



Globalizing a rural past: The conjunction of international development aid and South Korea's dictatorial legacy



Hyeseon Jeong

School of Environmental and Life Sciences, University of Newcastle, SR291 University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement)
International aid (foreign aid)
Developmental state
Developmental dictatorship
Mass dictatorship
Democracy

ABSTRACT

Saemaul Undong is an international development aid model that has recently gained international currency. It originated in a rural development campaign led by a South Korean authoritarian regime in the 1970s. What enabled the campaign's global transformation, and what are its implications? To answer these questions, this research examines the relationship between dictatorship and development by reviewing the literatures on developmental state, developmental dictatorship, and mass dictatorship. Park Chung Hee's authoritarian regime employed a discursive strategy of presenting the campaign as an opportunity of contributing to national development—a development defined only in economic terms—and secured participation from rural communities that had desired progress. At the wake of a national debt crisis in the post-authoritarian era, various non-governmental and quasi-governmental actors elevated the campaign into a political and economic imaginary that allegedly merits international replication in their efforts to practice the discourse of national development. This imaginary was institutionalized into an international aid model, which the Park Geun-hye administration abused for its glory. The findings of this research show that, unlike the liberal claim that democracy follows economic development, the legacies of developmental dictatorship may persist through evolution even after formal democratization. Attempts at the uncritical replication of Saemaul Undong in the Global South risk reproducing the reductionist definition of development that overlooks political development. As the country is still paying the cost of its dictatorial legacy, the true lessons from South Korea's development experience can be found in its prolonged struggle for democracy.

1. Introduction

Saemaul Undong, also known as the New Village Movement, is a discourse and practice of rural development that has recently gained international currency. It originated in the 1970s in South Korea, when the country's economy grew in terms of GDP per capita from USD 156 to USD 1778.¹ This unusual record of growth is the basis of Saemaul Undong's popularity among international development organizations. For example, the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2012) argues that Saemaul Undong instilled a performance-oriented self-help ethos that contributed to the country's economic growth. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015, 9) states that Saemaul Undong entails “valuable knowledge that UNDP can tailor to various contexts” and emulates the initiative through its Inclusive and Sustainable New Communities Model. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2016, 235) suggests that Saemaul Undong “can

offer valuable lessons on fostering collective action and accountability,” and therefore incorporated its lessons into its New Rural Development Paradigm for the 21st Century. Many developing countries also express keen interest in replicating Saemaul Undong in the hope that the initiative would help them reproduce South Korea's exceptional growth. In 2014, hundreds of government officials, development workers, and community leaders from across Asia and Africa collectively declared:

We believe that the Saemaul spirit of diligence, self-help and cooperation is a universal value that can be accepted in any country in the world and that Saemaul Undong can serve as a useful policy model to effectively develop the rural communities of developing countries.²

In South Korea, there are debates over (a) the politics in which the government launched Saemaul Undong (hereafter Saemaul) as a rural development campaign in the 1970s and re-institutionalized it as a

E-mail address: hyeseon.jeong@newcastle.edu.au.

¹ World Bank, GDP per capita, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=KR>.

² Declaration on Global Saemaul Undong, 22 October 2014, Seoul, South Korea. The Declaration was read at the first Global Saemaul Leadership Forum convened by the South Korean government. The Forum included lectures on Saemaul Undong in the 1970s as well as study tours to the production facilities of the country's most globalized enterprises today such as Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motor Company. I analyze the incoherence of linking Saemaul Undong with the country's global businesses elsewhere (Jeong, forthcoming).

foreign aid program in the 2010s and (b) the validity of the claim that Saemaul made a substantial contribution to South Korea's development and thereby merits international dissemination. Saemaul was launched in the middle of Park Chung Hee's authoritarian rule (1961–1979), a regime which inhumanely oppressed dissidents, deprived people of freedom of expression, and harshly exploited labor to such an extent that it was described as “one of the most brutal, venal and corrupt on Earth” (Wald, 1977, n.p.). Although the average rural household income did increase during Saemaul in the 1970s, the urban-rural disparities continued to grow, and many rural households today suffer from escalating debt (Moore, 1984; Baek et al., 2012). Judging Saemaul a success and attempting to replicate it globally is inseparable from how we define ‘development’ and how we understand the history of dictatorship.

These debates are rarely discussed in academia outside of South Korea, and are predominantly overlooked in the field of international development, where studies express high hopes for Saemaul's contribution to the elimination of world poverty (e.g. Rondinelli, 1993; Yi and Mkwandawire, 2014; Kim and Kim, 2014). The OECD (2016, 122) acknowledges that Saemaul took place in South Korea under “very specific circumstances,” but refrains from mentioning anything about the regime's oppressiveness or people's long struggle for democracy. Instead, it commends the regime's national development plans for having successfully achieved industrialization and rural development. Too often authoritarian regimes in developing countries are justified by the liberal maxim of “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” (Moore, 1966, 418). Promoting the international replication of Saemaul without scrutinizing its relationship to South Korea's politics defeats the purpose of the extensive international development aid that promotes both economic and political development around the world.

