

*Let's Farm Again This Year:*  
**Korean Ecologies Amidst American Militarization**

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**Abstract**

Since the Korean War in the middle of the 20th century, the American military has remained a disruptive force on the Korean peninsula. This increased militarization parallels an era of rapid industrialization ushered in at the expense of a predominantly agrarian tradition of living. This thesis seeks to explore how increased American militarization on the Korean peninsula has transformed the relationship between farmers and the land they cultivate. By identifying a case study through a series of protests at Pyeongtaek and Daechuri, two neighboring villages home to the American military base Camp Humphreys, I argue that the logic of militarization depends on a form of brute force in order to break the bonds between farmers and the ways they engage with the natural environment through bodies—both individual and collective.

The more immediate significance of this investigation lies in understanding and criticizing new, more obscured forms of American empire. More broadly, however, this thesis is an exercise in writing an environmental history. By articulating a worldview of the natural environment specific to the Korean peninsula at the turn of the 21st century, my work aims to unsettle the “natural environment” as an analytical category taken for granted and as, instead, a dynamic concept constructed through contestation. At this intersection between military histories and environmental histories, I hope to imagine more capacious, more critical conceptualizations of both subjects—the case of Pyeongtaek/Daechuri may reveal the variously violent ways the logics of militarization seep through everyday life, including a fundamental disruption of the ways communities may understand the environments and worlds they inhabit.

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*I am deeply grateful for the protestors and farmers I write this project about. Though I have never gotten the chance to truly meet or know you, thank you for your tireless work.*



*“Let’s Farm Again This Year”<sup>1</sup>*

The land known as 평택 (Pyeongtaek) is flat and close to the sea; for generations, the land has been shaped and molded to create communities centered around rice paddy cultivation and fishing. In both Pyeongtaek and the Korean peninsula more broadly, agriculture and the farmers who practice it have cultivated ways of relating to the natural environment rooted in this sense of place. Since the administration of American military forces on the Korean peninsula during the Korean War, this relationship between farmers and the land they cultivated has been challenged. Pyeongtaek becomes a region of interest for this paper not only because of its agrarian roots but also because it is the site of Camp Humphreys, a major American military base. In the eyes of the larger American imperial power that is propped up by its military forces, the land referred to as Pyeongtaek takes on a drastically different form. The abundance in

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<sup>1</sup> *Hwangsae wool Photo Studio*, digital photography, 2006.

question no longer concerns agricultural harvest; rather, it is more preoccupied with seizing and controlling land and access.

In response to Camp Humphreys and an increasing presence of American military, residents in Pyeongtaek have taken to a common sentiment: “Let’s Farm Again This Year.” The image above depicts these fiery words from a protest. The message of the image forefronts farming itself as a particular way of engaging with the natural environment. The image itself—from the color of the fire to motion of the flames—captures as assertive affect integral to the protests. The story of the camp’s expansion is, in turn, attached to stories of resistance and displacement, especially during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The land becomes a theater for various logics and worldviews to unfold and contend with one another. This paper is interested in the interface between the logics that legitimize military expansion and the agrarian communities in opposition. I argue that the series of protests against the expansion of Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek is a crucial moment in the region’s history and a defining factor in articulating the ways farmers in the region have conceived of the land they cultivate. The practice of protest, in particular, becomes an especially cogent avenue through which to posit a worldview that challenges the worldviews that prop up logics of imperial militarization.

### **Historicizing the Korean Environment**

This thesis is situated within an emerging conversation surrounding modern Korean environmental history, and the unique relationships to land that have unfolded across the peninsula. This history has been largely shaped by the narratives of militarization and war, with the Korean War in the mid-20th century standing as a formidable turning point in the country’s history. For example, Albert Park and Eleana J. Kim are two scholars especially active in tracing

the complicated webs between forces of militarization and its effects on the physical qualities of the Korean peninsula. The development of South Korea, split from its counterpart in the North, is a commonly used case study to map on contesting narratives of economic development and ecological degradation. Overly simplified narratives of this country depict the several decades after the War as a so-called Miracle on the Han River, in reference to one of the peninsula's major sources of water. The image of a deteriorating natural environment for the price of rapid urbanization is often associated with top-down frameworks that deem national governance, corporate cooperation, and international organizations as the only feasible solutions available to address ecological catastrophe. Norman Eder's *Poisoned Prosperity: Development, Modernization, and the Environment in South Korea* and Lisa Brady's "Sowing War, Reaping Peace: United Nations Resource Development Programs in the Republic of Korea, 1950–1953" are prominent examples of histories that treat the country's story as one shaped by elite actors and agencies. Eder's writing especially resonates with generally declensionist narratives around human relationships to the natural environment, without a historicization of what the natural environment might entail in the first place. I see this project adding to the growing field of Korean environmental history, with an attuned eye toward narratives that center "bottom-up" expressions of environmentalism, or other voices of the disenfranchised outside of elite ruling classes.

Many of these stories are rooted in agricultural contexts and center farmers. Parts of these discussions are shaped by the work of sociologists and anthropologists describing and articulating the formation of agricultural communities and qualities specific to the Korean context; for example, Yunshik Chang writes about hamlet solidarity in late 1900s rural Korea as a form of communalism that kept people alive. These social relations Chang describes become

important when they are put to the test in times of crisis, similar to what is demonstrated in Nancy Abelmann's monograph. In her book *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement*, Abelmann follows a movement of tenant farmers in Koch'ang demanding a redistribution of land that had been distributed to corporate ownership. For my thesis, I am interested in focusing on the farmers living in Pyeongtaek, which is also the site of the largest American off-shore military base called Camp Humphreys. While Koch'ang and Pyeongtaek are similarly agrarian, the residents of Pyeongtaek are more concerned with protesting military, not corporate, expansion. These stories of protest are contextualized by several waves of anti-militarization protests happening across bases all over the peninsula during the 1990s and early 2000s. Speaking to the work of scholars like Namhee Lee, writing about *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, protest and resistance are vital lenses of analysis when it comes to post-War Korean history. Parallel to the rapid economic development of the 1970s and 80s, the Minjung movement was a defining social force. The term refers to the Korean word for "the masses" or "the people" and mobilized generations of Korean citizens left behind the state's various economic development projects. While the movement mobilized factory workers, religious communities, and university students, to name just a few groups, this project is especially interested in the legacy of farmers questioning and protesting Korea's new position on the international stage.

