 1980; April 24, 1981; February 11, 1983; *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, July 14, 1986; January 9, 1990; *Han'gyŏre Shinmun*, October 4, 1988; July 21, 1989; Nanjido saemaŭl wiwŏnhoe, *Ch'ŏngwŏnsŏ: nanjido p'anjajip ch'ŏlgŏ mit chumin ijue kwanhan kŏn* (January 11, 1984); *Nanjido silt'ae chosa pogosŏ* (March 23, 1984); Taet'ongnyŏng pisŏsil, *Nanjido chukŏ hwankyŏng kaesŏn* (Sŏul: Taet'ongnyŏng Pisŏsil, 1985). HA0005046; Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Minwŏn simŭi wiwŏnhoe simŭi charyo* (Sŏul: Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1997) March 21.

Table 4-1 shows Nanjido's population from 1980 through 1990. The population reflects the amount of waste in the landfill, with the population doubling in 1984, then stabilizing.[359] At the center of this rise was the construction of prefabricated housing in 1984, a project initiated by waste pickers themselves due to their poor treatment by the state. As we shall see, this project raises questions as to how and why the state engaged with this particular population both as a labor force and as an urban underclass.

Division of Labor

How did informal labor flourish at Nanjido, a city-run landfill? At its inception, a team from the Map'o District Office's cleaning division undertook the landfill operation.[360] This team's limited capacity, along with their unpreparedness to receive the entirety of Seoul's waste, created opportunities for waste pickers, whose presence was reported as early as 1978. Their numbers increased with the volume of waste. Daily operations in the dumping field were run by waste pickers who recycled household waste and by organized crime groups who handled construction waste and excess soil.[361] This resulted in a hybrid labor structure comprised of city workers, waste pickers, and illicit businesses, with geographical and labor divisions (see Figure 4-3).

[359] In 1978, when the Nanjido Landfill opened, Seoul's daily waste generation increased from 11,517 tons, doubling to 20,377 tons in 1980, and tripling to 30,439 tons in 1990. Naemubu, *Tosi yŏng'am* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1990).

[360] The Nanjido Management Office (NMO) was originally established to manage the waste treatment plant in December 1985. Sŏul-si ŭihoe, *92-yŏndo haengjŏng kamsa - nanjido kwalli saŏpso ŏpmu pogo* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1992).

[361] The Soil truck segment ran their own "business" with their own bulldozers and other landfill equipment, charging drivers landfill entrance fees. Lacking managerial capacity, the city condoned it. The city and the prosecutors filed fraud and blackmail charges against the gangs, but prosecution did not put a stop to their illegal practices. "Nanjido t'onghaengse 8-ŏk kalch'wi," *Chungang Ilbo*, May 18, 1990.

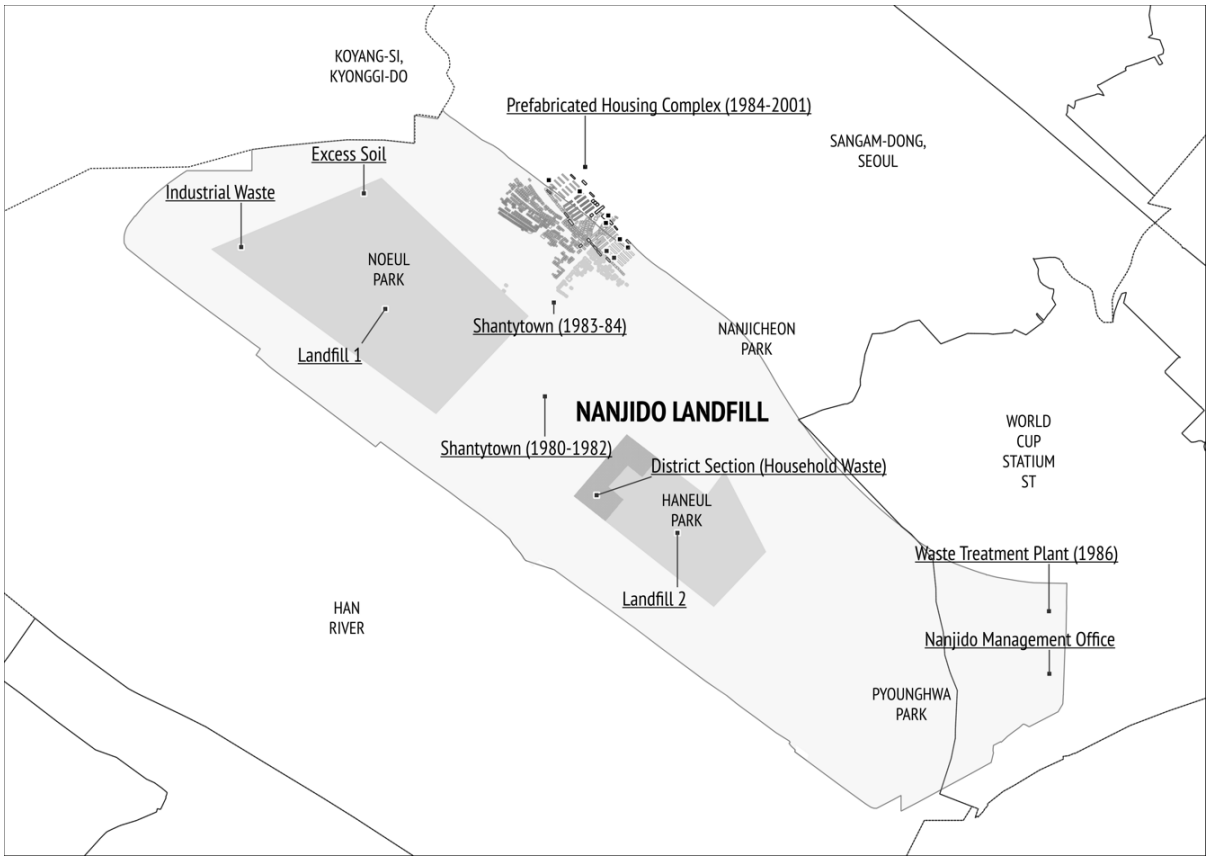

Figure 4-3 Layout of the Nanjido Landfill and the World Cup Park

This labor organization shaped power dynamics among workers. The workforce was comprised of both white-collar personnel (administrators and engineers) and blue-collar workers (bulldozer operators, incoming waste inspectors, security guards, and field superintendents). The former took charge of the landfill's overall planning, while the latter oversaw day-to-day operations at the dumpsites. However, they had conflicting interests over issues like illegal dumping. Administrators claimed that they kept crackdown schedules hidden from blue collars, implying potential corruption.

Waste pickers reclaimed household waste, working either in district or private truck segments. In the district segment, the city's garbage collection trucks unloaded their waste. There, waste pickers were categorized into first-line (*appŏri*) and second-

line (*twuippŏri*) pickers based on access to waste.[362] First-line pickers organized themselves by city administrative divisions (districts), with each district having a discrete team with its own crew leader (*ch'ongmu*), members (*taewŏn*), and regulations. District teams were sized by waste volume, typically ranging from 20-40 members; a membership fee was charged, varying by waste profitability.[363] First-line pickers had an exclusive access to waste when garbage trucks first unload waste and can enter into their dumping site. Second-line pickers collected remaining debris after the first-line pickers, working behind a bulldozer that was leveling the dump surface. There was no fee for this position.

In the private truck segment, private garbage haulers were assigned dumpsites to unload their waste, collected from apartment complexes, business districts, marketplaces, or U.S. army bases. On each site, a waste picker worked alone or alongside day laborers. Each waste picker "purchased" or "rented" the truck, with fees rising to match the profitability of the waste. Each private hauler sold an exclusive scavenging right to individuals, but most of them were not necessarily waste pickers. They hired waste pickers to work on the site; only a handful of people bought and worked there by themselves. The Korea Environment Refuse Association (Han'guk hwan'gyŏng chin'gae hyŏphoe, KERA), an association of private garbage haulers, sent staff to Nanjido to supervise the private segment.[364] Despite the competition and entry barrier, there was a degree of mobility, both inside and outside landfill waste work,

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[362] I borrowed these two terms from the English translation of *Familiar Things* by Hwang Sŏk-yong, a novel set in Nanjido. Hwang Sŏk-yong, *Nach'igŭn sesang* (Seoul: Munhak dongne, 2011; *Familiar Things*, trans. Sora Kim-Russell (Melbourne and London: Scribe Publications, 2017).

[363] A first-line picker, Kim Ki-ha, observed that waste volume was not always connected to its quality. Seoul's poorer neighborhoods had more rubbish and less recyclables; wealthy areas had more recyclables and less street sweepings. Workers in profitable districts (e.g., Yongsan-gu) were less mobile; workers in less profitable regions were more mobile (e.g., Kwanak-gu).

[364] Members in the private truck segment paid a fee to KERA, which facilitated operations, such as allocating dumpsites or mediating conflicts. Han'guk hwan'gyŏng ch'ŏngso hyŏphoe, *Han'guk hwan'gyŏng ch'ŏngso hyŏphoe sŏllip hŏga* (Seoul: Han'guk hwan'gyŏng ch'ŏngso hyŏphoe, 1980). Interview with a former KERA/Nanjido staff, June 26, 2016.

such as offering goods and services for landfill dwellers or entering into the informal waste economy.[365]

There was no city oversight of the sales process.[366] Every 10 days, after collecting and sorting recyclables, waste pickers sold them to intermediary buyers who came to the landfill to purchase the materials, which were then transported to their junk/scrap yard for additional sorting. District groups sold greater quantities of waste, which gave them leverage in negotiating prices. Some buyers paid more generously to newcomers. Others, on national holidays like New Year's Day or the Full Moon Festival, would give waste pickers small gifts like a bag of sugar much like any other workplace in South Korea.

Labor-laid Spatial Organization and Landfilling Process

In Nanjido, this labor structure established a distinct spatial organization. Landfills are situated in large areas of land divided into individual areas called "cells," a single spatial unit where waste is deposited into designated areas within the landfill site. Generally speaking, landfill cells are partitioned according to the type of refuse being disposed of; hazardous waste is typically separate from general waste in designated cells. In contrast to other landfills, Nanjido's cells were organized into three segments based on labor organization rather than waste type: district teams occupied the district segment, members of the private truck group occupied the private segment, and soil truck groups occupied the soil segment (Figure 4-3). When placed in other landfills, each segment, household waste and construction debris, would compose a single cell. In Nanjido, they were additionally divided into numerous distinct cells, each of which was allocated to a particular waste hauler, be it one from each municipal district or a private hauler from a particular location. Both waste pickers and city workers referred to these smaller chambers *tenba* (天馬, てんば), a vernacular Japanese term used in Korean construction site, specifying the primary spatial unit for day-to-day disposal.

