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Translating Global Values into National Contexts

The Rise of Environmentalism in South Korea

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abstract: Since the 1970s, the global rise of environmentalism has attracted growing attention from the social sciences. Although most studies acknowledge the lack of a direct link between environmental activism and environmental policy changes, grassroots activists, social movements and NGOs are widely considered to have made a significant contribution to the global spread of environmentalism. Recently, this standard account has been strongly challenged by neoinstitutionalist approaches. In lieu of elevating the role of local activists, they explain the global rise of environmentalism as a top-down process by stressing the importance of the so-called 'world environmental regime'. In an attempt to bridge this conceptual divide, the present article examines the interaction between local/national activists and the world environmental regime in the case of South Korea. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of statements, network data and surveys, this study describes the social mechanism driving the rise of environmentalism and demonstrates that its accession was equally shaped by the expansion of the world environmental regime, national configurations of power and the cultural creativity of environmental activists.

keywords: environmentalism institutionalism social movements South Korea
world society

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the global rise of environmentalism has attracted increasing attention from the social sciences. A good deal of sociological literature attributes the spread of environmentalism to a multiplicity of interrelated causes. These include the severity of (albeit socially constructed) ecological problems and risks, the vulnerability and sensitivity of social organizations and structures, the availability of alternative approaches for confronting

environmental risks and the general perception and evaluation of environmental problems (Brand and Reusswig, 2007: 659). Although most studies acknowledge the lack of a direct link between environmental movement activism and related policy changes, grassroots activists, social movements and NGOs are usually considered to have made a significant contribution to the global spread of environmentalism (Castells, 1997; Rootes, 2004; Rucht, 1999: 211–15).

Recently, this standard account has been strongly challenged by neo-institutionalist approaches. Rather than elevating the role of local activists, such approaches explain the global rise of environmentalism as a top-down process by stressing the importance of the so-called world environmental regime (Frank et al., 2000), which is described as ‘a partially integrated collection of world-level organizations, understandings, and assumptions that specify the relationship of human society to nature’ (Meyer et al., 1997: 623). The world environmental regime emerged in the late 20th century in conjunction with an increasing number of international organizations, treaties and norms dealing with environmental issues. As nation-states join this institutional network, they simultaneously assent to certain environmental norms and values, which they in turn enact by establishing environmental governmental ministries, taking appropriate measures against air and water pollution, and designating protected areas or natural reserves, etc. Consequently, the global rise of environmentalism should not be attributed to national and local actors; it is rather an outcome of cultural pressures exerted by the world environmental regime (Frank et al., 2000: 123–4).

In an attempt to bridge this conceptual divide, the present article examines the relation between local/national activists and the world environmental regime in the case of South Korea. Since the early 1960s, South Korea has experienced impressive economic growth. In the 1980s, South Korean dissidents increasingly attributed pollution problems to the economic policy of the military regime. In the immediate wake of the 1987 democratic transition, the influence of environmental activism could be described as moderate (Lee, 1999: 103–5). During the 1990s, however, the movement gained considerable momentum and was able to situate itself at the centre of public discourse. Although the world environmental regime had a substantial impact on this development, autonomous configurations of cultural and political elites also played a crucial role by creatively translating global environmental ideas and values into the Korean cultural context.

This article aims to provide a broader understanding of the social mechanism¹ behind the process of cultural translation in a globalized context. It begins by dealing with cultural translation from a theoretical perspective and moves on to examine the translation process in the

case of South Korea. The final section summarizes the major results of the study.

Ideas, Translation and Cultural Resonance

Many scholars regard the diffusion of cultural models and ideas as a central feature of globalization. In this context, it is important to distinguish between two types of ideas – normative and cognitive – which are relevant for social change (Luhmann, 1972). Normative ideas guide social change by distinguishing between desirable and undesirable modes of conduct or states of existence. Because they describe the world how it is supposed to be, they are relatively resistant to falsification and disappointment. Any time reality fails to comply with a normative idea, actors tend to change their situation – through sanctions or protest – rather than their expectations, i.e. the content of normative guidelines. Consequently, normative ideas constrain institutional change by limiting the range of choices ‘that decision-making elites are likely to perceive as acceptable and legitimate both to their constituents and themselves’ (Campbell, 2004: 96). In contrast, cognitive ideas, such as (scientific) theories, models and taken-for-granted worldviews, describe ‘relationships between two things or between some thing and a characteristic of it’ (Snow et al., 1986: 469). Cognitive ideas are much more open to revision and thus conducive to learning than normative ideas. If predicted outcomes deviate from expectations, their very content can be – at least in principle – reflected and changed. Consequently, cognitive ideas permit criticism and reflection, and with that development and change, and can open up new options rather than limiting choices.

As cognitive and normative ideas are both part and parcel of a cultural tradition, there is some pressure for them to coexist in a relatively consistent state of alignment. Nevertheless, they represent different ways to encounter the world: while cognitive ideas refer to a relatively independent reality to which actors have to adapt themselves, normative ideas ‘formulate the directions of choice in dilemmas of action’ (Parsons, 1991: 379). In other words, normative ideas are guided to some degree by cognitive concepts, but only partially determined by them since the former always refer to the *meaning* of a situation according to the values and preferences of an actor. Thus, the persuasiveness of a new idea largely depends on the degree to which either cognitive or normative patterns dominate the interpretation of a situation. If actors accord priority to cognitive orientations and interests, new (‘efficient’) ideas are likely to find greater acceptance. The worldwide spread of scientific and instrumental rationality is strongly linked to their cognitive persuasiveness (Schwinn, 2006: 222–5). Yet if actors give priority to

normative orientations, the integration of new ideas will be more difficult. Their acceptance requires a process of translation and adaptation to the dominant value system.

