# 5 "Locations of Reflexivity": South Korean Community Activism and Its Affective Promise for "Solidarity"

# 5 "Locations of Reflexivity": South Korean Community Activism and Its Affective Promise for "Solidarity"

MUN YOUNG CHO

This chapter situates anti-poverty community activism across different regions in Asia as a core location. Focusing on the discursive formation of "location of reflexivity," it critically engages in similar ideas discussed by scholars of "Asia as method." South Korean community activism has always been nourished through global dialogues and translations. As an associate director of the Institute on Urbanization at Yonsei University in 1968–70 and a training director of the Philippine Ecumenical Council for Community Organization in 1970–72, American pastor Herbert D. White helped early activists in South Korea and the Philippines learn the community organizing (CO) methodology of Saul D. Alinsky (1989).[1] Alinsky's principle that social change is impossible without the empowerment of the poor and their collective action greatly affected community activism in Asian countries. Organized by Asian bishops in 1971, the Asian Committees for People's Organization (ACPO) helped build institutions for training and managing community organizers in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, and India. In response to the forced demolition of shantytowns, Asian activists, including South Koreans, established the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) in 1988. They also built Leaders and Organizers of Community Organization in Asia (LOCOA) in 1993, as a successor of ACPO, in order to "introduce an extensive network of … [community organizations] and facilitate the exchange of CO tactics

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1 The work of Saul D. Alinsky and Paulo Freire contributed to developing CO as the main method for grass-roots activism in Asian countries in the 1960–70s; see Inamoto (2011, 15–16). Yet, the method has revealed historical and regional differences in the form that activism takes, as it intersects with the changing praxis of political economy.

and experiences between activists in Asian countries."[2] Based on their long-term CO experiences, South Korean activists built the Korean Community Organization Network (KONET) as a centre for training in CO methods and continued to seek solidarity with LOCOA as members of KONET (KONET 2010, 14; Inamoto 2011, 47–50).[3]

Over time, though, many South Korean activists have found themselves in a dilemma as they pursue solidarity across Asian countries. Solidarity was made possible by common histories of violent eviction and deportation, which the urban poor in most Asian countries experienced in light of the rapid modernization, economic development, and political turbulence of the twentieth century. In a speech in 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, described such circumstances as "the torment in the soul of Asia": "Compared with other regions of the world," he said, "Asia was in the midst of the most drastic changes, yet it could not change slowly; the drastic changes were accompanied by danger but Asians had no choice, and this was the biggest torment for Asians" (quoted in Sun 2013, 221). However, this "torment" has increasingly become a narrative of the *past* in South Korea, where democratization movements in the 1980s eventually put an end to military dictatorship.[4] Although forceful demolition did not entirely disappear (Choi 2012), poverty came to take a subtle and invisible form with the near-completion of redevelopment processes. As one-time activists transformed themselves into politicians or government officials, the poor's protests against the state have been replaced by so-called public-private partnerships, in which activists engage in community-based projects with financial support from local governments (Cho 2015; Cho and Lee 2017).

2 People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy website, accessed 10 January 2017, http://www.peoplepower21.org/English/37917

3 The term "CO" was not popular until the mid-1990s, when the scope of the "people" that South Korean activists targeted was expanded from *binmin* (poor people) to *jumin* (residents of a certain locale). "CO" began to be used widely when activists tried to coin a new term for "*jumin* movements." Today, activists tend to reconstruct South Korean histories of community activism by universalizing the term. See Cho (2015, 141–3). The names of persons and local institutions (e.g., KONET, KACO, Co-Village, and Peace Village) explored in this chapter are pseudonyms, except for the names of well-known activists (e.g., Je Jeong-gu and Jeong Il-u) and historically traceable organizations (e.g., ACPO, ACHR, LOCOA, FRSN, and UPC).

4 Similar to the way in which torment has become a narrative of the past, Park's chapter in this volume points out how garment workers' ongoing presence is buried under the images of the past.

Political transformations in South Korea have confounded not only the meaning of solidarity but also the nation's changing relationship with other Asian countries. Since the mid-1990s, South Korea's budget for official development assistance (ODA) has increased radically, as the government announced the shift in status from a recipient to a donor nation. Joining the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996, the country has attempted to declare its "great economic success from the ashes of the Korean War" and demonstrate "how ODA can play a crucial role in overcoming the hurdles of development" (Lee 1997, 1). Today, numerous South Korean students, volunteers, workers at non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious groups, technicians, entrepreneurs, and government officials head to "underdeveloped" or "less-developed" countries. Most of them define their activities in terms of "international development," not solidarity.[5] The narratives of horizontal comradeship among LOCOA activists are now rarely found in the mission to provide help or assistance to impoverished others.

This chapter examines the globalization of South Korean community activism amid the rearrangement of anti-poverty agenda among Asian countries, as well as the shifting political and social economy within the nation. My emphasis is on showing how South Korean activists have not so much abandoned the seemingly anachronistic slogan of solidarity as tried to reinterpret and revitalize it by remapping poor urban neighbourhoods in Asian countries as "locations of reflexivity" (*seongcharui hyeonjang*).[6] In 2012, KONET members founded the Korean Action for Overseas Community Organization (KACO) in order to bridge community organizing and international development. KACO has invoked reflexivity as a crucial part of its activism. In its scheme, reflexivity is a way of denaturalizing conventional rules and practices among people who work in the realm of international development. It

