Borderless Village: Challenging the Globalist Dystopia in Ansan, South Korea

JIEHEERAH YUN

This article discusses the development of Borderless Village, a multiethnic town in the planned industrial city of Ansan, South Korea. Despite the original vision of Ansan as a clean, self-sufficient model community, its subsequent development resulted in the creation of seemingly dystopic conditions. The perversion of initial planning goals, however, has not been able to prevent the emergence more recently of a vibrant community based on the promotion of global citizenship rights. This article argues that ambiguity within the process of globalization may bring both negative externalities and opportunities to transform dystopia into utopia.

Borderless Village, an NGO promoting the rights of migrant laborers, was born in 2006 when increasing numbers of foreign migrants and questions surrounding their rights as laborers became a central topic in South Korea. Prompted by the Reverend Chun-Eung Park, a representative of Ansan Migrant Shelter, Borderless Village promotes the notion that such laborers are entitled to certain rights regardless of nationality, cultural background, gender, or socioeconomic status.1

In addition to being the name of an NGO, Borderless Village is a name used to describe the Wongok-dong area of Ansan, home to many of the migrants. This community emerged in part as a response to the many factories in the nearby Banwall Industrial Complex, which provide a substantial number of blue-collar jobs (Fig. 1). For many centuries Ansan was a rural village, but in the late 1970s the Korean government designated it and surrounding areas as a site onto which to divert pollution-inducing industries and the growing population of Seoul. Like new towns elsewhere, designed to alleviate the pressure of urbanization, Ansan was also envisioned as a clean, self-supporting model community.2

In South Korea, regarded as an ethnically homogenous society (despite the recent increase in minorities), the establishment of Borderless Village represents a radical departure from previous labor struggles. Unlike traditional labor movements, which work within the framework of a nation-state, Borderless Village was based on the concept of “border-
less citizenship" — the idea that certain rights of citizenship should be extended even to foreign migrant workers.

The development of Ansan and the spatial practices of Wongok-dong have two important ramifications for the study of utopian visions and physical environments. First, the status of Ansan as the first comprehensively planned South Korean city meant that the utopian visions of its modernist planners could be relatively freely expressed in its original design. Unlike Seoul, where the presence of historic urban fabric presented structural limits to redevelopment, Ansan was largely a hinterland, with only a small population of farmers and fishermen; and when the decision was made to develop it, hopes were high that a model alternative community could be built out of such a tabula rasa condition. Second, the subsequent perversion of that plan, and later emergence of new spatial practices in Wongok-dong, illustrate how utopian elements can emerge from seemingly dystopian conditions. In particular, the demographic change resulting from international labor migration has presented new opportunities to explore the meaning of utopia.

The recent history of Ansan provides a revealing case study of how the multiscalar processes of globalization affect built environments. By examining various aspects of the struggle to survive there, this article will highlight how a comprehensively planned built environment may be reappropriated by new population groups. The development of Ansan originally reflected the design approach of an authoritarian state, but changing demographics and aspects of the natural environment have now triggered very different spatial practices. With the help of NGOs like Borderless Village, physical environments once designed to promote industrial efficiency are being utilized for unorthodox activities that support new livelihoods and opportunities for cultural networking. The transformation of Wongok-dong illustrates that while the general process of globalization may be understood as “flattening the world,” or as increasing existing inequalities, actual local manifestations of these processes may be varied and difficult to predict. The example of Borderless Village also shows that the dependency of a national economy on transnational flows of labor can create new spaces of political agency for migrants. The article thus hypothesizes that, as much as globalization has been shown to create negative externalities such as economic inequality and environmental degradation, it may unexpectedly also bring the opportunity to transform dystopia to utopia.

Before discussing the urban history of Ansan, it is imperative to examine theories of utopia and the way the concept has been defined. I will thus begin by examining traditional utopian visions and some criticisms of them. This will allow a reevaluation and redefinition of the concept of utopia and the establishment of my own position in regard to it.
UTOPIA OF TRADITION IN DISREPUTE

The notion of utopia has long been a subject of controversy. Most famously used by Thomas More, the term itself contains the double meaning of *euphoria* (good place) and *euphoria* (no place). While the concept of utopia appears benign, many scholars and philosophers have been critical of its application. Some have even warned that attempts to construct utopia are a clever disguise for totalitarian and authoritative measures. The failures of Communist states to build classless societies and of modernist urban planning in the cities of the capitalist West have likewise caused some scholars and urban planners to scoff at the naiveté of their predecessors. From the decentralized layout of Broadacre City to the superquadras of Brasilia, it seems that city plans containing utopian elements invariably fail. Furthermore, the megalomaniac scale of such social projects, which rarely afford either specificity or flexibility, bring serious environmental and social consequences.

Some scholars, such as Krishnan Kumar, have observed that the modern utopia is a fundamentally Western phenomenon. While utopia as an abstract notion is also prevalent in non-Western societies, he believes that the process of rationalizing it into specific building plans is largely a result of Western cultural traditions. Kumar has noted that, unlike the nonconcrete nature of non-Western paradises such as El fitness of utopia originated in novels such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*. And what distinguishes it from previous conceptions is its reliance on plausible mechanisms like advanced technologies and information infrastructures. In the West, such literary descriptions have had important historical consequences; for example, many architectural and planning movements, such as the Garden City Movement, were inspired by utopian societies portrayed in literature.

The repeated failure to construct such modern paradises, however, eventually exhausted the theme of utopia. At its best, the making of utopia came to be considered a daydream without practical application. Disillusionment with modernism and loss of faith in the prospect of human progress thus caused pragmatic-minded scholars to shun discussions of it. Especially once the hopeful scenario of world peace at the end of the Cold War was clouded by a continuation of regional wars, discussions of utopia seemed irrelevant. In architectural practice, social-minded designers advanced far more modest claims than their predecessors. Others withdrew from any claim to promoting social change, entrenching themselves in the pursuit of style. In brief, notions of utopia became unfashionable.

In recent years, however, the concept of utopia has regained traction within academic circles as a result of a growing fatalism over the negative externalities of globalization. Claims by supporters of open markets that the logic of capital is the paramount reality and that a certain level of socioeconomic polarization is inevitable became predominant for both internal and external reasons. Externally, the end of the Cold War and the conversion of the Chinese and Russian economies to capitalist structures were seen as unequivocal evidence that free markets are the only basis on which to construct a society. Internally, the failure of various social projects, such as public housing programs in the U.S., suggested that the welfare state could not deliver the benefits it claimed. Nevertheless, critics of free-market reforms were quick to discern that such arguments had the effect of discouraging debate on ways to address the consequences of globalization.

In such a historical context, a reexamination of the concept of utopia was seen as a useful strategy to counter the rise of fatalism. Scholars thus began to try to rearticulate the meaning of utopia, moving from a previously static concept to a more dynamic one based on notions of process and heterogeneity. Distinguishing contemporary uses of the term from previous ones, Patrick Hayden, for example, adopted the term “reflexive utopianism” to emphasize the “future-oriented possibility of self-reforming . . . however imperfect, of justice, human rights, autonomy and democracy. . . .” Similarly, David Harvey used the term “spatiotemporal utopianism” to emphasize the dialectical process of defining utopia both in terms of space and social process.

The concept of modern utopia as the exclusive preserve of Western cultural traditions has also been challenged. Various non-Western literatures have described forms of concrete utopia as radical responses to incompetent dynasties. At the same time, scholars have questioned the West-centric notion of utopia and the rigid dichotomy between the local and the global, and begun to examine liminal spaces as possible alternatives. Thus, contemporary discussions of utopianism are different from those of the past because they are based on an awareness that forms of utopia are diverse, and that they will always belong to the future instead of being within the reach of a decisive moment. To put it differently, admitting the elusiveness of utopian society should not imply the withdrawal of inquiry regarding its definition.

Following these ideas, I have adopted an articulation of utopia that emphasizes the process of constructing an ideal society. Instead of the inoperable and naïve notion of utopia as a potentially complete project, I imagine it as a gradual and relentless effort to celebrate difference and promote social justice. It is this vision I have employed in analyzing the case of Ansan and Borderless Village.

ANSAN AS A UTOPIAN/DYSTOPIAN CITY

From its beginnings, the city plan of Ansan contained utopian elements because it was considered part of the solution to the dystopic conditions of crowded and polluted Seoul. Already in the 1960s, Hochul Lee’s popular novel *Seoul un Manwon Ida* [Seoul Is Full] had described that city’s explosive growth, as well as the various social maladies that had arisen from rapid urbanization and a lack of economic opportunity.


In contrast to Seoul, whose proper functioning depended on the support of rural communities, Ansan was to be self-supporting, combining agricultural, industrial, commercial and residential districts. Although remaking Ansan from a rural village into a self-sufficient city was to be carried out by an authoritarian regime, the intent of the plan was to improve living standards by diverting the growth of Seoul and providing better housing for the urban poor.

As the first South Korean city to be planned entirely from the ground up, Ansan embodied many new approaches, including the strict separation of residential and commercial districts. Considering that most South Korean cities had not previously been subjected to zoning, the plan for Ansan thus reflected a strong Western influence. The 1977 urban plan of Banwall Industrial Complex, prepared by the Ministry of Land, Transportation, and Maritime Affairs (MLTM), covered a significant portion of Ansan (fig. 2). However, it was based on a peculiar amalgamation of two conflicting Western ideologies: the picturesque qualities of the Garden City Movement and the stark functionality of the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM). The synthesis of the two ideologies thus created a hybrid town — the result of idiosyncratic South Korean modernization policies that simultaneously pursued an enlargement of green space and increased industrial production. The central government played a dominant role in developing this plan. It considered Ansan a national project, required to ameliorate conditions in Seoul, which was expanding at an unprecedented rate. Thus, until the right to administer the plan was transferred in 1993 to the Ansan city government, it remained the responsibility of the MLTM to make amendments to it.

Reflecting the principles of the Garden City Movement, the plan for Ansan contained substantial green areas and space for residential development. Instead of proposing uniform highrise apartment complexes, a significant portion of the residential area was designated for low-density development. Detached, single-family houses were foreseen as the typical unit in these areas, in an architectural style resembling that of Frank Lloyd Wright (fig. 3). Ample space was also allotted for parks and greenbelts in this utopian city, to prohibit the total exploitation of nature. And, departing from precedent, the planning of apartment areas in Ansan took account of access to light and natural ventilation, instead of simply arranging the buildings in parallel lines. In contrast to the cramped residential conditions of Seoul, the intent was to build a new community that would provide access to the natural environment as well as adequate production facilities to make it economically self-sufficient.

However, since it was simultaneously a plan to disperse the industrial functions of Seoul, the ultimate plan for Ansan...
also departed significantly from the principles of the Garden City Movement. A new law in 1978 regarding the siting of industrial plants mandated the relocation of many industrial complexes outside Seoul. And while certain industries with lower pollution levels were permitted to remain there, heavy industries with higher pollution levels were targeted for removal. Some scholars have argued that Ansan was thus planned as “a repository for the industrial wastes of Seoul and the larger metropolitan region.”11 Indeed, as Ansan developed, it came to contain a far greater level of industry than was necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. Ironically, at a time when the principle of self-sufficiency was being applied to new towns like Ansan, it was not applied to the capital city. Thus, the master plan of Banwall Industrial Complex not only emphasized green space, but also a rapid increase in population and the incorporation of modern technologies to achieve a high level of industrial production.

Reflecting the significance of the industrial sector in Ansan, the architectural style of individual buildings also tended to adopt the language of high modernism. In contrast to the detached houses planned for the low-density residential district, a modernist architectural style and concrete construction was encouraged for apartment buildings that would accommodate large numbers of workers (FIG. 4). Although three- to four-story complexes seem far lower in density than contemporary tower-like residential structures, the apartments depicted represented a fairly high density at the time, given that typical apartment structures in Seoul in the mid-1970s were only five stories high. In addition, the construction of the Banwall Industrial Complex in the southern part of Ansan was dominated by a streamlined modernist aesthetic that emphasized efficiency. And, in spite of the generous allocation of green space, the organization of streets and the arrangement of building masses in the residential district followed a rigid geometry (FIG. 5).
Despite the initial dream that Ansan would become a model city with a balance of green and industrial space, the built result was far from such a utopian image. Rapid development meant that the negative externalities associated with its industrial facilities were never adequately addressed. The population of Ansan grew to an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 by 1985, and increased several times over after that. In addition to the explosive increase in population, the shoddy construction of urban infrastructure contributed to a deterioration of the natural environment. The pollution of Sihwa Lake, an artificial lake surrounded by three cities including Ansan, soon became so severe that it was discernible from satellite photos. Moreover, the strict separation of residential and production sites produced undesirable side effects such as long commutes and a lack of housing options.

At the same time, a loosening of central government control following passage of the Local Government Act resulted in decreased enforcement of guidelines and codes specified in the master plan. With the central government no longer able to manage change, and city government lacking the resources to administer the original plan, older residential areas were quickly transformed into slums. Remaining residents of these older districts suffered particularly from the foul smells emanating from the nearby Banwall Industrial Complex; some even complained of sleeplessness because of them. According to an environmental inspection report by the Secretariat of the National Assembly in 1998, the level of lead in the atmosphere of Ansan and Sihwa was the highest in the country. The level of dioxin — one of the most toxic industrial chemicals, and a byproduct of incineration plants in the Banwall Complex — was another source of concern, and led to several investigations by the Ansan Environmental Technology Development Center.

Another negative result of rapid and reckless industrial development was a lack of cultural and educational infrastructure. According to a 2007 study, education-related services occupied the lowest percentage (0.6 percent) of all business groups in the Wongok-dong area of Ansan, where Borderless Village is located. Considering the proliferation of private educational services and afterschool programs elsewhere in South Korea, the lack of such facilities in Ansan was extremely unusual. And while commercial establishments such as restaurants, small shops, and nightclubs thrived, their absence rendered the industrial town unattractive to families with school-aged children. With worsening living conditions, the construction of large-scale apartment buildings in the eastern part of Ansan during the 1990s brought a further decline in the number of residents of Wongok-dong. This decrease eventually resulted in interruptions of commercial functions.

However, the problems of Ansan did not result in complete failure. In spite of rapid population decline and the depletion of natural resources, the Wongok-dong area soon came to be repopulated by foreign migrant workers. Implementation of the Industrial Trainees System in 1993 by the Kim Young Sam administration, which promoted globaliza-
tion as a political slogan, encouraged a flow of migrant laborers into South Korea. Most of these migrants came from poorer countries, including China and parts of Southeast Asia, and many had only minimal skills. In Ansan, most of the migrant workers were employed on assembly lines in the Banwall and Siheung Industrial Complexes, where they performed repetitious and mechanical jobs. Since most migrant workers were single and lacked enough money to utilize the South Korean rent system of jeonse, demand for smaller units skyrocketed. Consequently, in contrast to the master plan, which designated Wongok-dong as a low-density residential district, the area became a site of intensive development. With the decreased role of the central government and a lack of local government resources to administer planning policies, private interests began to take advantage of the high demand for smaller, more affordable housing by subdividing larger units.

The most extreme example of this demand for low-cost housing are goshiwon (고시원), single-room residences that are common in the Wongok-dong part of Ansan (fig. 6). The term is derived from the small spaces used by students preparing for state examinations, such as the bar exam. Instead of living in an apartment or a house with roommates or family members, students found it more productive to rent small, quiet spaces for themselves. Although goshiwon began simply as study spaces with communal bathrooms, they were soon transformed into residential spaces, as students, wishing not to commute, fell asleep at their desks. Goshiwon also began to be occupied by more destitute populations such as the chronic jobless, the disabled, and foreign workers who could not afford higher rents elsewhere (fig. 7). After many South Koreans lost their jobs during the structural-adjustment period of the late 1990s, the percentage of goshiwon dwellers not involved in preparing for examinations increased significantly. In fact, less than half (42.7 percent) of those who live in goshiwon today are actually preparing for exams, while 57.3 percent are staying there for economic reasons. Originally, since goshiwon were not officially recognized as residences, the illegal subdivision of upper floors required to produce them also placed them technically beyond the scope of legal protection. Some goshiwon, such as those in the Sinrim-dong part of Seoul, were developed for students and continue to be used principally by students preparing for exams. However, the goshiwon complexes in Wongok-dong were specifically developed to house the new urban poor: neither does the area have a large pool of students, nor is it close to any major academic institution. The proliferation of goshiwon illustrates how residential conditions worsened to a significant degree in Ansan despite the outward appearance of lowrise structures reminiscent of the “bachelor” housing units once envisioned in the master plan.

Although there are various types of goshiwon, including more luxurious ones with separate bathrooms and kitchens, goshiwon in Wongok-dong can be as small as 44 square feet (about four square meters). Usually, they are equipped only with a small TV, since the extremely small living area prevents occupants from accumulating other furniture. In this

**Figure 6.** Goshiwon are very common in the Wongok-dong area, where Borderless Village is located. Most of them are crammed in upper floors of existing buildings. Photo by author.

**Figure 7.** A goshiwon complex consists of narrow hallway with minuscule rooms opening on both sides. Photo by author.
minimal habitation, every bit of space is used as efficiently as possible. Thus, one side wall is reserved for hanging clothes, while the space next to TV is reserved for the storage of personal items (fig. 8). Leftover space is for sleeping — a full-grown man can barely lie down across the length of the room, which can make it quite uncomfortable.

Besides their low level of comfort, goshiwon may sometimes be accessed only by narrow hallways, creating great potential danger during an emergency. With many doors open simultaneously into such a space, quick escape would be impossible. Indeed, a series of fires in goshiwon in other metropolitan regions have resulted in many deaths and injuries. Yet, despite poor safety standards and a lack of comfort, many people choose to stay in goshiwon because of their cheap rent, which in Wongok-dong can be as low as 30 thousand Korean won (about US$30) per month. Considering that studio-type apartments with separate bathrooms and kitchens require at least twenty to thirty thousand Korean won (about US$200 to US$300 per month), with an additional security deposit, the cost of goshiwon is attractive to the impoverished, many of whom border on becoming homeless.

Such high-density development stands in sharp contrast to the uncongested urban areas and low-density residential complexes envisioned in the Banwall master plan. Moreover, instead of the bucolic neighborhood portrayed in the architectural renderings, the ground level of buildings today is usually occupied by commercial activities. And while the master plan was intended to promote ordered growth, the rigid geometry of its street layout and building blocks could not prevent highly irregular and messy ground-level extensions from springing out to accommodate these activities. Although cylindrical bollards delineating pedestrian areas serve as a general boundary for these activities, the purpose of such devices is often circumvented by shop owners who use them for storage (fig. 9). A combination of the worsening residential environment and media reports of criminal activities in Wongok-dong has further generated an image of urban dystopia in the minds of many South Koreans. Initiatives by the Ansan Migrant Community Service Center (AMCSC), such as the provision of free medical services to foreign migrants on weekends, help mitigate these conditions. But such gestures produce only one-time benefits without addressing structural problems associated with national labor and immigration policies.

Despite the declining material conditions of Wongok-dong, it is too early to write it off as simply another failed attempt at utopianism. Its messy appearance does not reflect the full capacity of its residents. Although the identity of migrant workers has traditionally been defined principally in economic terms, this view may be challenged if the workers’ spatial practices might come to include political and community volunteer activities. Borderless Village thus promotes a concept of borderless citizenship which includes the utopian pursuit of social justice by reducing discrimination against migrants. The case of Borderless Village thus illustrates how the concept of citizenship as fixed status is increasingly being replaced by one of “performative citizenship.” Such positions also challenge the strict dichotomy between national identity and deterritorialized cosmopolitanism.

Before delving into specific spatial practices in Borderless Village (which make it a candidate for a “space of hope”23), it is necessary to examine articulations of citizenship and theoretical positions regarding global citizenship. Despite the skepticism surrounding the idea, I argue that it is pertinent to understand the political dimensions of contemporary spatial practices that are seemingly unrelated to the exercise of citizenship rights.
GLOBAL (BORDERLESS) CITIZENSHIP

Despite the widespread presumption that nation-states are being weakened in the age of globalization, many scholars have argued that states remain powerful agents of economic and socio-cultural exchange. In highly asymmetrical processes of transnational exchange, for example, control of borders and national citizenship has become a central method to curb or encourage transnational movements. Contrary to the rosy picture of disintegrating borders and the creation of a worldwide fraternity, the result has been an entrenchment of sectarian politics and the jealous guarding of privileges. Although the development of communication and transportation technology has facilitated movements of people, the benefits of such innovations have not been spread evenly over income and population groups. While those enjoying “flexible citizenship” may take advantage of porous borders, the less fortunate are subject to harsher realities. For instance, the majority of migrant workers in Borderless Village suffer from an ambiguous legal status as well as various forms of social and economic discrimination. One reason is that although most migrant workers enter South Korea legally, their continuing status is dependent on conformance to rules laid out in employment contracts. For instance, those who find better-paying jobs once in the country risk becoming “illegal” if they take them, since existing employment policy does not allow them to change workplaces without the consent of their employers.

While the classical conception of citizenship does not acknowledge the rights of migrant workers, many activists have appealed to the concept of global citizenship to address such forms of social injustice. Yet, despite the widespread use of the term, it lacks fixed definition. Although it generally refers to political rights beyond the boundary of nation-states, the concept provokes disagreement and controversy among scholars. The most common criticism is based on a fear of cultural relativism, and emerges from a communitarian and republican point of view. Other critics claim that the idea lacks ontological basis. Still others argue that the idea is redundant, or else they question whether it is practicable given the lack of political and legal institutions. Just as the concept of utopia remains elusive, so the concept of global citizenship seems unfeasible and largely metaphorical.

Nevertheless, contemporary global conditions encourage a more flexible interpretation of citizenship to counter new forms of oppression. For instance, Hans Schattle has argued that practices of global citizenship are complex and tangible, showing that the concept is more than an abstract ideal. And to counter the communitarian claim that global citizenship creates politically “thin” societies, April Carter has suggested that “accepting general duties does not entail denying the pressing claims of particular obligations and ties.” The assumed antithetical relationship between national identity and cosmopolitanism has also been challenged by examples of constructive feedback between national allegiance and universal human rights. Nigel Dower has thus extended the applicability of global citizenship by arguing that one is a global citizen regardless of one’s particular awareness. The reason is that some issues, such as environmental degradation and gender inequality, transcend national borders. The emergence of multinational NGOs and international political bodies also suggests that, despite the contention surrounding the definition of global citizenship, the concept is far from meaningless.

Whether or not it is compatible with the concept of national citizenship, a more imperative question may be the extent to which global citizenship affects and is affected by the traditional conception of national territory. Many scholars have argued that granting full citizenship rights (such as the right to vote) to migrant workers may not be desirable, since it may create a political backlash. However, the establishment of a graded system of rights may likewise create pools of second-class citizens, hatching conditions for “insurgent citizenship” in the long run. A significant portion of migrant workers — or “metics” to borrow Will Kymlicka’s rearticulation of a Greek term — plan to return home, but eventually change their minds, generating “permanently disenfranchised, alienated, and racially or ethnically defined underclass.”

In such a context, the experimental community encouraged by Borderless Village, which seeks to change the perception of migrant workers “from the providers of cheap labor to social and political human beings with rights,” may provide a model of global citizenship that is applicable within a variety of nation-states with rapidly diversifying populations. Despite skepticism regarding global citizenship, the concept can thus be based on a set of agreements on human rights, which, if applied appropriately, can generate the preconditions for a utopian society. Instead of emphasizing the neo-Kantian certainty of the Enlightenment, the issues involved may be approached with cautious optimism and regard for particulars. Despite the communitarian critique of global citizenship, the case of Borderless Village illustrates that one can be a responsible community member and a global citizen at the same time.

