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"There is a Spy Living Next Door":

The Spy Reporting System and Everyday Life Under the Anticommunist Policy of the Park Chung-hee Government

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Abstract

Analyzing intelligence documents from the Yongsan Police Station in Seoul, this study examines how the spy-reporting system functioned in South Korea under the Park Chung-hee government and its impact on urban social relations. Drawing on 115 cases of spy reports from 1973 to 1977, this research reveals how anticommunist surveillance mechanisms penetrated everyday life and shaped urban communities. The study finds that the reporting system primarily targeted three groups: frequent movers in a rapidly urbanizing Seoul, individuals with connections to Japan or North Korea, and members of the urban lower class without stable employment, such as day laborers and bar workers. While previous research has focused on fabricated spy cases and democratization movements, this study uniquely illuminates how ordinary citizens internalized and practiced anticommunism in their daily lives. The findings suggest that anticommunist practices served as a means of managing social anxieties generated by rapid industrialization and urbanization, while simultaneously allowing urban residents to engage with state power. The spy-reporting system created communities based on exclusion rather than inclusion, as suspicious persons were systematically marginalized. This research contributes to our understanding of how state ideology shaped individuals' everyday lives during South Korea's developmental period and suggests that contemporary social issues partly stem from this historical legacy of surveillance and exclusion.

Keywords: anticommunism, spy-reporting system, urbanization, everyday life, police surveillance system, *bansanghoe*

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Introduction

On January 19, 1968, two days before the "January 21 Incident," four brothers from the Woo family went to a mountain in Paju county, just north of Seoul, to cut wood. There, they encountered a group of around 30 individuals dressed in military uniforms and speaking with a North Korean accent. After being detained by this group for four hours, the brothers were released and promptly reported the encounter with whom they believed to be spies to the local police station (IMH 1998, 37). This marked the first report to the police of Kim Shin-jo and other North Korean guerrillas who had been dispatched to attack the Blue House. Over the following two days, until Kim Shin-jo's group was finally captured, citizens across various locations reported sightings of suspected spies.

The January 21 Incident in 1968 was a critical turning point for the Park Chung-hee administration, which in its wake launched a vigorous anticommunist propaganda campaign that emphasized reporting suspected spies. The media praised citizens for making such reports. The Woo brothers, who had first reported Kim Shin-jo's group, were awarded new jobs and a cash reward, while other informants received commendations. After the January 21 Incident, numerous spy cases were fabricated, and anticommunist dramas and films that emphasized the importance of reporting spies were produced.[1] Spy-reporting posters were ubiquitous on city streets, reports of spy incidents were frequent, and constant portrayals of spies in television programs and films fostered a widespread fear that spies could be anywhere, keeping the nation in a perpetual state of crisis (Kwon and Chun 2012, 176).

An important point to consider is that anticommunism under the Park Chung-hee regime always encouraged the active participation of the populace.

1. In this article, I use the term *spy* to translate the Korean word *gancheop*. While *spy* in English generally refers to a clandestine intelligence agent, the Korean usage during the Park Chung-hee regime had a broader political meaning. It often encompassed not only actual North Korean espionage agents but also critics of the regime, left-leaning intellectuals, and even ordinary citizens whose behavior appeared deviant or suspicious in any way. Despite this cultural and terminological disparity, this article opts to use the term *spy* rather than the Korean word *gancheop*, for the sake of readability and accessibility.

In practice, the Park administration established a tightly woven spy-reporting system by implementing measures such as the Anticommunism Law, Homeland Reserve Forces, the Resident Registration System, Civil Defense, and *bansanghoe* (neighborhood meetings), all aimed at continuously fostering informants. This focus on citizen involvement distinguishes Park Chung-hee's anticommunism from that of the Rhee Syngman. Although the number of North Korean agents dispatched to the South declined sharply after the 1970s, the Yushin regime emphasized spy reporting even more strongly.[2] To a large extent, Park's anticommunist initiative of *creating spies* was tantamount to *creating informants*.

Numerous studies in Korean history and literature have explored how the Park regime constructed anticommunism through fabricated spy incidents and their cultural representations (D. Kim 2012, 2015; Jun 2012; Lim 2015, 2018). In particular, Hwang Byeong-ju incisively pointed out that the Park Chung-hee regime responded to developmental crises by internalizing the threat of external invasion through a mode of public security governance, in which the figure of the *spy* served as a key mediator. This article is deeply influenced by Hwang's analysis (Hwang 2020).

The individual components of the spy-reporting system established under Park's rule—such as the Resident Registration System, *bansanghoe*, and civil defense units—have been partially analyzed in separate studies (Heo 2022; Hong 2012; M. Kim 2023). However, the overall function of the spy-reporting system, and how it embedded anticommunism into the daily lives of people, has yet to be examined. Alf Lüdtke and Detlev Peukert argue that understanding state violence and its impact on everyday life from below is essential for a comprehensive grasp of domination, suggesting that examining how individuals *creatively cooperate* with state violence can offer pathways to critical and anti-fascist historical narratives (Peukert 1987; Lüdtke 1995). Following this line of thought, anticommunism under Park Chung-hee can, in a similar manner, be better understood through the lens of people's daily lives, providing deeper insight into the mechanisms of

2. According to NISDC statistics, 1,686 spies were apprehended between 1960 and 1969, while 681 were apprehended between 1970 and 1979—a sharp decline of 40 percent between the two decades (NISDC 2007, 245).

control during that period.

This study explores the mechanisms of the spy-reporting system and the relationship between anticommunism and everyday life, utilizing intelligence records received by the police during the 1970s. These intelligence records refer to reports or intelligence received by the intelligence departments of each police station regarding suspicious individuals suspected of being spies. Currently, the National Archives of Korea holds only a portion of these materials as confidential records, with the largest collection being documents produced by the Intelligence Division of the Yongsan Police Station in Seoul. Collectively, the files are titled, "Gancheop geomgeo gongjak" (Spy Arrest Operations), and consist of five volumes from 1965 to 1970 and 76 volumes from 1971 to 1980. However, due to their classified status, access to these records is highly restricted.[3]

This study analyzes 115 cases documented in six randomly selected files from the collection. The composition and content of these cases are largely similar, suggesting that analyzing a subset of files still provides a reliable sense of overall trends. These selected cases all occurred between 1973 and 1977, and all were deemed unsubstantiated reports or intelligence, with investigations closed at the Yongsan Police Station level. Notably, under the Yushin regime, even minor expressions of dissent or dissatisfaction with the regime were either fabricated as espionage cases or punished under Presidential Emergency Measures, the National Security Act, or the Anticommunism Law (Oh 2014). Accordingly, presumably, if there had been even the slightest grounds for punishment in the received reports or intelligence, the case records would have been transferred to other agencies, such as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, for additional investigation. In other words, the cases contained in the materials analyzed in this study are ones that, even from the state's perspective, lacked grounds for prosecution. Jeong Byeong Wook analyzed the *subversive* elements, such as rumors and expressions of discontent, in materials from the Seoul District Prosecutor's

3. The National Archives of Korea permits restricted access to classified materials, allowing only viewing and transcription for academic purposes and similar uses. Photography and photocopying are not permitted.

Office and the High Court's Prosecutor's Office during the colonial period, revealing diverse attitudes and social backgrounds of the populace positioned between compliance with and resistance to colonial rule (Jeong 2013, 2023). However, as explained earlier, the cases analyzed in this study are those in which no *subversive* elements were found. Therefore, the intent of this article is not to determine the truth of each case or to explore the gray area between compliance and resistance hidden within subversion, but rather to examine how the spy-reporting system operated and how everyday life under anticommunism was embedded in the content and motivations of these reports. Specifically, it examines how the everyday lives of South Korean urban residents intersected closely with the spy-reporting system, how individuals internalized and enacted anticommunism, who were stigmatized and excluded as *suspicious individuals* within this system, and, finally, what forms of social hostility, discord, and anxiety were embedded within the language of anticommunism.

How was the Spy-Reporting System Constituted?

The deep integration of spy reporting into everyday life cannot be discussed without considering the Anticommunism Law. Following the May 16, 1961 coup, the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction enacted the Anticommunism Law to block any mention of, or contact with, North Korea or communist activities. This law included provisions for the "crime of non-reporting" and rewards for informants (W. Park 1989, 193–202). The crime of non-reporting refers to the criminalization of failing to report known offenses to the state. It was first introduced in the National Security Law revised after the April Revolution of 1960 and subsequently codified as Article 8 of the Anticommunism Law promulgated immediately after the May 16 coup.[4] Additionally, it included a provision to reward individuals

4. Anticommunism Law (July 3, 1961), Article 8 (Crime of Failure to Report): A person who becomes aware of the offenses stipulated in the preceding five articles and fails to report it to an investigative agency shall be subject to Article 9 of the National Security Act.

who reported or apprehended violators (Article 10).[5] This dual strategy of punishing non-reporting while rewarding reporting created a strong incentive structure around spy reporting.

Until the 1960s, North Korea primarily conducted infiltration operations into South Korea through networks of individuals with familial or personal ties to those who had defected to the North (NISDC 2007, 272). This suggests that those targeted for reporting under the Anticommunism Law were often family members, relatives, or others close to the informants. Consequently, the provisions for the crime of non-reporting and rewards for informants allowed anticommunism to penetrate civilian society, penetrating even family units, transforming them into mechanisms of surveillance (Fujii 2011). Moreover, informants could receive a monetary reward if their reported spy was apprehended.

However, if spies were rarely encountered in daily life, reporting could not have become a routine act, regardless of the law. The government's definition of a spy, however, was so abstract that it could apply to virtually anyone. An article titled "How to Identify and Report North Korean Spies" published in a monthly magazine in 1970 illustrated some characteristics of spies, as highlighted in the following excerpt (M. Park 1970):

1. A person who spends money freely without a stable job, whose activities are unknown
2. Someone whose behavior with their spouse is erratic, often engaging in arguments with secrets between them
3. A person who appears unfamiliar with the details of their own occupation
4. Someone who deliberately avoids eye contact with others
5. A person possessing large amounts of foreign currency or attempting to exchange it secretly
6. Someone whose previously difficult financial situation has suddenly and unexpectedly improved

5. Anticommunism Law (July 3, 1961), Article 10 (Rewards, etc.): A person who reports or arrests an individual who has committed an offense under this law or the National Security Act shall be granted a reward equivalent to one-half of the value of any seized items.

7. A person without any clear occupation who frequently goes out at irregular hours[6]

Following the January 21 Incident in 1968, the Park Chung-hee government intensified its emphasis on reporting spies. Initially, revisions to the Anticommunism Law and its enforcement ordinance increased the reward for informants from 200,000 *won* in 1962 to 10 million *won* by 1977[7]—a 50-fold increase, compared to a mere 4.6-fold rise in the Consumer Price Inflation Rate over a similar period.[8] After the July 4th North-South Joint Statement and the proclamation of the Yushin system in 1972, the push for spy reporting became even more pronounced. Slogans and posters were widely distributed nationwide, with phrases like "Report Spies to 113" displayed on the blank spaces of various signs, calendars, weekly and monthly magazines, and even on labels and packaging, where slogans such as "Guidelines for Reporting Spies" and "How to Identify Spies" became mandatory.[9]

The emphasis on reporting spies extended beyond propaganda alone. On May 29, 1968, the Park Chung-hee government amended the Resident Registration Act, assigning every citizen a resident registration number and mandating that individuals aged 18 and older obtain an ID card, with mandatory reporting of any changes in residence (Hong 2012, 96–102).

6. The characteristics of spies in the quoted text appear to follow government guidelines, as they are almost identical to those presented in the 1966 government-produced cultural film *This is a Spy* (*Igeosi gancheop-ida*), according to Hwang (2020, 55).
7. Anticommunism Act Enforcement Decree (February 27, 1962). Article 9 (Reward Standards): The amount of the reward shall be determined in consideration of merit, the severity of the crime, and other relevant circumstances, and shall not exceed 2 million *hwan*; Anticommunism Act Enforcement Decree (October 25, 1977) Article 12 (Reward Standards): …However, if a person engaged in fishing operations detects an offender attempting to infiltrate or escape by sea using a vessel and performs the act prescribed in Article 10 of the Act, the reward may be increased to up to 10 million *won*.
8. National Indicator System Consumer Price Inflation Rate (https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4226, accessed December 29, 2023). The Consumer Price Inflation Rate in the National Indicator System provides data that can be tracked from 1965.
9. *Gancheop singo uisik gyeimong jichim hadael* (Guidelines for Raising Awareness of Spy Reporting), KNPYPID (1973), Record Number BA0184227.

Figure 1. Korea International Foods Co., Ltd, Shany Banana Cake wrapper (1978). A slogan reading "Report spies to 113" is found inside a black box printed on the snack wrapper.

Source: National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, Collection Number Hanbak6474.

Building on this act, the Park administration established a local surveillance system. In February 1972, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented the "National Anticommunist Agents Program for *lijang* [village heads] and *dongjang* [neighborhood heads]," designating village heads as "anticommunist agents" and neighborhood heads as "anticommunist team leaders" (Heo 2022, 480–481).

While this measure primarily targeted rural areas, the government later enacted the Civil Defense Act in 1975 and formalized *bansanghoe* in 1976, effectively creating a surveillance system comprising *banjang* (block leaders), groups of five households, and civil defense units. A core agenda at *bansanghoe* in the 1970s was the detection of "spies, North Korean operatives, and other subversive elements" as well as "various criminals, draft evaders, and other lawbreakers" (Heo 2022, 506).[10] By the mid-to-late

10. *Bansanghoe* existed from the mid-1960s, but they were neither systematic nor mandatory. However, starting in 1976, a policy was implemented mandating monthly *bansanghoe* meetings nationwide, along with measures such as appointing honorary *banjang* (block leaders), assigning responsible public officials, and keeping meeting records. The *bansanghoe* served not only for reporting spies but also as a channel for instilling

1970s, the spy-reporting system was reinforced with a solid infrastructure that enabled physical enforcement and support.

How, then, did this *system* function in practice? And what impact did it have on the everyday lives of urban residents? To answer these questions, the following section provides an in-depth analysis of intelligence records of anticommunist reports received by the Intelligence Division of the Yongsan Police Station in Seoul.

Who were the Informants?

The "Spy Arrest Operations" files consist of intelligence reports on each case, investigation reports on gathered information, and other documents produced during the investigation process, such as family registers, resident registration cards, and progress reports. The intelligence reports include the date and location of the information obtained, the source (the person who provided the intelligence), and the content of the intelligence.

The table below categorizes the 115 cases analyzed from the six Spy Arrest Operations files according to the types of information sources. Although these sources vary by document, they can generally be divided into categories such as paid informants, collaborators, direct reporting, public opinion collection, recognition, and transfer.

First, "a. paid informants" are typically labeled as "Gap (甲) or Eul (乙) + Number." This suggests that each police intelligence division managed paid informants by number rather than name, indicating that the police did not simply wait for voluntary reports but actively and systematically gathered intelligence through hired informants. Some cases are marked as "Paid Informant + Surname" rather than a number, but these are also clearly indicated as paid informants, so they were included in the category of paid informant reports.

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anticommunist and national ethics and promoting various government policies (M. Kim 2023). While specifics vary by municipality, generally one *ban* (block) consisted of 20 to 200 households, and one *tong* (district) comprised 5 to 15 *ban*.

Table 1. Types and Distribution of Information Sources in Spy Reports

Main category	Subcategory	Cases	Percentage (%)
a. Paid informants		22	19
b. Collaborators	Collaborators	14	12
	Agents	9	8
	Anticommunist informants	2	2
	Anticommunist agents	1	1
	Anticommunist team leaders	1	1
	Subtotal	27	23
c. Direct reporting	In-person reporting	18	16
	Letter reporting	2	2
	Phone reporting	3	3
	Self-reporting	1	1
	Subtotal	24	21
d. Public opinion collection		15	13
e. Recognition		17	15
f. Transfer		1	1
g. Others		9	8
Total		**115**	**100**

Source: KNPYPID (1974, 1975, 1977).

"e. Recognition" incidents refer to intelligence gathered by intelligence division officers through regular monitoring of persons of interest within their jurisdiction, rather than from external reports. Thus, both paid informant reports and recognition incidents, which together constitute 34 percent of the cases, reflect the state's coercive intervention and control within the spy reporting system.

Surprisingly, "c. Direct reporting" cases—where individuals contacted the police in person, by letter, or by phone to report suspicious persons—account for 21 percent of all cases. These reports, made without state

coercion, show citizens actively practicing anticommunism and reflect the voluntary participation of Yongsan-gu residents, in contrast to paid informant reports and recognition incidents. "e. Public opinion collection," comprising 13 percent, is similar; these were documented as *gyunmun bogoseo* (observation reports), where police recorded information gathered from citizens during patrols. Like direct reporting, which involved citizens approaching the police, public opinion collection also lacked compulsion, distinguishing it from paid informants or collaborators. Together, direct reporting and public opinion collection represent 34 percent of cases, the same proportion as paid informant and recognition cases, suggesting that the spy reporting system in the 1970s relied on voluntary participation as much as on coercion.

How, then, should we understand "collaborators," who account for 23 percent of cases? In this study, all intelligence sources labeled as "collaborator," "agent," "anticommunist intelligence agent," and "anticommunist intelligence network" were classified as "collaborators" due to the common characteristic of listing only the surname while anonymizing the given name, such as "Mr. Kim," "Ms. Ko" or "Mr. Park." They are also distinctly different from numbered paid informants. Unlike paid informants, who were hired and compensated with operational funds, collaborators did not receive payment and showed wide variation in their roles, levels of voluntariness, and degrees of coercion.

One notable example involves a case reporting Choi Moon-o (pseudonym),[11] a second-year psychology student at Seoul National University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. His investigation was initiated based on a report from Ms. Ko, a collaborator who was a 15-year-old middle school student at Bongcheon Middle School in Gwanak-gu and a classmate of Choi In-ok, Choi Moon-o's cousin. During class, Choi In-ok reportedly said, "Do you want me to tell you something surprising? It's about North Korea. My cousin, who is a psychology major at Seoul National University, said his professor told him that 'Park Chung-hee is selfish. Every

11. All names mentioned in this text are pseudonyms to protect personal information. From this point forward, the fact that they are pseudonyms will not be noted.

household in North Korea has a refrigerator, and life is good there. If Kim Il-sung becomes the president of Korea, we will live well.'" She also allegedly stated, "What the teachers say is all lies. Do you know why university students are protesting these days? They're protesting to overthrow the president. What would you know? A Seoul National University student would know better."[12]

Choi In-ok, who was later summoned to the Yongsan Police Station admitted that she actually said what Ms. Ko had reported. But in the end, Choi Moon-o was released only with a warning as no "subversive ideology or incriminating evidence" was found.[13] How, then, did Ms. Ko become a collaborator? Interestingly, Ms. Ko's middle school was located in Gwanak-gu, and her residence was in Seodaemun-gu, both far from Yongsan-gu. The reason this case was handled by the Yongsan Police Station was that a police officer at the Galwol precinct station, located in Yongsan-gu, initially received the report from Ms. Ko.[14] It is unlikely that the Galwol Substation or the Yongsan Police Station managed a middle school student from Gwanak-gu as a collaborator. This suggests that Ms. Ko may have either coincidentally encountered a police officer or deliberately approached an officer from a different district to make the report.

This example shows that even reports from "collaborators" could sometimes resemble direct reporting. In other words, some "collaborator" reports reflected voluntary informant behavior more than state control or intervention. This implies that the actual rate of voluntary reporting could be higher than the 34 percent represented by direct reporting and public opinion collection alone.

While her motivation remains unclear, Ms. Ko seemed to display a strong anticommunist attitude for a middle schooler. However, her

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12. "Jinsul joso" (Statement Report) (October 15, 1974), *Gancheop geomgeo gongjak* (Spy Arrest Operations), KNPYPID, NAK, Record Number BA0183897. From this point forward, references in footnotes for spy reports will be formatted as follows: "Document title" (Date), Record Number.
13. "Gongjak cheopbo jonggyeol bogo" (Termination Report on Operational Intelligence) (November 5, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.
14. "Gyunmun bogoseo" (Observation Report) (date unknown), Record Number BA0183897.

statements reveal that Choi In-ok frequently boasted about her cousin at Seoul National University, hinting that personal jealousy might have motivated the report. In other words, there were cases where the motivation for voluntary reporting was personal feelings rather than anticommunism. Even voluntary reports often reflected the appropriation of anticommunism as a means to resolve personal emotions or interpersonal conflicts.

Who, then, were the other collaborators? Unlike the example above, the identities of most collaborators are not accurately documented. However, it is noteworthy that *dabang* (cafes) and inns frequently appear as the locations where collaborators provided intelligence (totaling 25 cases).

For instance, "Agent Mr. Park" met with the police at Daechi *dabang* in Hangang-ro 3-ga and reported that Lee Cheol-soo was loitering around the US Eighth Army Base, observing military activities and frequently sitting at a *dabang* during the day, talking with several men.[15] Given that the agent observed the reported individual meeting with someone at the *dabang*, it is likely that he was employed there. Moreover, a collaborator who reported Eun Dong-soo, a teacher at Deoksu Girls' High School and a friend of Zainichi Korean Mr. Kim, is specifically listed as "Agent Mr. Ku from Eunha *dabang*" in Wonhyo-ro 1-ga.[16]

Other collaborators seem to be employees at inns. For instance, "Collaborator Mr. Kim" met with the police at the Gongju Inn and reported Kim Hee-goo, who had stayed in room 302 for an extended period without family visits or correspondence, raising suspicion.[17] This suggests that "Collaborator Mr. Kim" had observed him for a long time and was likely the innkeeper or an employee. While *dabang* were natural gathering spots and

15. "Cheopbo bogo" (Intelligence Report) (August 27, 1974), Record Number BA0183897. The investigation concluded that the reason Lee Cheol-soo was loitering around the vicinity of the US Eighth Army was simply because it was part of his jogging and walking route, and the men he met at the café were merely members of a hometown club. "Cheopbo susa jonggyeol bogo" (Intelligence Investigation Termination Report) (October 7, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.
16. "Gongjak cheopbo ipsu bogo" (Acquisition Report on Operational Intelligence) (May 24, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.
17. "Gongjak cheopbo" (Operational Intelligence) (November 13, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.

frequently served as intelligence sites, these reports show that police officers maintained regular contact with *dabang* and inn employees to establish collaborative relationships. This suggests not only that the informants were, to some extent, operating under state coercion, but also that the reported individuals were often those who regularly frequented such establishments. Who, then, were the people frequenting *dabang* and inns in urban areas during the 1970s? This question will be explored in the next section.

Finally, *tongjang* (district leader) and *banjang* (block leader) were also significant collaborators, as evidenced by the 8 cases out of the 27 collaborator reports that involved residents who had recently moved in but had not registered their residence or attended *bansanghoe*. One specific example involves "anticommunist informant Mr. Lee," who reported Ahn Sang-gu, a construction day laborer living alone in a boarding house in Cheongpa-dong 3-ga, for not having a resident registration card or being registered at the local *dong* office, and for having no record of military service or supplementary reserve status.[18] Another example is "agent Mr. Kim," who reported Kim Jung-ja, who had recently moved to Hangang-ro 1-ga, noting that she had "not registered her residence, and a bald man in his 40s occasionally visited her" and "*banjang* advised the man to register his residence and attend *bansanghoe*, but he claimed to just be a visitor."[19] In both cases, it is clear that the informants were *tongjang* or *banjang*, as they had access to residents' registration and military service status and were responsible for encouraging attendance at neighborhood meetings. In these cases, Ahn Sang-gu had not fulfilled his military duty due to a long prison sentence for armed robbery,[20] while Kim Jung-ja's visitor was a Taiwanese national, exempt from *bansanghoe* attendance.[21]

The significant proportion of direct reporting and public opinion

18. "Cheopbo ipsu bogo" (Intelligence Acquisition Report) (December 23, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.
19. "Gongjak cheopbo" (Operational Intelligence) (October 5, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.
20. "Cheopbo susa bogo" (Intelligence Investigation Report) (December 30, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.
21. "Susa bogo" (Investigation Report) (October 28, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.

collection cases, along with the role of *banjang* and *tongjang* as collaborators, might suggest that anticommunist was widely practiced and that the state's spy-reporting system operated densely. While this may be partly true, as previously noted, the sharp decline in North Korean infiltrators after the 1970s calls for a closer examination of the effects of anticommunist practices and the spy-reporting system on urban residents' daily lives, as well as what could be observed through this system. The following section will provide a detailed analysis of those reported as suspicious individuals within the spy-reporting system of the 1970s.

Who Were Reported?

An analysis of the 115 reports reveals the frequent appearance of certain keywords. Table 2 summarizes the counts for each recurring keyword. Since the data includes duplicate counts, some cases contain all four keywords. Excluding duplicates, 81 cases, or 70 percent of the total, include at least one of these four keywords. This indicates that the majority of spy reports in the 1970s were related to the keywords in Table 2.

Table 2. High Frequency Keywords in Spy Reports

Keywords	Number of cases (Including duplicates)
North Korea (defected to, abducted to, collaborated with) and Japan	40
Newcomer, resident registration	36
Occupation	24
Total Number of Cases with Keywords (Excluding Duplicates)	81

Source: KNPYPID (1974, 1975, 1977).

Families of Collaborators (Defectors to North Korea, Abductees) and Zainichi Koreans

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently mentioned keywords pertain to North Korea—such as defection, abduction, and collaboration—as well as Japan. It is well established that from the 1970s onward, Zainichi Koreans were among the primary targets in fabricated spy cases (Lim 2015; Yun 2024). Additionally, the families of individuals who had collaborated with or defected to North Korea faced severe police surveillance and endured the repercussions of a guilt-by-association system that had persisted since the Korean War.

However, in most reported cases, individuals had merely traveled to Japan for business or tourism, or these allegations were unsubstantiated claims. Similarly, reports that someone was a collaborator or from a defector's family were often based on unverified information, and even when true, they were irrelevant to the individual's behavior. Consider the cases of Lee Bok-nam and Do Sung-hoon below.

In August 1974, a paid informant reported Lee Bok-nam to the police after a meeting at Myung *dabang* in Yongsan-dong 2-ga. The informant noted "suspicious behavior in the suspect's daily activities." According to the report, Lee had defected from the North shortly after liberation and was allegedly active in the Women's Alliance for North Korea during the North's occupation of Seoul in the Korean War. She then disappeared and reappeared in 1960, often voicing dissatisfaction with the government.[22] However, the investigation revealed discrepancies. Although Lee was indeed a defector, she had not been active in the Women's Alliance. Instead, she had evacuated to her sister's home in Daegu during the war, where she met her spouse, and later returned to the neighborhood.[23] In short, the report was baseless. Most cases with keywords related to North Korea or Japan followed

22. "Gongjak cheopbo bogo" (Operational Intelligence Report) (August 29, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.
23. "Cheopbo susa jonggyeol bogo" (Intelligence Investigation Termination Report) (October 5, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.

a similar pattern, likely using these terms to reinforce the suspicion around the reported individual.

Furthermore, several cases suggest that the police deliberately used keywords like Japan or North Korea to bolster their achievements. One example is the case of Do Sung-hoon in an intelligence report received through police initiative in November 1977. According to the report, Do was portrayed as a suspicious figure, described as a member of a collaborator family whose cousins had been executed for collaboration and who left home daily for an unknown business.[24] The investigation revealed that, while his cousins had indeed been collaborators, he himself was a respectable merchant running a rice store at the express bus terminal in Gangnam. He had no connection to his cousins. On the corner of the report, it should be noted that an annotation was added in red pen: "Do not waste time submitting worthless intelligence. Perform duties with strong professional zeal."[25] This note, likely made by a superior officer, indicates that even intelligence of little value was pursued because Do was associated with a collaborator family. Thus, in most cases, keywords like Japan and North Korea were either fabricated or added to bolster the suspicion surrounding the reported individual.

However, the use of keywords like Japan or North Korea also offers glimpses into the harsh lives of families of North Korean collaborators (i.e. North Korean defectors). The case of Park Bong-geum, reported by police collaborator Mr. Kim in March 1975 as a suspicious individual, is one example. According to Mr. Kim's report, Park's husband had been abducted to North Korea during the Korean War. Since then, she had frequently moved between Seoul and Gyeonggi-do province, avoided contact with relatives, and lost track of her two sons, who had run away. She was now working as a housekeeper for an Air Force lieutenant colonel. Based on these observations, Mr. Kim reported that Park Bong-geum might be a spy.[26]

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24. "Gongjak cheopbo" (Operational Intelligence) (November 22, 1977), Record Number BA0183920.
25. "Daegong cheopbo susa bogo" (Counterintelligence Investigation Report) (December 30, 1977), Record Number BA0183920.
26. "Yongui cheopbo ipsu bogo" (Suspect Intelligence Acquisition Report) (March 11, 1975),

Since Park's residence was in Seongbuk district, north of Seoul, it's likely that word of her situation traveled through indirect connections, eventually reaching the police in Yongsan-gu in central Seoul. The investigation confirmed that Park Bong-geum was indeed the wife of an abductee. Her life, however, was one of tragic hardship as a result of the war, a story difficult to tell without evoking tears. After her husband's abduction, she struggled financially, moving from one rented room to another and selling goods to US soldiers, only to lose contact with her sons after repeated setbacks. She remarried multiple times to earn a living, but each relationship brought its own miseries—domestic violence, conflict, abandonment, and ultimately divorce—forcing her to relocate repeatedly. Only through the compassion of a cousin was she finally able to find work as a housekeeper and some semblance of stability.[27] Her turbulent journey following her husband's abduction eventually led to her being labeled a spy.

Consequently, the above cases reveal the police's desire to inflate their performance under the label of espionage, the suspicious gaze cast upon families of defectors, collaborators, and abductees, and the uncomfortable views directed at urban lower-class women without husbands. The motivation for the spy report lay not in the person being reported, but within the reporters themselves.

Newcomers

The second most common keywords are "resident registration" and "newcomers," appearing in 36 out of 115 cases. As previously discussed, the spy-reporting system was rooted in the resident registration system and reinforced by networks of *bansanghoe* and civil defense units, with *tongjang* and *banjang* acting as key collaborators. Notably, 50 percent of the cases associated with these keywords were received through direct reporting or public opinion collection, suggesting voluntary submissions

Record Number BA0183922.

27. "Daegong cheopbo susa jonggyeol bogo" (Counterintelligence Investigation Termination Report) (April 11, 1975), Record Number BA0183922.

rather than reports from paid informants or official collaborators. This raises the question: does the frequent appearance of keywords such as "resident registration" and "newcomers" suggest that the state's spy-reporting system was functioning effectively and that anticommunism was widely practiced among ordinary urban residents?

However, it can be inferred that in most cases, there are additional reasons behind the motives for reporting. A notable case from November 1977 involves an anonymous report about Choi Hee-do in Ichon 2-dong. The letter began by expressing gratitude to the government for its dedication to state affairs before requesting an investigation into a "suspicious person" in the neighborhood. According to the report, what aroused suspicion was a man who stayed indoors with his mother throughout the day instead of going to work. The report further noted that they seemed to avoid interactions with neighbors, and when neighbors visited, they would abruptly halt their conversations and exchange meaningful glances.[28]

There is another case as well. In May 1977, Park Ki-soo, an employee at the Saemaul Credit Union in Cheongpa 1-dong, visited the Yongsan Police Station to report a suspicious neighbor. According to Park, a young man around 25 years old, who had recently moved into his neighborhood, stayed indoors all day, never leaving the house. Moreover, Park found it suspicious that the man did not place his shoes outside his door, which was customary in Korean households.[29]

In both cases, the suspicion arose primarily from a single observation: the new neighbors remained indoors for extended periods. However, the subsequent investigations revealed rather mundane explanations. The first case involved Choi Hee-do, who had recently established a clothing business with his mother. Their seemingly secretive behavior—pausing conversations when customers or neighbors entered—was simply due to the man explaining to his mother the actual costs and suggested selling

28. "Susa bujangnim guiha" (To the Chief of Investigation) (November 11, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.

29. "Gyeonmun Bogoseo" (Observation Report) (May 6, 1977), Record Number BA0183927.

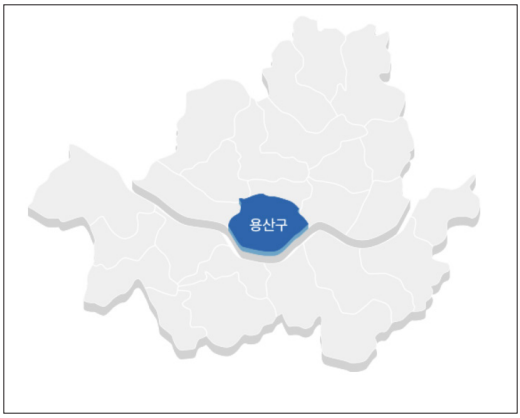

Figure 2. Yongsan-gu, located in the center of Seoul

Source: Yongsan-gu Office website (https://www.yongsan.go.kr/).

prices.[30] In the second case, the allegedly suspicious young man turned out to be a night-shift security guard at the Yongsan Police Station, explaining his daytime presence at home. His unusual practice of storing shoes inside the kitchen, rather than outside as was customary, was a practical measure to prevent theft, given the poor security conditions of his rented accommodation.[31]

Why were the newly moved residents in these two cases suspected of being spies? Seoul's population grew rapidly in the 1960s–1970s, driven by accelerated urbanization and substantial rural-to-urban migration. The city's population, which stood at 2.44 million in 1960, had quadrupled to 8.36 million by 1980 (SCCHS 2005, 60). By the late 1970s, over half of Seoul's residents were migrants. Moreover, nearly all individuals who moved to Seoul faced frequent relocations: those arriving alone often lived as lodgers, moving every few months, while even families commonly shifted between small, single-room accommodations every one to two years (Song 2018, 55).

Additionally, Yongsan-gu, where the Yongsan Police Station was

30. "Susa bogo" (Investigation Report) (December 10, 1977), Record Number BA0183922.
31. "Susagyulgwa Bogo" (Investigation Report) (May 9, 1977), Record Number BA0183927.

situated, was centrally located in Seoul. As a old downtown area and a lively commercial district, it was bustling with North Korean refugees and overseas returnees from right after liberation, and during the urbanization period, it became crowded with urban lower-class residents and migrants (SCCHS 1980, 25). The cases of newcomers being reported as spies in Yongsan reveal that migrants were regarded not as welcome members of the community, but as "suspicious individuals." Despite the presence of urban communities, newcomers faced difficulties integrating. The spy-reporting system thus served as a convenient tool to rationalize exclusionary sentiments toward migrants.

One should note that the first letter, regarding Choi Hee-do, was anonymous. Therefore, it is highly likely that the report was not motivated by a fear of punishment for non-reporting. Was this report, triggered by minimal cause, an indication that the informant had fully embraced anticommunism itself? This is possible, but the following letter below offers additional insight into this question:

> I am writing to report a young couple in my neighborhood who exhibit several suspicious behaviors. Here are my concerns: 1. They are not registered with the local district office; 2. It is noticeable that unfamiliar men and women frequently come and go. 3. It seems suspicious that there are occasional conflicts and disagreements with visitors; 4. The woman leaves home for several days and sometimes returns carrying a small bundle; … 6. Although they may be newlyweds, the fact that there is no furniture arranged in the room and that they only have minimal belongings, making it possible to move out at any time, clearly reveals strange and inexplicable details… **Given the current unstable times, which leave me feeling deeply anxious**, I am reaching out to request assistance in **alleviating our grave concerns**. [emphasis added][32]

32. "Seoul teukbyeolsi gyeongchalguk 113 susabonbu damdangja guiha" (To the Officer in Charge of the 113 Investigation Headquarters, Seoul Metropolitan Police Bureau) (March 1975), Record Number BA0183902.

The author of this letter was also anonymous. The police investigation revealed that this report, too, was based entirely on a misunderstanding. The reason the newlywed couple had not registered their residence was simply that they had yet to complete their marriage registration. The wife's absence was due to visits to her sister's house, and the bundle she carried was merely a market bag. The unfamiliar visitors were the husband's coworkers, and the lack of furniture was due to the couple's financial difficulties. The couple were both relatively recent migrants who had arrived in Seoul less than five years previous, and were typical migrants living in poverty, renting a single-room dwelling.[33]

However, the last line of the letter stands out, with its mention of "unstable times" and feeling "anxious." What might be inferred from these words? The letter was written in April 1975, a time when South Vietnam had just fallen. Around this time, the Yushin regime emphasized national security concerns, issuing Presidential Emergency Measures No. 9 and the Social Safety Act in response to the fall of South Vietnam. The phrase "unstable times" likely refers to this situation. But was national security the only reason the letter writer felt anxious? The police investigation report reveals that the building in question housed nine families in single-room units, all of whom were tenants under either lease or monthly rental agreements.[34] The majority of these residents, like the newly married couple under suspicion, were recent migrants to Seoul with presumably temporary residential status.

Seoul's rapid urbanization in the 1970s, along with frequent relocations among neighbors, inevitably fostered a sense of chronic insecurity among urban residents. This insecurity was further intensified when the fall of South Vietnam heightened the state's perception of crisis, fostering a *spy-like suspicion* toward new neighbors that kept letter writers on edge. In this context, it seems plausible that the informant, overwhelmed by anxiety, sought to establish a sense of stability through reporting these neighbors to state authorities. In the 1970s, Seoul was depicted as an "anonymous mass

33. "Susa bogo" (Investigation Report) (April 16, 1975), Record Number BA0183902.
34. "Susa bogo" (Investigation Report) (April 16, 1975), Record Number BA0183902.

society" and an "ideal habitat for spies," while the Yushin regime aimed to manage urban anxiety through the propagation of anticommunism (Hwang 2020, 74–75). This letter, however, demonstrates how urban residents, while subject to state control, actively appropriated the language of anticommunism to negotiate their own anxieties. The state's spy-reporting system thus served a dual function: it legitimized exclusionary attitudes toward migrants while simultaneously providing a socially sanctioned channel through which residents could express their underlying fears.

People Without Stable Employment

The third most frequently appearing keyword is "occupation," accounting for 24 out of 115 cases. Whether through collaborators stationed in *dabang* or inns, *banjang,* or directly reported by informants, the phrase "without stable employment" appears consistently. As discussed earlier, one of the characteristics that the Park Chung-hee administration attributed to spies was "unstable employment." However, it should be noted that in an urban context, lacking a stable job and frequent moves suggest that the reported individual was likely part of the urban lower class. In fact, of the 24 individuals reported for employment-related reasons, 10 were unemployed or engaged in precarious jobs like factory work, construction day laborers, street vendors, and hostesses. This demonstrates that the characteristic of "unstable employment" attributed to spies blurred the lines between suspicious persons and the urban poor.

One notable case involved Kang Yeon-su, reported via the 113 spy hotline. Kang was a peddler who had sold tofu and side dishes from a cart for years. The report stated that in June 1974, Kang had chalked suspicious numbers, which appeared to be a spy code, on a cement wall in a Wonhyo 4-ga alley and fled in shock upon encountering children there.[35] However, the investigation revealed that the written numbers were simply records of his customers' tofu debts. Then, who might have reported him? It is likely

35. "Daegong cheopbo hadal" (Anticommunist Intelligence Directive) (July 11, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.

that the report came from the children's parents or even from the children themselves, possibly as a prank. Nevertheless, Kang's status as a "peddler" provided enough grounds for the police to investigate him and label him a suspicious individual.

Ultimately, in the majority of the 115 cases, the reported individuals were migrants living in single-room rentals, people whose families had suffered hardships due to collaboration or defection during the Korean War, or urban residents scraping by with daily labor or street vending. They drifted in and out of the state's spy-reporting system—a robust apparatus involving the state, the residence registration system, *bansanghoe*, and civil defense units—like a tide. Rather than embracing these vulnerable residents as members of the community, urban residents used the spy-reporting system to exclude them as a way to manage their own anxieties about urban life.

The Use of Spy Reporting

Urban anxieties, a byproduct of the Cold War and modernization, were expressed through anticommunist language or controlled via anticommunism. On the other hand, some cases reveal instances where individuals exploited anticommunism to resolve personal grievances and conflicts.

> I reported Do Sang-soo as a spy on October 4, 1974, because he seemed suspicious. The reason is that Do Sang-soo and I sometimes drank together, and during our conversations, he boasted about having served as a major in the military and how he had been making a lot of money since then. This is where my suspicions started…It seems odd that the site supervisor, who had just met him two days ago, knows his name but still didn't know mine.[36]

The above paragraph was from a worker's written report at the Yongsan Police Station, in which he reported a fellow laborer solely because Do Sang-

36. "Jinsulseo" (Statement) (October 5, 1974), Record Number BA0183897.

soo and the site supervisor seemed familiar with each other even though Do had only recently started working at the site. In most cases of direct reporting, at least one of the keywords shown in Table 2 typically appears, but not so in this report. What is the reason? The informant was suspicious of Do due to his bragging and was bothered that the site supervisor knew Do's name but not his own.

The investigation revealed that the informant's report was rooted in personal resentment. The supervisor had said, "I place diligent workers in comfortable positions where they can work freely," while assigning the informant to a more visible position due to his habitual drinking and lackadaisical attitude.[37] In other words, he reported Do out of irritation with his boastful comments and perceived favoritism of the supervisor. Spy reporting was thus used as a means of personal revenge.

Another example involved Kim Jong-o, 22 *tongjang*, Itaewon 2-dong, and a heating installer, who reported a new resident, unemployed Oh Il-soon, for allegedly using the phrase "*dongmu* [comrade] bastard" twice during an argument with her neighbor on October 28, 1976. Kim reported Oh as suspicious because "*dongmu*" is a term used in North Korea.[38] He even sent a letter to the Blue House about the incident.[39] On the surface, this report might seem like another case of exclusion or misunderstanding due to keywords like "newcomer" and "unemployed." However, the situation was more complicated.

Oh Il-soon was a woman who had recently moved into the area after purchasing a house worth approximately 12 million won. Part of the property she bought included land where Kim Jong-o had built an unauthorized structure. Oh requested its demolition from the Yongsan-gu Office, and the structure was removed. Despite the demolition, Kim refused to leave, pitching a tent and reportedly "engaging in verbal abuse and various disruptive acts." In the ensuing conflict, Kim alleged that Oh used the term

37. "Susa bogo" (Investigation Report) (November 1, 1974), Record Number BA BA0183897.
38. "Jinsul joso" (Statement Report) (December 3, 1976), Record Number BA BA0183922.
39. "Daetongnyeong gakha-kke." (To His Excellency the President) (November 9, 1976), Record Number BA BA0183922.

"*dongmu* bastard" and reported her to the police as a suspected spy. Like the previous case, Kim used the spy-reporting system for personal revenge.[40]

Kim's story was indeed pitiful. His letter to the Blue House provides a glimpse:

> I am making an appeal to His Excellency the President. In the middle of this harsh winter, they suddenly demolished my kitchen, leaving me with elderly parents in their 80s and four young children to care for. The inspection team left, saying they would come back to finish the job if I didn't do it myself. The weather is getting colder, and I'm deeply worried. This woman named Oh, **who just moved here**, doesn't even register her residency and uses strange words, which makes me, as the tongjang, deeply suspicious…I was told I could build a house here, so I did so myself, **serving as the tongjang all these years**…But now she just called the Yongsan-gu chief, and they demolished my home without compensation. How am I, a helpless weakling, supposed to live? Heaven alone knows how wronged I feel.[41] [emphasis added]

While Kim mentions his suspicion toward Oh's manner of speech, the letter was actually a lament about the plight of a suddenly displaced tenant. Notably, he emphasized that Oh was a new resident while he had "lived in Seoul for over ten years" and was a "*tongjang*." The investigation found that neither Oh nor her associates had used the term "*dongmu*" during the altercation. Nevertheless, Kim used the spy-reporting system to seek state intervention in his difficult situation. By identifying himself as the *tongjang* and Oh as a new resident, he aimed to highlight his position within the spy-reporting system and portray Oh as an outsider. This shows that in the 1970s, the state was more actively involved in catching spies than in addressing the hardships of the urban lower class. Kim was well aware of this fact.

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40. "Cheopbo susa bogo" (Intelligence Investigation Report) (November 24, 1976), Record Number BA0183922.
41. "Daetongnyeong gakha-kke" (To His Excellency the President) (November 9, 1976), Record Number BA BA0183922.

Conclusion

The Park Chung-hee regime meticulously established a system for reporting suspected spies through measures like the Anticommunism Act, the national resident registration system, *bansanghoe*, and civil defense units. The importance of reporting spies was widely publicized, and regulations under the Anticommunism Act, along with various watchful eyes embedded within communities, led individuals to internalize anticommunism to varying degrees. The spy reports analyzed in this study were all misunderstandings or unfounded allegations, showing the extent to which the state deeply permeated everyday life and how actively individuals practiced anticommunism.

However, peeling back the surface of anticommunism reveals how many people were excluded by the state and urban communities forged through this reporting system. Migrants who moved from one small rented room to another, daily laborers living hand-to-mouth, bar hostesses and their managers, families of those with past affiliations to communist forces—many city dwellers who slightly deviated from *normalcy* were all labeled suspicious under this reporting system. In this way, practicing anticommunism became a tool for controlling the anxieties woven into the fabric of industrialization and urbanization. Conversely, urban residents also sought to draw the state into their lives by engaging in these anticommunist practices.

In conclusion, just as today's social conflicts are expressed through the language of gender conflict and hate, the social hostility, discord, and contradictions of the 1960s and 1970s were expressed in the language of anticommunism. This is why we refer to that period as a *time of anticommunism*. The communities formed under Korea's developmental state were grounded not in inclusion but in discrimination and exclusion. Could those deemed *suspicious persons* at that time ever have found acceptance within a new community? Perhaps many of the issues facing Korean society today stem from the failure to create a community of citizens rather than a community of informants.

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