5 See also Jeong's chapter on foreign aid through marriage migrants' kinship network in this volume.

6 In anthropology, "reflexivity" commonly refers to ethnographers' awareness of their relationship to the field of study. Since the late 1970s, many anthropologists have reflected on both fieldwork and ethnographic writing, questioning how they are saturated with the colonial baggage of their discipline, as well as with the problematic representation of otherness. Reflexivity in activism, which I analyse in this chapter, does not deal with the power relations of knowledge production as seriously as in anthropology. Yet, both parties are resonant with each other in that they extend the scope of interlocutors in the field, problematize the uneven relationship between themselves and ethnographers/activists, and prompt self-reflection and self-criticism through their engagement with others.

is also a way of restoring the CO spirit and values, which South Korean community organizations are thought to have lost in their project-oriented, institutionalized actions. I will probe the workings of reflexivity with an eye toward two ethnographic instances. One is the CO training that KONET members have provided to young workers from development NGOs, where most trainees had once conducted community-based programs in the aid industry. The other instance is overseas training, which has been organized by a social welfare corporation with a long and distinguished history of grass-roots activism in South Korea. KONET and KACO coordinated the corporation's visits to urban poor neighbourhoods in Thailand and Indonesia in tandem with LOCOA.

By delving into the two ethnographic examples, my ultimate purpose is to shed light on the relationship between reflexivity and solidarity in moments when radical actions for resistance are on the ebb and project-based anti-poverty interventions such as aid, welfare, and care have become the dominant approaches to "the poor." To achieve this aim, I explore dialogues between the activists' way of seeing Asia as "locations of reflexivity" and the scholarly focus on Asia as method while unveiling the insights and dilemmas of both. Despite being interpreted slightly differently among scholars, Asia as method is an attempt to provincialize and decolonize the West's epistemological hegemony. Central to this attempt is reflexivity – that is, to reach a new self-consciousness through the examination of "others" (Yoon 2014, 194). Defining Asia as method as "a self-reflexive movement," Kuan-Hsing Chen explains its potential in developing new paths of engagement: "The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt" (Chen 2010, 212).

Importantly, the Asia as method scholarship contributes to making it possible to explore self-reflection in relation to the ethics of solidarity. In the shadows of ever-increasing global violence, "the reflecting subject" in Western philosophy has emerged as a crucial theme for interrogating how to ethically undertake the responsibility to help address the failures of modernity. Judith Butler writes, "Critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live or appropriate a set of forms" (2005, 8). Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's study of the Other, Butler argues that the ethical preoccupation with the individual self has dangerous implications for legitimizing the elimination of the other. Instead, what she proposes is a theory of subject formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge,

which may open up "a possibility for acknowledging a relationality that binds me more deeply to language and to you than I previously knew" (40). In this way, a human appears not as an autonomous self but as a precarious self that is conditioned by relationality ("I am my relation to you"). While Butler's final destination is to discover a living place for "I," the Asia as method scholarship expands the reflecting subject from "I" to "us" by highlighting inter-referencing in the region with an eye to the "locations of reflexivity." These locations enable us to push further our discussion of ethics and responsibility as an opportunity to advance new thinking for solidarity, instead of limiting them to technologies of the self.

By focusing on the formation of locations of reflexivity in globalized community activism in South Korea and forging dialogues between it and the discussion of Asia as method, I will analyse the kinds of predicaments and new thinking the linkage of reflexivity and solidarity has catalysed. South Korean community activism sheds light on insights and tensions embedded in such a linkage in various ways. For instance, such activism is differentiated from the globalization of South Korea's ODA (the so-called Saemaul ODA) in that community activists pursue not the global influence of the nation but rather horizontal solidarity among varied locations in Asia. Nevertheless, it is important to ask *to what extent* can locations of reflexivity give rise to the transformation of "self-consciousness through the other" and thus build up solidarity between locations? As I will detail, the work of mutual referencing is based on historical ignorance as much as on historical awareness among different locations. The comparison between the "present" of one location and the "past" of another runs through such work. Furthermore, this type of work tends to generate an affective turn in activism without interfering with the systemic and institutional changes that have posed a considerable dilemma for it. Despite these limitations, I argue that the elusive linkage between reflexivity and solidarity awaits a new conceptualization of solidarity, opening up new ways of thinking about it. Solidarity is not necessarily limited to the interests that political forces seek when they articulate their demand upon the state in the name of the social (Rose 1996, 329) or attempt to bring systemic change to counter structural violence. It is also captured in a scene where people acquire the power of reflexivity – that is, where we reach some recognition "in which precisely our own opacity to ourselves occasions our capacity to confer a certain kind of recognition to others" (Butler 2005, 41).

In what follows, I will fully detail the aforementioned ethnographic instances of South Korean community activism. Before doing so, however, let me briefly introduce KACO – a group that has pushed forward

the globalization of South Korean community activism – by focusing on the trajectory of its founder.

## KACO: On the Edge between Community Organizing and International Development[7]

In the mid-1990s, I first met Eun Sil – a founder of KACO – in Bongcheon-dong, a southern area in Seoul where the demolition of shantytowns had been a primary issue. There, she acted as a community activist while I volunteered to take care of children whose parents were busy with anti-eviction struggles. When I interviewed Eun Sil some twenty years later and asked her how she became interested in global poverty issues, she reminded me of that time in the 1990s, when many community activists found themselves in a predicament. As she recalled, her self-identification as an activist had begun to falter during the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, when "many activists started merely conducting service delivery" as part of government-sponsored welfare programs. This crisis reached its peak in 2001–5, when she organized the relocation of low-income residents to rental apartments as a result of redevelopment processes. Once they secured new housing, former slum-dwellers who had previously fought together against demolition were scattered about. Newly arriving staff members in community centres were devoid of what she called "the self-consciousness of activism" (*undongjeok maindeu*). The seeming de-politicization of urban communities led Eun Sil to question neoliberalism, not only as a changing mode of capitalism but also as a specific mode of governing people's affect and conduct (Eun Sil, interview with the author, 20 December 2013).

In order to investigate how neoliberalism actually affected local communities, Eun Sil headed to the Philippines, a place she had become acquainted with through LOCOA. As she recounted, she hoped to regain her vigour in the Philippines, a country where grass-roots activists had in the 1970s organized a squatter community of 250,000 in Manila. Yet, what intrigued Eun Sil most during her stay was the presence of development NGOs. Framing their activities in terms of "international development," these NGOs frequently visited local communities:

> Staying in the Philippines for about eight months, I came to know that so many development NGOs in South Korea and elsewhere dispatched volunteers and staff to the country. Witnessing their activities, I really felt that I had found a blueprint for activism under global neoliberalism.

7 Some portions of this section appear in Cho 2015.

> Their acts seemed to model the linkage of the global and the local. However, I was surprised to find that local activists in the Philippines kept complaining about South Korean staff's feelings of superiority as well as their irresponsibility. The gap between South Koreans' appreciation of their own work and the local activists' view of them was remarkable. (Interview with the author, 20 December 2013)

Returning to South Korea in 2007, she began to study the discipline of international development: she joined in various events, workshops, and conferences relating to it while introducing herself to development NGOs. In 2011, together with young members of development NGOs to whom she, as a KONET trainer, had given CO training, she formed the Co-Village, a group formed to discuss people- and community-centred models of international development. For about nine months, she interviewed more than fifty figures in development NGOs, to whom she was introduced by those youths. These interviews made her realize that experts in the realm of international development were unable to produce alternative voices: "Most interviewees disliked the overly nationalistic discourses of Korean ODA. They also criticized the structure of aid projects that made people-centred development almost impossible. Because their funds came mostly from the government, however, they hesitated to voice their opinions publicly. In particular, young employees who had just returned after their dispatched work in 'recipient' countries were afraid of disclosing the problems of their organization despite their serious awareness of them" (interview with the author, 10 February 2017).

Through a series of interviews, visits, and studies, Eun Sil felt compelled to bridge the gap between international development and community organizing, and to implant the ethics and methodology of CO among young, passionate workers in development NGOs. For this purpose, she founded KACO in 2012, in consultation with other members of KONET. Without financial support from the government, KACO was funded by KONET and other CO-related organizations, as well as by progressive development NGOs. Nevertheless, this move was not entirely smooth. At first, Eun Sil had difficulties persuading veteran CO activists of the need for KACO. Reminding her of the long tradition of international solidarity through LOCOA, many activists in KONET wondered why they should make new friendships with those who had worked from the outset in close partnership with the government. However, Eun Sil asserted that interactions through LOCOA had already become nominal and lost vitality.

> Today, South Korea has little common experience to share with other Asian countries. We now witness the apparent differences in poor people's experiences and socio-economic conditions in different countries. Many activists in Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and the Philippines also think that way. The poor still resist and fight against state violence there. In Korea, however, governance[8] has become a mainstay of community activism after the forceful demolition has decreased. Most CO activists are busy conducting state-led community programs in their own neighbourhoods. If the annual meeting of LOCOA is coming up, they suddenly gather together and improvize a report to prepare for it. This process makes everyone feel tired and listless. (Interview with the author, 10 February 2017)

Under circumstances where Asian activists see more differences than similarities in each other's locations, what is the motivation for pursuing international dialogues relating to community activism? While creating a new relationship to the realm of international development, how has KACO sought to approach the globalization of community activism differently than its predecessors? Though not publicized explicitly, reflexivity has served as the primary methodology of KACO, as I will outline in the following two sections.

**Co-Village: Reflexivity Regarding What We Have Naturalized**

As noted, the Co-Village started as a group for (incumbent or former) young workers in development NGOs to share their anxieties about the industry of international development and to discuss people- and community-centred models of international development. Most members had experience conducting development programs in Asia or Africa for two or three years as employees of large-scale development NGOs. After returning to South Korea, they organized a seminar group for studying alternative models of development, and invited Eun Sil, a KONET trainer, to teach them the CO methodology. Frustration about the realm of international development led a small seminar meeting to evolve into a solid group of about fifty members: the group organized regular CO training courses, created an agenda for linking CO to international development, and contributed to the foundation of KACO.

8 Eun Sil here used the term "governance" to indicate an increasingly institutionalized partnership between community organizations and the local government.

For example, returning after being dispatched to work in Laos for two years, Seo U became a member of Co-Village. As she recalled, "Most young staff members, including myself, shared frustration while working in development NGOs. Receiving top-down directions from the headquarters in Korea and implementing them in conflict with native coordinators and villagers, we felt tired and helpless. Senior officials of development NGOs brushed aside our frustration, treating it as a sort of 'rite of passage.' Co-Village provided us with a shelter for sharing our worries. It was a great comfort to us" (interview with the author, 20 May 2015).

Since 2011, new members of Co-Village have received CO training for about three months under the guidance of Eun Sil and other KONET activists. Reflexivity has been central to the training courses. Trainees are expected to look back on what they did in the field during their time in Asia and/or Africa and reconstruct theses sites as "locations of reflexivity." Points of reference for reflexivity include conducting interviews with veteran CO activists and progressive practitioners from development NGOs, reading books about well-known activists in and outside Korea, visiting historic sites of community activism, and participating in memorial events for late activists or in international exchanges with Asian activists. The basic premise of reflexivity referencing is that the locations of community activism cannot be distinguished as being "at home" or "abroad." Whether they come from the records of the past or the present, or from the stories of South Korea or other countries, all have served as locations of reflexivity.