As described by Campbell, translation involves 'the combination of locally available principles and practices with new ones originating elsewhere. Thus, translation is a potentially important source of revolutionary change' (Campbell, 2004: 65). As it always involves disputes between different actors with opposing definitions of the situation, translation is inherently both creative and contentious (Joas, 1996; Kern and Nam, 2009). However, not every translation is equally viable. First, the more actors grant priority to normative orientations, the more cultural resonance is required. Following Snow and Benford (1988; 2000: 619–22), cultural resonance is the product of a framing process. Accordingly, the persuasiveness of new ideas and values increases if they are (1) compatible with the existing values, beliefs and ideas of a collectivity (*centrality*), (2) provide answers and solutions to individual problems (*experiential commensurability*) and (3) resonate with culturally deeply rooted narratives, myths and folk tales (*narrative fidelity*). Consequently, the success of any potential or pending translation depends on the degree of 'fit' between new ideas and the given cultural orientations of a collectivity. Second, translation must be conceived as a collective project. Therefore, changes in *political opportunity structures* (POS) 'that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action' (Tarrow, 1994: 85) greatly affect its outcome. Usually, POS are identified with the state (Eisinger, 1973). However, Goldstone recently criticized this approach as too narrow, while demanding that collective actors 'need to be situated in a dynamic relational field in which the ongoing actions and interests of state actors, allied and counter-movement groups, and the public at large all influence social movement emergence, activity, and outcomes' (Goldstone, 2004: 333). Therefore, an analysis of translation processes should also take into account changes in the larger institutional environment, *including the growing influence of global institutions*.

A Case Study: Environmentalism in South Korea

This section focuses on the framing processes and changes in the broader opportunity structures that affected the impressive rise of environmentalism in South Korea in the 1990s. The following analysis is structured in four parts. In a first step, the *centrality* of environmental values in South Korea is discussed from a comparative perspective. The results show that pro-environmental values exhibit a strong correspondence with traditional cultural patterns. The second part provides an overview of changes in the opportunity structure of the South Korean environmental movement,

and the third part examines the ideological transformation of South Korean environmentalism. In the course of the analysis, a particular focus is accorded to translation activities of South Korean intellectuals and activists who increased the *narrative fidelity* and *experiential commensurability* of their ideology by linking it to pre-existing elements of Korean cultural and religious tradition. In a last step, the impact of the world environmental regime is demonstrated to have been not only cultural in nature. South Korea's ascension to the world environmental regime at the Rio conference in 1992 provoked a significant shift in the power relations within the social network of the environmental movement.

Environmental Attitudes from a Comparative Perspective

According to Meyer et al. (1997: 625), the world environmental regime is dominated by a rationalist and scientized culture. Picking up on this argument, Frank (1997: 412) postulates a linear process of functionalization and physicalization, 'in which nature lost its primary connections to God and the spirit world (nature as creation) and gained connections to the physical laws of the universe'. This statement resembles classical secularization theory, which suggests that secular ideas have increasingly usurped the position of religious worldviews.² Consequently, Frank predicts the rise of a scientific *nature-as-ecosystem model* according to which:

... each component of nature is dependent on the larger natural system for exchanges of energy and matter. Homo sapiens is but one species in the larger biosphere, which itself is subsumed within a larger physical universe. The basic notion in the ecosystem model is that nature, including a naturalized human society, constitutes an integrated physical system. (Frank, 1997: 418)

However, recent empirical studies show that the pattern described by classical secularization theory is largely restricted to Europe (Casanova, 2007: 332). In other parts of the world, religion has developed along strikingly different paths and the variety of religious responses to modernization depends on specific structural, cultural and historical conditions (Joas and Wiegandt, 2007). Traditional or spiritual views of nature are thus not necessarily replaced by western scientific rationality. On the contrary, in many cases scientific rationality and traditional (religious) ideas are merged into new cultural models and perceptions of nature. The global spread of the nature-as-ecosystem model consequently does not result in a homogeneous (scientific) perception and awareness of environmental problems. Rather, the absorption of scientific views of nature greatly depends on the given cultural context.

In line with this argument, recent public opinion surveys on environmental attitudes and values in different parts of the world revealed striking variations in levels of support for environmental protection (Abramson, 1997; Chatterjee, 2008; Dunlap and Mertig, 1997; Lee and Kidd, 1997a, 1997b; Pierce, 1997; Pierce et al., 1987). Inglehart (1995), for example, examined the level of environmental concern in 18 countries. Based on data from the World Values Survey (1990/1), he found that public support for environmental protection – measured by the Environmental Protection Index (EPI) (see below) – ranged from 24 percent in Hungary to 69 percent in Sweden. The Gallup Survey ‘Health of the Planet’ (1992) found similar differences in its examination of environmental attitudes across 22 countries (Brechin and Kempton, 1994, 1997). In contrast to previous, more conventional explanations which proposed a link between growing environmental awareness and the spread of postmaterialism, these two studies demonstrated that environmental concern is by no means restricted to economically developed countries. Although postmaterialism appears to be an important source for the development of environmental consciousness, other cultural and historical factors must also be relevant (Kim, 1999).

Survey data indicate a considerable commitment on the part of the South Korean population to environmental protection in the 1980s and 1990s. Table 1 presents an overview of positive responses to the four questions which constituted Inglehart’s (1995: 64) EPI for 10 major countries in East Asia, North America and Western Europe.³ Ultimately, as illustrated by participant responses, East Asian nations demonstrated a considerable edge over North American and Western European countries when it came to environmental awareness. South Korea in particular shows a high level of public support for environmental protection. At 58 percent, it has the highest EPI score of all countries listed in the table. This finding indicates that environmental protection had already figured as a central value in South Korean society and, significantly, *before* the state entered the world environmental regime in 1992.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, environmental concern experienced a sharp increase in South Korea. Among the general population, those who disagreed with government environmental policy increased from 24 percent (1982) to 51 percent (1997) (Ku, 2000: 112), while the proportion of survey respondents who considered the environment as the most important policy issue increased from 6 percent in 1982 to 17 percent in 1987 to 21 percent in 1990 and 23 percent in 1997 (Ku, 1999: 23). In 1982, 7 percent of the respondents preferred environmental protection over economic growth, and 52 percent voiced the need for a balanced relationship between the two areas. By 1992, the proportion of those in favour of environmental protection over economic growth increased to 52 percent. Only

Table 1 World Values Survey Measures of Support for EPI (in percentages)

Country	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	EPI
South Korea	84	76	50	78	58
China	78	82	54	68	52
Japan	68	51	44	88	47
Canada	73	63	48	78	42
USA	74	63	46	71	40
Great Britain	67	68	42	78	41
West Germany	53	49	43	88	39
Italy	69	55	22	84	30
France	61	54	26	81	28

Note: Inglehart’s Environmental Protection Index (EPI) is based on an evaluation of the following four statements: (a) ‘I would be willing to give a part of my income if I were sure that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution’ (agree or strongly agree). (b) ‘I would agree to an increase in taxes if the extra money were used to prevent environmental pollution’ (agree or strongly agree). (c) ‘The government should reduce environmental pollution, but it should not cost me any money’ (disagree or strongly disagree). (d) ‘Protecting the environment and fighting pollution is less urgent than often suggested’ (agree or strongly agree). A high level of environmental support is assigned to respondents if they ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the first two items and ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with the last two items. Accordingly, the overall EPI scores are much lower than the scores for single items.