[365] Interview with a waste picker in the private segment, April 9 and June 22, 2015.

[366] This relationship stood in contrast to waste pickers in various waste picker camps, as I discussed in Chapter 3, where police or other intermediaries profited from their labor.

Tenba represents both the labor organization and the labor process. Once tenba units were established, waste pickers (first-line pickers in each district team) assumed responsibility for its management, including daily dumpsite maintenance, particularly the soil cover (obtaining covering materials and leveling the dumpsite surface), which was supposedly the city's responsibility. Additionally, tenba represents the most distinct and significant disposal regulation in Nanjido: vehicles are restricted to unloading at a designated tenba. Consider the district segment as an example. In Seoul's Kangnam-gu tenba, only first-line pickers of the Kangnam-gu team could scavenge waste, and only vehicles from Kangnam-gu were allowed enter and unload their waste.

This disposal regulation, which was rooted in the informal labor organization itself, was strictly applied to all incoming trucks but never made explicit. Nor were there any maps or signs indicating each segment or each tenba. Nonetheless, since waste pickers invested their time and resources in maintaining their tenba, they had a greater incentive to defend waste from the district, for which they had paid varying membership fees. Municipal garbage truck drivers were the first to adhere to this regulation. Waste pickers would confront drivers if they deposited their refuse in another's tenba, "lest the dumped garbage contain any treasure."[367] Exceptions were made when landfill access was blocked or other tenba was unavailable. Even if it was for their specified district, waste pickers would sometimes deny the driver to unload if the district waste did not contain an sufficient amount of recyclables.

The landfill's disposal process and the spatial configuration led to particular politics and demands. Each stage of the disposal process, ranging from daily dumping and compacting, securing landfill access for trucks, constructing breakwater on the edges of each segment, entailed conflicts

[367] On the first day of his duty, one driver got lost inside. He arbitrarily disposed of the refuse at a nearby dumpsite and accidentally drove over a tarp-covered area, which was a sorting station for waste pickers. He quickly realized that an angry waste picker was running after him, swinging a pitchfork (*sosirang*) in one hand and holding honeycomb coal briquette ash on the other. Only after a senior driver came to explain that it was his first day on duty, was he able to find his way out.

between different actors. Each district team competed against each other to locate their tenba in a location that would be more convenient for vehicles to access, to occupy a greater area than their rivals, and to acquire additional dumping spaces. Others in the private segment would relocate or expand their tenba arbitrarily for their own benefit, thereby jeopardizing ongoing or planned construction works. Workers in the soil segment would privately dispose of surplus soil for financial gain. This conflict of interest between informal workers at each segment and city workers frequently impeded landfill planning. However, without their daily labor, the landfill would have been unable to function. City employees, despite their mixed feelings about waste pickers and workers at the soil segment, all acknowledged that they were mutually dependent on each other to ensure the seamless operation of the landfill.

This labor organization created an informal social institution that influenced the disposal practices of city workers and waste pickers alike.[368] There was no attempt by the city to overturn the labor procedure or regulation. On the contrary, the city's disposal practices were adapted to cater to this labor organization and its spatial configuration. Waste pickers established the actual disposal process: waste pickers and intermediary buyers negotiated freely without the city's intervention; waste pickers established the shift system between first-line and second-line pickers with a differentiated access to waste; they directly traded district team positions as well as scavenging rights for private hauler trucks; and most importantly, they fragmented an otherwise single landfill cell into many small disposal units (tenba) for each municipal district and private hauler, which characterized Nanjido's peculiar disposal process. Despite the precarious nature of their position, waste pickers possessed control over their own labor processes. Nevertheless, this hierarchical structure of their labor

[368] Waste pickers in a South African landfill also created a shift system, where the workers are divided into two different time shifts based on their nationality. Melanie Samson refers to this system as informal institutions forged by informal workers and argues that this self-governing of their labor processes engenders different social identities, social divisions, spatial claims, and varying forms of organizing. Melanie Samson. "Trashing Solidarity: The Production of Power and the Challenges to Organizing Informal Reclaimers." *International labor and working class history* 95 (2019): 34-48.

organization affected interpersonal relationships outside of work and the formation of a collective identity in an effort to mobilize the workforce, as I will elaborate on later.

The Valuation of Waste Pickers' Labor

How much did their labor produce? In its 1984 survey, the NSC compiled the income data of waste pickers to claim their contribution to the national economy. The average individual waste picker earned 21 thousand wŏn ($253.8)[369] per month; total monthly recyclable sales amounted to 234 million wŏn ($282,813);[370] and annual sales amounted 2.81 billion won ($3.4 million).[371] Because the city did not intervene in the sales process nor enforce property rights over waste materials or disposal facilities, landfill waste pickers could "common" their means of production (incoming waste), albeit with a varying degree of access, and autonomously organize their labor process.[372] One could argue that the city did not act as an intermediary in the sales process, but merely appropriated their labor. However, other elements of waste pickers' work, particularly daily covering, reducing the volume of landfilled waste, and increasing the landfill's lifespan, directly benefitted the landfill operation. Waste pickers returned the material remnants of urban life to the production process, and this labor maintained the metabolic relationship between Seoulites and their living environment.[373]

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[369] Income data was based on 10 days of income, the regular sales cycle at Nanjido, which was then converted to monthly income (30 days).

[370] Nanjido saemaŭl wiwŏnhoe, *Silt'ae chosa*.

[371] The conversion is based on the currency rate in 1984: 1 dollar was 827.4 won.

[372] Waste pickers arranged their work in a hierarchical and competitive manner, with teams competing for better dumpsites. First-line pickers protected their rights against second-line pickers, and second-line pickers—despite being in the lowest position in Nanjido—against newcomers.

[373] "Metabolic relationship" draws on notions in ecological Marxism and political ecology. According to John Bellamy Foster, Marx's concept of a metabolic rift suggests that "the waste of industrial production and consumption, needed to be returned to the soil, as part of a complete metabolic cycle." Political ecologist Erik Swyngedouw defines urban metabolism as "the making of the urban as a socio-environmental metabolism ," connecting material flows within the city. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's*

We notice similar figures in the income data in governmental reports. Four disposal reports published in the early 1980s recommended the city incorporate waste pickers' labor into the disposal process. Table 4-2 compares the suggestions of four disposal reports to incorporate waste pickers into the disposal process, and Table 4-3 compares figures from the waste pickers' survey and two other reports. While they all suggested similar figures for the monthly income of a waste picker, they relied on different numbers of waste pickers and volumes of reclaimed waste materials, resulting in disparate estimates for the annual sales income presented to the city as the potential profit rate. Among these, the Japan International Cooperation Agency's report explicitly addresses the different average incomes of first- and second-line waste pickers, indicating its reference to the NSC income data. Although waste pickers' labor had gone unrecognized, this acknowledgement made clear both the value of their labor and the benefit it brought to the city, and the city's attempts to extract this labor force.

Table 4-2 Incorporation of Waste Pickers

Report	Suggestions
A Basic Study on MSW Treatment Plant of Seoul (Sep 1983)	• Incorporating waste pickers' labor into material recovery process • Installing 3 hand picking stations in between mechanical separation processes • Hiring 80 waste pickers as wage laborers (paying 200,000 wŏn / month)
Han River Basin Environmental Master Plan (Dec 1983)	• Incorporating waste pickers' labor into material recovery process • Installing 18 sorting lines on a conveyor system • Hiring 106 waste pickers as wage laborers (paying 180,000 wŏn per month)
Master Plan on Seoul's MSW system in the RoK (Jun 1984)	• Estimated average income: 250,000 wŏn / month • Specifically addressing the income disparity between first- and second-line waste pickers

Ecology: Materialism and Nature (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 163; Erik Swyngedouw, "Metabolic Urbanization: The Making of Cyborg Cities" in *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*, eds. *Heynen, Nik, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw* (London: Routeledge, 2006): 33.

Nanjido Sanitary Mounding Landfill Plan (Dec 1985)	• Estimated average income: 235,000 wŏn / month • Incorporating waste pickers into the landfilling process • Charging a fee (20% of their income) for their access to waste (844 million wŏn of revenue)

Table 4-3 The estimated income of waste pickers and their sales profit

	The number of waste pickers	The amount of recyclable materials	Average monthly income of individuals	The total annual sales income
NSC	104 [1)]	N/A	212,680	2.81 billion
JICA	4,000 [2)]	190,512 tons	250,000 [3)]	11.9 billion
Seoul-si	1,500	84,000 tons	235,000/188,000 [4)]	4.23 billion

1) This figure indicates the number of people who participated in the survey.

2) This figure indicates both the number of waste pickers (2500) and the Self-sufficiency Work Camp (1400).

3) JICA indicated the average incomes of the front-line pickers and the second-line pickers. It estimated that the latter earned 100,000 to 300,000 wŏn.

4) The former is the estimated monthly income, and the latter is the estimated income after deducting a fee (20%).

Despite the diverse workforce, there was no overarching control. The district segment was overseen by blue-collar city workers (bulldozer operators, guards, and field superintendents), who were waste pickers' main contact with the city administration. While both the private truck segment and the soil truck segment were left to their own devices, landfill administrators occasionally interacted with the head of the groups when the need arose, such as altering dumping yards or relocating dumpsites. Due to spatial and labor divisions, waste pickers had limited interactions with one another unless they worked in the same segment or lived nearby. While the organization of the dump sites gives the impression of design and designation from above, it was also the result of competition between waste pickers for access to trucks and garbage pits, and the constraints on space with positions based on skill, networks, and resources. As such, the spatial arrangement of the dumping segments (by district-, private-, and soil-trucks) reflected the social relations and labor types at Nanjido.

Why did so many people move into the landfill knowing they would be living next to a dump? Why did the city provide housing units for waste pickers? How did the city's provision of alternative housing affect their dwelling and/or labor? To answer these questions, I examine the lived

experience of waste pickers through their housing forms in three phases: shantytowns, prefabricated housing complexes, and moving out of the landfill.

THE PROVISION OF LIFE

Organizing Housing: The Early 1980s

When waste pickers began to gather around Nanjido, they lived close to their work. They built dugouts or shacks (*p'anjajip*, 'plywood house') adjacent to, or under the brink, of each dumping site, facing the garbage mounds (Figure 4-4 and 4-5). Such housing was temporary: waste pickers described moving their house every three days, retreating backwards as the garbage heaps marched forward towards their shacks. The minimalist shacks resembled a tent, with a pole supporting an awning or a tarp. Distinguishing earlier forms of housing from more developed ones, a waste picker differentiated the former "rag house" (*nŏngmajip*, Figure 4-4 and 4-5) from the latter "shack" (*p'anjajip*, Figure 4-5). Living in the dumping fields, dwellers were unable to register and had no access to basic urban infrastructure such as water, electricity, or gas.[374]

[374] The shantytown received public telephones for the first time in 1984. More than 3,000 individuals received mail at the landfill's sole address. Nanjido saemaŭl wiwŏnhoe, *Pulgwang chŏnhwaguk kongjung chŏnhwa kasŏl yoch'ŏng*, April 10, 1984.

Figure 4-4 Shacks on the dumpsite, 1984.

Source: Sŏbu kongwŏn nokji saŏpso

Figure 4-5 Shacks on the dumpsite, n.d.

Source: Sŏbu kongwŏn nokji saŏpso

Figure 4-6 Relocated shantytown, 1984.
Source: Taet'ongnyŏng Pisŏsil, *Kaesŏn*.

From the early 1980s, the city intervened in waste pickers' dwelling, mostly through relocating their shacks. By summer 1981, the Map'o district office had fifty to sixty residents, leaders of waste picker groups or villages, sign a demolition notice agreeing to leave at the city's request. Between the late autumn of 1981 and the summer of 1982, the district office relocated the shacks to two locations: one in the center of the landfill near the dumpsite (Figure 4-7), and the other to the northwest corner of the landfill adjacent to the current site of Nanjich'ŏn Park (Figure 4-8). By 1983, all the shacks had been relocated to the Nanjich'ŏn Park site, forming a single shantytown (Figure 4-6). Following this series of relocations, the district office issued a notice to vacate in November 1983, citing the occupants' breach of land use regulation and unauthorized use of otherwise available landfill space.[375] Waste was encroaching to the north of the landfill site and the city claimed it needed to vacate the shantytown to

[375] Map'o kuch'ŏng and Map'o kyŏngch'alsŏ, *P'anjajip chajin ch'ŏlgŏ yomang*, November 1983.

make room for waste disposal. By the time the city issued the notice to vacate, 70% of the landfill had already been filled, and a new waste treatment plant was being built on the landfill's eastern edge. Waste pickers anticipated that Nanjido—both their workplace and home—would soon close.

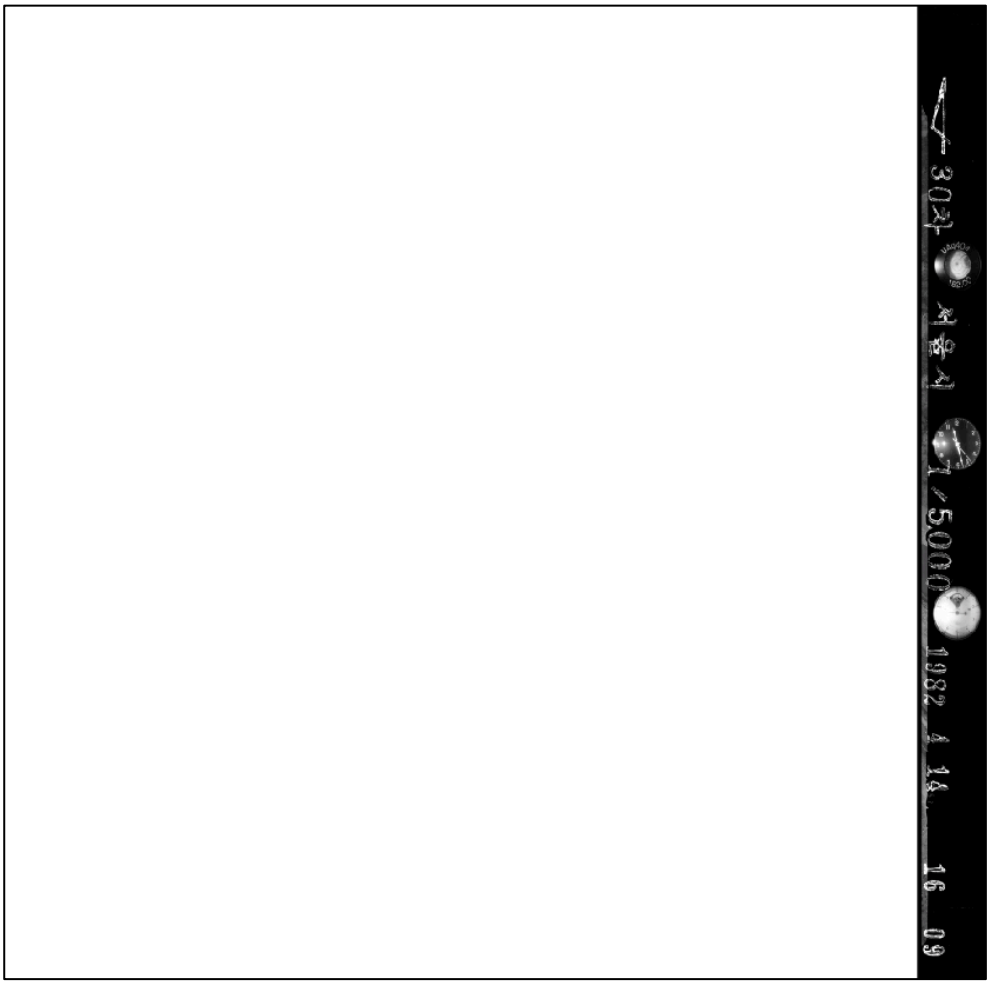

Figure 4-7 Aerial photograph of Sang-am dong area: 1982-30th. Course 40-019 (April 14, 1982).
Image description: This aerial photograph shows the Nanjido Landfill site, with the area delineated by a straight tract line bifurcating in the middle of the site. The image depicts various topographies of the site, including a landfilling area at the site's lower end, paddies covering the majority of the left side, and indications of human habitation along the right tract line. All aerial images are not displayed due to the Security Management Regulation of National Spatial Data Infrastructure (Clause 17).

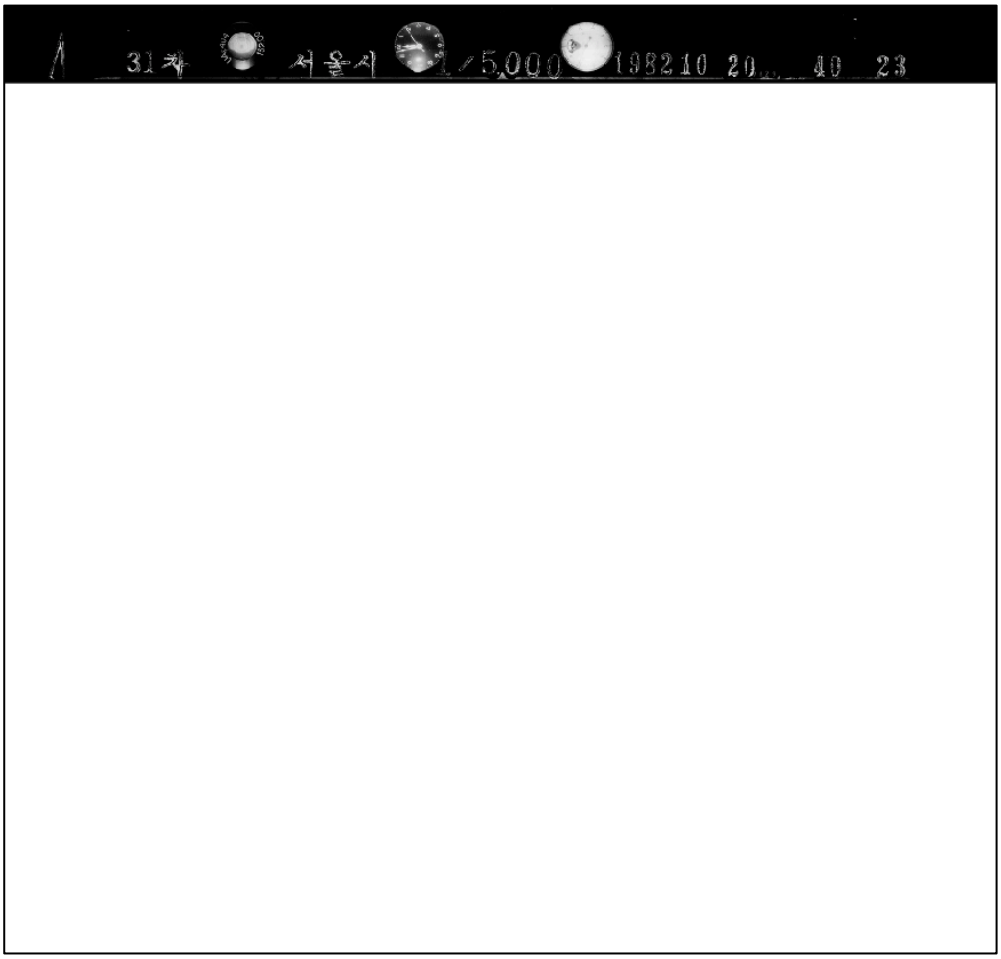

Figure 4-8 Aerial photograph of Sang-am dong area: 1982-31st. Course 40-023 (October 20, 1982). Image description: This aerial photograph shows the Nanjido Landfill site. The image outlines a landfilling area occupying one-third of the site at the lower end of the location. The previous indications of human habitation in Figure 4-7 have been diminished in scale and are now in close proximity to the vicinity of the landfilling area. A new human habitation area appears in the northeastern corner of the site, with the majority of structures located on the right side of the tract line.

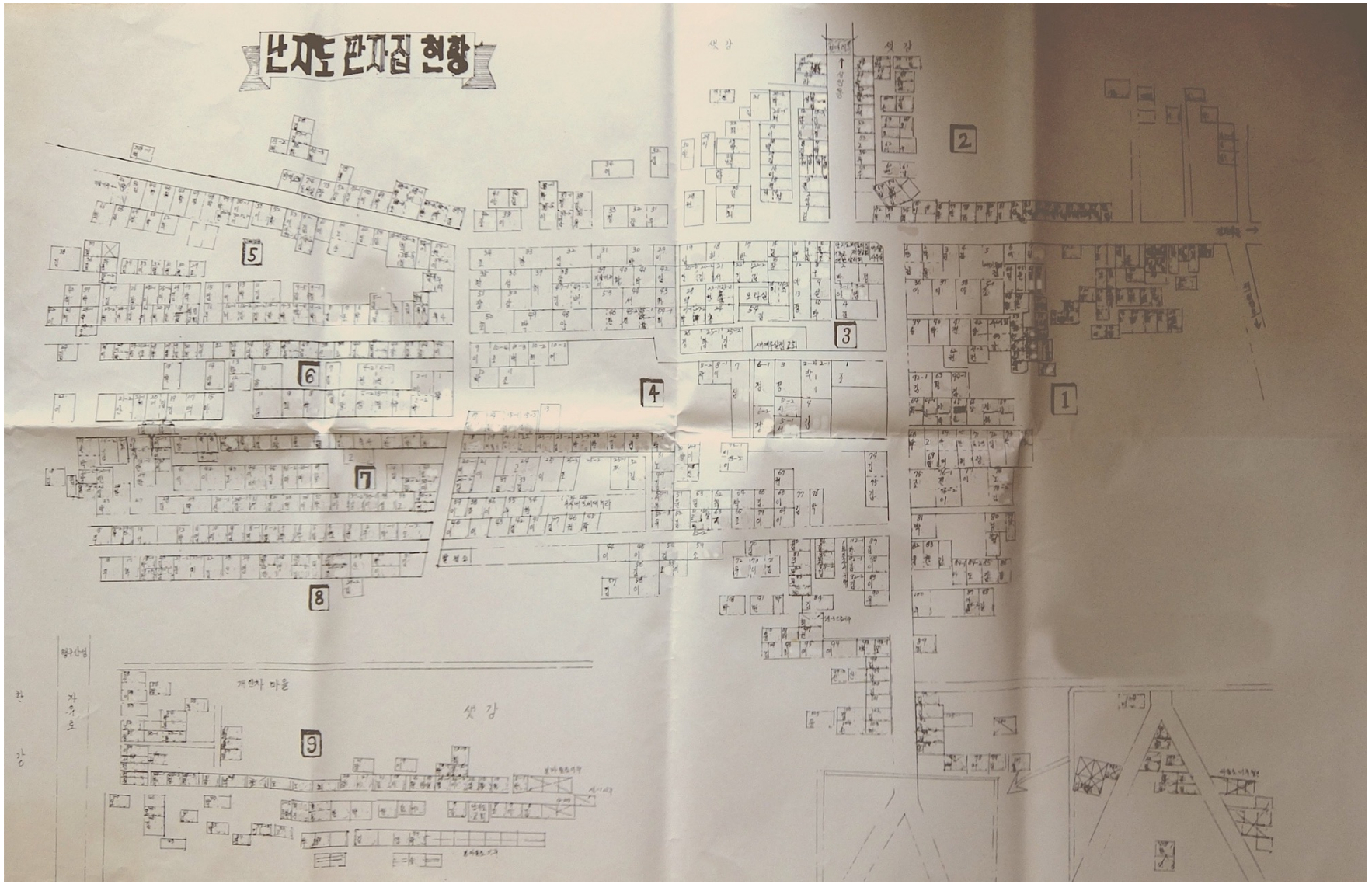

Figure 4-9 Self-drafted Map of Nanjido shantytown, 1984.

To maintain anonymity, householder names were removed. Map by Yun In-ho.

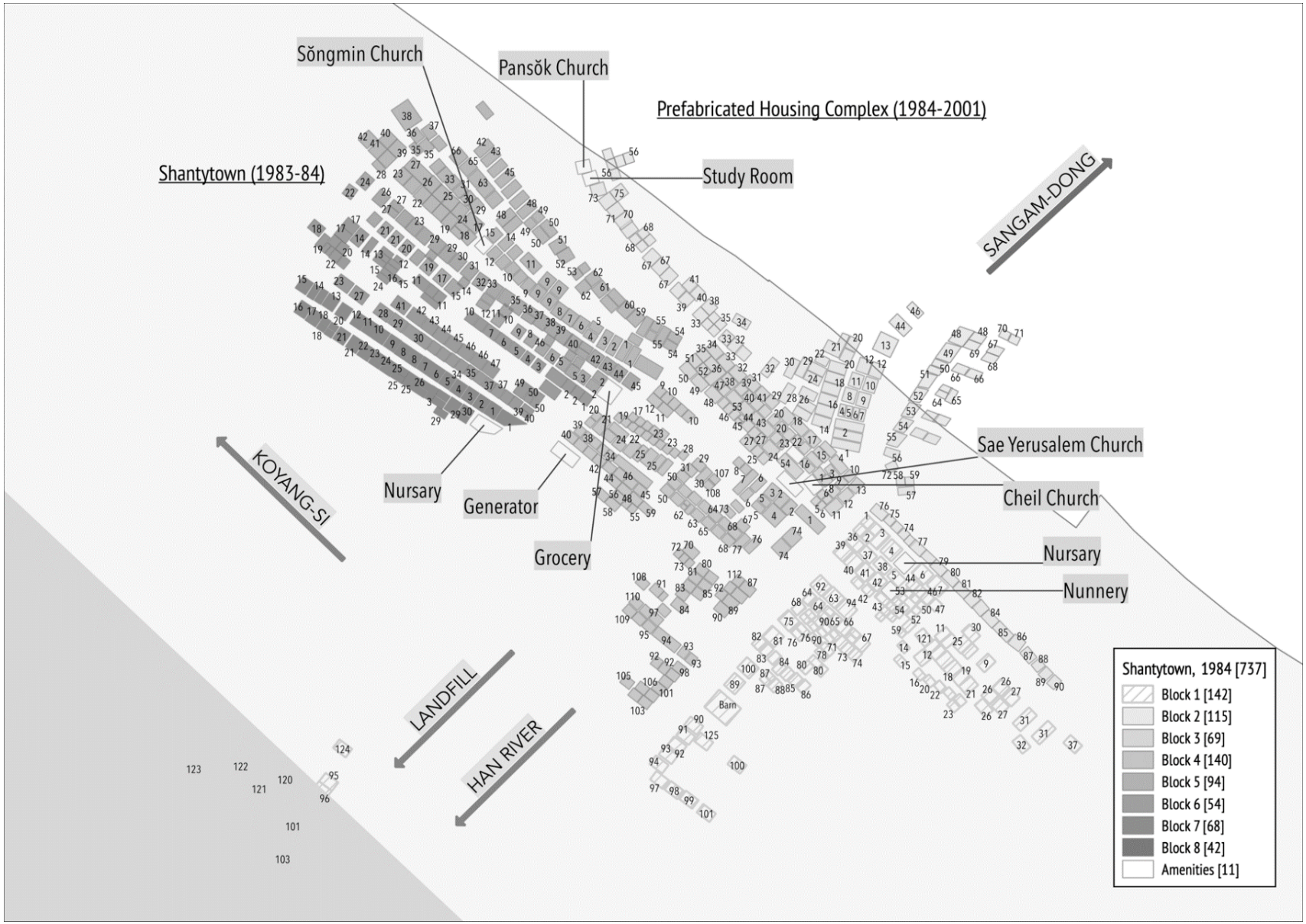

Figure 4-10 Digitized map of Nanjido shantytown, 1984. Each block number corresponds to a *t'ong*.

Figures 4-9 shows a 1984 map of Nanjido shantytown while Figure 4-10 features a geo-referenced, digitized version. The map, created between 1983 and 1984 by a waste picker, illustrates the Nanjido landfill as a lived space. Yun In-ho, the second-line waste picker who produced the map, recalled that it was "the only way to prove that we existed in the landfill" and convince the government to improve their housing conditions. Because Nanjido's population and settlement area grew over time, and unregistered waste pickers resided there, local authorities lacked control over the shantytown population. The shantytown map produced specific spatial knowledge of the landfill: shacks and outhouses in different sizes with householder's names or names of amenities; narrow, meandering pathways that were rarely straight; a village that grew without any regulation or premeditated planning. Inscribing the social organization of waste pickers' lives, the shantytown map bears the imprint of the state's negligence. After all, waste pickers used surveying and mapping—tasks that would otherwise fall to the state—as a primary means to become legible to the state, gain formal recognition and registration, and eventually obtain housing rights.

Shantytown, 1983 - 1984

The relocated shantytown (Figure 4-6) was the waste pickers' dwelling area between the 1983 relocation and the 1984 housing complex. The shantytown had grown noticeably larger in comparison to the 1982 settlement area, exhibiting the characteristics of an unplanned neighborhood.[376] Each shack was built one at a time, resulting in an unorganized, unregulated, and ever-expanding disarray. The administrative divisions (*t'ong*) reflect a sprawling population with varying dimensions and household sizes: Yun In-ho reported that more than half of the nine *t'ongs* were created during the resident investigation between 1983 and 1984.[377]

[376] The shantytown grew with each move. See Course 16-9 (April 14, 1982) and Course 16-004 (November 2, 1984).

[377] Yun In-ho reported that there were no systemic administrative divisions in the shantytown. There were one or two *pans*, after which the population increased significantly, creating additional divisions at random.

Being isolated from basic urban services and public transportation, village facilities and makeshift infrastructure sprouted locally to meet their needs. Those who were resourceful built their own shacks, while others traded with other dwellers. The price of housing reflected the size of the shack and its accessibility: the distance to the bus stop or the two bridges that connected Nanjido to the outside world. There were a few barns that housed cows, pigs, and ducks, fed with food leftovers sourced from the dump. It was not until the town bus connected Nanjido to Sangam-dong that residents could go grocery shopping in the nearby Susaek or Moraenae markets. While vegetable or fish peddlers came through the village on occasion, some dwellers ran a grocery shop (*kumŏng kage*), food stalls (*p'ojangmach'a*), or an electricity generator (*paljŏnso*) selling electricity, all started by waste pickers who found a niche market.[378]

Despite the dearth of amenities, religiously-affiliated volunteers provided essential services for Nanjido residents. There were four protestant churches and a Catholic nunnery in various parts of the village. Churches served several capacities: organizing medical volunteers, distributing donated items and financial payments, and liaising between local authorities and the dwellers, including for the housing improvement project. Two nurseries, both run by Catholic volunteers, looked after waste pickers' children. Four Catholic nuns, while working as waste pickers themselves, assisted residents with various errands: coordinating hospital appointments or matching orphans with child protection facilities. Many dwellers were illiterate, few had social networks, and most were unable to navigate the social welfare system, which included medical support or livelihood assistance for the needy (*yŏngsemin*). Under such circumstances, volunteers offered a link for those who would otherwise have had little access to the outside world.

The shantytown had both kinship and work-related characteristics. Kinship ties were common in the village: waste pickers often invited their siblings or family

[378] As necessary as these services were, being a waste picker guaranteed more voice in the village. Kang Min-gu, a waste picker who later ran a small business in the village after working in the private truck segment, continued to receive one garbage truck to preserve his "waste picker" status. "Had I not worked with waste at all," Kang explains, "I would not have been able to have a say in private truck segment meetings or anything else."

members.[379] Another social connection was cultivated through the labor organization. Waste pickers in the private truck segment developed their own segment in the village (*kaeinch'a maŭl*); district team crews (*taewŏn*), while not indicated on the map, also lived near each other.[380] Running a curb market (*kye*), a rotating credit association, was another means to establish their ties.[381]

The landfill's geography represented the labor organization of waste pickers, their living spaces, and their social relationships. Waste picker settlements had grown from shacks scattered around garbage mounds to a large shantytown, demonstrating the nature of their organization: unlicensed, unregulated, and self-contained. Simultaneously, their settlement area served as breeding ground for a reenactment of social relations that resulted in a variety of local bonds. This autonomous organization began to change in 1984 when waste pickers, threatened with eviction, demanded the right to housing.

A Temporary Resettlement: Prefabricated Housing Complex, 1984

What prompted waste pickers to voice their housing rights? In addition to the 1983 notice to vacate and the prospect of the landfill's eventual closure in the mid-1980s, two incidents motivated waste pickers. First, dwellers were frustrated by those who misrepresented or denigrated them to outsiders. During a November 1983 fire, for example, the residents had the opportunity to address their housing problem to the then-mayor of Seoul, who came to the site to offer moral support. When the mayor asked the dwellers whether they could work hard and repay loans if they were given

[379] While no list exists listing all the Nanjido residents, the householder names on the shantytown map show similarities that can be inferred as siblings.

[380] "Tasŏt pŏntchae int'ŏbyu," *Tŏk'it* (December 31, 2020), 148-149. *Tŏk'it*, a Korean magazine, published interviews with people with connections to Nanjido. This article (the fifth interview) interviewed a study room student and her parents who worked in a district team.

[381] Gerard F. Kennedy, "The Korean Kye: Maintaining Human Scale in a Modernizing Society, "*Korean Studies* 1 (1977): 197-222. When many waste pickers earned just enough for their subsistence and could not secure formal credit from places like banks, a credit cooperative curb provided them with a lending mechanism that helped them deal with large and/or unexpected expenses like weddings, schooling children or younger siblings, or paying for injuries and hospital treatment.

rights to public housing, the local pastor claimed that waste pickers did not deserve a right to housing and urged instead that he be given a relocation site.[382] Thirty villagers who witnessed the conversation were enraged, and Yun In-ho recalled that the residents wanted to tell the city what they actually desired.

Second, not only did the absence of necessary urban services leave the dwellers exposed to numerous disasters, but the government's response to these disasters sparked outrage. In particular, the September 1984 flood exemplified this neglect. When the flood swept down the entire shantytown, the dwellers were evacuated to Sangam elementary school until the village was recovered; up to 140 people were crammed into a single classroom. After a week of inaction, 200 dwellers occupied the nearby Moraenae market, the Sŏngsan Bridge, and the Map'o district office on September 7. The protesters demanded that the city provide disaster compensation, a fair distribution of donated funds, and an explanation for the shantytown's recovery delay, if not neglect. The city forcefully repressed the protest with tear gas and riot police, arresting 37 people and injuring 42 others.[383] Neither the intensity of the protest nor its harsh repression was reported in the mainstream media.[384] Despite the damage, the protest resulted in more realistic compensation for the residents, such as food and emergency cash handouts.

The prospect of eviction and misrepresentation prompted residents to demand their rights. The NSC conducted a resident survey, created a map of the shantytown

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[382] Rev. Kim, a self-described reformist, claimed Nanjido residents could not maintain a self-reliant life. He portrayed himself as a savior figure who could guide the landfill workers and demanded a new site. The waste pickers I interviewed all expressed frustration, particularly at Rev. Kim's "commercialization" of waste pickers to the outside world for his own gain. "Minjung sogŭi sŏngjikchadŭl (21) 't'allanjido' kkumkkunŭn Kim Hŭng-su moksa," *Donga Ilbo*, Feb 11, 1983; "Kananhan moksa ŭi p'yŏnji," *Donga Ilbo*, Aug 28, 1984.

[383] For shantytown development, anti-eviction protest, and violent suppression in South Korea, see Jonson N. Porteux and Sunil Kim, "Public Ordering of Private Coercion: Urban Redevelopment and Democratization in South Korea," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 16, no. 3 (2016): 371-90.

[384] The protest was covered in-depth by a university newspaper and magazine. "Nanjido nongsŏng hyŏnjang ŭl kada," *Sŏnggyun'gwandaehakkyo minjuhoebo*, 3 (1984): 12-15; Chŏng Yong-hwa, "Uĭyok kwa kyuje-suhae pokku hyŏnjang ŭl tanyŏwasŏ," *Sŏuldaehakkyo taehaksinmun*, September 17, 1984, 4; "Nanjido sujaemin nongsŏng," *Tonga Ilbo*, September 8, 1984.

between December 1983 and January 1984 (Figure 3), and submitted a petition. In the petition, Nanjido dwellers emphasized their contributions to the national economy through waste reclamation. Despite their wish to continue working as waste pickers, whether in Nanjido or elsewhere, they were aware of the landfill's impending closure. As long as they could avoid forced eviction in front of their children, they wrote, they would comply with the city's eviction procedure. Although they believed they "were not in a position to demand the government for anything," they asked for a humble place to live: they highlighted that "they wanted to be part of society, and there should not be a social outcast settlement (*ch'ŏnmin purak*) by the dump."[385] Based on the foreseeable demolition, this petition was primarily focused on locating resettlement alternatives in the city, particularly public rental apartments.

In 1984, shortly after the flood disaster, the city started to build prefabricated housing units for Nanjido dwellers. The landfill's capacity was approaching and the city intended to accommodate waste pickers temporarily while the landfill was filling up. The housing complex was made up of 40 tenements, each of which had 20 units and two communal kitchens at each end of a building, taking up the space of two housing units each. Each housing unit was 12 meters square (4 *p'yŏng*) and divided by sandwich panels with no water or heating. Housing units faced each other, with all doors opening onto a single 1.2-meter corridor, which increased fire risk and reduced privacy (See Figure 4-11). Temporary as they were, the original building plan incensed the waste pickers, who preferred to remain in their shacks rather than move into a 12-square-meter space they likened to a "pig barn."[386]

The Map'o district office declined to increase the size of each unit, denying the residential purpose of the housing complex: it was intended as "temporary, makeshift tenements for waste picking," not as "regular housing where an entire family resides."[387] However, it agreed to remove the communal

[385] Other demands include basic infrastructures such as water and sewage connection, public toilets, and access roads for fire trucks. Nanjido saemaŭl wiwŏnhoe, *Silt'ae chosa*.

[386] "Nongsŏng hyŏnjang," 14.

[387] The official name of the project, as reported to the President, was "Nanjido Living Environment Improvement Project" (Nanjido chugŏ hwankyŏng kaesŏn saŏp). This denial can be interpreted as a desire not to set a precedent for future evictees. Taet'ongnyŏng Pisŏsil, *Hwankyŏng kaesŏn*.

kitchens. Each of the building's two kitchens were converted into four housing units, creating 160 additional units in 40 tenements, allowing more households to move in. In the end, 3,973 people from 958 households moved into the housing complex between December 1984 and February 1985. The 12-square-meter unit was, as many had feared, too small to house a family, lacked a kitchen and floor, and the dwellers had to request connections to electrical, water, and sewage facilities.[388] Yet, it felt like a "hotel room", former waste pickers recalled.

Figure 4-11 Nanjido prefabricated housing complex, tenement 39

Source: Sŏbu kongwŏn nokji saŏpso.

[388] "Sebŏntchae int'ŏbyu," *Tŏk'it*, December 31, 2020, 97. The article (the third interview) interviewed a study room teacher. Also: "Tasŏt pŏntchae int'ŏbyu," 157.

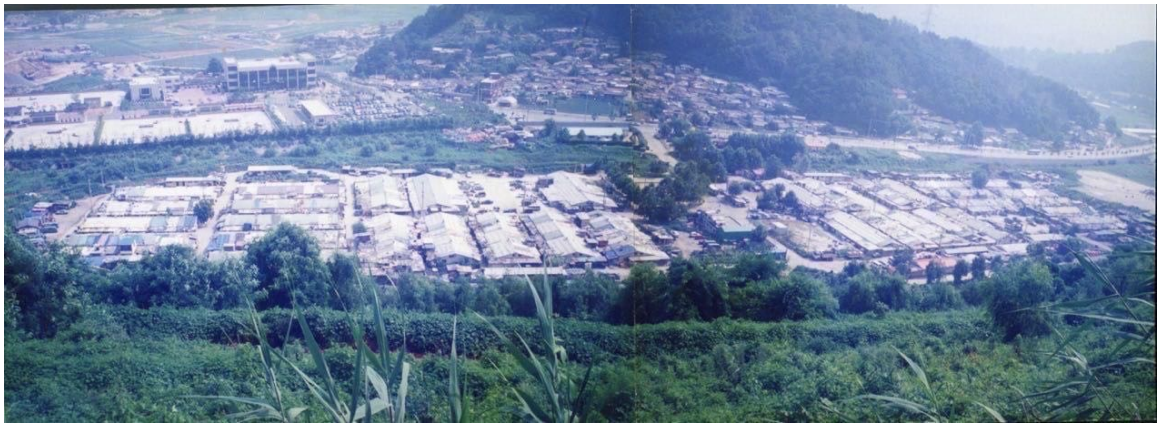

Figure 4-12 Nanjido Prefabricated Housing Complex, 1995.
Source: A city worker.

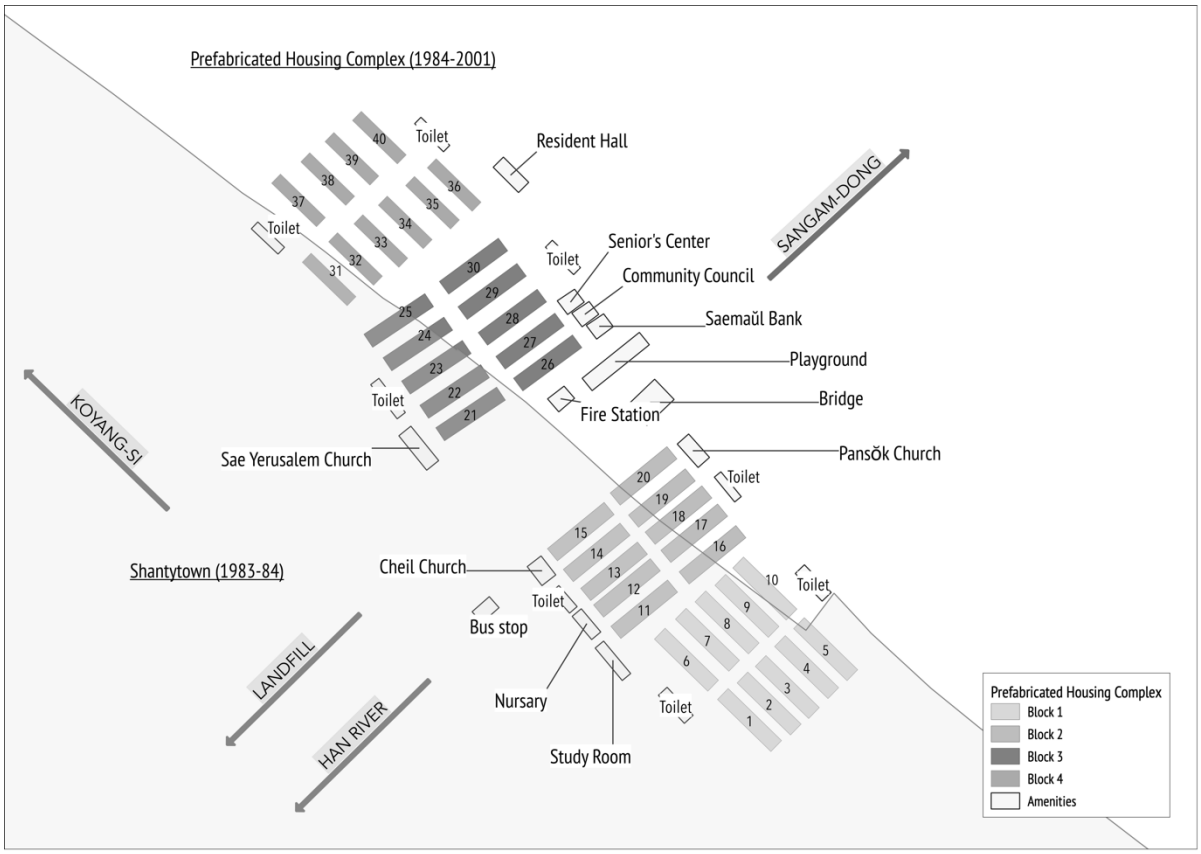

Figure 4-13 Digitized prefabricated housing complex, 1984

Figure 4-13 shows the prefabricated housing complex and Figure 14 shows an aerial photograph capturing both the the shantytown and prefabricated housing complex. With rectangular-shaped structures set beside one another, the housing complex resembles a typical planned neighborhood (Figure 4-12). Each of the four blocks (*tanji*) contained ten tenements. There were 35 tenements built for residential use and

12 for community use. Looking into living conditions, the settlement site's structure and housing more resembled barracks than living quarters intended for temporary purposes (Figure 4-11).

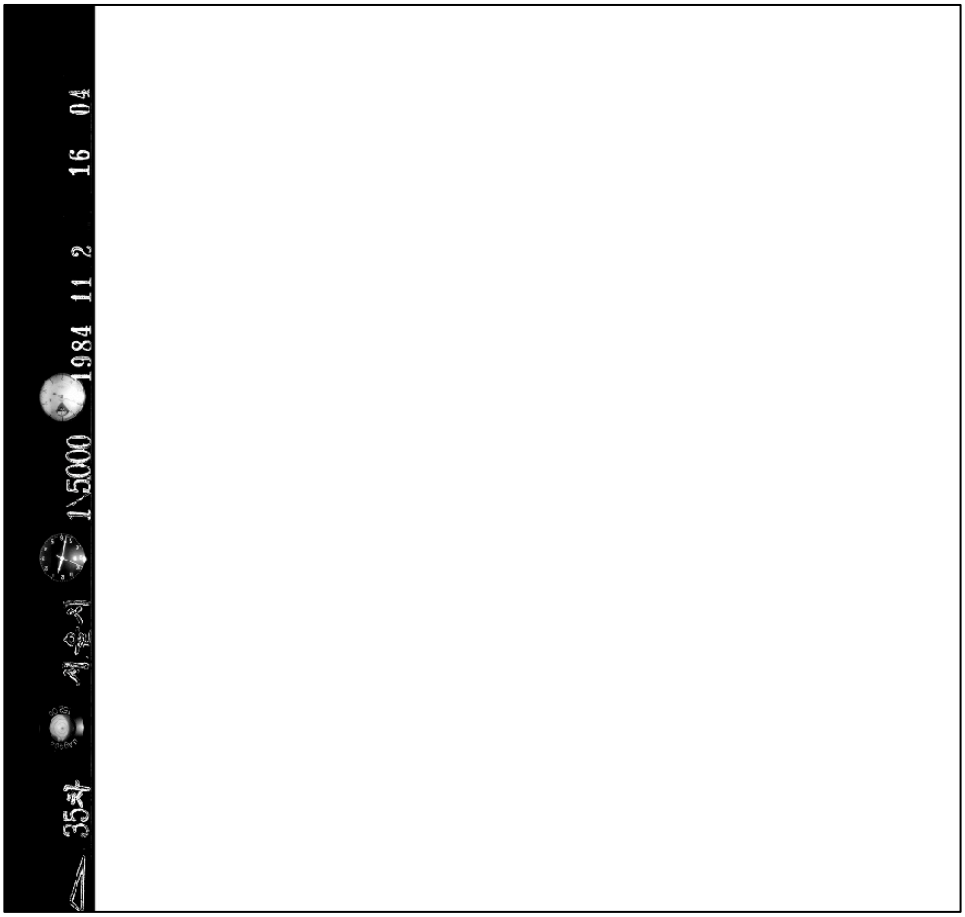

Figure 4-14 Aerial photograph of Sang-am dong area: 1984-35th. Course 16-004 (November 2, 1984). Image description: This aerial photograph shows the Nanjido Landfill site. The image depicts two human habitation areas along the diagonal line in the image's center that slopes from upper left to lower right. Below the diagonal line is the settlement area in Figure 4-8, with a higher density of structures observed on the right side of the tract line. Above the diagonal line are 40 long rectangular structures arranged into 4 sections, with each section consisting of ten structures. Landfilling areas have replaced the majority of the paddies illustrated in Figure 4-7. They have moved northward and are in close proximity to human settlements.

This state intervention changed Nanjido's living condition. First, the housing complex separated living and working space, changing forms of social relationships. Instead of previous neighborhood/work-based ties, new relationships arose such as ties between

people living in the same tenement or administrative unit.[389] Second, the housing complex allowed more time, space, and stability to grow as a community: amenities including a playground, a neighborhood committee hall, an elder hall, and businesses catering to dwellers' needs such as grocery stores, a butcher, a hair salon, a public bath, and a laundromat. Third, the dwellers were all registered and integrated into the local administrative system, gaining formal recognition from the city.[390] Neighborhood leaders formed a resident committee to serve as a liaison between administrative bodies (*tong* or *ku* office) and residents.

This acknowledgment of their residence was conditional. The new settlement area was maintained as a segregated residential quarter where only waste pickers were allowed to live. The city prohibited anyone else moving into the housing complex or trading housing units, so that waste pickers were all visible, contained, and unchanged. By segregating waste pickers into a single location, the city established oversight and control over the waste pickers and their labor. Upgrading unlicensed housing was not state benevolence; it benefitted the state. State intervention formalized what it had previously categorized as unlicensed housing, but it left the labor of waste pickers unrecognized, rendering them vulnerable to marginalization.

Nanjido dwellers formed a community that created its own self-sustaining structure, which might have been invisible from the outside. Nonetheless, there was no overarching leadership, representation, or unified community of all residents. Rather, they were frequently divided into different

[389] Prior work-based social ties overlapped with neighborhood-ties, such as waste pickers at the district and private truck segment forming small neighborhoods. According to Korean anthropologist Chŏng Ch'ae Sŏng, following the construction of the housing complex, new neighborhood-based ties arose. Chŏng, "Nanjido," 367-399. However, this should not be interpreted as implying that work-related ties were weakened or disintegrated completely; regardless of where one lived, work-based district units and private truck segments had a vested interest in maintaining close relationships due to the nature of their work.

[390] Only those who moved into prefabricated housing in December 1984 were eligible for registration. Anyone who moved into the housing complex after 1984, or those who lived in a shantytown that sprung up after that, were all unregistered until 1993 when the landfill was closed down.

groups, some more organized than others.[391] The explanation can be found in Nanjido's labor structure: different ranks in the landfill resulted in internal stratification among waste pickers. Despite the structural limitations, the residents were linked by numerous social relationships. These social ties, which are common in poor neighborhoods and shantytowns, became crucial when waste pickers lost their jobs and were forced to relocate to different segments of the city.

Post-landfill Resettlement, 1993 - 2001

Nanjido landfill closed in 1993. Between 1985 and 1992, 146 households had already left, most of them classified as "needy" (*yŏngsemin*) and qualified for permanent rental housing. In 1993, the city commenced its relocation efforts. To encourage waste pickers to leave the landfill site, the city offered moving assistance and then the right to public housing and new apartment complexes.[392] During the early and mid-1990s, the government constructed its first major public housing projects,[393] allowing the city to offer Nanjido residents the right to permanent rental housing (*yŏng'gu yimdae chut'aek*) or a newly-built apartment at cost. The city recognized Nanjido residents as unlicensed housing owners, granting them housing rights. Despite the fact that only 60% of the dwellers had civil registration, they filed an administrative appeal,

[391] Even when the NSC served as the official liaison between the city and residents during the 1984 housing improvement project, it faced opposition from some residents and their organizations.