In the fall of 2015, Co-Village members were expected to write a reflective essay on a book entitled *A Tale of Jeong Il-u* (Jeong Il-u iyagi) and discuss it during their training process. Jeong Il-u (John V. Daly, 1935–2014) was a long-esteemed Catholic priest and grass-roots activist. Born in the United States, he eventually settled in South Korea and fostered solidarity among the evicted poor, despite continuous threats of exile under military rule. In 1973, he and Je Jeong-gu (the late South Korean activist and politician, 1944–99) met in Cheonggyecheon, the largest slum area in Seoul.[9] On three occasions between 1977 and 1985, they led collective

9 Many factories in Changsin-dong – the focus of Park's chapter in this volume – used to be located in Cheonggyecheon. In 1970, Chun Tae-il, a worker at a Peace Market clothing manufacturer in Cheonggyecheon, committed suicide in protest of harsh working conditions. Factories in Cheonggyecheon gradually moved to Changsin-dong and other nearby areas in the 1970 and 1980s, as Chun's death led to the unionization of workers and prompted the government to enforce some regulations regarding labour protection See N. Han (2017, 34).

migrations for poor people who were evicted from Cheonggyecheon and other shantytowns in Seoul. With the evicted poor, they built "Peace Village" in the outskirts of Seoul. Since then, Peace Village has remained a legendary place of South Korean community activism.[10]

When asked to write about how Jeong's life could lead them to view the locations of international development in different ways, some trainees at Co-Village newly identified Jung as an American who had lived with the poor in a remote country. They thus compared his life with their own lives as staff in the realm of international development: "I enjoyed reading *A Tale of Jeong Il-u*. Like him, I will be a foreigner in my field. Priest Jeong was the very person who put his CO thoughts into action in the field of international development"; "I was impressed by Jeong's humility and desire to become an ordinary resident of Peace Village"; "Jeong made me realize that long-term stays with local people would bring about changes for the community spontaneously." Furthermore, Jeong's "quiet" activism, which took a long time to bear fruit, led some trainees to reflect on their "loud" community projects: "Haven't we destroyed the freedom of local residents by enforcing time-sensitive projects regardless of their will?" "Can we really become not a strange foreigner but a real resident in our locations of international development?" (Co-Village 2015, 268–76).

Through a series of training practices that supplemented workshops, interviews, on-site visits, and reading books, the members of Co-Village transformed their project sites in Asian and African countries into locations of reflexivity. That is, they reflected on these sites as locations where (as shown in their narratives) they had mobilized local residents against their will instead of encouraging their voluntary participation, treated those residents as a kind of tool for achieving project goals, and transplanted a "universal" model for success without considering various political, economic, and cultural differences. For example, Ji Hyeon, a trainee of Co-Village, interviewed a veteran activist who used to run a day-care centre in a shantytown in Seoul. The activist's contrast between "community building through long-term relationships to the poor in the past" and "short-term and performance-oriented projects in the present" prompted Ji Hyeon to de-naturalize her own experiences of conducting development programs in the Philippines: "The activist, who devoted her life to grass-roots activism for three decades, made me brood over the meaning of the word 'speed.' In the Philippines, I took it for granted that

10 In 1986, Je Jeong-gu and Jeong Il-u won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of their community activism in South Korea.

community programs should be done depending on my own speed, not the speed of local people" (Co-Village 2015, 319).

Such self-reflection did not mean that these Co-Village members decided to leave the industry of international development in search of a more radical mission. Most Co-Village members kept working in development NGOs, although they continued to join events organized by KACO and participated in some political rallies in the name of Co-Village. In this sense, the making of locations of reflexivity through CO training at Co-Village raises some questions. How can the problems of international development, which Co-Village trainees newly discovered, be dealt with when the trainees return to development NGOs and other related agencies as front-line practitioners? If the performance-based, business-like community projects that they denaturalized through reflexivity are structural rather than individually inappropriate, what does it mean to say that front-line workers of this industry desire to identify themselves as community activists? Let me turn to another ethnographic instance that raises a similar problem.

**Overseas Training: Reflexivity Regarding What We Have Lost**

As discussed above, South Korean community activism has become a subject of learning and respect for those who feel disappointed and exhausted by the standardized system of international development. The CO training has helped them engage seriously with "people" and "communities," which are buzzwords in the realm of international development. Nevertheless, it should be noted that what they commonly call "CO" does not necessarily represent the landscape of present community activism. CO activists are increasingly confronted with the need to fulfil a new role as business operators as they compete to apply for projects sponsored by governments, corporations, churches, and large-scale NGOs. KONET trainers rely heavily on the past experiences of their seniors because they find it difficult, albeit not impossible, to bring up pertinent examples of best practices from current CO activities (Cho 2015, 153–4).

