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Vagrant Optics: *The Seosan Pioneer Corps and Cold War Visual Culture in South Korea*

Thomas M. RYAN

Abstract

This article rethinks Korean and global anticommunism through an analysis of the Seosan Pioneer Corps (1961–1966), a land reclamation project and vagrant penal colony sustained for years by the delivery and misappropriation of US agricultural surpluses. In the past decade, the Seosan settlement has resurfaced in public discourse as a forgotten scandal of forced labor and marriage. This essay begins by noting a formal correspondence between recent exposés of the settlement and the Cold War anticommunist tropes that undergirded its existence, notably the unmasking of the vagrant as a communist in disguise. While contemporary narratives of burial and exhumation imply that public ignorance was a precondition of the violence, a wide reading of 1960s media points to the settlement's remarkable visibility in popular and intellectual culture. Public knowledge and participation, the article argues, helped facilitate the mobilization of settlers to Seosan and other pioneer corps projects, a movement enabled by both an injunction to mass vigilance vis-à-vis the vagrant as potential communist and the visual inscription of this figure in a legible domestic order. Media spectacles documented this newfound domesticity in detail, disclosing not only geographical coordinates and architectural dimensions but also violence and coercion. Anticommunism, then, functioned less to obscure violence than to sever the settlement from its social and material foundations. Countering this ideological move, the article's last section reconstructs an alternative genealogy of the settlement from a recent volume of oral histories, in which the pioneer corps appears as a continuation of wartime refuge and a structural outcome of Cold War aid flows.

Keywords: visual culture, the Cold War, ideology, violence, vagrancy, photography, Korean War, gender, mobilization

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Thomas M. RYAN is an assistant professor in the Department of Korean History at Korea University. E-mail: thomasryan@korea.ac.kr.

Introduction

> Ten kilometers from Seosan Township, in the northwest corner of Chungcheongnam-do. A featureless, desolate country road carrying only clouds of dust. Getting off the bus in this area, you follow a path that winds below the road before crossing a gentle hill. It's early October. A westerly wind carrying the smell of salt strikes the sea-facing Mowol Village, Inji Township, Seosan County. To the northeast, against the backdrop of the spindly Jobisan mountain, a broad expanse of tidal mudflat and a 10 *ri*-long embankment come into view. At the foot of a hill, upon a foundation of red earth, we find a small village, a plot of farmland reclaimed by blocking the sea with stone excavated from the mountains. Settled about four years ago by the Korean Youth Pioneer Corps, this is the Seosan Self-Help Settlement Project worksite. Also known as Diligence Village, it's a town enclosed by over 200 Italian poplars. It was in 1961 that its residents, weighed down by their dark pasts and reduced to wandering the streets like refugees, had nothing left but to put down roots in an abandoned salt farm lush only with the purple residue of flowers. November 14, 1961. A chilly sea breeze heralded the arrival of winter. After the first round of 68 entrants, there have been 89 more rounds of settlers, 2241 in total, people who abandoned hometowns from all 13 Korean provinces. With the occasional escape and addition of a family member, the population presently numbers about 1700. Residents categorized by province of origin, Chungcheongnam-do ranks first with 386 people, with Gyeongsangnam-do and Jeollanam-do not far behind. Sixty-eight or so don't even know where they're from. (D. Kwon 1965, 273)

Printed in the most widely read South Korean magazine of the 1960s, this rare full-length report on the notorious Seosan Pioneer Corps (Seosan gaecheokdan) opens cinematically, inviting the reader to inhabit the perspective of the reporter as he travels, by bus and on foot, to the settlement. Moving from cartography to demography, the text then tells us that the 1700 settlers, although united by their status as refugees (*sirhyang samin*), hail from all 13 Korean provinces (North and South) and range

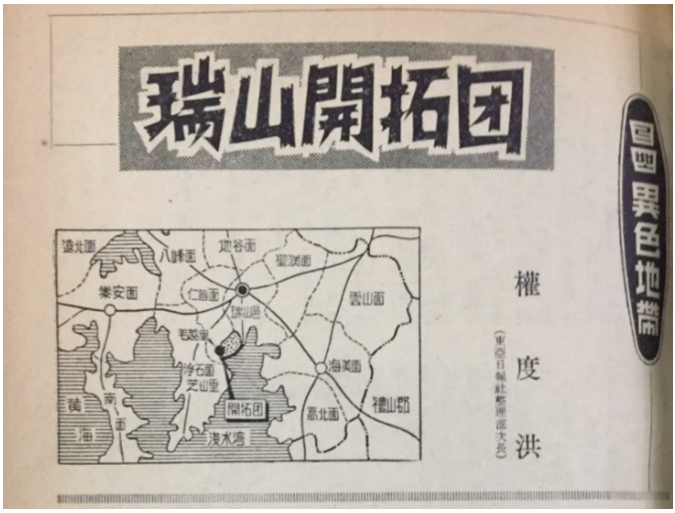

Figure 1. Kwon Dohong, "Reuppo isaek jidae: Seosan gaecheokdan"

Source: *Sindonga,* December 1965, 273.

from children to the elderly. The report then shifts to biography, offering snapshots of the lives of several settlers prior to their "voluntary entry" into this capitalist version of the "collective farm." Given the authoritarian political climate of the time, the writer's romanticization of what scholars now recognize as a glorified penal colony is to be expected. Formally, however, the report builds towards a disclosure of the scandalous unseen, revealing, for example, that medical care is completely unavailable and that rule violations, such as "talking about the past," are punished with hard labor (D. Kwon 1965, 273–279). In addition to the detailed set of directions with which it begins, the report also provides readers with a map (Fig. 1).

By late 1966, the Seosan Pioneer Corps, formally known as the Korean Youth Pioneer Corps (Daehan cheongsonyeon gaecheokdan), had been shut down, owing to the discovery that its organizer, a Seoul auto repair shop owner named Min Jeongsik, had been embezzling aid allocated to the project. While the pioneer corps ceased to exist as a disciplinary institution, management of the land reclamation project was transferred from Min to the Seosan County government, with some settlers compelled to remain

by promises of eventual land ownership (A. Kim 2018, 350). Like many other so-called self-help work settlement projects (*jajo geullo jeongchak saeop*) in this period, the Seosan Pioneer Corps had been funded by American agricultural surpluses distributed in accordance with US Public Law 480, also known as the Food for Peace Act. In South Korea, US PL 480 provided for the transfer of food aid—especially corn meal, wheat flour, and powdered milk—to local relief or development projects claiming to cultivate self-help spirit and a desire to work in able-bodied, underemployed Koreans (Han 2020). Title III (US PL 480-3) of the law governed aid delivered by US voluntary agencies, notably the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), to specific projects selected by the South Korean Ministry of Health and Society (Bogeon sahoebu). As historian Han Bongseok has shown, US PL 480-3 aid was especially prone to misappropriation and resale on the black market, as organizations like CARE retained little oversight regarding the distribution of aid once it arrived in the hands of project organizers like Min, a problem so severe that in 1965, CARE estimated that 85–95 percent of aid delivered to self-help work settlement projects that year had been used illegally (Han 2020, 102). Although leading to the eventual suspension of PL 480-3 aid to such projects, the discovery of embezzlement was at this time largely local and bureaucratic, clearly visible to isolated settlers but mostly unreported in the popular media.

Having been romanticized by reporters and intellectuals from its establishment in 1961 up until its dissolution in 1966, the Seosan settlement suddenly retreated from public awareness, receiving little attention until the Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission launched a 2009 investigation into the suspicious disappearance of one recruit (A. Kim 2018, 328).[1] South Korean historical studies and documentaries have since demonstrated that

1. While the initial investigation pertained only to the one incident, continued petitions from former settlers compelled further investigations, including one commissioned by the Seosan city government in 2019. In 2022, the Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission carried out a more comprehensive investigation, corroborating earlier allegations and producing several recommendations for redress. See Sangji daehakkyo sanhak hyeomnyeokdan (2019) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (2023, 44–45).

the settlement, celebrated for furnishing orphans and vagrants with the rudiments of family life, was the site of a range of human rights violations, among them forced labor and marriage.[2] Amidst the sensational exposure of such abuses, one cannot help but hear echoes of the 1965 report, which also purported to expose, for a Cold War readership inundated with scandal, the Seosan Pioneer Corps as anthropological curiosity.[3] In a 2018 episode of the popular documentary television series *Unanswered Questions* (Geugeosi algo sipda), which reenacts history as true crime, the truth of the Seosan Pioneer Corps emerges gradually, by way of a string of visual discoveries (SBS 2018). The episode begins with a puzzle, a series of unmarked graves in a public cemetery overlooking the former site, which compels the investigative team to visit a provincial archive, where they dig up a single folder of 26 photographs of a joint wedding (*hapdong gyeolhonsik*). These encounters set the stage for a sensational investigation narrated by the host, the actor Kim Sangjung, who moves like a detective through a series of photographs pinned to the on-set evidence board.

The documentary points to the enduring resonance of what I have elsewhere called a Cold War ideology of exposure in South Korean popular and intellectual culture (Ryan 2022). The sense of historiography as criminal investigation reflects the influence of that seminal problem in contemporary Korean history, the question of responsibility for the Korean War, itself an extension of the old debate over the origins of the Cold War. In pre-democratization South Korea, it was dangerous to approach recent history—the division, the war, the Cold War—as anything other than the pursuit of a smoking gun that would disclose the truth of North Korea as a proxy for a global communist conspiracy. If the urge to unmask the spy is a familiar trope of conservative political discourse, the adherence of even progressive exposés to the idea of history as procedural is perhaps more surprising. While not without its advantages, such an approach to history precludes

2. The scholarship of the historian Kim Aram is the most comprehensive of these studies. See A. Kim (2017, 2023).
3. In the 1960s, with the advent of color printing, South Korean media increasingly provided readers with images and reports of unseen or marginalized spaces, knowledge linked to a broader discourse of mass "cultivation" (*gyoyang*). See R. Kim (2019) and Lee (2013).

critical reflection on the problem of ideology itself. The narrative power of *Unanswered Questions* depends on the assumption of an almost total lack of knowledge, outside of the victims and their families, of these episodes of violence, which must be excavated from unmarked graves, local archives, and long-withheld testimonies. The viewer is left to conclude that public ignorance was a critical condition of the five-year existence of the Seosan Pioneer Corps.

Yet far from being concealed, the Seosan settlement, including the violence and coercion central to its management, was presented as a spectacle in 1960s media, suggesting that Korean anticommunism did not, and does not, depend on illusion or mystification for its reproduction. The crudest vestige of Cold War paranoia in South Korea may be the right-wing insistence that progressive politics is communism in disguise, but another trace of this epistemology would seem to be the faith of critical scholars in the knowledge generated by counter-histories (Sedgwick 2003). Demonstrations, for example, that many of the victims of counterinsurgency campaigns in late 1940s Jeju and Jeollanam-do were not communist agents but rather innocent women and children will only strike the faithful anticommunist as more evidence of the ability of communism to conceal its true nature.[4] In the case of the Seosan Pioneer Corps, indications that mobilized recruits were not always vagrants or criminals, or that their newfound domesticity was a mirage, did not seem to blunt the appeal of an anticommunist drive to forcibly fix them in space. As ideology, then, anticommunism would appear to be less a problem of false consciousness than one of the preservation of belief in the face of its refutation, a process of disavowal captured in Octave Mannoni's famous formulation "I know

4. Slavoj Žižek offers the hypothetical example of a late 1930s German confronted by a discordance between his own deeply ingrained anti-Semitism and the apparent friendliness of his Jewish neighbor: "His answer would be to turn this gap, this discrepancy itself, into an argument for anti-Semitism: 'You see how dangerous they really are? It is difficult to recognize their real nature. They hide it behind the mask of everyday appearance—and it is exactly this hiding of one's real nature, this duplicity, that is a basic feature of the Jewish nature.' An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor" (Žižek 1989, 49).

very well, but all the same" (Mannoni 2003). The literal translation of the title of the documentary program, "I want to know that" (Geugeosi algo sipda), belies the invulnerability to knowledge of the ideology that justified the violence in the first place. This essay argues further that knowledge, and in particular visual documentation, was central to the construction and maintenance of the Seosan Pioneer Corps.

The establishment of North and South Korea as global Cold War showcases produced an "exhibitionary complex" in which the simultaneously oppressive and civilizing functions of visual representation were set in high relief (Bennett 1994). In the authoritarian political context of 1960s South Korea, however, we should perhaps pay closer attention to, as Allan Sekula puts it, "those modes of instrumental realism that do in fact operate according to a very explicit deterrent or repressive logic" (Sekula 1986, 7). In both its initial selection and further mobilization of recruits, the Seosan Pioneer Corps depended on popular injunctions to scrutinize the vagrant. First, as one part of a larger "social brightening" (*sahoe myeongnanghwa*) campaign launched by the Ministry of Health and Society, the vagrant and other signs of socioeconomic dislocation were fetishized as symptoms of a new communist strategy of "indirect invasion" (*ganjeop chimnyak*).[5] Earlier programs of US aid and refugee resettlement had similarly pathologized mass displacement, but the Park Chung-hee regime turned the surveillance and mobilization of vagrants into a mass exercise in social vigilance, encouraged by cultural elites and pursued by settlement organizers. Second, the Seosan Pioneer Corps and other such settlements, as solutions to the indistinction of vagrant and insurgent, were dramatized in the popular media as spectacles of family and domesticity, most notoriously in the form of joint wedding ceremonies. Such exhibits retained a claim to visual resolution, introducing readers not only to the expanding area of reclaimed land but to minute details such as the dimensions of the settlers' accommodations. Reflecting

5. While I have translated *myeongnanghwa* as "brightening" in order to retain both the visual (clear, cloudless) and emotional (cheerful, merry) connotations of the term, film scholar Hye Seung Chung is more precise in translating *myeongnanghwa* as "becoming or making cheerful" and *myeongnang* 明朗 as "gaiety" (Chung 2025, 116).

the broader importance of the family to Cold War anticommunism, however, these portraits of domesticity were often unsettled by their own ideological insistence on visual detail.[6]

This visual regime of surveillance and spectatorship functioned most fundamentally to fetishize the vagrant and the settlement, severing them from the social relations and material histories that brought them into being.[7] Just as the vagrant appeared as either the floating symptom of a universal problem of underdevelopment or the specter of an external communist conspiracy, the settlement emerged as a utopian solution, saving the recruit from a marginalized existence under postwar capitalism and effecting a return to a prelapsarian, egalitarian, self-sufficient condition. If most consumers of popular media would have thus viewed land reclamation projects like the Seosan Pioneer Corps as militarized variations on the Enlightenment narrative, the recruits themselves—isolated, sometimes illiterate, and without access to newspapers—sensed much more clearly the structural preconditions of the settlement, what made it go, so to speak: corn meal, wheat flour, powdered milk, plywood, scrap metal, the distribution of these resources and especially their misappropriation. Their testimonies, as the final section of the article suggests, allow the construction of a different historical genealogy of the settlement, one originating not in generalized homelessness ('Sixty-eight or so don't even know where they're from') but in wartime bombing and refuge and the postwar aid regime that such destruction necessitated.[8] Viewed this way, the settlement was dependent on both the uneven social consequences of war and the postwar amplification of these inequalities. Although promoted as a mechanism of family creation and reunion, the Seosan Pioneer Corps only deepened the chasm between recruits and that from which they had been displaced.

6. See, May (1988), H. Kwon (2020), and N. Heo (2022).
7. On fetishism, see Balibar (2007, 42–79) and Pietz (2022).
8. I rely in this final section on the oral history volume *Iju-wa jeongchak: 1950-1960nyeondae nongchon jeongchak saeop chamyeoja-ui gyeongheom* (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016).

Vigilance

The Korean War, caused in part by the mass repatriation of overseas Koreans from across the Japanese Empire, aggravated an already existing refugee crisis, such that by the end of the war in 1953, 2.5 million refugees remained in the South alone (A. Kim 2017, 71). Although promoted as examples of the humanitarian uplift of populations displaced by communism, postwar US-South Korean refugee resettlement programs in fact targeted various distinct waves of refugees. To be sure, some were northern refugees who had been evacuated during the war or driven out by early north Korean policies like the 1946 land reform, but many were internal refugees displaced by US bombing campaigns.[9] The category refugee (*nanmin*) also encompassed orphans and juvenile delinquents reduced to lives of vagrancy and petty crime. Reflecting the war's civil character, US and South Korean forces often suspected refugees, sometimes visually indistinguishable from communist partisans, of consorting with the enemy, a logic that lay behind such incidents as the July 1950 No Geun Ri Massacre (Conway-Lanz 2005). The end of the war did not totally dispel this problem of indistinction. Itinerance remained grounds for suspicion on both sides of the 38th parallel (Schmid 2018). Meanwhile, global US aid programs across the developing world targeted poverty as a potential breeding ground for communism, with the vagrant an especially compelling example of this association.

The vagrant was emblematic of a disavowal central to the US Cold War aid economy, appearing to anticommunist elites as a floating symptom of a universal problem of underdevelopment or social maladjustment rather than the structural consequence of war.[10] Vagrancy was subject to a fetishistic misrecognition, appearing not as "an effect of the network of relations between elements" but rather as "an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also [belonged] to it outside its relation with other elements" (Žižek 1989, 24). Accordingly, in the postwar 1950s,

9. See T. Kim (2013).
10. On the constitutive "self-deception" of USAID programs in Egypt, see Mitchell (2002, 209–243).

a range of US-trained experts attempted to diagnose what they perceived as a dramatic increase in the number of "mentally ill people one can see swarming in the streets" while eschewing the sorts of structural critique prohibited by South Korea's extreme red complex.[11]

To get a sense of a pathologizing operation that would remain central to later understandings of vagrancy and juvenile delinquency, it is worth briefly examining one such diagnosis that in the late 1950s commanded national attention. This was the case of a 20-year-old man named Hong Seokgwi, who in 1958 and 1959 committed a series of robberies in downtown Seoul targeting taxi drivers.[12] In the spring of 1959, responding to these events, an expert "evaluation meeting" was convened at the newly opened Seoul Children's Counseling Center, bringing together a number of psychologists, legal scholars, and social workers to investigate the root causes of Hong's crimes.[13] In an essay published in the journal *Justice,* Kwon Sunnyeong, a judge in the Seoul Juvenile Court, provided a full account of the meeting's proceedings. Hong, originally from Hwanghae-do in North Korea, had fled south during the war with his parents and four siblings, taking up residence in a refugee camp. While Hong was in middle school, his mother suddenly died, and not long thereafter his father remarried and absconded from the camp with one of Hong's siblings, leaving the rest to survive as orphans. Suddenly cut off from previous sources of financial support and unable to secure employment, Hong started robbing taxi drivers (S. Kwon 1960, 3). The judge's formal diagnosis, remarkably, ignored the economic motivations that he had himself so clearly delineated. Hong's diary, combined with a "psychiatric evaluation," revealed that the young man had harbored frustrated "fantasies of a happy family," which produced delusions of persecution culminating in a profound sense of "defiance" and "hostility" towards society. With these abnormalities in mind, the expert committee

11. Seokhwan O, "Jeongsin wisaeng iran mueosinga" (What is Mental Hygiene?), *Dong-A Ilbo*, November 26, 1957.
12. I owe the discovery of this episode to Ha (2017).
13. "Choe cho-ui sonyeon beomjoe pyeonggahoe: Taekshi gangdo ne beon beomhaenghan Hong gun daesang-euro" (The inaugural Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation Meeting: On the Matter of Four-time Taxi Robber Mr. Hong), *Dong-A Ilbo,* April 19, 1959.

had offered several non-punitive options for institutionalization, including a period of apprenticeship under a "boss" who could teach Hong the spirit of "self-reliance" and reunion with his siblings at an orphanage, with the latter ultimately deemed most suitable (S. Kwon 1960, 46).

The treatment of Hong as an object under a microscope, and the corresponding elision of structural explanations, was characteristic of Cold War anticommunism in general. The two recommendations, however, help us more specifically situate the early 1960s emergence of self-help work settlements, which encompassed a range of land reclamation projects, including the pioneer corps. The first implied a period of unpaid work under a dubious benefactor, as the term "boss" (*wangcho*) usually connoted the head of an operation mobilizing the labor of orphans and other displaced youth.[14] According to this recommendation, work would ameliorate Hong's apparent mental illness. The second option offered another cure in the form of family reunion, which would apparently relieve Hong of his frustrated "fantasies" of family even as it would have to take place at an orphanage. Beginning in 1961, the Seosan Pioneer Corps and other such institutions would similarly purport to furnish surplus populations with work and family, mutually reinforcing cures to the essentially spiritual condition of vagrancy.