[392] Map'o district office relocated the residents respectively between November 23, 1993 and June 27, 1994, and June 10, 1995 and October 19, 1996. Since November 7, 1996, Seoul City issued relocation guidelines for the Nanjido prefabricated housing complex. Map'o-gu, *Nanjido choripsik chut'aek chumin iju taech'aek* (Sŏul: Map'o-gu, 1994) June 13; Map'o-gu, *Nanjido choripsik chut'aek mit chahwal kŭllodae chŏngbi e ttarŭn posang kyehoek konggo (konggo che 1996-132-ho)* (Sŏul: Map'o-gu, 1996) June 10.

[393] In 1989, the government introduced permanent rental housing, a new public housing scheme for the needy. Kim Su-hyŏn, an urban planning scholar, contends that the public housing plan, part of the 2 million housing construction plan (1988-1992), arose from the political instability of the late 1980s. Kim Su-hyŏn, "Konggong imdae chut'aek chŏngch'aek ŭi munjechŏm kwa palchŏn panghyang," *Tosi wa pin'gon*, 1 (1993): 1-13.

negotiated with the district office, and were able to register themselves in June 1993.[394] As exceptional as these measures were, Nanjido residents lost their work, their homes, and, as a result, their community.

After the 1993 fire that destroyed five residential tenements and one community tenement, residents formed the Nanjido Relocation Committee (Nanjido Iju Taech'aek Wiwŏnhoe, NRC) in March 1993 to negotiate with the city.[395] The NRC's report directly claimed their rights based on their contribution to landfill management[396] and to society at large. It reminded the city that waste pickers helped to reduce landfill operation costs, which extended its life by five years. Admitting that waste labor was the only viable work they could do, they asked the city to allow them to continue their work either by securing jobs with the Korean Recycling Corporation, whose yard was located in the Nanjido site, or providing them a resettlement site where they could build collective housing and a recycling cooperative.[397] Neither materialized. In the case of the latter, waste pickers suspected that the city might be unwilling to relocate them all to a single location, an observation that proved prescient.[398]

[394] 370 households moved to Nanjido between 1985 and 1993 after housing was built and were thus unable to register as residents and were denied relocation benefits. Yi , "Chugŏkwŏn," 58.

[395] In 1994, it was renamed the Nanjido Housing Committee (Nanjido Chugŏ Taech'aek Wiwŏnhoe, NHC), emphasizing their right to housing. Nanjido chugŏ taech'aek wiwŏnhoe, *Chugŏ taech'aek wiwŏnhoe ch'onghoe mit nanjido kongdongch'e sasudaehoe*. (April 10, 1994).

[396] This contrasts with the NSC's 1984 report primarily centered around housing alternatives, reminding the city of their modest contribution in a humble, pitiful, and self-abasing tone.

[397] During relocation negotiations, residents organized various committees and presented petitions. They all proposed forming a recycling cooperative and constructing social housing for Nanjido inhabitants. To do so, they requested substitute land.

[398] Their reservations were not entirely unfounded. Korean scholar Song Un-yŏng suggests that during the Kwangju Complex Incident, the state realized that the collective relocation of evictees posed a potential political threat to the regime. Song Un-yŏng, *Sŏul t'ansaengi* (Sŏul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2018), 315.

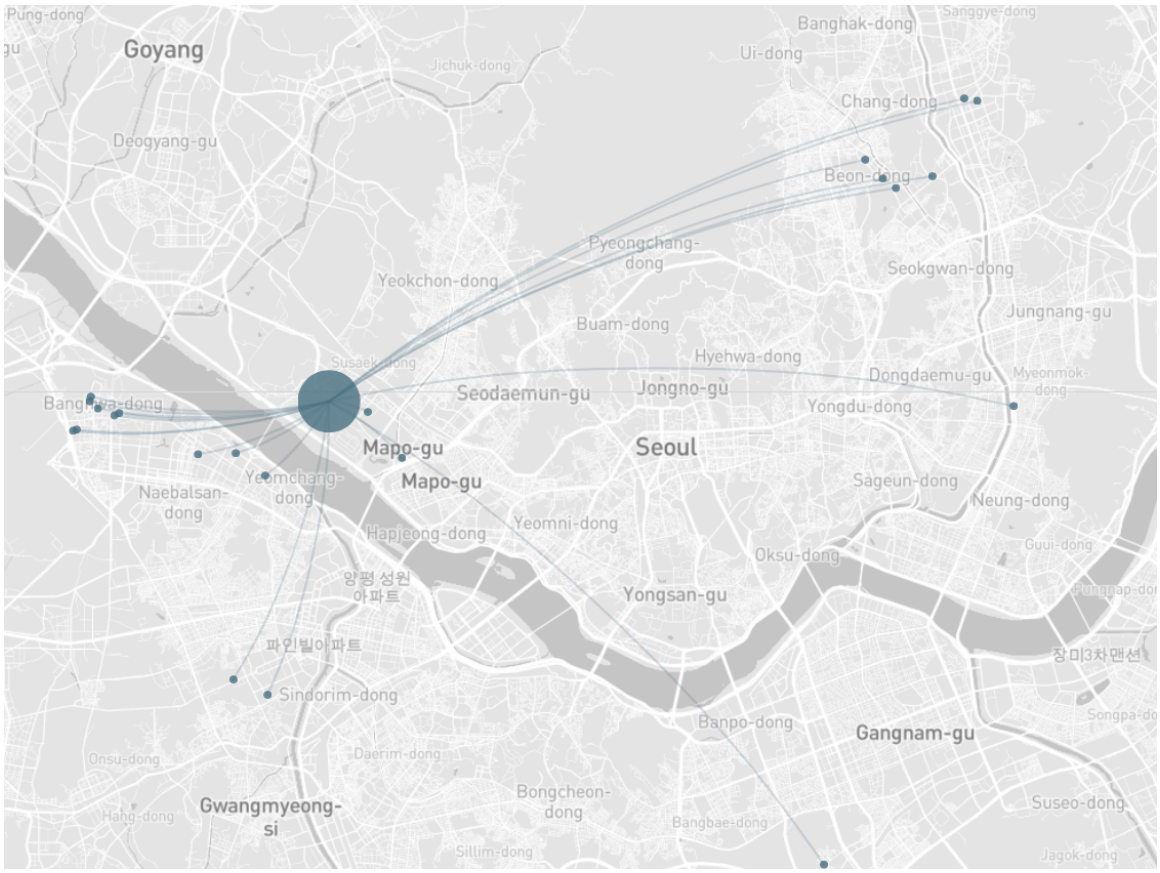

Figure 4-15 Relocation sites of Nanjido dwellers in the 1990s

Concerning relocation, different positions in the landfill led to competing interests over relocation measures. According to the NRC's 1993 survey, 46% preferred a substitute plot in Nanjido or at an adjacent site, 30% wanted a right to an apartment (*punyang*), and 10% sought public housing.[399] Cho Chin-su, who grew up in Nanjido and formed the NRC, explained that the dwellers were separated into three groups based mostly on their strata within the landfill. Those with lucrative positions in Nanjido wanted to migrate to the new sanitary landfill in Kimp'o, which was not an option. Others wanted to move out with governmental assistance.

Figure 4-15 shows the relocation status of Nanjido dwellers in the 1990s. The residents were relocated far from their homes and each other to more than 10 separate areas. The NRC survey and other petition letters record the waste pickers' socioeconomic statuses following the landfill's closure.[400] The inhabitants

[399] Nanjido Iju taech'aek wiwŏnhoe, *Nanjido chumin sŏlmunjosa pogosŏ*, June 10, 1993.

[400] Nanjido chugŏ taech'aek wiwŏnhoe, *Ch'onghoe*.

(householders) were mostly in their 50s, with half unemployed or day laborers. After the landfill closed, respondents had few job prospects. Five alternatives opened up: driver, construction day laborer, itinerant waste collector, building caretaker, or sanitation worker. None were feasible: few had a driver's license or a vehicle, and most were too old to secure a steady job anywhere, let alone on construction sites. Indeed, for many waste pickers, public rental housing was not always ideal: moving out meant forfeiting one's rights over the public housing, which limited their mobility and career prospects. Without a job, monthly rent and upkeep fees became a substantial burden.

After more than a decade in the dump, those who moved out early reported that they faced "the fundamental fear of life," as well as unpredictable and precarious job prospects.[401] Furthermore, because residents were relocated to different parts of Seoul, they were unable to maintain their network, particularly in terms of trading job opportunities and supporting one another as neighbors. Despite several petitions with proposals for land usage and a recycling cooperative, the city refused to provide them with other land.[402] Of the 810 households in 1993, 407 had left by 1995, 218 by 1997, 150 by 1999, and all had relocated by 2001. Those who persevered until the very end were eventually confronted by eviction thugs.

After the landfill closed and the city no longer required the waste pickers' labor, the city positioned itself as benefactor to the Nanjido residents. In a 1996 note to the dwellers, Seoul's mayor urged them to relocate, claiming credit for allowing the waste pickers to "live in the prefabricated housing complex for free for thirteen years" and providing them "unconditional support" during their time there, including "maintaining electricity and breakwater for fire and flood prevention, restoring fire-damaged buildings, provisioning subsidies for fire victim and moving-out expense."[403] Most of these are standard administrative responsibilities for residents under its jurisdiction.

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[401] Sŏulsijang ch'ŏngwŏnsŏ: nanjido chumin mit ijuja chugŏdaech'aek e kwanhan kŏn, June 1996.

[402] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi minwŏn ch'ŏri sŏryu chunggan hoesin* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1997a), August 1997.

[403] Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsijang, Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsijang annaemun - choripsik chut'aek ch'ŏlgŏ (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1996)

In alleging this as extra favor bestowed on Nanjido dwellers, authorities implied a magnanimity deserving of the recipients' gratitude. In so doing, the city disregarded the 15 years of labor that went into the landfill operation.[404]

FORMAL DWELLING, INFORMAL LABOR, AND PRECARITY

The development of the housing complex captures the contradictory position waste pickers occupied in the state's perspective. While the state's intervention recognized the presence of waste pickers, it remained ambiguous about their labor. To understand how this liminal state affected waste pickers, we must place Nanjido within two larger contexts: one, Seoul's urban development, particularly the lack of adequate housing and the need to contain urban labor forces; and two, the formation of a nationwide waste management system and its impact on Seoul's waste disposal policy.

First, the construction of prefabricated housing distinguishes the Nanjido shantytown from other eviction/redevelopment cases. During the 1960s and 1970s, the state frequently tolerated informal, inadequate housing to meet its demand for cheap urban labor.[405] Until the 1970s, housing was considered as part of social welfare, and one of the solutions to eviction was relocation or resettlement of evictees.[406] However, the last evictee resettlement case occurred in 1972. After the 1973 Kwangju Complex

[404] Similarly, waste pickers and their actions were blamed for the city's inability to run a sanitary landfill. In this narrative, they were portrayed as a nuisance to landfill operations, erasing their contributions to the city and its residents. Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Nanjido maeripchi hwan'gyŏng oyŏm pangji mit anjŏnghwa taech'aek kibon kyehoek pogosŏ* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1992): 9; Yi Sŭng-mu, "Nanjido maeripchi kulch'ak e issŏsŏŭi hwan'gyŏng oyŏm kwa kŭi taeŭng chŏllyak," *Hwan'gyŏng pojŏn* 17, no.7 (1995): 3.

[405] In Seoul, the proportion of residential units to households declined from 50.1 percent in 1966 to 45.7 percent in 1972. Kim Myŏng-su, "Pakchŏnghŭi chŏnggwŏnŭi sahoe kaeip kwa yuyedoen hyŏndae: 1960~70-yŏndae sahoe kaebal chŏngch'aek kwa sobijŏk sam ŭi munje," *Sahoewa yŏksa* 127 (2020): 129-183.

[406] Shin Na-ri, "1950- nyŏndae mal – 1970- nyŏndae ch'o sŏul chŏngch'ak saŏp e kwanhan yŏn'gu ," *Taehan kŏnch'uk hakhoe nonmunjip* 38, no.9 (2022): 191-200.

Incident,[407] the state realized that the collective force of urban poor posed a potential political threat to the regime and refrained from relocating policy.[408] In that sense, the state's decision to relocate 4,000 of waste pickers and their families into temporary dwelling might have been motivated by short-term considerations. Neither the city nor waste pickers expected Nanjido to last another decade or that waste pickers would continue to work at the landfill and live in the same prefabricated buildings—built for a temporary purpose—for more than a decade, much less in the same manner. What began as a provisional resettlement, however, provided the state a stable source of labor for landfill operation. Unlike other resettlement cases, this case cannot be seen entirely as welfare measure.

Second, Seoul's waste disposal policy was in flux during the 1980s, and the city benefited from the pickers' unpaid labor. Waste pickers achieved a provisional agreement for resettlement after they demonstrated their presence and contribution through self-drafted community maps and self-enumeration surveys, including their income data. They provided their annual income to claim the value of their labor and

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[407] The Kwangju Complex was planned to relocate up to 350,000 Seoul evictees to Kwangju County, a township 26 kilometers southeast of Seoul, and construct a residential complex on approximately eight million square meters (two-and-a-half million *p'yŏng*). Coercive urban removal or relocation processes, the state's unfulfilled promises for land ownership rights exacerbated by a speculative real estate market on the very place where displaced people were supposed to live, the city's neglect of basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, and sanitation, with outbreaks of water-borne disease—all of these led to frustration and rage of the displaced population, culminating in mass protests and rioting on August 10, 1971. Sociologist Kim Dong-choon (Kim Tong-ch'un) claims that the resistance at the Kwangju Complex was a result of Seoul's excessive urbanization and the city's desire to establish a mass residential complex to house its poor urban population without having the financial resources to do so. Historian Russell Burge suggests that the Kwangju Complex Incident encapsulates developmentalism under the Park Chung Hee regime, which was simultaneously a material as much as a moral undertaking: it was the tension and discrepancy between the two that gave rise to the volatile social action. Kim Tong-ch'un, "1971-nyŏn 8·1 kwangju taedanji chumin hanggŏ ŭi paegyŏng kwa sŏngkyŏk," *Konggan'gwa sahoe* 21, no. 4 (2011): 5-33; Russell Patrick Burge, "The Promised Republic: Developmental Society and the Making of Modern Seoul, 1961-1979," (Ph.D diss., Stanford University, 2019).

[408] Shin Na-ri. "1957~1973-nyŏn soul-si chŏngch'ak saŏp chŏn'gae kwajong kwa tosi hyŏngt'ae" (Ph.D diss., Kyŏnggi University, 2020), 57-65.

its economic contribution, and based on these, they claimed their rights to housing. These strategies formalized their dwelling and established their citizenship status. But it nonetheless left their labor unrecognized. Rather, this data presented the state with an opportunity to effectively extract their labor and generate more revenue. The state could register the monetary value of their labor and produce plans that could subsume the informal workforce under its control, whether by referencing the data or by approximating using a comparable income figure (See Table 4-2].

These attempts to subsume waste pickers also neglected the informal, hybrid, hierarchical labor structure as well as its strict disposal regulations. In particular, the city's proposal to charge waste pickers 20% of their annual sales income (846 million wŏn) for their access to the landfill would have disrupted the social institution of waste pickers.[409] Had waste pickers been required to pay an equal entrance charge capable of overturning their internal order, it is highly unlikely that they would have taken part in collective action or established solidarity. In hindsight, waste pickers were not necessarily aware of ongoing discussions of disposal policies and their consequences. In the end, it was the state's failed efforts rather than waste pickers' collective resistance that prevented them from losing their work.

After 1985, the extended operation of Nanjido further stabilized the lives of waste pickers. But it had no effect on their labor, labor organization, or labor situation. Not only did the city never adequately compensate them for their labor, but it also did not provide adequate safety and sanitary measures despite the fact that open dumping methods were prone to sinkholes, slope slides, and methane gas leaks and fires. Rather, the fact that waste pickers opted to work in the landfill obscured the city's responsibilities, implicitly apportioning blame to waste pickers themselves.[410]

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[409] Seoul-si, *Ipch'e wisaeng maerip*.

[410] Similarly, waste pickers and their actions were blamed for the city's inability to run a sanitary landfill. In this narrative, they were portrayed as a nuisance to landfill operations, erasing their contributions to the city and its residents. Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Nanjido maeripchi hwan'gyŏng oyŏm pangji mit anjŏnghwa taech'aek kibon kyehoek pogosŏ* (Sŏul: Sŏult'ŭkpyŏlsi, 1992): 9; Yi Sŭng-mu, "Nanjido maeripchi kulch'ak e issŏsŏŭi hwan'gyŏng oyŏm kwa kŭi taeŭng chŏllyak," *Hwan'gyŏng pojŏn* 17, no.7 (1995): 3.

This tension between formal dwelling and informal labor rendered waste pickers vulnerable to precarity in three ways. First, it illustrates that alleviating one type of precarity (e.g., living conditions) may not mitigate other types of precarity (e.g., precarious labor). Second, it demonstrates that informal people's strategies to alleviate their precarious circumstances are vulnerable to state appropriation, which may conversely exacerbate their precarity. Lastly, it indicates that this selective formalization of waste pickers might not be entirely incidental.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how waste pickers organized their lives around the Nanjido landfill and how the state's intervention in their settlement resulted in the appropriation of their labor. By locating Nanjido's housing history within the formation of waste management and urban development in the 1980s, I discussed the soaring amounts of household waste throughout the 1980s, the failure to successfully adapt waste treatment technology originally suited to a Western context, and bureaucratic conflicts in securing an alternative landfill site. All led to the prolonged use of the Nanjido landfill, which was itself the result of the waste pickers' labor, providing them a stable job for longer than anyone could have anticipated.

Waste pickers claimed urban citizenship by producing self-enumeration surveys and self-drafted neighborhood maps by articulating their presence, demographic details, labor, and land-uses. By "seeing like a state" through surveying and mapping, waste pickers developed a language that complies with the state. But they contested the state's knowledge production and its conceptualization of them as illegal occupants. These strategies provided them with spaces of engagement with the state in housing negotiations and concession regarding their dwelling and their citizenship status (e.g., civil registration), which eventually granted them legal recognition from the state.

The Nanjido dwellers created a self-sustaining community with its own provision of community, makeshift infrastructure, and goods and services. Despite their demographic similarities, the dwellers were not entirely homogenous. One of the dividing lines was the labor organization that stratified waste pickers. In the 1983

housing demand, waste pickers were not motivated by political ambitions, but rather by the urgent need to survive. Despite the hierarchical labor structure among waste pickers, they were all placed in a similar position by an imminent eviction threat. As such, waste pickers presented themselves the collective identity of the "Nanjido people" and effectively united their voices to secure housing. Their sheer number, 4,000 individuals at its peak, also turned them into a potential social force. As a result, they avoided immediate threats of eviction and alleviated the precariousness associated with an unstable living environment.

Unlike housing, waste was a contentious issue among waste pickers. After the landfill's closure, while all faced joblessness and homelessness, each coped differently. Although the dwellers organized themselves to better negotiate with the city, most notably finding ways to continue living together, the internal stratification ultimately hindered them in presenting their demands in a unified and cohesive way. In fact, following the 1993 closure of Nanjido, first-line pickers desired to negotiate with the city regarding the possibility of working as a waste picker in the new sanitary landfill. For many individuals, particularly second-line pickers, housing was a more pressing concern than maintaining their position as a waste picker. The stratification and intergroup competition fragmented waste pickers into distinct factions with divergent interests, which diminished their ability to mobilize and alleviate their precarity. In the end, the community was broken up and resettled across more than ten different locations, most in permanent rental housing on Seoul's periphery.

Looking back, the city never showed a genuine concern for waste pickers, their dwellings, or their labor practices. The city could maintain the urban landscape and thus save face at international events by physically improving the settlement; it could also reduce the landfill's operational costs by mobilizing this pool of labor. As long as the landfill remained operational, the city had an incentive to keep waste pickers on site. When the city decided to build the housing complex, there might not have been any deliberate intent other than providing temporary housing. Rather, it was a series of events in Seoul's disposal policy that resulted in the housing complex surviving far longer than anyone anticipated, ultimately serving as a means for the state to contain and control waste pickers and their labor. This liminality rendered them vulnerable to

other marginalization mechanisms, which were sometimes intentional and at other times incidental, but which contributed nonetheless to their precarity.