Peace Village is no exception to this trend. It is a community made possible through the collective migration of the urban poor in the 1970s and 1980s. Well-known CO activists Je Jeong-gu and Jeong Il-u purchased land on the outskirts of Seoul and managed the costs of construction through the sponsorship of a German Catholic foundation.[11]

11 A total of 471 households from three slum areas in Seoul moved to Peace Village in 1977–85 (Jeong Il-u 2009, 86).

Je, Jeong, and relocated residents built houses in Peace Village together and, by working in nearby factories, paid back the money they borrowed from the foundation. Running a co-op credit union, producers cooperative, day-care centre, library, and scholarship association, poor people and activists survived amid Korea's rapid modernization drive and military dictatorship. They built a kind of self-contained community, what was termed a "thick mixed rice community" (*jjinhan bibimbap gongdongche*), where "local residents were mixed while they fiercely fought, reconciled, backbit, and praised each other" (Jeong Il-u 2009, 87). As Jeong Il-u wrote in his memoir, "Wherever in rural or urban areas, the poor cannot live alone. They need to live together. I haven't thought of anything except that poor people cannot but live with community" (ibid., 90–1).

When most cities went through the brutal demolition of unlicensed houses and anti-eviction struggles in the 1980s, Peace Village served as the sort of model for the poor community that CO activists in other areas hoped to emulate. However, the working of the community has been rapidly institutionalized since the 1990s. Along with the near-completion of redevelopment processes and the evolution of electoral democracy, activists in Peace Village reframed their CO histories in terms of "welfare" and registered their main centre as the Peace Village Social Welfare Corporation (PV) in 1996. This transformation into a corporation meant that PV came to conduct many welfare-related projects in partnership with the government or to run welfare-related institutions outsourced by the government. Over two decades, the one-time community where poor people and CO activists communalized production, education, and livelihood has dramatically shifted into an ordinary neighbourhood, where initial settlers are heavily outnumbered by new immigrants, and local residents use PV's facilities as welfare clients or customers. In this process, PV has become a sizable corporation under which seven institutions conduct diverse community programs for "at-risk populations" in tandem with government or corporate bodies. Social workers, not community activists, constitute the great majority of PV employees.

Such spillover expansion has been a source of worry among senior members of PV, who still remember the old days in Peace Village. Jung, the director of a community welfare centre affiliated with PV, explained to me the reason why:

> Since the building of PV, we have relied heavily on government subsidies. Our activities have been brought into the regulatory system of the government. Although the founders are certain that the CO principle and spirit should survive under the corporate system, most employees have

> found themselves stuck in bureaucratic documentation. 2011 was the fifteenth year of the founding of PV. At that time, many senior members, including myself, raised voices of self-reflection. Our roots come from the CO principle and spirit. We asked ourselves if we really abided by them. (Interview with the author, 17 February 2017)

PV's overseas training began in this context. With senior advisers, the chair of PV – an early activist in Peace Village and the widow of the late Je Jeong-gu – formulated a new mission for the corporation and sought a way to "re-educate" its employees. For this purpose, senior members tried to find "locations" where people put the mission for revitalizing the CO principle into practice. As Director Jung remarked to me:

> [In Southeast Asia], housing rights are ignored, and evicted people endure social suffering … Of course, you can find these problems in Korea, but they are made invisible in most cases … In Korea, you can also find communities where grass-roots activists still struggle to realize the CO methodology. However, we seniors suggested that we go to relatively unknown locations outside Korea, which might be closer to the sort of original form of CO. We thought that this way would be more effective to re-educate our workers. (Interview with the author, 17 February 2017)

To explore the effects of "re-education," twelve senior officials in PV first visited poor urban neighbourhoods in Thailand for six days in May 2013. KACO coordinated PV's visit in conjunction with LOCOA,[12] and a young member from Co-Village joined as an interpreter. Activists in the Four Regions Slum Network (FRSN) in Thailand – a member of LOCOA – guided PV officials to a homeless centre, public land near a canal and railroad tracks, and other slum communities in Thailand, where they were organizing poor people to improve their living conditions, to respond to lawsuits and evictions, and to urge the government to solve land conflicts between slum dwellers and private landowners.[13] Director Jung looked back on her travels, saying that all visitors from PV "gently speaking, learned a lot, and roughly speaking, got shocked." They were "shocked" by the fact that "*homeless* people" (Jung's emphasis) had finally won a long-term land-lease agreement

12 Despite her criticism about "nominal" interactions among Asian activists affiliated with LOCOA, Eun Sil continued to communicate with that group. Yet, she placed more weight on LOCOA's role of linking different CO locations than on formalized meeting among activists.

13 See the 2014 annual record of PV.

from the government through sixteen years of resistance. They were also "shocked" by a scene in which slum dwellers commonly called community activists "our family" or "comrades." Such observations led her to question her own practices:

> Most of us received social work education. Basically, social workers focus on how to allocate government subsidies effectively and how to satisfy social work targets by planning good programs. They tend to use the word "target" (*daesang*) without question. For those who frequently did surveys to find welfare need, community organizers in Thailand seemed to do nothing. It was shocking to see them do nothing while slum dwellers do everything … We came to realize how impatient we had been in PV – that is, how we couldn't wait for our residents so that they could solve their problems for themselves. I couldn't guess how much work the community organizers had done until local people did it that way. (Interview with the author, 17 February 2017)

Similar responses continued to emerge in subsequent training programs. Acknowledging the benefit of overseas training, PV has expanded this opportunity to low-level officials, most of whom are front-line social workers. Through the coordination of KACO and LOCOA, PV officials received CO training in various communities in Indonesia: fifteen officials visited Surabaya for six days in November 2014, and eighteen officials visited Makassar and Jakarta for six days in August 2015. Most communities were organized by the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), a coalition of civil society organizations focusing on urban poverty issues.