Despite these continuities, the multiplication of pioneer corps was enabled by the radicalization of anticommunist discourse in the early 1960s, as South Koreans were increasingly enjoined to visualize the vagrant as a stand-in for the North Korean spy. Reflecting the indigenization of counterinsurgency doctrine and modernization theory in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the early Park era (1961–1979) discourse of indirect invasion reframed socioeconomic dislocation as a deliberate communist strategy in an age of explicit Soviet and Chinese sponsorship of global wars for national liberation.[15] While the Hong diagnosis above had been formulated

14. Kim Chunsam, for example, who established several orphanages and upwards of 20 pioneer corps from the 1950s to the 1970s, was the subject of a 1999 MBC drama called *Wangcho* (Street King). Kim's self-serving account of these often coercive operations was published as *Na-nueun ireoke sarawatta* (C. Kim 1980).

15. On the broader discursive context of *indirect invasion*, see J. Kim (2013). On the institutionalization of Korean counterinsurgency, see E. Heo (2016).

by a committee of experts, the Park military regime urged the population as a whole to participate in the business of diagnosis and treatment. Such calls were mediated by the parastatal National Reconstruction Movement (Jaegeon gungmin undong, NRM), a mass movement created by the regime but led by intellectuals, writers, artists, and other civilians, who among other ventures worked to deploy educated youths to rural villages to assist, as "workers of the revolution," in land reclamation projects like the Seosan settlement.[16]

Cultural elites propagated the theory of indirect invasion in institutional organs like *Reconstruction Dispatches* (Jaegeon tongsin), pointing out that global communism had turned away from direct military confrontation towards internal subversion. One feature in the September 1962 edition of the publication began by pointing out the inadequacy of conventional military understandings of the various terms denoting "spies" in an era in which the "North Korean puppets" had shifted strategy. No longer limiting themselves to traditional operations, "southbound spies" had penetrated "the surroundings of our everyday life," disguising themselves as "law-abiding citizens" struggling under the poverty of "common life" in South Korea. This article warned against the "big mistake" of imagining spies as "holed up in bunkers or attics," noting that they were to be found amongst "merchants and workers" like "candy vendors, repairmen, cobblers, beggars, leprosy patients, housemaids, female entertainers, [and] fortune tellers." The article also suggested that general dislocation, migration, or unemployment were suspicious, as in the case of someone returning home after a long absence or in the case of a discharged soldier unable to find a job (Pyeonjipsil 1962). In the December 1962 edition, which coincided with what the journal had advertised as a turn-in-spies (*jasu*) month, the "People's Enlightenment Desk" offered another list of characteristics that might help "distinguish spies": they might look too old or young compared to their family members, spend their days indoors and nights outside, or walk around in severely wrinkled clothing (Gungmin gyoyanggwa 1962). Judging from the front cover of the journal, whose title pages were illustrated by the painter Bak

16. For an overview of the NRM, see E. Heo (2003).

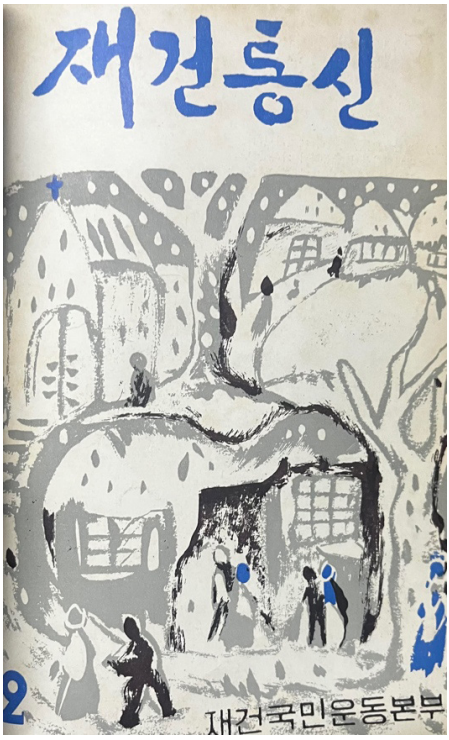

Figure 2. Bak Seobo, cover, *Jaegeon tongsin*

Source: *Jaegeon tongsin*, December 1962.

Seobo, this theme colored the December issue as a whole. Bak's painting shows a neighborhood in which shadowy figures lurk in and emerge out of alleys (Fig. 2).

These and other writings produced the social discontents of South Korean policies as evidence of external threats, figuring poverty as a security problem demanding wide-scale civilian participation. The injunction to turn in people who fit such descriptions helped contribute to a logic that established the poor as targets of bottom-up vigilance. In the November 1962 issue of *Jaegeon tongsin*, Bak Taesu of the NRM's Gyeonggi-do branch pointed out that the "people's movement" was developing, with "comrades" rallying together and "actively" engaging in various projects. A group of youth council members in Goyang county, for example, had spontaneously formed a "night watch corps" and patrolled key intersections in downtown Seoul, where they arrested a thief. In addition, a group of youth council

members had "unified" to spontaneously organize a "network" to help "hunt spies" near the DMZ (Bak 1962, 15–16). However, such texts mentioned neither what happened to the captured spies or criminals after they were arrested by these NRM members, nor how they were determined to be spies in the first place, rather than, say, vagrants dressed in wrinkled clothing. The discourse of indirect invasion thus established the unproductive sectors of society as appropriate targets for spontaneously formed vigilante bands.

Ideologically, then, the pioneer corps or work settlement became a solution to the visualization of the vagrant as insurgent. It is therefore no coincidence that such settlements served as literal and symbolic extensions of wartime counterinsurgency. Kim Chunsam, the former orphanage manager and so-called "Beggar King" (*geoji wang*) who reportedly established around 20 pioneer corps throughout the country and spuriously claimed to have invented the joint wedding, had served in counterinsurgency operations during the Korean War as a member of the National Defense Guard. In describing the establishment of his first pioneer corps in early 1960s Yeonggwang, an epicenter of the southern insurgencies of the late 1940s, Kim recalled working with his old wartime friend, an Army transportation officer, to procure several Army trucks in order to move "aspiring pioneer corps members" and "idle people" from Seoul to Jeollanam-do in the middle of the night. Kim established his second settlement in Goseong, Gangwon-do, also a key area of communist partisan operations during the war (C. Kim 1980, 255).

Domesticity

The identification of suitable candidates for mobilization into self-help work settlements thus proceeded through a blurring of distinctions between the vagrant and the communist, such that socioeconomic dislocation appeared as a sign of embryonic insurgency. By both widening the net of potential communists and incentivizing their pacification, the early Park regime inculcated a kind of everyday anticommunist vigilance. Theories of indirect invasion established a set of visual criteria for selection, but as

settlements like the Seosan Pioneer Corps expanded, further recruiting could be accomplished through the production of a different set of images, which reinscribed the vagrant in a utopian domestic order. If the discourse of indirect invasion functioned to sketch the outlines of a wanted poster, this second operation hinged on the production of a family portrait.

Newsreels and photographs depicting the "thunderbolt marriages" (*byeorak sijip*) of male recruits and young women transported from shelters or abducted from streets or workplaces framed the purported achievement of domesticity as a spectacle.[17] The Seosan settlement was a particularly conspicuous stage for such ceremonies, which began shortly after the arrival, in November 1961, of an initial round of 68 settlers. Settlement organizers, working with the Ministry of Health and Society, were constantly engaged in the selection and transportation of suitable brides, but the most visible of such occasions were the September 1963 and November 1964 ceremonies, which married off 125 and 225 new couples, respectively.[18] In the aforementioned episode of *Unanswered Questions*, the investigators are appropriately bewildered at their discovery of photographs of these ceremonies, but such scenes were presumably familiar to audiences of the time. Joint wedding ceremonies were a longstanding feature of the institution of the pioneer corps, a term first used to describe Japanese colonial settlements in Manchuria. In post-liberation southern Korea, pioneer corps were seen as one solution to the destabilizing influx of colonial repatriates and northern refugees, and as early as 1949 newspapers were reporting that a group of "warriors engaged in pioneer work (land reclamation)" in Gangneung were in need of "maidens" (*cheonyeo*) who might volunteer to become their brides.[19] It was especially in the postwar period that joint wedding ceremonies became more common, arranged for war veterans, refugees, and early North Korean defectors as well as self-help work settlement recruits.

17. For a good overview see Park (2024, esp. 115–145); on the "joint wedding" (*hapdong gyeolhonsik*) more generally, see A. Kim (2015, 53–95).
18. *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 15, 1964; *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, November 24, 1964.
19. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, May 18, 1949.

Figure 3. Joint wedding of 225 couples bound for Seosan, in Seoul, November 25, 1964

Source: Naver News Library.

The spectacle of the wedding ceremony was emblematic of the logic of the settlement, which claimed to target only those without any "family connections" (*yeongoja*), orphans and young women "fallen" (*yullak yeoseong*) from the patriarchal order.[20] Celebrating the mobilization of orphans or "helpless delinquents" (*mueuimutakhan burang sonyeon*) into meaningful work, one July 1963 report suggested that the Seosan settlement was a "Yellow Sea miracle" that promised to transform "nothingness" (*mu*) into "existence" (*yu*).[21] The provision of spouses and domiciles, another report pointed out, would allow settlers to record their existence in family registers (*hojeok*), a precondition of their formal "entry into the world."[22]

20. *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 15, 1962.
21. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 22, 1963.
22. *Chosun Ilbo*, July 24, 1963.

Domesticity, then, carried the additional benefit of visibility, a movement from dark back alleys and red light districts into the sunlight and onto the illuminated stage. Arranged by the settlement director Min Jeongsik and sometimes officiated by the mayor of Seoul, the wedding ceremonies also functioned as family reunions, replacing the lost or deceased parents of settlers with Director Min as a new father and Kim Daenam, Min's wife, as a new mother;[23] Kim received an award on Mother's Day in 1965 in recognition of her role in facilitating the marriages of 350 "fallen women."[24] The transformation of drifting orphan into desirable husband, and of prostitute into homemaker, was a narrative script rehearsed over and over at the settlement, so much so that some settlers seem to have been married off multiple times (SBS 2018). One September 1962 report noted, in fact, that in celebration of Chuseok the settlers had performed a play based on one settler's original script, which told the story of a young man who won the affection of his love interest by enlisting in a pioneer corps.[25]

Perhaps the most representative such narrative came in the form of a memoir serialized in the *Kyunghyang Shinmun* in the summer of 1963, a text that exhorted the paper's readers to join its author in Seosan. Interested applicants, an editorial note revealed, could come by the newspaper's offices in downtown Seoul, from whence they would be transported to the settlement, all expenses paid.[26] The memoir chronicled the transformation of its author, a 26-year-old man named Baek Seongok, from northern refugee and orphan into model settler and husband. Born into a poor peasant household in Hamgyeongbuk-do in 1937, Paek had lost both parents at the age of five before crossing the 38th parallel after liberation with his aunt, who soon mysteriously died by gunfire in a mountain village. Like other former "back alley delinquents" (*dwit geori-ui burang cheongnyeon*) saved by the settlement, Baek became addicted to crime as if to a drug, pickpocketing passersby at train stations and even beating a man to death at the age of

23. *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 1, 1963.
24. *Chosun Ilbo*, May 2, 1965.
25. *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 15, 1962.
26. "Gyeonghyang sallong dokja-ui jiruiran" (Gyeonghyang Salon: Reader Inquiries), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, August 16, 1963.

Figure 4. Baek Seongok and his new wife in their Seosan home, July 1963.

Source: Naver News Library.

13.[27] His redemption had everything to do with the good graces of Director Min, who facilitated Baek's wedding to a 23-year-old woman he had first encountered in a reformatory some nine years before. Serialized in three parts, this short memoir thus chronicled Paek's transformation from an orphan addicted to violent crime to the head of a new household, pictured staring wistfully with his wife out the window of their new home in Seosan (Fig. 4).[28] In a series of supplementary features printed over the next month on the "echo" of Paek's story, the newspaper claimed that the memoir had generated a tidal wave of interest in the settlement, with the office receiving ten boxes of letters a week from people interested in joining as laborers, teachers, or doctors. These were not criminals or vagrants but rather people

27. "Sam-ui saesun Seosan gaecheokdan… jeonkwa 9beom Baek Seongok ssi-ui sugi (sang): 'Na-ui daeyeol-e chamgahara'" (Seosan Pioneer Corps, A Fresh Start at Life…Memoir of Nine-time Criminal Offender Baek Seongok: 'Join My Ranks'), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 29, 1963.
28. "Sam-ui saesun Seosan gaecheokdan (ha)" (Seosan Pioneer Corps, A Fresh Start at Life [continued]), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 31, 1963.

and families struggling to make ends meet, eager to "give the soil a try" before socioeconomic precarity gave way to criminality (and onward, we presume, to communism).[29]

Baek's melodramatic account of his entry into the Seosan Pioneer Corps included very few details about the settlement itself, instead focusing on his criminal exploits prior to his redemption. Other reports functioned to fill in the details, panning out from this close-up of the newly constructed housing unit to give readers a more specific sense of the place. Beyond the usual statistics on the steady increase in reclaimed land and rise in the population (up to around 2200 at its peak), the media paid much attention to the construction of 154 housing units, "stately houses" that seem by mid-1963 to have replaced the initial "barracks" (*maksa*) erected to accommodate early rounds of settlers. A report printed shortly before Paek's memoir revealed that there were two families per unit, each measuring around 13 *pyeong*, or 43 square meters (463 square feet).[30] Although perhaps preferable to a barracks, this would have been tight quarters indeed, especially given that many of the settlers, still bachelors, lived as "lodgers" (*hasuk*) in the homes of the newlyweds. Such reports also acknowledged that these were temporary arrangements, as there was no private ownership of land.[31] Still, the reports conceded, the settlement offered seductive snapshots of the "coziness of domestic life" (*gajeong-ui aneukham*).[32] The hundreds of Italian poplars planted the previous spring had grown to the height of human beings and given the former wasteland a quaint village scenery. The reclaimed land was also proving to be fertile, yielding crops like squash, spinach, peppers, garlic, and, by the next year, almost 3000 bags of barley.[33] This picturesque rural scene was rounded out by 4300 ducks, 22 pigs, 1300

29. "Gaecheok-ui gil jawon 10 myeong: 'Jeonkwa 9beom' Baek Seongok ssi sugi-e gamdong-ui meari" (Ten Volunteers to Set Out on Pioneer Path: The Moving Echo of Nine-time Criminal Baek Seongok's Memoir), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, August 2, 1963.
30. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 22, 1963.
31. *Chosun Ilbo*, July 24, 1963.
32. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 22, 1963.
33. *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 15, 1964.

chickens, two cows, themselves accommodated in a "handsome barn."[34] By June 1964, the married couples had reportedly produced 32 children, 29 of whom were boys, a piece of good fortune that had settlers exclaiming "the water is fresh at the pioneer village."[35] Such details amounted to an intricate portrait of a community that promised not only healthy family life but also neighborly cooperation and even a kind of primitive symbiosis with the natural environment.

Such reports reveal that while exoticized as an anthropological curiosity, the Seosan Pioneer Corps was far from a concealed scandal. On the contrary, it served as the backdrop for the production of an idealized image of settled domesticity, a key anticommunist trope in an age when vagrancy came to be conflated with insurgency. If, as we have seen, the discourse of indirect invasion enjoined upon cultural elites a certain vigilance vis-à-vis vagrants as potential spies, the family portrait inscribed among other things the pacification of this threat. The visual regimes of anticommunist vigilance and settlement were complementary, both culminating in the submission of drifting populations to state surveillance. Far from being concealed, the Seosan settlement and other pioneer corps were turned into spectacles, attracting visits from not just investigative journalists but contingents of college students on summer break, including, in the summer of 1966, a 131-person medical team sent from the Seoul National University dental school, and representatives of the Yonsei University Christian Students Council.[36]

The establishment of the Seosan Pioneer Corps as an object of close visual inspection compelled the disclosure of some unsettling details. Observers quickly noted, for example, that a few prerequisites of modern family life were missing from the picture: Apart from the absence of medical care, there was no church and, more importantly given the multiplying number of children, no school. A July 1963 report in the *Chosun Ilbo* paid much attention to the brides, who had been trained in a range of domestic

34. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 22, 1963.
35. *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 15, 1964.
36. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 4, 1966; *Maeil Gyeongje*, July 8, 1966.

Figure 5. The Seosan settlement, November 1964

Source: Seoul Photo Archive.

duties at the Seoul Municipal Women's Shelter before moving to Seosan, where they put their training into practice by sewing and mending the uniforms of male and female settlers. Many of these women, the report revealed, were complaining about their new husbands, even if 15 of them, a small fraction, claimed to have entered the settlement voluntarily and selected their own partners. Some had even submitted requests to have their marriage annulled after their husbands abused them for having previously engaged in prostitution. Other protests included demands from young women who had run away from home to be allowed to return to their families, "youthful complaints" refuting the conceit that all of the settlers were orphans.[37] Later testimonies would confirm that the roundup

37. *Chosun Ilbo,* July 24, 1963.

of recruits was violent and indiscriminate, targeting for example children out in the street past curfew or young women and girls working outside the home to support their families.

It is striking that such details were freely published in the popular press, including acknowledgments of the settlement's strict surveillance and prohibition on outside correspondence. The *Chosun Ilbo* report, for example, noted that the village was regrettably still animated by the militarized dynamics of "group life" (*danche saenghwal*), patrolled day and night by a security detail—often euphemistically referred to as a "rescue squad" (*guhoban*)—of 67 rotating guards and surrounded by 20 lookout posts (*choso*). The same report also revealed that one settler, a 21-year-old man called J who was abducted for being out past curfew, tried to write letters to his parents in an attempt to return home but that these letters were branded as "eyesores" and censored.[38] In fact, the settlement seems to have been broadly understood as the kind of place one might expect to find a missing family member. A July 1964 issue of the *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, for example, in a classified ads column called "Trash Can" (*hyuji tong*), printed a missing person's report on behalf of a mother searching for her teenage son, noting that he may have been kidnapped and taken to Seosan.[39] Far from reuniting vagrants and orphans with the comforts of family, then, the settlement seemed intent on separating people from their families. While the close-up shot or portrait of family abstracted out the broader social organization of the settlement, panoramic perspectives hinted at another reality, one based more in the preservation of settlers' separation from one another and from society than in the achievement of a restorative togetherness or community (Fig. 5).

Social Histories of Refuge

The establishment and expansion of the settlement embodied an anticommunist narrative hinging on the transformation of vagrancy

38. *Chosun Ilbo,* July 24, 1963.
39. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 11, 1964.

into family, an ideological gesture that in the specific context of divided Korea rehearsed, in the form of a spectacle, the wartime pacification of insurgents. If on one level the movement from shadowy back alley to the sunlight of the open frontier hewed to a familiar trope of Enlightenment discourse, it also connoted in this case the subjection of settlers to a regime of surveillance. Ideology worked to hoist these two figures—the vagrant and the settlement—above the social processes that produced them. While sensational documentaries like *Unanswered Questions* imply that what was concealed about Seosan was its extraordinary violence, the media in fact provided a meticulous, albeit stilted, record of these abuses. Anticommunist ideology worked less to conceal violence than to, as Sarah Kofman writes of Marx's camera obscura analogy, "disguise, burlesque, and blur" the settlement as an extension of postwar social processes (Kofman 1999, 14).

In the context of Cold War South Korea, rural settlement embodied overlapping mythologies and utopias. With the division in 1945 and the establishment of separate states in 1948, the Republic of Korea effectively became an island, surrounded by seas and blocked from the continent by the DMZ. With a large Christian population of anticommunist exiles separated from northern hometowns, South Korea was increasingly imagined as itself a besieged fortress or settlement. More practically, land reclamation projects, despite their hazards and difficulties, were seen as a way of turning unproductive wastelands or tidelands into food and shelter for refugees. While projects like the Seosan Pioneer Corps manipulated such promises, self-help work settlements encompassed a diversity of ventures, some of which successfully settled refugees on reclaimed land. Kim Hyeongseo, for example, a refugee from Hamgyeongbuk-do, organized various settlements for other refugees in Jangheung, Jeollanam-do, developing a reputation as the "Reclamation King" (*gancheok wang*) (J. Kim 1964).[40] In a postwar capitalist society destabilized by mass death and corruption, these villages were envisioned as utopian refuges not only from communism but from the warped social relations of cities like Seoul and Busan.

At Seosan and other self-help work settlement project sites, however,

40. See also *Maeil gyeongje*, December 23, 1969.

the utopia of land reclamation carried, as Louis Marin has written of utopia in general, two apparently contradictory elements, both a "free play of imagination in its indefinite expansion" and "an exactly closed totality" governed by strict laws and "insuperable frontiers" (Marin 1993, 403–404). Movement to the western frontier of the nation, the miraculous creation of "farmland upon the sea" (J. Kim 1964), would accordingly be accompanied by the establishment of an enclosure, a space isolated from the messy world of capitalist social relations, including the increasingly public display of female sexuality. The settlement functioned ideologically to relocate the vagrant from the urban social disorder of the 1950s into an egalitarian, self-sufficient space in which the old class divisions and prejudices would no longer apply. The 1965 report with which this essay began, for example, revealed that settlers included former criminals, rag-pickers, shoeshine boys, and prostitutes, but also carpenters, typists, seamstresses, weavers, hairdressers, barbers, ironworkers, drivers, mechanics, tanners, and teachers, a population diverse enough to constitute a self-sufficient community (D. Kwon 1965, 277). This utopian vision cohered largely with the US Cold War ideology of community development, founded on the romantic assumption that rural communities were naturally democratic and egalitarian. The upshot of this optical illusion, as scholars have shown, was a consistent blindness to local power dynamics and, notably, the embezzlement of aid by unscrupulous officials and enterprises.[41]

Even before the systematic provision of US agricultural surpluses to self-help work settlement projects took off in the early 1960s, pioneer corps, distinguished from other land reclamation settlements by the youth and alleged criminality of their members, were apparently often little more than pyramid schemes, exchanging vague promises of future harvests for hard and unpaid labor. Occasional newspaper reports in the 1950s and 1960s showed the organizers of such schemes struggling to fend off accusations that they were exploiting refugees. In 1959, for example, a 71-year-old pioneer corps director near Daegu was accused of pocketing his recruits' "registration fees" while flaunting his luxurious lifestyle and young mistress

41. See especially Immerwahr (2015).

at the work site, a charge that he responded to by threatening to report his settlers to the police for slander.[42] Yet as Han Bongseok shows, opportunities for large-scale misappropriation greatly expanded in 1960–1961, when US agricultural surpluses began being channeled through US voluntary agencies to local community development and self-help projects in accordance with US Public Law 480. While the Seosan Pioneer Corps was perhaps the most notorious and violent example, the misappropriation of PL 480 aid was so pervasive that, as Han observes, organizers of projects slated to receive aid shipments had often arranged for the illicit sale of US agricultural surpluses to private businesses even before the aid had arrived at South Korean ports (Han 2020, 102). In this sense, while publicly justified as a response to the blurring of vagrancy and criminality, the Seosan Pioneer Corps was the structural outcome of a possibility afforded by US Cold War aid flows, one that leveraged and deepened existing inequalities and contradictions.

The belated discovery of corruption led to the shutdown of the Seosan Pioneer Corps and informed the suspension of PL 480 aid to self-help work settlement projects, but these essentially bureaucratic revelations never featured significantly in public discourse, even if the rampant corruption of the aid economy in general was evident to most. But even if the specific details of Min Jeongsik's misappropriation of aid had been documented alongside the media reports of everyday coercion and privation discussed earlier, it seems reasonable to assume that these facts, too, would have been disavowed. Given the fetishization of the vagrant and the corresponding elision of the social processes that produced both the settler and the settlement, it is not surprising that discontent emerged not in public discourse but at the isolated site, where access to outside information, including newspapers and even personal letters, was strictly regulated. Oral testimonies published following the early 2010s reemergence of the Seosan Pioneer Corps in South Korean public discourse suggest that settlers initiated a number of strikes and demonstrations in response to their violent mistreatment over the years, but that many remained voluntarily out of belief in the false promises of free distribution of farmland (A. Kim 2018,

42. *Chosun Ilbo,* September 16, 1959.

350). As Kim Aram shows, following the late 1966 dissolution of the pioneer corps and the transfer of control over the reclamation project from Min to the county government, the remaining settlers submitted a petition that, among other items, exposed Min's final "scheme" of "collective emigration" to Paraguay, described the collapsing roofs of their ramshackle housing units, and most urgently inquired into when they might be distributed the farmland they had worked for years to reclaim. But especially notable in the petition were the number of questions pertaining directly to the question of aid: the precise quantity of support earmarked to the project; the quantity and processing of grain distributed by foreign aid agencies; the origin, transportation, and market value of the aid; and the "actual outcomes" of the distributed resources (A. Kim 2018, 351–352). For the settlers, it was thus clear that the driving impulse and condition of possibility of the whole enterprise was the circulation and misappropriation of foreign aid. In other words, it was perhaps only within the isolated confines of the settlement that the Seosan Pioneer Corps could appear as an effect of distributions of resources, of social relations and inequalities, and the aggravation of those inequalities by global circulations of material.

Compiled in the recent oral history volume *Migration and Settlement* (Iju-wa jeongchak), the testimonies of participants in a range of self-help work settlements also portray these spaces as extensions of postwar social relations. Although all nine testimonies emphasize the destitution of work settlements and the dangers of reclamation work, they constitute an inconsistent archive, one reflecting the segregation of settlements themselves into permanent settlers (often northern refugees) and pioneer corps members. Some settlers in Jangheung, for example, worked for the Korean Settlement Development Promotion Agency (KSDPA), an organization chaired by Kim Hyeongseo and devoted to the welfare of refugees from Hamgyeongbuk-do. O Okseon (b. 1934), for example, a northern refugee who settled in Jangheung, revealed that she and her husband received actual wages as "field workers" for KDSPA, a status different from that of the pioneer corps, whose members were nonetheless well-compensated, she suggested, in aid and food (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 159, 162). O Taekseong (b. 1935), who worked as a "project manager" (*saeopjang*)

and "surveyor" (*cheungryang gisa*) at settlements across Jeollanam-do and Chungcheongnam-do, painted a darker picture of these sites, conceding that he oversaw the surveillance and sometimes violent punishment of pioneer corps recruits, who indeed lived a "life of slavery" (*noye saenghwal*). And yet, O and his wife, who interjects at various points in the transcript, maintain that the "vagrants" mobilized into these projects were either guilty of actual crimes or were in any case "already as good as dead" before they arrived (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 188, 198). Another interviewee, Yi Jeongsun (born 1939), recalled a clear segregation, in the village of Goma in Jangheung County, between "employees" (*jongeobwon*), "executives" (*ganbu*), and "workers" (*jigwon*) on the one hand and pioneer corps "members" (*danwon*) on the other.

Turning to the interviews profiling the experiences of pioneer corps members, we can stitch together the rudiments of an alternative genealogy of mobilization into the settlement, one beginning in wartime refuge. These testimonies offer a counterpoint to the anticommunist pathologization of the vagrant by gesturing to the uneven social consequences of war, and particularly of US bombing. While KSDPA "employees" viewed the labor of pioneer corps members as a way to atone for a social crime and rejoin a community of citizens, the interviews attest to an unbroken continuity of refuge and alienation, to the impossibility of the kind of reunion promised by the settlement.

Many of the interviews, whose ultimate object is the work settlement, begin with memories of US bombings. Kim Ikon (b. 1944), for example, recalls that he and his family, who lived in Gwangju in 1950, had to take refuge in the neighborhood of Mangwoldong after the Sangmu district was totally destroyed by US air attacks targeting the advancing communist troops. With control over the area shifting from the South Korean security forces during the day to communist partisans at night, Kim's family stayed holed up indoors, a confinement Kim protested by leaving home to wander through abandoned fields, stealing cabbages and potatoes and sleeping outdoors under rice straws (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 45). In the summer, he continues, he would sleep in huts or rice paddies with a group of other homeless children. While attached to his memory of the war, these

reflections seem rather to correspond to a later period of homelessness sometime in the early 1960s, when he permanently left home, became an "orphan," and was recruited into the pioneer corps in Jangheung. In this way, while the chronology is often confused, Kim presents his mobilization as a continuation of a wartime history of scavenging, as the involuntary movement of Kim and other vagrants to an "unpopulated island" in Jeollanam-do, with nothing in sight apart from a row of pine trees, repeats the desolation inflicted upon the landscape years earlier by American bombs. Escorted to this island to work on a reclamation project, Kim remembers, the recruits were reduced to living like "animals" or "slaves" with no food, lodging, or blankets. When meager US relief supplies did arrive by boat, he continues, the young men were made to construct their own accommodations and makeshift kitchens from sheets of galvanized steel carried off the boat (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 43).

We find a similar structure in the testimony of Jeong Yeongcheol (b. 1941), arguably the most significant of the interviewees and the only one to discuss the Seosan Pioneer Corps in any detail. Like Kim Ikon and others, Jeong traces the origins of his mobilization into the Seosan settlement to a wartime history of refuge, as he reveals that his mother was killed in the June 1950 bombing of the Han River bridge. Following a makeshift burial of his mother's body Jeong fled Seoul by train with several other family members, but fell off the top of an overcrowded train car, left to survive by scavenging tomatoes amidst continual bombings (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 273). In Jeong's recollection of the events leading up to his arrival in Seosan, the pioneer corps thus appears as an extension of this wartime refuge. While surviving for a brief time on the relief grain and flour that was not embezzled, the settlers are deprived of even this aid when Ministry of Health and Society officials point to their lack of "output" in land reclamation, leaving them to become truly "self-sufficient" (*jageup jajok*). Having been settled by force or deception, then, the settlers once again become drifters and day laborers, struggling to make a living on fishing boats or in pool halls (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 295–296).

Despite pretenses to the contrary, the settlement did not function, in Jeong's recounting, to reunite the settlers with that from which they

had been displaced, whether domesticity, family, or self-help spirit. He dismisses, for example, the several rounds of joint wedding ceremonies as propagandistic showcases aiming only at the production of "demonstration effects" (*jeonsi hyogwa*). We might say more generally that the pioneer corps was always and above all a demonstration of anticommunist discipline, one founded on the concealment not of violence per se but of the place of capitalist social relations in its functioning. Given that the central illusion of the settlement revolved around its purported ability to reassimilate the vagrant into a harmonious national whole, it is perhaps fitting that Jeong's interview concludes with a description of his experience in the sensational *Finding Dispersed Families* (Isan gajok-eul chatseumnida) broadcasts of the early 1980s. Having remained an orphan since his fall from the top of a train car in 1950, Jeong was able to use the popular KBS program to locate the aunt (*gomo*) who had "lost" him in the confusion, only to find that she had become a well-known "real estate speculator" (*bokbuin*). Implying that the reunion was undermined by a class divide sparked by the war and compounded by a lifetime of postwar vagrancy, Jeong reflects that "well, of course the haves and have nots are very different" (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 2016, 318).

Conclusion

These oral histories of settlement, along with the insights of recent Korean-language scholarship, allow us to understand the pioneer corps as a structural outcome of war and the kind of Cold War aid regime it necessitated. Marxist and post-Marxist conceptualizations of ideology agree that among its representative characteristics is an illusion of universality and thus of autonomy from the social processes that enable its articulation. Ideology is blind to the social and structural determinants and constitutive exclusions of supposedly universal ideas and values. As this article has argued, anticommunism exhibits these formal attributes—what is anticommunism if not a claim to the impossibility of any system not based in a universalizing capitalism?—while retaining a historically and culturally

specific content of its own. In South Korea, as other contributions to this special issue demonstrate, anticommunist ideology has been intimately tied to war, founded more specifically on a denial of the structural reality of war in favor of a paranoid fetishization of the communist as proxy. Korean anticommunism has reproduced itself by associating communism with anything appearing to imperil the legitimacy of the state, even (or especially) the internal contradictions of its own mode of development. In the 1950s and 1960s, vagrancy was subject to this ideological procedure, appearing as the spectral sign of a shifting communist conspiracy rather than a structural discontent of postwar capitalism. Framed as solutions to this problem of visual indistinction, projects like the Seosan Pioneer Corps attempted to domesticate vagrancy and other signs of postwar mass displacement by inscribing recruits in a legible domestic order.

The recent reemergence of the Seosan Pioneer Corps into public awareness, this time as a human rights violation and the subject of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigation, reminds us of the extraordinary endurance of Cold War ideology in divided Korea. Documentaries like *Unanswered Questions* have narrated this reemergence as an excavation of unmarked graves and local archives. One can of course read too much into a popular program reenacting history as true crime, but these flourishes dramatize a broader historical sensibility in post-democratization Korea, one based in the progressive exposure of episodes of authoritarian violence by new testimonies and counter-histories. Democratization did produce a flood of non-fictional accounts of theretofore banned topics, including exposés of state massacres in Jeju and Gwangju, which the state has managed to sanitize and incorporate, however uneasily, into official histories. Such narratives of historical exposure often mirror the ideology they seek to counter, recalling the anticommunist obsession with pulling the curtain back on North Korea, or locating the communist partisan lurking behind the vagrant. In subscribing to a narrative of exposure we put our faith in knowledge, but anticommunism, as ideology and belief, is remarkably capable of surviving its corrections and refutations. Placing the Seosan settlement in the larger context of Cold War South Korean media suggests that it occupied a prominent place in

public discourse, down to its geographical coordinates and architectural dimensions. Many people, from students to intellectuals to aid officials, participated in the larger culture and system that enabled the multiplication of pioneer corps in the 1960s. They did so by participating, as this essay has argued, in a certain visual regime, first as vigilantes and second as spectators, with both acts animated by an anticommunist injunction to watch.

It is important, of course, not to take this conclusion too far: most kinds of knowledge and correspondence about the settlement were very strictly prohibited, both before and after the shutdown in 1966. While newspapers include anecdotes of recruits writing scripts for plays about their own redemption from vagrant to husband, they seem to have otherwise not had access to paper. In 1976, a former settler who kept a diary on rationed sheets of toilet paper presented "several notebooks" of transcribed entries to a publisher for consideration, only to be berated and dismissed, after which he briefly hid the pages in an attic before deciding to burn this "record of my life" (Sangji daehakkyo sanhak hyeomnyeokdan 2019, 146). While this essay began with the observation of a formal parallel between progressive and anticommunist exposés, it has otherwise been deeply informed by the truth commissions, oral histories, and works of scholarship produced in Korean about the Seosan Pioneer Corps over the last decade. In paying close attention to ideology, however, the essay has also demonstrated the utility of closely reading anticommunist texts, looking past their exhortative content to their shared formal characteristics, most notably their conceit of visual resolution or detail. Amidst the details are to be found granular fragments of social history overlooked by the search for a smoking gun.

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