



Center for Korea Studies
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Reconstructing the Present: Agriculture and Food as Vehicles for Social Critique and Transformation in Contemporary Korea

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This paper investigates the intersection between neoliberalism, agricultural food cooperatives and social formations in Korea since the 1990s through three areas of study. First, it examines the role of cooperatives, such as Hansalim, iCOOP Korea and the Korean Women Peasant Association, in tackling the influences of neoliberalism on the social and material milieu of the urban and rural. Linked to a long history of agricultural cooperatives contesting hegemonic forces since the colonial period, these cooperatives have created a culture of food through which they have articulated and materialized an alternative system of intimate production, consumption and exchange that is based on the goal of protecting and enhancing human life and nature. Second, this paper studies the culture of food's part in furnishing a counter-narrative of development that has helped to deepen social democratic drives for change in contemporary Korea—especially the campaign for economic democracy. The third area of study focuses on the prospects of agriculture, the rural and the pastoral becoming effective sources for social critique and forging sentiments and desires for social change in Korea and elsewhere through a process of valuation—reclamation—that problematizes and severs them from their legacy as conservative and traditional forces.

Albert L. Park is an associate professor of history at Claremont McKenna College. As a historian of modern Korea and East Asia, his current research interest is centered on the relationship between culture and political economy and alternative forms of modernity. Analyzing the intersection of modernity, religion, and the pastoral, his book manuscript, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism and Protest in Japanese Occupied Korea*, will be published by the University of Hawai'i Press in 2015. He is also the coeditor of *Encountering Modernity: Christianity and East Asia* (University of Hawai'i Press), which includes his article "A Sacred Economy of Value and Production: Capitalism and Protestantism in Early Modern Korea (1885-1919)." His next research project is on alternative conceptions and practices of democracy under neoliberalism through architecture, design, and food movements since the 1990s. It is tentatively titled *Designing and Building Utopia: Culturally Reconstructing Democracy in Contemporary South Korea through Architecture, Design, and Food*.

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