It is important to note that most CO "locations" that PV officials visited faced tense situations. They seemed to be different from community centres in PV, where social workers implemented routine programs. In the Indonesian locations, for instance, people who lived on the banks of a river were threatened with eviction on the grounds that they polluted the water. Some poor people whose land was purchased at an extremely low price by a big company struggled to recover their land rights. Others were in danger of losing their community as a result of a leakage accident caused by an oil company. They were urged to leave, receiving only meagre compensation, because the accident was framed as a "natural disaster" through an alliance between the company and the local government. Regardless of whether CO activists tried to challenge the irresponsible decision made by the government or prevent the forceful relocation through negotiations based on the electoral power of the poor, every situation was highly intense and urgent.

PV officials were deeply impressed by these desperate actions for, as well as passionate attachment to, these communities. Realizing how they had become inured to regular and banal tasks, these officials were re-awakened by their time in Indonesia and by viewing that site as a location of reflexivity. In the previous section, we saw that Co-Village members reflected on their naturalization of the system of international development. In this section, PV officials brought up the CO principles and spirit, which they thought they had lost, as the target of reflexivity. When asked to give their impressions of CO locations in Indonesia, a PV official compared the present state of poor communities in Indonesia with the past of Peace Village, which she had only heard about from senior members. She said that her visit to Indonesia provided her with an opportunity to imagine how Je Jeong-gu and Jeong Il-u would have communicated with local residents. Another official began to question why her work in PV was not as "touching" as at CO locations in Indonesia.[14] Coordinating PV's overseas training, Eun Sil emphasized that this kind of reflexivity was made possible only through the encounter between "locations."

> In the process of training, it seemed that PV officials felt the "love" (*aeteutham*) of the locations that they visited, although this expression might not be objective. Some officials looked at those whom they met in Indonesia as fellows. Other seniors reminded them of their younger days in Peace Village. Self-reflection and a fellow feeling of love naturally emerged because they did not simply hear stories but faced "locations" (*hyeonjang*) straightly … "In Korea, I'm becoming a machine." "I'm now nothing but a technician obsessed with projects" … By being at the "location," they began to confess what they had silenced for fear of criticism. I think there's no moment as touching as this. It's touching because they let out what they couldn't say due to shame. (Interview with the author, 10 February 2017)

What happened in PV after the overseas training? Jinwoo, a low-level official, told me that social workers tried not to "objectify" (*daesang-hwa*) local residents. "No one induced them to, but social workers began to help building various self-help groups among local residents. Some of them made community programs in dialogue with residents, instead of doing it on their own authority" (interview with the author, 17 February 2017). He smiled while saying that senior officials became

14 See the 2014 PV Training Packet.

more generous about calculating the inputs and outputs of welfare programs. After completing the overseas training in Indonesia, a senior official wrote about how community leaders there successfully preserved CO values: "They made us realize what it meant to let people speak for themselves and let them solve problems by themselves.[15] Every moment, we got inspired and challenged by them."[16]

However, one may have noticed the difference between the "CO" brought up by the PV official and the "CO" highlighted in the locations in Indonesia. In the poor communities in Indonesia, the CO principles – stating that community organizers and leaders should believe in people's power, wait for people's initiative, and act together with people – were based on urgent situations, such as violent evictions and forcible relocations. In today's Peace Village, however, the CO principles are interpreted and operate within the boundary of community "projects." In Indonesia, the UPC called for people's "participation" for *survival* – that is, in order for them not to be evicted and deprived of their land rights. Yet, PV requires "participation" as an indicator for measuring the success of a series of community-oriented projects while constituting people as a governable group. In such a relationship of governance, people "must be made to act"; otherwise, they are to be criticized for their "nonparticipation," "powerlessness," and the "lack" of self-esteem (Cruikshank 1999, 82, 83, 93). Like the ethnographic example of Co-Village, PV's overseas training leads us to question the political implication of reflexivity, when affective efforts for recuperating "what was lost" do not necessarily interfere with the shifting relationships of governance.

## Dialogues between Community Activism and Asia as Method Scholarship

Thus far, I have examined how grass-roots activists in South Korea have re-read poor urban neighbourhoods in Asia as locations of reflexivity while organizing and coordinating CO training practices in diverse ways. Such pluralistic readings of locations are significant for our understanding of the world, as Mizoguchi Yūzō has asserted. In his book *China as Method* ([1989] 2016), which inspired Kuan-Hsing Chen's notion of Asia as method, Mizoguchi criticizes mainstream

15 Song's chapter in this volume echoes how activists in working-poor neighbourhoods appreciate people's autonomy.

16 See the 2015 annual record of PV, 43.

sinology in Japan for measuring China's degree of progress (or lack thereof) by using the world as the standard. He problematized this method because the "world" was a Eurocentric one with a "fixed and pre-arranged method." He thus argued that a world that takes China as method would be "a world in which China is a constitutive element'" – that is, "a pluralistic world in which Europe is also one of the constitutive elements" (Mizoguchi 2016, 516). Much earlier than Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), he attempted to provincialize both Europe and China instead of reinforcing the opposition between East and West (Murthy and Sun 2016, 503).

Mizoguchi's insight is exuded in the creation of locations of reflexivity, which I have explored through the two ethnographic examples above. Such creation distinguishes South Korean community activism from the nation's Saemaul ODA, although both of them commonly seek the globalization, or "South-to-South" interaction, of anti-poverty interventions. Since 2011, the South Korean government has attempted to export the Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement), the nation's rural development campaign that took place under military rule in the 1970s, as the representative development model for ODA.[17] The preachers of Saemaul ODA highlight their "non-colonial" and "non-Western" position but nevertheless identify themselves as passengers on the linear trajectory of modernization, as did Korean and Korean-American missionaries in "less-developed" countries ( J. Han 2010, 147). In other words, the government discourse addresses the Saemaul ODA's contribution to South-to-South interaction as a source of national pride: it merely raises South Korea to the rank of "the West" without problematizing the conventional principle of modernization.

Importantly, in contrast to the Saemaul ODA, community activism no longer considers the nation state as the primary unit of global interactions. On the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the KACO in July 2016, Eun Sil declared to the audience that "the world is much the same as Bongcheon-dong." In her statement, Bongcheon-dong was neither

17 In fact, Saemaul Undong is traceable to various indigenous movements for rural development preceding the state-led campaign in 1970 (Kim 2009). It has also been interpreted and appropriated by rural people in unorthodox ways (S.-M. Han 2004; Oh 2014). However, such heterogeneous historiography does not deny the fact that the discourse of national development overtook other voices when local flows of rural development were incorporated into the main agenda of the Park Chung-Hee regime. In the shift of Saemaul from a rural development campaign in the 1970s to a foreign aid program in the new millennium, "national development" continued to exert discursive dominance. See H. Jeong (2017).

an administrative place-name in Seoul nor the erstwhile site for the anti-eviction struggles that she had long engaged in during the 1990s. Instead, it emerged as a metaphor of a location (*hyeonjang*), which would become critical through the encounter with another *hyeonjang*. Dissatisfied with "the state" being the first and foremost grid in the regime of international development, Eun Sil tried to conceptualize *hyeonjang* as a suitable alternative: "I like the word *hyeonjang*. I frequently say 'I go to *hyeonjang*' or 'I see *hyeonjang*.' In my 20s and 30s, Bongcheon-dong was my *hyeonjang*. Now, my *hyeonjang* could be somewhere in Surabaya and Makassar" (interview with the author, 10 February 2017).[18]

Indeed, globalized community activism in South Korea resonates with scholarly discussions of Asia as method in interesting ways. Both advance a new imagination by separating the boundary of *hyeonjang* from its national borders. Like Bongcheon-dong in Seoul and a village in Surabaya, the Korean peninsula, Okinawa, Kinmen (Quemoy), or Diaoyu (Senkaku) are considered core locations (McCormack 2011; Sun 2011; Baik 2013a, 2013b). Though marginalized or particularized in the global world order, each location may steer what Baik Young-seo calls interconnected East Asia "away from a New Cold War, and toward an East Asian Community" (2013b, 137).[19]

More importantly, it should be noted that both South Korean activism and Asia as method scholarship shed light on the linkage between reflexivity and solidarity. KACO's attempts to train and spread CO methodology configure Asia's poor neighbourhoods as locations of critical reflexivity, which people learn from and refer to across time and space. They aim at a pluralistic world where no hierarchy among locations exists, no boundary of the nation state matters, and horizontal solidarity emerges through encounters between locations. Asia as method scholarship furthers the method of reflexivity while focusing on the imaginary unit of "Asia" (or "East Asia"): "A society in Asia may be inspired by how other Asian societies deal with problems similar to its own, and thus overcome unproductive anxieties and develop new paths of engagement" (Chen 2010, 212). Such reflexive dialogues between locations ultimately aim at achieving solidarity, whether it is built among (poor) people, activists, or intellectuals. Prompted by "a

18 Park's chapter in this volume provides an excellent elaboration of competing meanings of *hyeonjang* in a different context.

19 For thinkers grounded in Asia as method, however, geopolitics based on national borders is still significant because it leads us to better understand how "core location" is doubly marginalized in the hierarchy within East Asia as well as in Eurocentric world history. See Baik (2013a, 17).

self-reflexive movement" (ibid., 213), this solidarity is full of affect. In CO training programs, participants were "moved," "shocked," or felt "love" through the encounter of locations. Baik Young-seo proposes "co-suffering" (*gonggo*) – that is, sharing suffering – as an affective condition for solidarity (Baik 2013a, 26–7).

Yet, in what ways and to what extent do the locations of reflexivity lead to solidarity? As mentioned in the introduction to this collection, notions of core location and Asia as method have been developed by humanities scholars. In their approach, the relationship between reflexivity and solidarity remains elusive: their mission is to cast some new direction for rethinking the global order rather than to examine how the direction is actually performed in practice. Yet such elusiveness may appear problematic for activists who seek social change through their actions. Indeed, South Korean community activism has actively incorporated what Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010, 213) describes as the "political motive of Asia as method" – that is, "the use of Asia as an emotional signifier to call for regional integration and solidarity." However, what if this work of mutual referencing leads to an affective turn in activism, without addressing the systemic and institutional issues that have created the initial dilemmas for it? How is it possible for the affective locations of reflexivity to lead to a sort of solidarity that both South Korean community activism and the Asia as method scholarship strive for?

As I have shown in the previous two sections, CO training practices organized by community activists have rarely brought about immediate and visible changes in the lives of trainees. Young members at Co-Village felt that, under the present circumstances – according to which they were expected to adjust to the short-term cycle of development projects – the CO-centred movement was something remote from them. The more they were involved in CO training, the more they felt that people-centred development was impossible, short of leaving their current positions. Although trainers emphasized the possibility of people fighting against unjust powers in their own communities, most of the development NGOs to which they belonged tried to avoid taking an ideological stance (Cho 2015, 154–5). Self-reflection led some Co-Village members to live as a kind of "double-agent." At one level, they, as front-line workers of development NGOs, continued to implement conventional programs, following the ruling office's directions. At another level, they, as Co-Village members, occasionally organized signature campaigns against the malpractices of the nation's aid policy[20]

20 In January 2017, it was reported that Choe Sunsil, a person at the centre of a political scandal involving the impeached President Park Geun-Hye, gained illicit profits from the South Korean ODA program in Myanmar.

or the poor's forceful eviction caused by global capital in "recipient" countries.

PV officials have continued to engage in welfare programs while trying to adjust them to an evaluation index. Some of them were "shocked" by the desperate struggles that they had witnessed in the poor communities in Thailand or Indonesia. Others started to wonder if the scene of violent repression that they witnessed there could also be found in their own country, and they reflected on themselves, those who used to pursue the "improvement" of the lives of the poor in South Korea. Nevertheless, such self-reflection did not enable them to resist the giant system of the welfare industry. After returning from overseas training, PV social workers tried to revitalize the CO methodology, which they believed played a crucial role in the formation of Peace Village in the 1970s and 1980s. As I noted earlier, however, community organizing has become a desperate mission, intended more for the social workers who are expected to boost people's "participation" and "empowerment" than for local residents whose life concerns are not necessarily bounded by their "community."

All in all, the creation of locations of reflexivity contains the danger of instrumentalization – that is, a danger of referencing each other based on each other's need while streamlining and simplifying the particular historical specificities of each location. This critique may also acquire currency in the case of the Asia as method scholarship if it focuses solely on "Asia's rich multiplicity and heterogeneity" against the binary opposition between East and West (Chen 2010, 215). It is important to be reminded that the task of inter-referencing is not external to the uneven power dynamics within and among locations. Without any consideration of those dynamics, the inter-referencing of the CO methodology would mean that it merely shifts from a weapon through which to struggle against state and corporate violence to a means for measuring the "empowerment" of the weak. Nevertheless, does this critique lead us to the conclusion that collective efforts for creating the locations of reflexivity are nothing but "incomplete" and "fictitious"? Rather than entirely dismissing such efforts on account of ignoring the structural unevenness among locations, I conclude this chapter by demonstrating that affective activism, shown in solidarity based on reflexivity, causes us to await action rather than stifle it.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the emergence of locations of reflexivity in Asia by focusing on two kinds of CO training practices organized and coordinated by grass-roots activists in South Korea. One is

CO training at Co-Village, aimed at young workers from development NGOs who conduct community-based programs mostly in Asian countries. The other is overseas training at poor communities in Thailand and Indonesia, aimed at officials in a social welfare corporation with a long and distinguished history of grass-roots activism. In both cases, CO sites across different regions in Asia were given new attention as locations of reflexivity. Diverse methods of CO education across time and space made participants realize what they had assumed or lost. Rethinking the locations in which they had worked or visited, Co-Village members de-naturalized the apparatus of international development while PV officials tried to revitalize the CO principle in their workplaces.

It is significant that those who construct the locations of reflexivity have not so much dismissed the seemingly outdated slogan of solidarity as pursued it with affective engagement. The prevalence of reflexivity as an ethics of solidarity indicates an affective turn in activism, in which affective dialogues for sharing social suffering outweigh a teleological mission to complete a goal. Emotionally engaged with horizontal solidarity, veteran activists, poor people, NGO practitioners, and social welfare officials encounter one another across time and space. Such encounters lead South Korean participants to realize the limits of their self-understanding and to problematize the techno-politics of global anti-poverty interventions in which structural problems are redefined in technical language and considered easily solvable. Although such problematization rarely leads to immediate action, it still lies in the affective sentiments of those who remember intimacies, passions, and warm camaraderie in these locations. In this sense, the location of reflexivity calls for new thinking about solidarity in order to entail not just direct, immediate action but also the promise of action, which may endure through affective bondage.

When I interviewed Ms. Jung, the PV official whom I mentioned earlier, she tried to share her worries with me. In Jung 2016, four activists from Indonesia visited "CO locations" in South Korea at the invitation of the Je Jeong-gu Foundation. This trip was a kind of "overseas training" for Indonesian activists. Jung was delighted to meet them again and to have an opportunity to take them around "fancy" institutions in PV. Yet, she said, she was also anxious because she quickly realized that they were not that interested in visiting those institutions. As she lamented, what UPC activists really wanted to see no longer existed:

> Because they were struggling to help the re-location of poor people, the UPC activists wanted to know more about Peace Village in the 1970–80s – that is, how activists had negotiated with the government, how they had

> persuaded poor people to come here, how they had collected funding for this task, and so on. They didn't look interested in today's PV, except for a few co-ops. But I felt ashamed to say that even the co-ops received government subsidies. In Indonesia, we really felt touched by what they did. Here, we also want to provide them with some "touching" moments. But what will be these moments? How can we impress them through our contemporary activities, not memoirs of the past? (Interview with the author, 17 February 2017)

Indeed, Jung's story reveals the structural and historical unevenness among locations in Asia, which cannot be dealt with through reflexive dialogues or mutual referencing. Promptly linking reflexivity to solidarity, inter-referencing may lead to mutual ignorance as well as mutual imagination, failing to differentiate itself from liberal pluralism. Nevertheless, I would emphasize that Jung's deliberate questions that problematized state-sponsored CO practices in South Korea might not have emerged without these very encounters between locations. The encounter should be taken seriously because it generates affective uneasiness – the feeling of being "touched" and "ashamed" – and thus urges community participants to think or act differently. In this way, Jung's self-reflection takes on a futuristic form of solidarity, implicitly avowing her promise to be accountable for herself and others.

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