While farmers have occupied varied positions throughout the discipline of environmental history, this project is focused on the ways their work poses an important opportunity to unsettle the false distinction between humans and the natural environment. In acknowledging this more nuanced approach to concepts of "nature" and the "natural environment," this project works off definitions of "first" and "second nature" established by writers like William Cronon. In loosely

distinguishing “first nature” or “original, prehuman nature” from “second nature”, which may be understood as “the artificial nature that people erect atop first nature,” the active cultivation practices farmers participate in order to turn “first nature” into “second nature” indicate how human interactions with the natural environment cannot be so easily disentangled.<sup>2</sup> I am interested in the highly physically mediated relationship with and knowledge of the natural environment farmers may access, as well as how these wells of embodied knowledge are facilitated across individuals and amidst collective communities over time. The more immediate significance of exploring Pyeongtaek’s story through the realm of landscapes and environmentalisms lies in understanding and criticizing new, more obscured forms of American empire. More broadly, however, this thesis is an exercise in writing an environmental history. By articulating a worldview of the natural environment specific to the Korean peninsula at the turn of the 21st century, my work aims to unsettle the “natural environment” as an analytical category taken for granted and as, instead, a dynamic concept constructed through contestation. At this intersection between military histories and environmental histories, I hope to imagine more capacious, more critical conceptualizations of both subjects—the case of Pyeongtaek/Daechuri may reveal the various violent ways the logics of militarization seep through everyday life, including a fundamental disruption of the ways communities may understand the environments and worlds they inhabit.

### **Notes on Methodology**

To begin grappling with the question of militarization and its interactions with the natural environment, this project starts by looking to American military bases as sites of contention.

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<sup>2</sup> Cronon, William. 1991. *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton. <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/1128770>, page XVII.

These spaces are often turned into a locus of protest, especially when the base is set to expand in size. The project deals with primary sources generated from protests around Pyeongtaek and relevant neighboring villages. These waves of protests led by farmers that live in the villages at the turn of the 21st century produced memorials, museums, and small archives to work out of. This project grapples predominantly with photos as a kind of source that is uniquely positioned to reveal certain demands, complaints, and sentiments residents may hold toward the land they are seeking to protect. The project uses photos archived on various online blogs on the Internet. The quality of these sources reflects the time period in which they were generated. At the turn of the 21st century, communities, both on- and offline, were beginning to recognize and wield the Internet for its ability to transport information and facilitate communication across space; this moment in time reflects the international scale the protests in Pyeongtaek achieved. On a broader level, I am interested in continuing a larger conversation about what is and is not considered archival material, as well as the ways the Internet has complicated this work of historical analysis. In the same spirit of protest, the blogs are solid examples of farmers and villagers who have been structurally disenfranchised reclaiming the narrative and remembering the past on their own terms. Online spaces have allowed for a crucial pluralization of memory-making processes, reflective of the many ways people may have engaged with the land known as Pyeongtaek.

The source base is also relatively constrained by language and my own limited fluency in Korean; thus, the work of analysis depends heavily on visual material or colloquial uses of the language. Employing visual information unique to photographs is especially important to the protests in Pyeongtaek because the creation of visual art itself—including murals, photographs, and paintings—was so fundamental to the building of community throughout the movement. On a



more conceptual level, sources rich in visual data like photographs access a kind of physical evidence that is integral to the discussion of environmental histories. Margaret Archibald, a historian working in the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch of Parks Canada, has described photographs as a source of “physical evidence” that “can play a vital role in investigating man-made...environments.”<sup>3</sup> If the practice of agriculture may be understood as a form of man-made environments, then it becomes especially relevant to begin investigating these landscapes and the histories that unfold within them via photographs. The following section serves to introduce and contextualize the various sets of photos that will be analyzed throughout this project.

**Blog: Pyeongtaek Counteraction Committee to Oppose the Expansion of US Military Bases (평택미군기지 확장저지 범국민대책위원회)<sup>4</sup>**

This blog appears to be one of the first, most comprehensive online documentation of organizing and protests around Camp Humphreys and surrounding areas. The Counteraction Committee behind the blog was formed in November of 2001.<sup>5</sup> The complete collection of 684 images spans a range from November 16, 2002 to October 15, 2007. Most images explicitly depict sites of protest and have been uploaded by several different accounts.

**Blog: Stork's Sadness / Stork Village (황새우울 / 황새울)<sup>6</sup>**

This blog was directly linked from the Pyeongtaek Counteraction Committee blog. The blog appears to be referenced by both names. This specific blog was compiled and maintained by artists—including visual, literary, and musical—active in the protests at Pyeongtaek. There is a separate folder containing 61 images of art that have been used to raise funds; these photos range from being uploaded between May 19th, 2006 and March 30th, 2007. The remaining 59 images housed on the blog depict miscellaneous landscapes and protests around Pyeongtaek, as well as promotional material for various events; these images range from July 8th, 2008 to October 25, 2007.

**Blog: Peace Village Daechuri (평화마을 대추리)<sup>7</sup>**

This last blog contains the most recent sources, with 105 images spanning the temporal range from January 24th, 2013 to August 8th, 2014. The blog appears to be a continuation of the initial blog put together by the Pyeongtaek Counteraction

<sup>3</sup> Archibald, Margaret. “Positive Evidence: Using Photographs as Documents in Structural History.” *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology* 12, no. 3 (1980): 61. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1493783>.

<sup>4</sup> Accessible at <http://antigizi.jinbo.net/>

<sup>5</sup> “거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village),” 2012, 185.

<sup>6</sup> Accessible at <https://cafe.daum.net/hwangsaewool>

<sup>7</sup> Accessible at <https://cafe.naver.com/peacemadang>

Committee in the early 2000s. The photos depict life in Daechuri after the heat of the protest and direct conflict; there is a renewed interest in maintaining a way of life through a co-operative style of governance. There appears to be one primary documenter who takes photos and uploads them to the blog.

**Book: *There Once Was a Village* (거기 마을 하나 있었따)**

This photobook was compiled by the Pyeongtaek Peace Center (평택 평화 센터) and published in 2012. The book contains large spreads of the landscapes and inhabitants of Pyeongtaek, as well as moments of violent conflict and protest. There is also extensive text complementing the images with historical context. The photography was credited to No Soon-Taek (노순택), Jung Taek-Yong (정택용), and Kim Chul-Su (김철수).

**Documentary: *Daechuri* (दै추리)**

Lastly, this project draws upon this documentary as a different kind visual image. The documentary documents a handful of farmers and their experiences throughout the protests. It is unclear exactly who is behind the creation of the documentary *Daechuri*. The film captures stories from the early 2000s and was attributed to “5 students who sought to learn about Korean culture” who, at the very least, spoke Korean—a clip at the end of the film briefly reveals the documentarian’s voice.<sup>8</sup> This source taps into a visual and oral history that documents the visceral experience of protest.

The methods behind analyzing these photos for this project are derived from Gillian Rose’s textbook *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. Rose identifies four key sites in which the meaning of an image is made: the site of the image itself, the site of its production, the site of its circulation, and the site in which it is seen by various audiences.<sup>9</sup> Each of these four sites may be filtered through the perspective of three aspects: the technological, the compositional, and the social.<sup>10</sup> Given this framework, I will focus on forms of discourse analysis in order to articulate the structures that shape the ways communities in Pyeongtaek have thought about the natural environment and then act on the basis of that thinking through the practice of protest.<sup>11</sup> The approach towards discourse analysis

<sup>8</sup> Intercontinental Cry. n.d. “Daechuri | Intercontinental Cry.” <https://intercontinentalcry.org/daechuri/>; *Daechuri*. n.d. (Documentary. Intercontinental Cry), 17:22. <https://intercontinentalcry.org/daechuri/>.

<sup>9</sup> Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. SAGE, 2016, page 25.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Rose, 187.

overlaps with a cultural analysis of the photos that seek to identify the “production and exchange of meanings...between the members of a society or a group.”<sup>12</sup> The tactical side of these methods looks like a qualitative coding process of the images in order to draw out pertinent findings. The images were coded for signage and other written expressions, as well as expressions of visual art making. On a more conceptual level, I looked for explicit expressions or references to a physical, surrounding environment as well as an awareness of the memory-making process of documentation. While applied to the several hundred images across several platforms, a specific and contested conception of the natural environment begins to emerge.

### **America in Korea**

Since its intervention in the Korean War during the mid-20th century, American forces—primarily expressed through military power—have continued to grow. Even the selection and backing of the 38th parallel as the line that divides the peninsula reflects a priority to maintain a decisively “politico-ideological role in the developing situation in Korea.”<sup>13</sup> The country’s transition out of active wartime proved to be an especially vulnerable period significantly shaped by the presence and occupation of the American military.

This interest directed towards Korea is part of a larger shift in attention towards Asia. This theater, in the perspective of the American military, is often defined by North Korea, China, and the, often simplified, threat they pose. In 2005, then-President George W. Bush commissioned a report reviewing the Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States. In the generated report, North Korea is consistently characterized as a volatile threat or, in even

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<sup>12</sup> Rose, 2.

<sup>13</sup> R. R. Krishnan, “Early History of U.S. Imperialism in Korea,” *Social Scientist* 12, no. 11 (1984): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3516875>, 13.

broader strokes, a “bellicose society” that poses an “unending shrillness.”<sup>14</sup> Relatedly, the report characterizes China’s plans for space exploration and relationships with North Korea through dealing arms as a source of nervousness for the United States.<sup>15</sup> Upon explicitly identifying and characterizing the issues in the region, the rest of the report is able to build a justification for accumulating American military presence in Asia. The language behind the commissioned report insists that the justification of American military forces is “more than a matter of geographic accessibility” and is, instead, an “indicator of alliance relationships.”<sup>16</sup> The narrative posited by the American military depends on the conception of America as a protector for South Korea against the threat that exists to the north.

These narratives are then physically expressed by decades of building out a network of military bases across the Pacific Ocean. Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek is only one base of a total of 121 military installations across Korea, as of 2018.<sup>17</sup> Across these installations, a familiar story emerges in which the construction and maintenance of these bases are closely linked with some form of environmental degradation that then generates resistance from inhabitants living in the area. For example, groundwater near Yongsan, the former location of Camp Kim, has recently been tested and revealed to contain concerning amounts of crude oil.<sup>18</sup> The village of Gangjeong on Jeju Island garnered international attention in the late 2010’s due to their resistance against the construction of an American Naval Base, which would have resulted in the

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<sup>14</sup> “Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States” (Overseas Basing Commission, May 9, 2005), 14.

<sup>15</sup> “Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States,” H2.

<sup>16</sup> “Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States,” 14.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Junghyun Kim, *Base Towns: Local Contestation of the U.S. Military in Korea and Japan*, Oxford Studies in Culture and Politics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Yonhap, “Underground Water near Seoul’s US Military Camp Contaminated,” [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/01/113\\_122923.html?fa](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/01/113_122923.html?fa).

destruction of a symbolic volcanic rock formation known as Gureombi.<sup>19</sup> Cleaning up contaminated bases across the peninsula has been estimated to amount to over 100 billion Korean won.<sup>20</sup>

The network of American military installations extends beyond the Korean peninsula. Expanding the scope of focus to just East Asia hints at the pervasive global presence of the American military. For example, Japan is an important region within this network, hosting a total of 83 sites as of 2018.<sup>21</sup> Together, the sites in Japan and Korea make up nearly 40% of the global total of 514 officially recognized overseas American military installations.<sup>22</sup> While this project focuses on one military base in one Korean town, it is important to situate these findings within a larger context that concerns not just forces of militarization broadly but the American military project in particular.

The continuous expansion of the American military has been described with various frameworks. For some, the term globalization accurately reflects a growing military, one “whose territorial realm knows no limit,” and its ability “to set the rules for a new globalized world.”<sup>23</sup> America’s global presence may also be described as a form of hegemony, where the ultimate goal is the “productive, commercial and financial pre-eminence of one core [or advanced-industrial] power over other core powers.”<sup>24</sup> Military advantage, then, “locks in” these goals.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Claudia Junghyun Kim, “Dugong v. Rumsfeld: Social Movements and the Construction of Ecological Security,” *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 258–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120950013>.

<sup>20</sup> Jung, “110 Billion Won: The Estimated Cost to Clean Up Pollution at U.S. Bases, But Will the U.S. Will Pay Up?,” [https://english.khan.co.kr/khan\\_art\\_view.html?code=710100&artid=201912121800517&medid=enkh](https://english.khan.co.kr/khan_art_view.html?code=710100&artid=201912121800517&medid=enkh).

<sup>21</sup> Kim, *Base Towns*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Kim, *Base Towns*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Cumings, “Is America an Imperial Power?,” *Current History* 102, no. 667 (November 1, 2003): 355–60, <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2003.102.667.355>, 355.

<sup>24</sup> Cumings, “Is America an Imperial Power?,” 357.

<sup>25</sup> Cumings, “Is America an Imperial Power?,” 357.

With this language, Camp Humphreys becomes a site of interest because it serves America as a core power.

America's control over this network of military bases may also be described as imperial, though it is important to recognize the various forms of power over time that have been broadly described under the term empire. Qualifiers, like "post-" or "neo-", may be used to better capture the range of imperial relations that may exist today; phrases like "informal empire" are flexible enough to be stretched in use.<sup>26</sup> This project departs from Bruce Cumings' articulation of America's global presence as one of an "archipelago of empire." The collective group of "hundreds of military bases that still remain in place, long after the wars which gave birth to them" are critical to securing the United States across "both oceans simultaneously and with striking power sufficient to reach to the other side of each of them."<sup>27</sup> This archipelago hosts the "permanent stationing of soldiers in a myriad of foreign bases across the face of the planet" and is supported by the massive "complex of defense industries," estimated to operate on a budget between \$300 billion and \$500 billion U.S. dollars.<sup>28</sup> If one were to consolidate the over 500 bases and the millions of Americans inhabiting this land, it would be hard to deny the heavy hand of American empire. However, reflective of archipelagos as natural structures, this network is characterized by distance that has the power to occlude; the global landscape of the archipelago is still "commonly unknown" and, so, "its full dimensions almost always come as a surprise to the uninitiated."<sup>29</sup> This paper is interested in extending an exploration of the visual qualities of this kind of empire, and how distance makes it difficult to visualize.

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<sup>26</sup> Cumings, "Is America an Imperial Power?," 355.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Cumings, "Dominion From Sea to Sea: America's Pacific Ascendancy," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 10, no. 7 (February 11, 2012): 355–60, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cumings, "Dominion From Sea to Sea: America's Pacific Ascendancy," 3; Cumings, "Is America an Imperial Power?," 359.

<sup>29</sup> Cumings, "Dominion From Sea to Sea: America's Pacific Ascendancy," 5.

Before the network of bases is able to expand, it is necessary to contend with the structure of power that presently organizes the land on which the bases will be built. In the case of American militarization on the Korean peninsula, it is important to consider the reasons why the Korean federal government not only allows but actively collaborates in the process of building out American bases across the country. One prominent explanation includes a prioritization for federal and city governments to build out images of Korean camp towns as “international cities.” These goals are situated within discourses that weave together urban development and concepts of modernity. Camp towns in Korea have historically been associated with “gritty” images as “concentrated spaces of gendered and racialized violence,” especially given the large part sex work often plays in these local economies<sup>30</sup> Predominantly concerned with this “stigmatized and violent image” itself rather than the structural causes of violence, Korean city planners seek out “gentrification, consumerism, and...booming real estate markets” as answers.<sup>31</sup> These processes depend upon the designation of existing local shops and communities as “outdated” that need to be replaced by “craft beer, American-style foods and trendy clothing” or other symbols of “global urban vitality.”<sup>32</sup>

Transforming the images of these camp towns requires, then, a dependency on the “outsourcing of state violence to host countries.”<sup>33</sup> Micol Siegel employs the concept of “violence workers” in order to better capture “the enormous range of activities such people do and the wide parameters of the ambits within which they do them.”<sup>34</sup> In the story of Pyeongtaek,

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<sup>30</sup> Bridget Martin, “From Camp Town to International City: Us Military Base Expansion and Local Development in Pyeongtaek, South Korea,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42, no. 6 (2018): 967–85, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12698>. 973.

<sup>31</sup> Martin, “From Camp Town to International City,” 972.

<sup>32</sup> Martin, “From Camp Town to International City,” 982.

<sup>33</sup> Simeon Man, A. Naomi Paik, and Melina Pappademos, “Violent Entanglements: Militarism and Capitalism,” *Radical History Review* 2019, no. 133 (January 1, 2019): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-7160029>, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 12.

violence workers span beyond just “law enforcement” and “police.”<sup>35</sup> The expansion of the base and transformation of the land that provided for farmers and their livelihoods also depended on the labor of those in the Korean Ministry of National Defense (MND), the United States Forces-Korea (USFK), the Korean National Assembly, and the Korean Department of National—all acting organizations “whose work rests on a promise of violence.”<sup>36</sup>

This project is interested in the various images that are in conflict when the land becomes a site of contestation for farmers and the expansion of military bases—images of violence, of modernity, of the natural environment and what it stands for. This overarching theme of images and visibility is especially important to further dissecting the archipelagic quality of American empire and its presence in farmlands on the Korean peninsula. This attention to imagery responds to the lack of visibility that so often characterizes the military-industrial complex.

### **America in Pyeongtaek**

This paper frames its geographical and analytical focus around American militarized bases located on the Korean peninsula. These demarcated sites are understood as the literal environments upon which conflict between varying worldviews plays out and takes on its most physical form. The primary sources investigated in this paper emerge from these ecologies.

The paper is primarily interested in Pyeongtaek and nearby villages like Daechuri, the site of Camp Humphreys. It is important to note that this site is only one plucked out of a much larger network of bases—and a consequent legacy of anti-base protest movements—that span the entire peninsula. Korean residents have since organized, up to the present moment, to demand accountability and transparency. Consistently, across time and space, American military bases

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<sup>35</sup> Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and Limits of Police*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and Limits of Police*, 12.



have been the loci of disruption and protest. In order to define the scope of this research, I have chosen to utilize the military base, especially that of Camp Humphreys, as a unique ecology. This base's heavily-fortified borders frame my interrogation of the same military forces that perpetuate these borders in the first place.

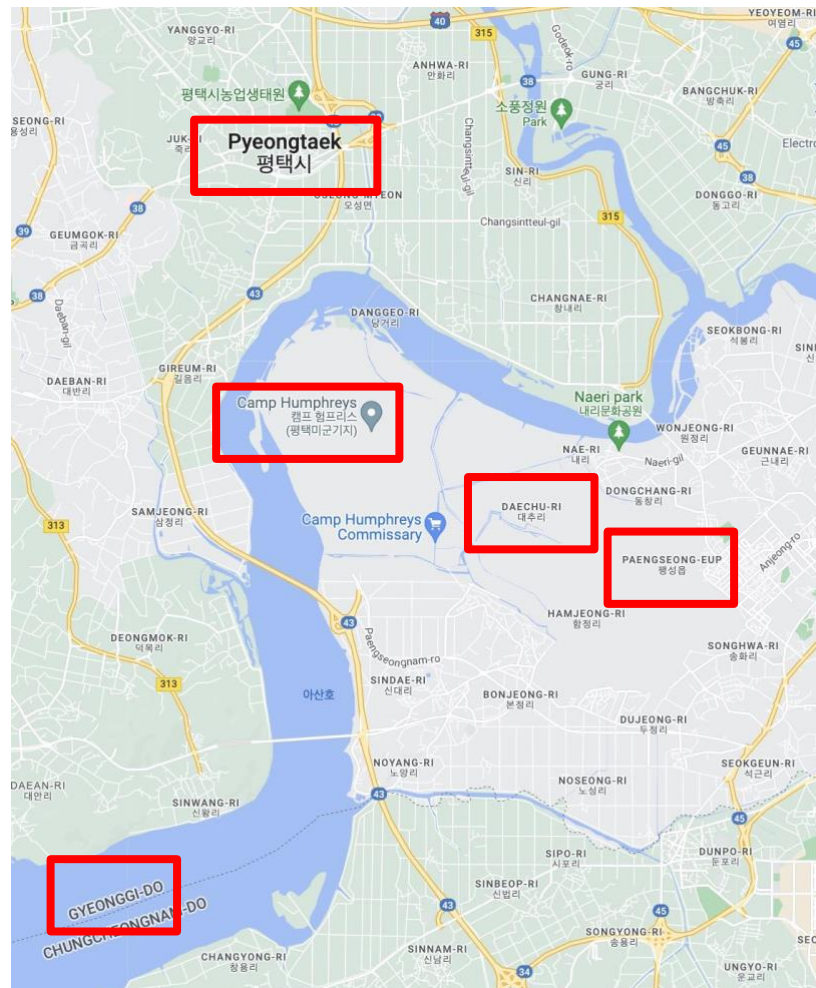


Figure 1. Map of relevant sites and names. This image, from Google Maps, has been edited by the author to highlight relevant regions. Camp Humphreys is located in Pyeongtaek-si (city), which is located within Gyeonggi-do (region). Daechu-ri (village) is a nearby village located within Pangseong-eup (town). This paper is largely concerned with Pyeongtaek-si and Daechuri.

Camp Humphreys was founded in the early 20th century when the land transferred ownership from the Japanese to the American military.<sup>37</sup> The history of this base is defined by expansion. Since its conception, it has grown to become America's largest overseas military base, housing American soldiers and their families in around 500 building and amenities.<sup>38</sup> The most recent and relevant expansion project begins with the construction of the Korean Land Partnership Plan (LPP) in 2001; organizers in Pyeongtaek also identify this legislation as the starting point when narrating the story of resistance.<sup>39</sup> The LPP would kick off the work of consolidating 41 military facilities to 10 south of the Han River; upon consolidation, the USFK would then manage these facilities.<sup>40</sup> The project was estimated to cost about \$8 billion dollars, with the South Korean government agreeing to pay the majority of the cost.<sup>41</sup> These expansion projects come at the expense of pushing out residents who have lived on and made a living on the land for generations. The Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States interestingly employs vague language to describe this project, emphasizing the *leaving* of sites for the continued adaptation of base structure and realignment; it is important that the leaving and consolidation of sites directly mean the expansion of sites like Camp Humphreys; this expansion is closely linked to the displacement of prior residents, often farmers. Farmers, and the way of life that centered the act of farming, defines Pyeongtaek. These communities became crucial when mobilizing protestors over the several-year-course upon which these protests unfolded. Below is a timeline of significant protests related to Pyeongtaek

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<sup>37</sup> "History | U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys (Camp Humphreys, South Korea)." 2013. *U.S. Army Garrison*. February 17, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130217152918/http://humphreys.korea.army.mil/history>.

<sup>38</sup> Yeo, Jun-suk. 2017. "Moon Welcomes Trump at US Base." *The Korea Herald*. November 7, 2017. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20171107000753>.

<sup>39</sup> "거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village)," 2012, 185.

<sup>40</sup> "거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village)," 2012, 185; "Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States," M3.

<sup>41</sup> "Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structure of the United States," M3.

and the expansion of Camp Humphreys. With the elaboration of these events in mind, it is important to remember that these protests were ultimately not enough to stop the expansion project—Camp Humphrey still stands.

<b>Timeline of Significant Protests Around Pyeongtaek</b>		
2001.07	The Land Partnership Plan is first proposed by United States Forces Korea (USFK). Through this plan, USFK seeks to consolidate and then manage all military facilities throughout South Korea. This plan resulted in the relocation of the Yongsan Garrison and the expansion of Camp Humphreys.	
2003.08.28	The first of many civilian demonstration rallies. This first rally was held in front of a major bank in Paengseong.	
2003.10.31	Rally in the Square of Pyeongtaek train station.	
2004.08.28	Rally in front of Camp Humphreys.	
Continuous candlelight vigil	2004.09.01	Public hearing of Pyeongtaek Support Special Law, in which the Korean government offered residents 1.8 trillion Korean won as compensation. Protestors were arrested, including Kim Ji Tae (김지태), the leader of the Pyeongtaek Counteraction Committee to Oppose the Expansion of US Military Bases. In response to the arrests, residents began a candlelight vigil that lasted nearly continuous three years.
	2005.03.05	First nationwide demonstration in opposition to the expansion of US military bases.
	2005.07.10	Peace march in front of Daechu Elementary School
	2006.02.12	Another peace march, aligned with the lunar new year.
	2006.05.04	Referred to as the Hwangsaeul of Dawn (여명의 황새울 대작전), this day was likely the height of violence throughout the years of protest. The Korean government stations 1,500 police officers, soldiers, and members of the National Defense Ministry with the aim of forcibly pushing out residents and constructing a designated military-reserved area. In the process, 524 residents were arrested and Daechu Elementary School was bombed.
	2006.05.05	Rally protesting the dispossession of farm land.

	2006.05.14	Second nationwide demonstration in opposition to the expansion of US military bases.
	2006.06.18	Third nationwide demonstration in opposition to the expansion of US military bases.
	2006.09.24	Fourth nationwide demonstration in opposition to the expansion of US military bases. Rally was held in front of Seoul City Hall.

*Table 1. Important, identifiable protests throughout the early 2000s in which organizing was most active in the region.<sup>42</sup>*

Given this background, the following sections dive into the images themselves to illustrate some of the ways protesting farmers were relating to the natural environment. Beginning with the concept of embodiment, the first two sections consider the ways bodies—both individual and collective—serve as mediators between the land itself and the knowledge attached it. The project then ends with an exploration into the nuanced ways violence makes these embodied relationships contentious. Each section begins with two paired images that have been re-contextualized outside of the context of its original source in order to pose the relevant questions that frame the rest of the writing.

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<sup>42</sup> “거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village),” 2012.

## Part 1. Knowing the environment through the individual body.



This first section begins an exploration of embodied knowledge, or knowledge about the environment uniquely contained by the individual body. In tracing these forms of knowledge throughout the story of the protests of Pyeongtaek, this section aims to forefront the body of the farmer as a specific kind of historical agent in the larger history of militarization on the Korean peninsula. The work of the farming becomes an integral mediator between most residents of Pyeongtaek and the ways they relate to the natural environment.

The image on the left comes from a blog post shared on Peace Village Daechuri in 2013, a significant amount of time after the major protests.<sup>43</sup> The individual in the bottom left corner, Doctor Choi Ho Sung (최호성) is performing acupuncture on a resident; his gaze is focused on careful placement of the fine needles in the patient's knee while the patient's body is stretched across the floor. This documentation of healing an aching body illustrates the body of a farmer as one that engages in physical labor—labor that facilitates the embodiment of knowledge about the

<sup>43</sup> Peacemadang, [Dr. Choi Ho Sung performing treatment] (최호성 한의사의 한방진료활동), digital photography, 2013.

physical qualities of Pyeongtaek. This same labor is what takes a toll on the farming body, wears it down, and makes it susceptible to injury. Injury, expressed through pain, represents the experience of labor—and the linked knowledge of the land acquired through this labor—coming to a head until it is made recognizable as something to heal and take care of.

The image on the right is a part of a photo series published on the Pyeongtaek Counteraction Committee's blog in 2006; the photo series is titled "A Grandmother's Tears."<sup>44</sup> Two residents have fainted while protesting the mobilization of forklifts sent by the national government to dig up the farmland.<sup>45</sup> In its composition, the image centers the struggles of these residents as they are stretched across the ground. The feeling of pain reflected in the residents' facial expressions resonates across both images. The second image is a visual culmination of the farming body as one that is attached to the natural environment because of its dependency on knowing how to work the land for sustenance. The protests in Pyeongtaek highlight the conditions that put this attachment at risk. A digging and destruction of the farmland effectively severs the relationship between farmers and the environment. Thus, protest through involving the body itself becomes an act of protecting the farmers' attachment to the land or, when abstracted, a form of taking care of the body that the attachment sustains.

While these images were generated in different times and contexts, Part 1 of this project's findings begins by placing them in conversation with one another. Taking note of the resonances this pair may provoke draws attention to the importance of the body and, more specifically, a

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<sup>44</sup> Countermeasure Committee (대책위), A Grandmother's Tears (어느 할머니의 눈물), digital photography, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> In the photo series, the image was originally captioned: "정부에서 포크레인을 동원에 대추리 농토를 파헤치자 주민한분이 온몸으로 막다가 실신했습니다. 옷을 보면 당시 상황이 어땠는지 짐작이 가능합니다 (While using their whole bodies to block the forklifts sent by the government to dig up the farmland in Daechuri, these villagers fainted. If you look at their clothes, you can guess the reality of the situation)."

body that farms. This serves as a starting point to further explore the ways that the farmers and residents of Pyeongtaek came to know and relate to the natural environment.

For the farmers protesting in Pyeongtaek, the embodied knowledge of the land comes from an extensive history of residents working and reshaping the land through physical labor mediated by their individual bodies. With archaeological evidence of artifacts spanning all the way to the Bronze Age, Pyeongtaek has been the home of agrarian communities for generations. More specifically, this region and the practice of farming of associated with the land has been heavily shaped by the proximity of the Yellow Sea and the connected bodies of water that have historically put the region at risk of flooding. The city of Anseong (안성), for example, neighbors Pyeongtaek and the same flooding rivers connected to the Yellow Sea. Since the turn of the 21st century, the city's Headquarters of Disaster Response has regularly published regional disaster prevention plans, indicating the unquestionable presence of these disruptive waters. The incoming saltwater would kill planted crops and would do so relentlessly, causing farmers to replant their crops 3 or 4 times in a single season. Without manipulation, the flooding also renders the land into salty mud flats. Residents reshaped these flats to physically create more arable farmland by draining the land closest to the sea, working all day while using spades and hands in the absence of equipment. The people involved in the creation of this environment—an origin story of its own captured in the Daechuri documentary—are often the same people protesting their displacement. In this transformation of the land, knowledge of it becomes embodied through work.

Beyond just a transformation of the land, the role of the farmer is to manipulate the land for the purpose of cultivating food. In Pyeongtaek, reshaping the mudflats made way for farmland used to grow regionally-specific, renowned rice. Rice grown in Pyeongtaek, and the

larger province of Gyeonggi-do in which Pyeongtaek is situated within, is known for its recognizable taste; in 2007, rice from Pyeongtaek was being bought out by American consumers at a price six times the rate Calrose rice in the United States. The qualities of the land become embodied in the rice itself, becoming the basis from which the value of the rice is derived. The farmer, then, becomes a critical mediator of value that travels between the land, the food that is cultivated on the land, and then the body that consumes the food. This vital position that farmers hold demonstrates the embodied knowledge mediated by the farming body: the food that continues to sustain the body is grown on the same land that was shaped by those bodies.

With this in mind, expansion projects that require the violent destruction of land implicate the bodies of farmers as well. Pyeongtaek and the surrounding areas have remained subject to multiple transfers of power, as well as several expansion projects continuously broadening the borders of the military camp into the surrounding villages. The older residents protesting in the early 2000s were the same residents who had endured a similar violence and destruction in 1952 due to another, earlier expansion project. The knowledge of the land that becomes embodied is no longer restricted simply to the know-how of farming but also the violence and pain that had been enacted on the land as well.

The embodied knowledge that is at risk also becomes a source of resistance. So much of the protests consisted of simply putting bodies on the line. This form of embodied resistance is most visible in distinguishable events like May 4th of 2006, colloquially referred to as the Hwangsaoul of Dawn (여명의 황새울 대작전). While resistance in the area had been steadily increasing, the Hwangsaoul of Dawn represented a peak in violence when the Korean government sent over a thousand police officers, soldiers, and members of the National Defense Ministry in order to forcibly push out residents.





*Protestors blocking equipment.<sup>46</sup>*

Resistance to these attempts at severing residents' access to the land included directly blocking the tools of violence with the body itself, as depicted in the photograph above. Almost serendipitously organized by the color of their clothing, the image can be broken down into the officers dressed in black swarming the foreground, documentarians wearing green in the bottom right corner, and masked protesters climbing the forklift in the top half of the photo. The protesters are part of a notably younger demographic, serving as a reminder of the ways the ability to resist with the body is shaped by the physical capacity of that body, including its age.

<sup>46</sup> 평 통 사, [Photoessay] *What is happening in Hwangaewool?* ([포토에세이] *지금 황새울에선 무슨 일이?*), digital photography, 2006.



From top to bottom, banners read: “Our land will forever be farmland,”<sup>47</sup> “We will protect this land with our life,”<sup>48</sup> and “We’ll block the American Military base today and continue to farm next year.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 평통사, [Photoessay] What is happening in Hwangsae-ri? ([포토에세이] 지금 황새울에선 무슨 일이?), digital photography, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> 평통사, [Photoessay] What is happening in Hwangsae-ri? ([포토에세이] 지금 황새울에선 무슨 일이?), digital photography, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> “거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village),” 2012.

For most of the older, farming population, resistance through the body simply looked like the act of living—continuing to take up space and maintain a livelihood even if the land is contested. When asked about next year’s crops, one farmer in the *Daechuri* documentary responds without hesitation: “Of course, next year’s crops are ready... We’re not afraid.”<sup>50</sup> This direct emphasis on farming was critical to the narrative-building around the protests. Most of the slogans and chants spread throughout the protests depended upon a pragmatic emphasis on farming and farmland; this localized knowledge of the farmland was crucial to asserting a more fundamental right to livelihood and survival of farming bodies and communities.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, knowledge about the land acquired from working it renders the bearer of this information into potent historical actors because it cannot be so easily wrestled out of the body it is stored in.

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<sup>50</sup> *Daechuri*, 15:19.

<sup>51</sup> Kim, *Base Towns*, 103.

## Part 2: Knowing the environment through the collective body.



This next section takes the idea of knowing the land through embodied relationships a set further by expanding the notion of the body. Beyond just the individual body that farms, the creation of a collective body is crucial to telling the story of protests in Pyeongtaek. The individual body is a limiting frame of analysis without acknowledging the work that is put into forging critical relationships that transcend the individual body to build larger, collective bodies. Photos and visual data are an especially generative source to explore these concepts because provide a sense of scale; this concept of scale is important when moving between individual and collective subjects. The image on the left comes from one of the hundreds of candlelight vigils held in the greenhouses of Daechuri.<sup>52</sup> The image on the right is more recent and depicts a smaller gardening project in the village from 2013.<sup>53</sup> Together, these images capture the subtle movements between operating on a scale that prioritizes the individual body—whether that body is a human or a planted seed—to a scale that accounts for a larger, organized whole. Both images

<sup>52</sup> 평택문화원 (Pyeongtaek Cultural Center) et al., “2018 평택의 사라져가는 마을 조사보고서 (2018 Survey Report of Disappearing Villages in Pyeongtaek),” December 28, 2018, <https://memory.library.kr/items/show/210052976>, page 557.

<sup>53</sup> “주민들이 분주히 움직입니다 (Residents Are on the Move),” March 16, 2013, [https://cafe.naver.com/peacemadang?iframe\\_url\\_utf8=%2FArticleRead.nhn%253Fclubid%3D25682661%2526menuid%3D%2526boardtype%3DI%2526page%3D5%2526specialmenutype%3DP%2526articleid%3D27%2526referrerAllArticles%3Dtrue](https://cafe.naver.com/peacemadang?iframe_url_utf8=%2FArticleRead.nhn%253Fclubid%3D25682661%2526menuid%3D%2526boardtype%3DI%2526page%3D5%2526specialmenutype%3DP%2526articleid%3D27%2526referrerAllArticles%3Dtrue); the original caption reads “아 봄입니다 (Ah, it is spring).”

depict this larger whole extending into the horizon. The photos do the work of introducing the collective body as a crucial entity through which embodied knowledge may be mediated.

The concept of a collective body bears weight long before the protests in Pyeongtaek. For example, a sense of hamlet solidarity—or a form of a collectivist ethic—was crucial for many farming communities when the country was experiencing rapid industrialization in the late 20th century. Between 1960 and 1980, the rate of commercialization of agricultural products rose from 24.3 percent to 75.0 percent.<sup>54</sup> Family farms began seeking profit by generating surplus products for increased demands in urban areas, and farmers possessed a new power in mediating between urban and rural markets. They tended to derive their bargaining power with urban merchants through “organiz[ing] themselves on a hamlet basis,” consequently maintaining the traditional basis of peasant communities in the midst of an aggressive capitalist market.<sup>55</sup> The protests in Pyeongtaek resonate with these prior histories of social action that hinge upon the acceptance of the village as a potent agent.

In the case of Pyeongtaek, the creation of a larger social unit that transcends any individual body begins with the experience of shared suffering. The documentation of protests captures a fervent belief that the traumatic experiences from the months and years of resistance were something shared within the collective community. In the *Daechuri* documentary, residents gather again in the greenhouse. One resident proclaims their hope “to live here with my friends, with my neighbors until I died” while another elder closes out the event and rallies hope by offering to “suffer together.”<sup>56</sup> Their voices ring clear and strong.

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<sup>54</sup> Yunshik Chang, “Peasants Go To Town: The Rise of Commercial Farming in Korea,” *Human Organization* 48, no. 3 (1989): 236–51, page 238.

<sup>55</sup> Chang, “Peasants Go To Town,” page 244.

<sup>56</sup> *Daechuri*, 15:19, 16:52.



*Protestors and farmers lining up at the Paddy*

*Field.<sup>57</sup> Farmers working at the Paddy Field.<sup>58</sup>*

Protest through collective, as opposed to individual, bodies continues to take various forms throughout the history of Pyeongtaek. In a process that spanned from 2002 to 2004, a collective of villagers and allies formed a project called Paddyfield for Peace. A total of 605 individuals in solidarity with Pyeongtaek each purchased 1 pyeong of land (which roughly converts to a total of a little over 1800 square meters). Members of the project continued to work on this land (as depicted in the image above on the right) and the project was publicly celebrated in 2004 (as depicted in the image above on the left). In the image on the left, the subjects are lined up and they extend across the entire frame, contributing to a sense of the scale of the project. Both images depict the effectiveness of a uniform—whether it be coordinated green vests or blue overalls—in visually conveying the communal organization required not just for protest but in work, as well.

The collective body being fleshed out in the case of Pyeongtaek was not homogenous, however. The work of connecting individual bodies is one of deliberation and decision-making

<sup>57</sup> Countermeasure Committee (대책위), 8 월 8 일 평화의 눈 제막식, digital photography, 2004.

<sup>58</sup> 김용환, 평화의 눈에 못자리 하던 날 3, digital photography, 2003.

between who is and is not apart of the collective body. In addition to the police, the Korean and American federal governments behind the expansion projects are relatively easily imagined to operate outside of the collective body, especially in heated moments of protest and direct action where bodies are pitted against each other. The collective protesting body sees more ambiguity and conflict when distinguishing between base town residents, local political elites, and committed activists.<sup>59</sup> For example, while there is an important sense of solidarity between activists—or people who have relocated specifically to Pyeongtaek for the sake of protest—and long-time residents, there also exists a tension. When full-time activists are able to continue the prolonged fight, villagers who are not active anymore may feel the uncomfortable that they have lost their home; while the activist may have another home to return to, the villager has nowhere else to go to.<sup>60</sup> The composition of the collective body, ultimately, consists of both the inclusion and exclusion of these points of conflict that make the body murky. The ambiguity serves as a reminder that building of relationships between individuals is a choice; this paper posits the project of collective-building as a choice that then entails work—work in the way that labor connects the body, both individual and now collective, to the land.

Finally, the protests in Pyeongtaek suggest ways to consider bodies more expansively on a temporal scale. In addition to building relationships between individual bodies to create a larger sense of a collective, the story of Pyeongtaek relies also on the building of relationships between bodies that exist in the past, present, and future; the work of forging these relationships extends across generations. The practice of documentation becomes the straightforward work

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<sup>59</sup> These distinctions have been framed and articulated by Claudia Kim in the introduction of her 2023 book *Base Towns*.

<sup>60</sup> Sung-hee Choi and Christine Hong, “Over 5,000 Days of Resistance: An Interview with Anti-Base Activist Choi Sung-Hee on the Gangjeong and Jeju Struggle for Peace,” *The Abusable Past* (blog), April 5, 2021, <https://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/forum-5-7-over-5000-days-of-resistance-an-interview-with-anti-base-activist-choi-sung-hee-on-the-gangjeong-and-jeju-struggle-for-peace/>.

needed to build intergenerational collective bodies. This documentation may look like a familiar form of taking photos and building out accessible archives, like the ones that have built out the bulk of this thesis. The documentation may also take on more subjective renditions. Various forms of art-making—including performing music, creating screen-prints, and curating photos—have been critical to the process of protest in Pyeongtaek. All of this documentation serves the purpose of cultivating a memory of Pyeongtaek in the midst of all the violent changes incurred by militarization. The Paddyfield for Peace was ultimately sold off again, and the profits from the sale were used to build the Pyeongtaek Peace Center.<sup>61</sup> The Peace Center hosts a small museum dedicated to housing physical remnants of the protests so that are not forgotten—both by those who may have been directly involved and those who may be more distantly related.

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<sup>61</sup> Seungsoo Moon, “Protesting the Expansion of US Military Bases in Pyeongtaek: A Local Movement in South Korea,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 865–76, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1724246>, page 870.





*Installation from Pyeongtaek Peace Museum.*<sup>62</sup>

In this acknowledgement of the temporal element, the scale of the collective body grows even larger. To build the relationships that constitute the collective body, the individual components that make up the collective are no longer restricted to having the share the same physical realm; rather, there is work to be put into building relationships across lifetimes. This more expansive understanding of the body—one that transcends individual lifetimes—is crucial part to the collective ways protesting farmers in Pyeongtaek related to the land not just as individuals but as a collective organism.

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<sup>62</sup> Peacemadang, *Daechuri Peace Museum*, digital photography, 2013.

**Part 3. American militarized violence puts this embodied knowledge at risk.**



These last two images posed against each other bring us to our final point in this story of Pyeongtaek. On top, the image of the rice paddies in Pyeongtaek represents a culmination of both individually and collectively mediated embodied knowledge of the land—knowledge that has been cultivated over generations.<sup>63</sup> The second image comes from the *Hwangsaeul of Dawn*, one of the most outwardly violent days throughout the years of protest.<sup>64</sup> Aside from the visceral destruction documented between the two images, the visual data opens a space in which to begin witnessing and exploring the various kinds of disruption and violence that this land has undergone.

The second image may represent a more familiar depiction of violence, where the disruption is easily identifiable. This form of violence closely describes the disruptive kind of presence the American military holds in Pyeongtaek. On a spatial level, mechanisms like fences, barriers, and barbed wire represent unavoidable disruption. The *Daechuri* documentary also provides insight into the aural landscape of the region; throughout the piece, the tireless sound of helicopters and aggressive announcements made non-stop by representatives from the MND disrupt Pyeongtaek's soundscape. On a physical level, tactics like filling in irrigation canals with concrete disrupt ongoing practices of farming; in 2006, the USFK pressured the MND to continue to take control over more land in Pyeongtaek and the MND resorted to these tactics.<sup>65</sup> On the end of the American military, the point of the project begins with the goal of disrupting and violating relationships to the land—relationships mediated by both individual and collective bodies. Since the architects behind the building of these military bases do not have access to either the individually or the collectively embodied relationship to the land, they must rely on

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<sup>63</sup> 거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village),” 2012.

<sup>64</sup> 거기 마을 하나 있었다 (There Once Was a Village),” 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Martin, “From Camp Town to International City,” 974.

violence as strategy. Overt violence is used to displace bodies, so that individually embodied relationships cease to exist; violence is used to destroy the land, the catalyzing entity shared between individual farmers in order to facilitate a collective body. Ultimately, this violent disruption is in service of expanding military bases like Camp Humphreys and the sustained presence of the American military in East Asia.

However, it is important to be cautious of falsely assuming that only the American military has the capacity to disrupt or violate. In this hesitation, the site of protest as a frame of analysis becomes especially crucial. It is in these spaces where farmers, and other recipients of the American military's technical force, are visibly pushing back and exercising their agency. Furthermore, it is important to extend this recognition that the power to violate and disrupt does not only belong to one kind of actor. The residents of Pyeongtaek also disrupt the land, through the act of farming, and have done so for generations. This practice of manipulating the land through farming has also undergone various changes, especially as farming has shifted towards producing surplus for an international market, as opposed to subsistence farming.<sup>66</sup> So what constitutes a disturbance? The problem posed by the story of the protests in Pyeongtaek is not just a matter of disturbance but, rather, the *kind* of disturbance; different kinds of disruptions can possess different qualities.

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<sup>66</sup> Chang, "Peasants Go To Town," 237.



*Farmland upturned by the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>67</sup>*

*Pyeongtaek farmers continuing to till the land.<sup>68</sup>*

Part of the strategies leveled by the Korean government to make space for the expansion project include physically destructing the land and related infrastructure that existed in the area (as depicted in the image above on the left). The disruption, framed in the center of the image, is visibly abrupt and violates the rows of crops that continue in the background. While both images on the left and right capture changes to the land brought upon by the same tool—a mechanized forklift—the quality of the disruption, or manipulation demonstrated on the left does not originate from the community this disruption most closely affects. Disruption through farming possesses a cyclical time scale with each returning growing season. This quality is reflected in the predominant protest chants and slogans, most of which referred to an assumption of another farming season to come in the future, even amidst the protests. On the other hand, the disruption

<sup>67</sup> 평통사, [Photoessay] *What is happening in Hwangsae wool?* ([포토에세이] *지금 황새울에선 무슨 일이?*), digital photography, 2006. This photo was originally captioned: “All the roads that the tractors used to plow the fields were destroyed like this.”

<sup>68</sup> 평통사, [Photoessay] *What is happening in Hwangsae wool?* ([포토에세이] *지금 황새울에선 무슨 일이?*), digital photography, 2006. This photo was originally captioned: “The photo was originally captioned: Despite the violence of the Ministry of National Defense, farmers continued to start plowing the rice fields one after another”

brought on by the American military seeks to disrupt these seasonal relationships. This latter form of disruption operates on a far more rapid, decontextualized timescale.

These images and the story of Pyeongtaek they represent serve to complicate our understanding of violence and ways of relating to the natural environment. Moving beyond a simplistic indictment of violence, it is more important to interrogate the quality and character of the ways different actors violate and disrupt through different means. Sites of protest create the conditions of crises where these various kinds of disruption are most closely pitted against each other, making it an especially ripe space for questioning.

## **Conclusion**

In a very real way, these protests were unsuccessful. Despite the years of struggle, Camp Humphreys remains in Pyeongtaek. Its walls and connections to a larger looming network of an American military force that spans the globe continue to shape the local environment. But a protest, especially protests as persistent and rich as those in Pyeongtaek, is never limited to just a single outcome or one story. As long as the potential for an increasing American military presence still exists on the Korean peninsula, there remain contemporary stakes attached to this ongoing project of questioning and pushing against the forces of American militarization and the ways it has violated not just the natural environment but fundamental conceptions and relationships to it.

This project is but a small, limited exploration in an otherwise endless pursuit of articulating ever-changing worldviews and relationships to the natural environment. In diving into the protestors' archives and their ways of documenting the protests in their own terms, we begin to flesh out relationships to the natural environment that existed for at least one moment in

time. Photos and visual data have proven to provide a unique portal into what it means—and what it feels—for information to be embodied. More importantly, in placing these relationships against and in conversation with one another, we—as interlocutors in the present—get the privilege of taking part in a dynamic conversation about the ways these concepts and relationships are never just one thing but are, rather, highly contestable. In these states, it becomes especially important to draw attention to the social and political forces that may take advantage of these malleable qualities. In the case of Pyeongtaek, the power of farmers is pitted against the forces of militarization. In the exploration of this intersection, it becomes more and more clear how the logic of militarization never just looks one way but can seep into the environment, as well as the ways people conceptualize and engage with the environment. In this work of revisiting and writing a history of the protests in Pyeongtaek, we are offered the opportunity to continuously question and make new connections around concepts that might otherwise be taken for granted.



*Sculpture in the Pyeongtaek Peace Center*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Peacemadang, , digital photography, 2013.

This project concludes with one final, parting image of a sculpture from the Pyeongtaek Peace Center. In this art piece, the form of missiles has been re-appropriated using agricultural tools. Knowing that Camp Humphreys still exists in Pyeongtaek, this image holds a somber affect. At the same time, it represents the possibility that exists in continued resistance. In the conflict between these two worlds, a new world is made.



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