Source: World Values Survey (1990/1).

29 percent of the population still advocated a harmonious relationship as the priority.

On the global scale, environmentalism varies not only with respect to the *centrality* of environmental protection in different societies; there are also substantial differences concerning its *interrelatedness with other values*.⁴ For example, Inglehart attributed the spread of environmentalism in Western Europe and North America to the rise of postmaterialism (Abramson, 1997; Inglehart, 1995; Lee and Kidd, 1997a, 1997b). In those contexts, support for environmental protection is closely connected to what are described as ‘liberal’ values. Inglehart claims that postmaterialists ‘are more likely to be concerned about the environment, to deemphasize economic growth, and to support the women’s movement and the peace movement’ (Inglehart and Abramson, 1995: 10). Indeed, this assertion appears to be well founded, particularly with respect to environmental attitudes in many economically developed countries (Aoyagi-Usui et al., 2003; Pierce, 1997; Pierce et al., 1987).

Nonetheless, postmaterialism can by no means be regarded as the sole cultural wellspring of global environmentalism. Table 2 compares

public support for environmental protection among materialists and postmaterialists in East Asia, North America and Western Europe. Based on these findings, support for environmental protection among *both* materialists and postmaterialists in East Asia is considerably higher than in western countries. Moreover, the relative difference among environmental supporters within these two categories turns out to be significantly lower in international comparison. In a comparative study of environmentalism in the US and Japan, Pierce et al. (1987) identified *two* distinct sources of support for environmental protection in Japan: one following the general trend towards postmaterialist values in the industrialized world, and the other expressing the traditional Japanese view of nature. The authors explain this observation by the fact that ‘much of the substance of the “New Environmental Paradigm” must ring familiar to the Japanese, given the traditional Japanese view of the interdependence of humans and nature’ (Pierce et al., 1987: 76).⁵ In other words, local traditional worldviews and religions may also be taken as constituting an important source for the global rise of environmentalism.

In contrast to the anthropocentric worldview of western cultures, East Asian religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are considered to be more ‘ecocentric’ (Berthrong, 2003; Choi, 2002; Kim, 2002; Miller,

Table 2 Support for EPI by Materialists and Postmaterialists (in percentages)

Country	Materialists	Postmaterialists	Difference
South Korea	55	65	10
China	48	45	-3
Japan	52	59	7
Canada	26	59	33
USA	28	52	24
Great Britain	32	49	17
West Germany	27	57	30
Italy	21	40	19
France	18	46	28

Note: The measurement of postmaterialism is based on Inglehart’s index (four-item battery), calculated from the question: ‘There is a lot of talk these days about what this country’s goals should be in the next 10 or 15 years. Would you please say which one of them you yourself consider most important in the long-run: (a) Maintaining the order of nation; (b) Giving the people more say in important government decisions; (c) Fighting rising prices; (d) Protecting freedom of speech.’ Respondents are asked to choose their first and second priorities from the above items. Respondents with materialist orientations choose (a) and (c); respondents with postmaterialist value-orientations select (b) and (d). All other response combinations are categorized as ‘mixed’. Distributions for the latter are omitted from Table 2.

Source: World Values Survey (1990/1).

2003; Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel, 2003; Thompson, 1994; Tucker, 2003). Instead of ascribing value based on material and physical benefits accruing through its use, nature is valued in its intrinsic worth: 'The person is linked to the cosmos through life generating patterns reflecting both order and change of the universe' (Tucker, 2003: 124). Sensitivity to environmental problems thus tends to be relatively strong. While western environmentalism is considered to run counter to traditional (western) values and ideas, East Asian environmentalism embraces both 'postmaterialist' and traditional values (Aoyagi-Usui et al., 2003). Given this mixed constellation, it is not surprising that East Asian supporters of environmental protection generally display more conservative political attitudes (Table 3). For example, 67 percent of the South Koreans who scored high on the EPI characterized their political orientation as 'right'. This self-positioning deviates considerably from supporters of environmental protection in western countries. These results point to salient differences in the cultural and political conditions required for successful environmental mobilization in East Asia.⁶ while environmental movements in western countries need to frame their issues against traditional values, environmental movements in East Asia encounter a *supportive* cultural tradition.⁷

These findings challenge us to question the proposed contradiction between the rationalization of nature and its sacralization. Our results indicate that traditional East Asian perceptions of nature have not been replaced by the nature-as-ecosystem concept of modern science. In contrast, it appears that scientific rationality has undergone a successful process of translation and become intertwined with traditional Korean values, and moreover that the environmental movement played a crucial

Table 3 *Self-Positioning on the Political Scale of the General Population and Those Scoring 'High' on the EPI (in percentages)*

Country	Political orientation of population		Political orientation of 'high' EPI scores	
	Left	Right	Left	Right
South Korea	34	66	33	67
China	–	–	–	–
Japan	38	62	40	60
Canada	54	46	55	45
USA	55	45	59	41
Great Britain	60	40	55	45
West Germany	62	38	65	35
Italy	66	34	63	37
France	71	29	78	22

Source: World Values Survey (1990/1).

role in this process. In order to examine these assumptions, the next two subsections focus on the historical development of the environmental movement and the process of translation.

Connecting National and Global Environmentalism

The roots of the South Korean environmental movement go back to the 1960s and 1970s, when the country experienced a rapid industrialization with high economic growth rates. During this period, environmental activists mainly focused on pollution problems caused by the military regime's developmental policy, thereby concentrating on compensation for the effects of environmental damage (Ku, 1996: 161). Activists attributed the increase in pollution and the suffering of local residents to the actions and policy of the ruling establishment and demanded the democratization of political structures. After the collapse of the military regime in 1987, the political opportunity structure expanded and the situation of the environmental movement gradually improved. The number of officially registered environmental non-profit organizations (NPOs) increased from 7 (1987) to 22 (1992) (see also Ku, 2004: 673; Shin et al., 2005: 80). Following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992, the number of Korean environmental organizations jumped yet again from 89 in 1997 to 175 in 2001. In the same period, the annual number of start-ups of environmental NPOs greatly surpassed the average number of newly established organizations in other fields of the non-profit sector, such as women's issues, education, labour and administrative reform. Moreover, the environmental movement was increasingly able to situate itself at the centre of the public discourse. A quantitative content analysis of two daily newspapers with national distribution (*Dong-a Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*)⁸ shows that the number of articles mentioning the 'environmental movement' (*Hwangyeong Undong*) or the 'anti-pollution movement' (*Konghaechubang Undong*) increased from 63 (1990) to 1221 (2008).

How can the rapid growth of environmentalism be explained? Classical approaches in social movement theory underscore the expansion of political opportunities and the growing influx of resources into the social movement sector after the 1987 democratic transition. But what can account for the disproportionate success rate of the environmentalist movement over similar collective endeavours? And what caused the movement to gain such extraordinary momentum after 1993/4 (see Figures 1 and 2)? From a neoinstitutionalist perspective, 1992 figured as a major turning point as the year South Korea entered the global environmental regime through the country's participation in the Rio conference and consecutive ratification of numerous international environmental

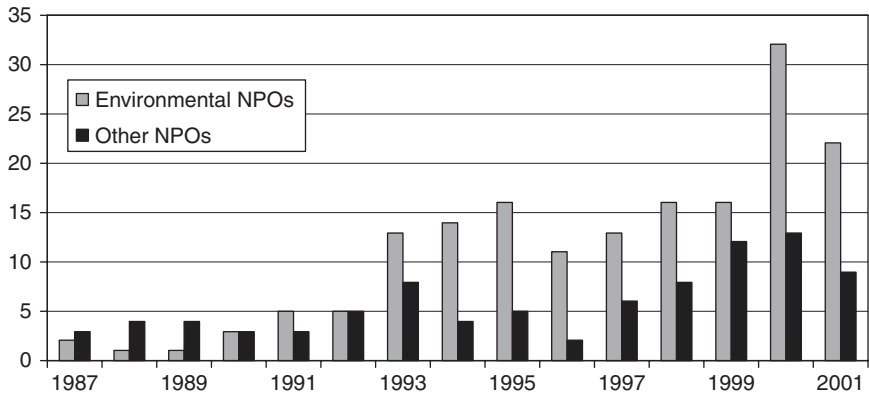


Figure 1 Start-ups of Environmental Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) Compared with the Average Number of Start-ups in the Fields of Gender, Labour Education and Administrative Reform ('Other NPOs'), 1987–2001

Sources: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Gender Equality, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education (all sources in the Korean language).

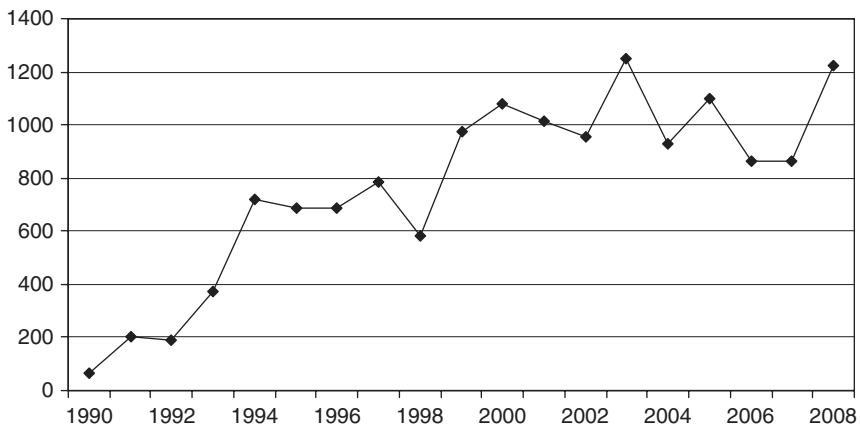


Figure 2 Newspaper Articles Mentioning the 'Environmental Movement' (Hwangyeong Undong) or the 'Anti-Pollution Movement' (Konghaechubang Undong), 1990–2008

Sources: Dong-a Ilbo and Hankyoreh newspapers.

agreements.⁹ However, the event in Rio not only marked the entry of the South Korean government into the world environmental regime, but also gave rise to significant ideological and structural changes within the South Korean environmental movement (Ku, 1996: 164; Lee, 2000).¹⁰

Prior to the UNCED conference, preparatory committees comprised of environmental experts, NGO representatives and public leaders convened in many countries in order to accompany and advise the diplomatic process of the conference. Moderate civic groups like the YMCA, YWCA and Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) assumed a leading role in the formation of the UNCED Korean committee, which consisted of about 100 well-known lawmakers, journalists, union and religious leaders, as well as civic activists. The Korean committee was in charge of preparing the UNCED conference.¹¹ To that end, it cooperated closely with governmental officials and even went so far as to accept donations from large national companies (*Chaebol*) in order to cover the delegates' travel expenses for the trip to Rio. The latter action resulted in deep divisions among environmentalists. Some leading members of the influential Korean Anti-Pollution Movement Association (KAPMA) consequently resigned from their posts. They criticized the participation of government and corporate representatives in the UNCED preparatory committee, as they regarded these same actors as the parties responsible for the environmental problems they now seemed eager to address. Moreover, the top-ranking former KAPMA members were critical of the cooperative stance adopted by moderate organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA and CCEJ towards the South Korean political and economic establishment; the dissenting leaders ultimately distanced themselves from the committee (*Hankyoreh*, 30 April 1992).¹² As a consequence, the moderate wing of the environmental activists was able to assume the leadership of the South Korean environmental movement.

In 1993, shortly after the Rio conference, KAPMA merged with seven other environmental organizations and established the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements (KFEM). Today, the KFEM is regarded as one of the major civic organizations in South Korea with about 85,000 members. The Rio conference obviously supported the networking of those civic activists who wanted to let go of the radical anti-government stance of the 1980s democracy movement. In the process, the majority of environmental activists abandoned their radical opposition towards the state. This shift enabled environmental activists to succeed in increasing their influence vis-a-vis the government and public sphere in the following years.

Moving to the Cultural Centre

As mentioned earlier, Korean survey data indicate a high degree of centrality for pro-environmental values in the 1980s and 1990s. However, Snow and Benford (1988; 2000: 619–22) stress that centrality alone is insufficient when it comes to the acceptance of new ideas, values and practices. The prospect of such innovations meeting with any resonance also

depends on *experiential commensurability* and *narrative fidelity*. These two concepts view the success of environmental mobilization as highly contingent upon the concomitant success of civic activists' efforts to adjust their agendas to reflect the specific problems and cultural traditions of their addressees, i.e. a local population (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the solid political conservatism of most South Koreans (see Table 3) presented a major obstacle for the mobilization of pro-environmental support. In this period, environmental activists conceptualized nature as a domain of class struggle. They criticized the developmentalist ideology of the military regime by drawing on the cultural framework of the so-called *Minjung* democracy movement in the 1980s (Kern, 2005, 2007, 2009). *Minjung* was the term which dissident intellectuals used to describe the poverty-based suffering of the Korean masses (Chang, 2007; Koo, 1999; Lee, 2005; Wells, 1995). In this account, economic development had served to increase the power and the well-being of the ruling elite, while the majority of the populace remained politically suppressed and excluded from the benefits of economic prosperity.

The *Minjung* narrative dominated the perspective of the early Korean environmental movement during the 1980s, as it threw its weight behind the democratic struggle against the military regime (Ku, 1996). After the transition to democracy in 1987, leading environmental activists and organizations established KAPMA in April 1988. As mentioned earlier, this organization was a dominant actor in the Korean environmental network. Considering the history of Korean environmental activism, it is not surprising that the interpretative framework of KAPMA remained strongly influenced by ideas of the *Minjung* democracy movement. In its founding declaration, the association states that 'the life of the *Minjung* and the existence of the Korean nation' are 'endangered like a candle in the calm before a storm'.¹³ Furthermore, it describes the peninsular environment as faced with imminent devastation: air and water pollution along with thousands of nuclear weapons threatening to wipe out the existence of the entire Korean nation. Following this drastic assessment, the activists then proceed to reveal the culprits behind this state of affairs:

If it is so, who is responsible for this situation? . . . We can firmly declare: The main perpetrators are the monopolistic *Chaebol* looking frantically for opportunities to earn money, the military dictatorship that guards them and the United States dominating and regarding the Korean peninsula as a colonial rubbish dump.¹⁴

Thus, environmental problems were presented here as inextricably linked to conflicts and contradictions within Korean society: victims (*Minjung*) of environmental pollution and nuclear armament are clearly pitted against the political and economic establishment and foreign influences, i.e. the beneficiaries of this situation. KAPMA proposed four strategies to address

this problem: the formation of an organization that unifies victims of pollution, democracy activists, environmental experts and researchers; raising popular awareness of the connection between environmental problems and sociostructural contradictions through environmental education; close cooperation with other wings of the Korean democracy movement; and finally, participation in international campaigns and activities in order to support 'Minjung pollution victims'¹⁵ and promote global peace.

In sum, the collective identity of the environmental movement did not come into its own during this period. Its conceptual framework remained subsumed under the *Minjung* ideology and the environmental movement itself an adjunct of its democracy-oriented 'big brother'. The concept of the relation between society and nature remained underdeveloped and framed in the context of class struggle. However, in the mid-1980s, this situation underwent a profound change: a number of dissident intellectuals developed an independent ideological framework, which finally took hold in the early 1990s. Although this new set of meanings was deeply rooted in Korean tradition, it simultaneously introduced all important characteristic features of global environmentalism: a universalist perspective, scientific analysis and a systematic environmental ethic (Frank, 1997).

Drawing on the Korean religion of *Donghak* ('Eastern Learning') – which emerged in the late 19th century as an influential alternative to the increasing popularity of Christianity in Korea – intellectuals attempted to connect environmentalism with Korean cultural heritage. The key concept of this new philosophy was 'Life' (*Saengmyeong*) (Kim, 2003a, 2003b). Intellectuals argued that modern society is separated from the 'true' order of life and considered this separation to be 'largely the result of the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body and the Newtonian conception of a mechanical world' (Yu, 1992: 101). They criticized the typical western conception of the individual as an isolated and self-contained entity. This worldview was, furthermore, deemed inadequate for confronting modern ecological challenges. In line with Oriental tradition, this group of intellectuals regarded mind and body not as two separate entities, but as the product of a vital energy called *Ki*. As with all other things in the universe – flora, fauna, human beings and even material objects – this energy forms the basis of all things, rendering general existence as a highly interrelated phenomenon. Consequently, this philosophy centres around a strong reverence for life.

While the *Minjung* frame focused on the relation between the perpetrators and victims of pollution, the Life frame moves the focus of environmentalism to the interrelation between individual human beings and nature. In lieu of an emphasis on class struggle, it advocates dietary awareness, organic farming and administrative and economic decentralization as appropriate means for resolving environmental problems. These

concepts helped to broaden the experiential commensurability of the environmental frame of reference considerably. As regards movement-related mobilization, the *Minjung* ideology limited its addressees to the victims of environmental pollution, while expressing its critique of government developmental policy. By emphasizing general health issues and living standards, the new environmental framework addressed a broader spectrum of experiences and was, therefore, able to increase the mobilization potential of the movement considerably. At the same time, ideological tensions with the state and society were strongly reduced.

After the division of KAPMA in 1992, the newly established KFEM adopted basic ideas of the Life philosophy and identified industrialization, urbanization and irresponsible consumption as the true causes of ecological problems.¹⁶ The founding declaration of the KFEM provides an impressive illustration of the extent to which former KAPMA activists abandoned their former *Minjung* ideals:

Environmental disruption and pollution have been caused by rapid industrialization and urbanization and by misguided policies which have rashly advanced them. . . . Besides such political and economic causes, we, as individuals, also have come to play roles in destroying and polluting the environment through immoderate consumption.¹⁷

As a solution to the ecological crisis of modern society this group proposed a programme which strongly reflects the concepts of the Life philosophy:

We must go one step further from simply protesting and advance the environmental movement into a voluntary movement in which citizens participate willingly, based on scientific analysis of the causes of environmental destruction. . . . Moreover, we will form a community in which each and every individual has liberty and equality by breaking through short-sighted self-interest and bringing back an order in which humans and nature live in harmony.¹⁸

The symbols and slogans indicative of the Life philosophy were used intensely in connection with several important campaigns targeting dam and tunnel projects (Ku, 2006: 139–43). Besides the KFEM, other leading environmental organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, Green Korea United (founded in 1991) and the Citizens' Coalition for Environmental Justice (formerly the Environment and Development Centre of the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice [CCEJ], founded in 1993) also adopted the new philosophy (Ku, 1996). While the anti-pollution movement of the 1980s was generally perceived as 'radical' and 'leftist', the new approach embraced the Korean cultural tradition and succeeded in moving environmental issues to the centre of the public discourse. Pro-environmental attitudes experienced a rapid diffusion and their spread in turn facilitated the mobilization of resources for the environmental movement. As a

result, the number of environmental organizations rapidly increased (see Figure 1). Those which let go of the 'anti-government' ideology of the *Minjung* democracy movement and adopted a more cooperative attitude towards the South Korean state were able to exert significant influence on environmental policy and received sizeable public funding.

Power Shift in the Environmental Network

This section shows that the ideological transformation of the environmental network was accompanied by power struggles, leading to a significant shift in the distribution of influence within its network structure. The Rio conference played a significant role in this process. However, contrary to neoinstitutionalist arguments (Lechner and Boli, 2005: 82), the 'impact' of the Rio conference was not so much caused by cultural pressures as the Life philosophy was already firmly in place; rather, it offered several incentives for groups to cast off the *Minjung* frame in favour of the new environmental paradigm it proposed, thus effecting significant changes in the opportunity structure of the environmental movement. The following analysis demonstrates the structural transformation of the environmental network in two steps. In the first step, patterns of cooperation and group formation are examined on the basis of a correspondence analysis. The results show that the environmental network was once heavily divided between the supporters of the new (Life philosophy) and previously dominant (*Minjung*) environmental paradigms. In the second step, it is shown how the distribution of influence within the environmental network shifted from one camp to the other in the wake of the Rio conference.

The empirical analysis is based on activity patterns within the South Korean environmental network in the period between 1990 and 1995. The sample includes 138 joint statements and reports pertaining to the joint activities of at least two collective actors from the Internet database of the Korean Democracy Foundation. This database offers the most comprehensive collection of resources related to protest activities in the 1980s and 1990s. The selected cases were either related to an environmental issue or connected to at least one environmental group.¹⁹ This approach aimed at comprehensiveness, i.e. to include as many environmental activities and organizations as possible. Seventy percent of the 138 activities were found to be related to environmental issues. In contrast, environmental groups constituted only 19 percent of all participants. This distribution indicates that environmental groups cooperated closely with many other organizations.

The joint statements and activities of the environmental network were grouped into eight categories (see Table 4). However, coding the groups actually proved to be more difficult in some cases, as a number of groups gave similar or equal priority to multiple issues. For example, the National Teachers' Union is committed to both labour affairs and education policy.

In order to address this problem, the groups were regarded as ‘configurations’ (Ragin, 2000: 64–87), sometimes consisting of two or three issue priorities. The coding process was carried out in two steps. First, the issue priorities of 406 groups were collected. In most cases, they were derived from the group names, as the names of many Korean civic groups are often at the same time a statement describing their main issues. For example the ‘Korean Anti-Nuclear, Anti-Pollution and Peace Institute’ was assigned to the categories ‘environment’ (anti-nuclear, anti-pollution) and ‘peace’ (peace). Based on this strategy, a total of 24 issues was identified. In the second step, similar issue priorities were combined as a further streamlining measure (for example, citizen participation, consumer protection and administration reform were grouped into one category). This process resulted in 12 final categories (Table 5).²⁰

A correspondence analysis was applied in order to examine the map of relations between the actors involved in the environmental network. Basically, correspondence analysis provides insight into ‘the structure of a complex data matrix by replacing the raw data with a more simple data matrix without losing essential information’ (Clausen, 1998: 1). Based on this method, it is possible to visualize data as spatial points of reference. Variable categories with a similar distribution are represented as proximate points, while categories with dissimilar distribution are more distant. Basically, the methods of correspondence and factor analysis are very similar. After transforming and representing the raw scores as points in a data cloud, the next step was to find the *n*-dimensional space that best fits the plotted points. Thus, the data cloud must be rotated in a way that minimizes the distance between each point and the axes of the coordinate system. As a result, the axes can be interpreted as dimensions (factors) which explain the position of the data points within the space. The first dimension explains most of the variance; the second dimension ranks

Table 4 *Issues of the Environmental Network (1990–5)*

Issues	Frequency	%	Cum. %
Environmental policy	34	24.6	24.6
Environmental ethics	29	21.0	45.7
Pollution	25	18.1	63.8
Anti-nuclear and peace	13	9.4	73.2
Anti-government	12	8.7	81.9
Earth Day	9	6.5	88.4
Regional autonomy	9	6.5	94.9
International trade	7	5.1	100
Total	138	100.0	–

Source: Korean Democracy Foundation; at: www.kdemocracy.or.kr/ (accessed 16 January 2009).

Table 5 Issue Priorities of Groups in the Environmental Network (1990–5)

Issue priorities of groups	Frequency	%	Cum. %
Environment	98	18.8	18.8
Citizen participation	82	15.8	34.6
Labour	69	13.3	47.9
Peace and unification	58	11.2	59.0
Religion	57	11.0	70.0
Education and cultural reform	44	8.5	78.5
Farmers and agricultural workers	27	5.2	83.7
Health	24	4.6	88.3
Youth	20	3.8	92.1
Women	18	3.5	95.6
Political opposition	9	1.7	97.3
Other	14	2.7	100.0
Total	520 ^a	100.0	–

^a As multiple issues were identified for some groups, the total number of issue priorities exceeds the number of groups.

Source: Korean Democracy Foundation; at: www.kdemocracy.or.kr/ (accessed 16 January 2009).

directly behind it, etc. The maximum number of axes is $z - 1$, where z is the number of categories of variables in the table.

The correspondence analysis for the network of the South Korean environmental movement produced six dimensions. The following discussion is limited to the first two dimensions, which explained about 75 percent of the total variance. A plot of the results is provided in Figure 3. On the whole, these empirical findings support our descriptive account of the environmental movement. The network was previously divided between two groups: field A contains progressive parties, unification, labour and farmers' groups, who mainly participated in anti-nuclear and anti-government campaigns. The confrontational approach of these groups and issues was typical of the 'old' *Minjung* movement. Field D contains religious, youth and citizen participation groups with agendas centring around environmental policy reforms, regional autonomy and the opposition of certain international trade agreements. These groups strongly sympathized with the politically moderate approach of the Life philosophy. Field B is located between the two camps and contains environmental groups in a narrower sense; campaigns in this field focus mainly on pollution problems and environmental ethics.

In the next step, a social network analysis was applied. 'Centrality' is often taken as an important measure for the description of social networks. It identifies patterns of influence (Jansen, 2006: 127–62). Most centrality measures assume that the actor in the centre of a star-shaped network enjoys the highest possible degree of centrality. In contrast,

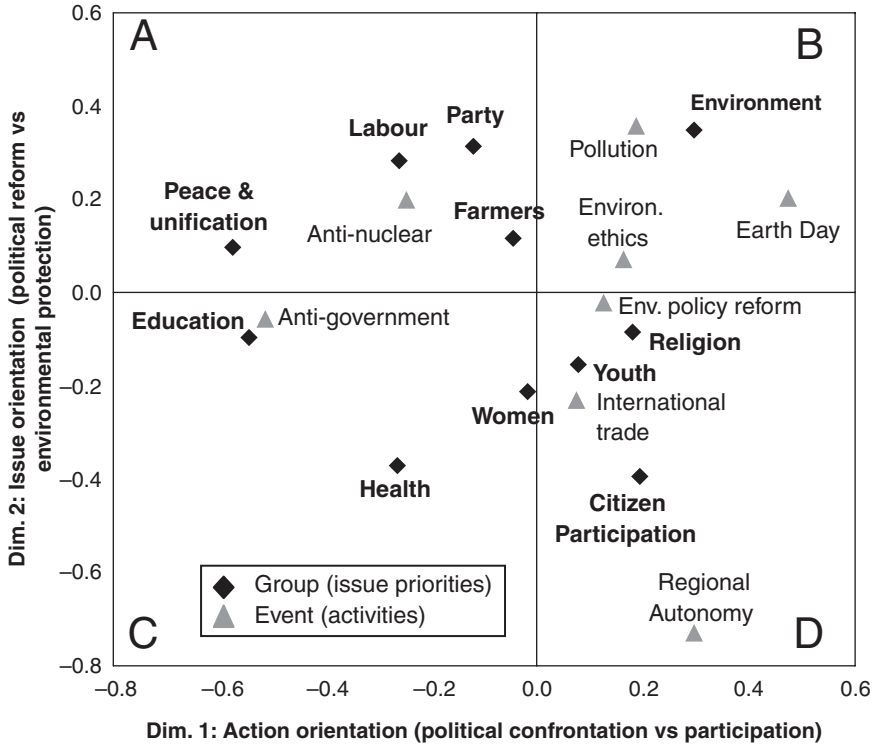


Figure 3 Correspondence Analysis of the Environmental Network (1990–5)
 Source: Korean Democracy Foundation; at: www.kdemocracy.or.kr/ (accessed 16 January 2009).

circular networks have the lowest level of centrality, as none of the members is in a privileged position when it comes to the distribution of influence. Among various measures used to evaluate the distribution of power in social networks, ‘degree centrality’ counts the number of direct ties between a network node and the node’s neighbours. This indicator provides information about the extent to which an actor is involved in the activities of the network.

Table 6 compares the degree centralities of the 10 leading organizations in the South Korean environmental network before and after the Rio conference. From 1990 to 1992, it turns out that the network’s most influential groups were located in fields A or B. This means that the *Minjung* ideology still played a significant role. From 1993 to 1995, following the Rio conference, the centre of power shifted from field AB to field BD. Among the 10 leading organizations, not a single group was located in field A.

Table 6 Degrees of Centrality of the 10 Leading Environmental Organizations

1990–2 (183 groups)			1993–5 (251 groups)				
Organization	Category	Degree	Field	Organization	Category	Degree	Field
KAPMA	Environment	155	B	YMCA	Citizen participation/religious	170	D
NFF	Farming	83	A	CCEJ	Citizen participation	168	D
KTU	Labour/education	81	A	KFEM	Environment	167	B
CCEJ	Citizen participation	63	D	KWAU	Women	129	C
KNPI	Environment/peace	61	B/A	YKA	Citizen participation	95	D
Gwangju RIEP	Environment	60	B	RIDRIK	Health	85	C
Womenlink	Women	59	C	CEM	Religious	85	D
CFA	Farming/religious	59	A/D	Buddhist CCEJ	Citizen participation/religious	83	D
Mokpo GRI	Environment	59	B	Consumers Korea	Citizen participation	83	D
NPMA	Peace	58	A	Local Power	Citizen participation	79	D

Abbreviations: KAPMA = Korean Anti-Pollution Movement Association; NFF = National Farmers' Federation; KTU = Korean Teachers' Union; CCEJ = Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice; KNPI = Korean Anti-Nuclear and Anti-Pollution Institute; Gwangju RIEP = Gwangju Research Institute of Environmental Pollution; CFA = Korean Catholic Farmers' Association; Mokpo GRI = Mokpo Green Research Institute; NPMA = Anti-Nuclear and Peace Movement Association; KFEM = Korean Federation of Environmental Movements; KWAU = Korean Women's Association United; YKA = Young Korean Academy; RIDRIK = Research Institute of the Differently Abled Persons' Rights in Korea; CEM = Christian Ethics Movement.

Source: Korean Democracy Foundation; at: www.kdemocracy.or.kr/ (accessed 16 January 2009). The analysis was performed with the software Ucinet.

This result supports the assumption that the *Minjung* ideology lost its central position to the supporters of the Life philosophy.

Conclusion

This article has examined the social mechanism behind the process of cultural translation in a globalized context. While the expansion of the world environmental regime had a significant impact on the rise of the South Korean environmental movement, the results of the present article indicate strong support for the argument that cultural creativity was also at work. Our analysis consisted of three components. First, survey data indicate that respondents in South Korea and other East Asian countries generally accord a high priority to environmental protection. In other words, pro-environmental values exhibit a high degree of *centrality* in this context. However, environmental support was also closely *interrelated* with traditional and conservative political values. As long as the South Korean environmental movement retained its ties to the progressive *Minjung* ideology, with its strong oppositional stance towards the government and capitalist companies, it was not able to reap the full benefits of the generally favourable pro-environmental climate within the broader society.

Second, by picking up on themes of the global environmental discourse, moderate groups and activists were able to change their collective identity and moved from the periphery to the cultural centre of the public sphere. Instead of framing environmental problems as a result of class conflicts, they attributed it to a conflict between society (individuals) and nature. In this process, translation was crucial: by mobilizing traditional Korean cultural and religious resources, intellectuals and activists increased the *experiential commensurability* and *narrative fidelity* of their conceptual framework and improved the alignment of local environmentalism with global discourses at the same time. Accordingly, the activists were not limited to the role of a mere 'enactor' of the world environmental regime. Instead, they made a significant contribution to the rise and growth of environmentalism by merging global themes with local traditions.

Third, the chief impact of the world environmental regime was not limited to cultural pressures: the Rio conference initiated a major change in the political opportunity structure and paved the way for the successful diffusion of the Life philosophy. It also favoured moderate groups who willingly cooperated with the state. As a result, the new ideology garnered a central position within the environmental network. Consequently, the spread of environmentalism was not just a result of institutional isomorphism. It was based on collective struggles over meaning and power.

This study has demonstrated that the relationship between classical social movement theories and neoinstitutionalism is in need of further clarification. On the one hand, national configurations of culture and power played an important role in the rise of environmentalism in South Korea. On the other hand, the empirical example of the Rio conference demonstrated that the development of the environmental movement was substantially influenced by the world environmental regime. Thus, both theoretical perspectives must be integrated in a broader explanatory account: the encounter of national actors and structures with the global environmental discourse gave rise to an impressive process of creative translation and innovation. In this process, both sides appear to have acted in a mutually reinforcing capacity: by bringing global and sub-global environmental frameworks into alignment, the cultural tradition of South Korea was affirmed and reproduced. This result indicates that cultural homogeneity and diversity are not necessarily a contradiction in terms. Global structures of the world environmental regime and national configurations of power and culture might even stabilize and reproduce each other.

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Notes

1. Drawing from Mayntz (2004: 241), mechanisms are 'sequences of causally linked events that occur repeatedly in reality if certain conditions are given'. In other words, mechanisms 'state how, by what intermediate steps, a certain outcome follows from a set of initial conditions'.
2. It is important to note that Frank et al. not only focus on cultural and organizational changes at the global level, but they also make claims about attitudes in particular national contexts: 'were local degradation in fact a fundamental catalyst to people's actions and perceptions, one might expect to find cross-national variation in environmental values, given highly variable states of degradation. On the contrary, however, environmental values are remarkably homogeneous worldwide. People in all sorts of countries – rich and poor, Christian and Confucian, degraded and non-degraded, etc. – value more or less the same types of environmental protection at more or less the same levels' (Frank et al., 2007: 277).
3. The four questions composing the EPI were only included in the 1990/1 World Values Survey. Subsequent surveys omitted parts of the index, thus precluding a longitudinal analysis of the EPI. As regards support for environmental protection at the time of the Rio conference in 1992 (see later), a central issue in this article, the data do, however, provide sufficient information.
4. Snow and Benford (1988: 205–7) consider the 'centrality' and 'interrelatedness' of values as key elements of the infrastructure of collective belief systems.

5. Chatterjee (2008: 9) recently made a very similar point for the case of India, drawing the conclusion that any attempt to study environmental concern 'should be region specific'.
6. In his study examining the social sources of environmentalism in the metropolitan area of the South Korean city of Daegu in the 1990s, Kim (1999) identified further patterns which exhibited conspicuous deviations from typical western forms of environmentalism. First, age was shown to have a positive correlation with pro-environmental attitudes. Older people demonstrated a greater level of environmental concern than their younger counterparts. Second, income correlated negatively with environmental concern: individuals with higher incomes tended to favour economic growth over environmental protection.
7. Thus, the rapid shift in environmental attitudes in South Korea despite the existence of an enduring ecocentric cultural framework which supported pro-environmental attitudes would initially appear to present a paradox. This question is revisited in the following sections in greater detail.
8. The daily *Dong-a Ilbo* is one of the leading conservative newspapers in South Korea, with a market share of about 20 percent. *Hankyoreh*, a leading progressive newspaper, comes in with a market share of roughly 5 percent. The content analysis presented here ran a count for every article that mentioned the environmental and/or anti-pollution movement, regardless of contextual information, e.g. whether the movement was presented in a positive or negative light. The investigation was conducted using KINDS, the Internet database of the Korean media research system.
9. The first major international environmental treaty to be ratified by the South Korean government was the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in 1992 (Anheier et al., 2002: 288).
10. South Korea participated in the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. However, the country did not lend its signature to some of the major pre-1992 environmental treaties (e.g. CITES, RAMSAR) until after 1992.
11. This process is documented in a series of reports published by the online newspaper *Birok Hwangyeong-Undong 25-Nyeon* ['Confidential Document: Environmental Movement over 25 Years']; at: webzine.keen.or.kr (accessed 22 March 2008).
12. The members of the Environment and Pollution Research Group and others clearly opposed cooperation with economic agents and political authorities. See: www.culturec.org/about/05_press_01_view.asp?idx_num=218&Page=1&Search=&Keyword=&number=217.
13. The Founding Declaration of the Korean Anti-Pollution Movement Association (KAPMA), April 1988.
14. KAPMA Founding Declaration.
15. KAPMA Founding Declaration.
16. The YMCA guidelines for environmental action are very similar (YMCA, 'Hwangyeong Munje Haegyeoleun Simin Modueui Himeuro', 1990).
17. The Founding Declaration of the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements (KFEM), April 1993.
18. KFEM Founding Declaration.

19. The selection of cases from the database depended on the three search terms: 'environment' (*Hwangyeong*), 'pollution' (*Gonghae*) and 'green' (*Nogsaeg*). Cases were selected if at least one term appeared either in the names of participating organizations or in the title of the event.
20. Guidelines for assigning the codes were documented in a code book. In order to evaluate the reliability of the coding process, a random sample of 25 percent of the cases was drawn from both the 'statements/activities' and 'groups' (first step of the coding process) and recoded by an instructed Korean native speaker. The results were compared to the original codes. For the 'statements/activities', Holsti's coefficient of reliability (CR) indicated a correspondence of 79.2 percent, and for the 'groups', 87.2 percent.

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