This research extends the discussion on the relationship between dictatorship and development by juxtaposing Saemaul's transformation with South Korea's transition from a dictatorship to a democracy, as well as from a foreign aid recipient to a donor. In doing so, this paper addresses the gap in the literature, as mentioned above, on the domestic debates over the political nature of the developmental state and Saemaul during the Park Chung Hee regime. The paper also addresses the gap between the extensive research on Saemaul as a rural development campaign in the 1970s and the growing research on Saemaul as an international development model by shedding light on the evolution of Saemaul across the last four decades. Data on Saemaul's transformation were collected from newspaper articles published in South Korea's major daily newspapers from 1988 to 2016 and interviews conducted from 2014 to 2016 with the key organizations involved in Saemaul. The data collection was cross-checked against the documents published by the following sources: the South Korean government's Committee for International Development Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing Program, reports of the Korea Saemaul Undong Center and the Korea International Cooperation Agency, as well as existing studies on the global dissemination of Saemaul.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on the nature of Saemaul in the 1970s and on the responses to the campaign in rural areas and shows that Saemaul in the 1970s was a rare moment when the authoritarian regime's political and economic agenda and the rural communities' desire for development coincided. Section 3 reviews the extant debates on the developmental state, developmental dictatorship, and mass dictatorship and argues that the regime employed a discursive strategy of presenting the campaign as an opportunity of contributing to national development—a development defined only in economic terms—and secured participation from rural communities that had desired progress. It also examines how the discourse of national development elevated Saemaul into a symbol of South Korea's outstanding economic success in the post-authoritarian era. Section 4 investigates how Saemaul's symbolism was institutionalized into an international aid model, which the recently-ousted corrupt administration abused for its glory. The paper concludes

with a discussion on the persistence of authoritarian legacies and calls for continued critical interrogation of the relationship between dictatorship and development.

2. Saemaul as a rural development campaign

This section discusses the nature of Saemaul in the 1970s as a government-led rural development campaign. Although Saemaul was part of the Park Chung Hee regime's dictatorial developmentalist agenda, it faced little resistance in rural areas because farmers who had wanted change and progress viewed the campaign as an opportunity to achieve much-desired development.

Scholars do not easily agree on the origin of Saemaul. Imperial Japan's agrarian development campaign, Kibbutzism in Israel, and South Korea's Canaan Farmers School are the most commonly identified sources of Saemaul. Despite the disagreements on its origin, it is widely accepted that when Saemaul was born in 1970 it was not a ‘movement’ as the name suggests, but a government ‘campaign’ personally and institutionally pursued by Park. As industrialization accelerated rural-to-urban migration and devastated rural communities, Park felt the urgency to address rural poverty and designed Saemaul to improve infrastructure and increase productivity in rural areas. What made this rural development campaign distinctive was its village-scale economic strategy of reward and punishment. The government made limited resources available for Saemaul projects and had villages compete for them. Outperforming villages were called ‘self-reliant (*jarib*)’ and yet received financial rewards, whereas underperforming ‘rudimentary (*gicho*)’ villages had to solely rely on their own resources. In this way, the number of Saemaul projects grew from 385,000 in 1970 to 2,667,000 in 1978 and the average rural household income leapt from KRW 255,800 to 1,432,800 (Whang, 1979, 41, 46). Saemaul projects included everyday practices such as street sweeping and food canning to technical projects such as paving roads and growing new varieties of rice.

The rural development campaign soon became part of the Park regime's dictatorial scheme. In 1972 Park declared a state of emergency in the name of national security, dismissed the National Assembly, and enforced a constitutional revision. The Yushin constitution enabled him to imprison his political opponents, persecute people for voicing dissent, and remain in power in perpetuity (though he was assassinated in 1979). The marriage between the Yushin constitution and the Saemaul campaign structured all parts of rural society under the flag of Saemaul. By presidential decree, a Community Development Committee was established in every rural village. Men were organized into Saemaul Farmers' Clubs and women into Saemaul Mothers' Clubs.³ Despite being a rural development campaign, Saemaul was not led by the ministry of agriculture, nor did it include any measures addressing the structural vulnerabilities of rural economy (Park and Han, 1999). Oh (2002) contends that the regime implemented Saemaul to mobilize rural resources for its project of modernization and make rural communities governable. Sonn and Gimm (2013) further argue that Saemaul was an organizational technology of the regime designed to implant a developmentalist governmentality and cultivate a passively consenting, subordinate working class.

Defining Saemaul as an instance of coercion, however, is only partially merited since it fails to address why resistance to Saemaul was so rare and why Saemaul did not disappear after the Park regime. Indeed, whereas protests against the regime's labor policies and authoritarianism were frequent in urban areas, farmers did not dissent to Saemaul until the final years of the regime when it forced the farmers to plant the government-sponsored *Tong-il* rice, despite this variety's failures.

³ Women played a crucial role in carrying out Saemaul projects, but Saemaul often recognized women as ‘mothers’ as it mobilized their reproductive health for population management (Hur, 2013).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات