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Afterword

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Afterword

JESOOK SONG AND LAAM HAE

Readers of this volume might wonder how we, the editors and contributors, came to conduct this thematic and paradigmatic inquiry related to “Asia as method” and “core location.” Indeed, it has been the product of a long journey through various platforms. Our collective point of departure was a shared interest in interrogating the paradigms through which urban South Korea has typically been studied. Many aspects of the project, however, were not initially foreseen. For one, none of us expected the lengthy timeframe it would ultimately require to complete the volume when we first met on a panel on urban Korea at the annual meeting for the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in Chicago in March 2015, which was the beginning point of our discussion regarding developing a project together.

In a way, our thematic attention to urban Korea has remained intact – although it was expanded to encompass certain aspects of rural and transnational Korea (see the chapters by Cho, Eom, Jeong, and Oh, in particular) – attempting to challenge the boundary of urban and rural, and national and transnational, dichotomies. Yet, we did not anticipate the changes in our framework from urban development to Asia as method and core location, or the format of publication from a special issue in a journal to an edited volume. This has been quite a dialectical, experimental, and collaborative process, though not one without its uncertainties and challenges. This afterword affords us the opportunity to reflect upon and share the journey of our collaborative efforts. We undertake this not necessarily as an account of the unusual trajectory that we took to produce this volume, but as a testament to the potential of open-ended intellectual endeavours that cherish contingent processes, rigorous dialogues, and a commitment to collaboration. Toward these ends, we met as a group on five conference panels and via workshops, punctuated by three Skype conversations for discussions of readings and writings.

Youjoeng Oh, a contributor to this volume, organized double panels on the subject of urban developmentalism in South Korea at the 2015 AAS meeting in Chicago, inviting as panelists scholars whose research was broadly connected to this theme. Many of the contributors to this volume presented papers as part of these panels. Oh also convened a post-conference meeting to explore the possibility of publishing the presented papers as a special issue of a journal. There was nearly unanimous support for this idea, arising from the excitement and appreciation for the value of the presented papers, which made a range of contributions to interdisciplinary understandings of Korean urban development and urban developmentalism in general. Most of the participants were not particularly experienced in the publishing process, however: the majority were junior scholars who had recently secured tenure-track positions or who had just finished their doctoral degrees. In light of this, the editorial responsibility was left to the two people who were in relatively senior positions at that time – that is, Jesook Song and Laam Hae. These two scholars began exploring different journals in the fields of area studies, development studies, and urban studies that might be willing to host our collection as a special issue. Given the fact that the academic careers of many contributors were facing “publish or perish” pressures, speedy publication of their work within a couple of years was the goal, especially in peer-reviewed journals. Despite our efforts, however, our inquiries to these journals did not yield any success.

In order to strengthen our manuscript, Jesook Song and Laam Hae organized a two-day workshop with the other contributors in the fall of 2015, co-sponsored by the York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR) at York University, Toronto, and the Centre for the Study of Korea (CSK) at the University of Toronto. For this workshop, we invited esteemed scholars in geography (Jim Glassman – the University of British Columbia), critical development studies (Katharine Rankin – the University of Toronto) and Asian urban studies (Bae-Gyoon Park – Seoul National University). We received insightful suggestions from them that were helpful in revising and refining our manuscripts for publication.

Based on the strengthened manuscripts that emerged from the first workshop, we submitted our proposal to a wider set of journals. Unfortunately, these efforts were also made in vain. This was a valuable learning process for us, however, as the rejections by the journals illuminated several things to us. First, the limited frequency of the publication of special issues and consequent backlogs of special issues to come out in the next few years was a common basis for many top-tier journals to decline taking on new special issue proposals. In particular,

there has been increasing competition among Korean studies scholars to publish journal articles, as a result of the current incentive and funding structures, especially for scholars based in Korea. This has inflated the number of requests for special issues in various journals, which has led most to refuse requests for any special issue themes related to Korean studies. Second, journal editors seemed to think that a special issue that focuses primarily on a specific country would not be appealing to readers who have increasingly preferred transnationalist perspectives. The assumption, it seems, was that research on a particular country (i.e., South Korea) was incapable of engaging in transnational analysis. Third, some journals were concerned about the disciplinary fit of our project for their audience, as our manuscripts engaged with both social sciences and humanities perspectives and methodologies.

By the time we were preparing for a panel at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in San Francisco in April 2016, the editors of and contributors to our project were puzzled by the repeated rejections by the journals and the rationales given for doing so. Our puzzlement and predicament was twofold, related to the form of publication and the value of our research. Regarding the form of knowledge production and distribution, we began to question whether a special issue in a journal was necessarily the best option for us. Second, we confronted the difficulty of assuring the significance of knowledge grounded in a particular location, especially one in the non-West, because of its supposed limitations in appealing to conceptions of universality and certain understandings of transnationality. Thus, we began discussing how to reframe our work in terms of engaging in conceptual dialogues, rather than as a collection of case studies of a particular location. We believed that our research problematic was neither parochial nor irrelevant to a general or cross-regional audience, so we felt it imperative to frame our problematic more clearly in transnational and relational terms. Additionally, we also felt it necessary to highlight our interest in frameworks that challenge Euro-American epistemologies and anglophone hegemony in the field of knowledge production.

Following the 2016 AAG meeting, then, we started to examine the tradition of “Asia as method” as a tool to rethink our research subject and our interest in studying different locations in and of the Koreans. This approach also gave us a chance to concretize our take on epistemological colonization, and provided us with an analytic lens through which to interrogate the validity of postcolonial schools of thought. In an effort to situate critical approaches to development in understanding South Korean capitalism (on which most of our manuscripts are foregrounded) along with the humanistic literature on Asia as method,

we found another venue of exploration that was opened to us at a workshop at Seoul National University, co-organized by Bae-Gyoon Park and Jesook Song in July 2016. We read and discussed various leftist state theories (Keynesianism, developmentalism, and neoliberalism) in conjunction with the Asia as method literature for the workshop. While it was a productive and exciting cross-fertilizing moment for us, it also confirmed the well-entrenched disconnect within contemporary academia between postcolonial humanities, on the one hand, and the metatheory of development studies and social sciences on the other. Ironically, the fruitfulness of our explorations came from a meeting after the workshop. In the debrief meeting for the workshop, the members stumbled fortuitously upon a notion that would provide an original platform to reveal our manuscript's significance in terms of both content and approach. It was Mun Young Cho's erudite understanding of the multiple intellectual lineages within Asia as method that brought Baik Yeong-seo's concept of "core location" to our attention. Since that time, we have conducted three Skype meetings among the writers of this volume, who are currently spread across three continents, by reading and discussing together the genealogies of Asia as method, including Baik's literature in Korean and English on core location.

Through intense discussions and debates about the idea of core location, we gradually reorganized our conceptual stance by synthesizing works on postcolonialism, Asia as method, core location, Marxist area studies, and leftist urban studies. In order to revise our manuscript in accordance with this major turn, we organized another conference panel at the 2017 AAS meeting in Toronto (organized by Hyeseon Jeong), as well as at a publication workshop at the University of Toronto in October 2017 (hosted by Jesook Song). At these meetings, we continued to exchange rigorous feedback on each contributor's paper. We also benefited from the critical comments of Hyun Bang Shin, a leading geographer and urban studies scholar who explores planetary processes of gentrification in dialogue with postcolonial urban scholarship.

During this process, we decided to seek publication of our manuscripts in the form of an edited volume, instead of a special issue. This decision was the result of a long-term collective commitment to explore and seek an original way through which to understand urban development in South Korea without losing sight of the significance of the knowledge of it in relation to the problematic of decolonizing knowledge production and the broader matrix of political economy and resistance politics. Moreover, without the integrity, patience, and solidarity of the members in less-secure jobs who nonetheless took the initiative of this collective project and stood by every turn in its development, we

could not have come this far as a collective. This was a tremendously valuable experience of intellectual collaboration, one that cannot be taken for granted in the current hyper-competitive academic world.

Through our journey of knowledge production, we learned the importance of open-ended questioning and critical intellectual engagement, realizing that the value of our research content and material is not necessarily self-evident when viewed through the epistemological hegemony of Western-cum-anglophone knowledge circulation. Yet, the challenges we faced on the way, and will doubtless face again in the future, catalyzed us to explore unfamiliar paradigms together and build our thoughts from our tenacious collaboration. This kind of open-ended and long-engaging dialogue over ideas generated decades ago resembles the praxis that Sun Ge referred to as “building ideas” – that is, not merely deciphering ideas, but rather making sense of the insights in our own spatial-temporal problematics. This volume was, therefore, an experiment in this sort of praxis, similar to the ways in which Sun Ge excavated Takeuchi Yoshimi’s ideas behind Asia as method in her geo-historical juncture, or to how Takeuchi Yoshimi reinterpreted Lu Xin’s ideas of self-disavowal for his time and place in Japan.