SPATIAL PRACTICES OF BORDERLESS VILLAGE

Although the organization Borderless Village ultimately emerged in response to the global migration of labor, the initial impetus for its formation involved issues related to the local physical environment. The spatial practices of Borderless Village demonstrate that even overcrowding and failed modernist planning cannot prevent the formation of a vibrant community if new meanings become attached to old sites. In particular, while the presence of most migrant workers on the streets of Borderless Village is directly related to their role in larger systems of economic production, that presence generates the conditions for further involvement, including community volunteer work and political activity.
For instance, the concentration of migrant workers necessitated the start of a monthly village-wide clean-up day, during which new workers and older residents joined hands to address the problem. Taking advantage of the successful event, Borderless Village was established, aiming to promote multicultural understanding and solutions to other local problems caused by ethnic and cultural diversity. Eventually, organization of the monthly clean-up not only improved sanitation but improved the relationship between migrants and long-time residents. In effect, the act of cleaning the streets, as a form of community involvement, created the image of good neighbors, and thus earned migrants acknowledgement as equal members of the community.

At the same time that the high population density of the area has led to a proliferation of street-level market activities, it has also encouraged politically disenfranchised minorities to engage in performances that give voice to their political views and cultural diversity (Fig. 11). On the one hand, official public programs now include the staging of multicultural festivals such as traditional music performances and dances, organized mainly by South Korean volunteers with the participation of migrant workers. But, on the other, migrant workers themselves have organized unofficial activities that are more controversial. For instance, members of the Falun Gong religious movement use the plaza in front of the Ansan subway station and the meeting square of Wongok-dong to voice dissent against the policies of the Chinese government by popularizing alleged human rights abuses. Regardless of controversies surrounding Falun Gong, the strategy of appealing to universal human rights illustrates how practices of global citizenship can spring up in unexpected ways. Whereas South Korean volunteers and government workers focus their efforts on addressing the relationship between migrant workers and mainstream Korean society, migrant workers have attempted to publicize political issues in their homelands — thereby educating passers-by to cultural and political conditions elsewhere.
Another possible positive result of the presence of migrant workers may be the development of goshiwon as a new low-income housing market. This will ultimately involve addressing the safety of buildings in which they are located and improving their level of comfort. But despite apprehensions and controversy regarding the proliferation of goshiwon, the typology does provide affordable housing for people who would otherwise have no options. Although a studio apartment with a separate bathroom and kitchen (which may rent for US$100 per month, with a security deposit of US$2,000 to $3,000), is considered ideal for each individual, such housing may not be practicable given that 33 percent of non-regular factory workers in Ansan earn less than US$1,000 per month.36 Given the sharp increase in rent from a goshiwon to a studio apartment, it may be necessary to seek alternatives, rather than insist on the relatively high living standards of developed countries. Recent implementation of a new housing ordinance, which legalized goshiwon, offers a glimmer of hope. While bringing goshiwon within legal bounds, it requires a minimum corridor width of five feet and the installation of fire sprinklers.37 Thus, although the original lack of affordable housing has generated an unconventional new form, that form is gradually being incorporated into the official housing market with appropriate regulatory oversight.

The combined effect of the aforementioned practices — the monthly clean-up, street festivals/political campaigns, and the legalization of goshiwon — might not seem to be enough to produce significant change within South Korean society — let alone usher in a state of utopia. However, if one accepts a process-oriented and temporal notion of utopia, such practices are far from meaningless mini-spectacles. Nor should the local/global dichotomy be accepted as normative in a way that assumes local issues have only a minor influence on global practices. The fact that such local events do not directly address the political rights of migrant workers vis-à-vis South Korean society should not be mistaken as a sign of unmitigated subjectivity. As Mark Goodale has pointed out, it is “much easier to appropriate the idea of human rights for specific legal, political, or social purposes than it is to embrace the radically alternative conception of the person.”38 Thus, depending on local context, the practices of global citizenship can take diverse forms which might not fit into the definition of activism espoused by classical political theories. For example, the ability of migrant Chinese workers in South Korea to address political issues in their homeland illustrates that globalization creates new political domains that can be utilized in unexpectedly multiscalar ways.

BEYOND SUPERFICIAL MULTICULTURALISM

This article has attempted to show how the unpredictable nature of globalization may cause both the perversion of utopian planning as well as the possible conversion of dystopian landscapes into spaces of hope. On the one hand, the case study of Ansan illustrates how optimism associated with efforts to build a model community was shadowed by a corollary plan to relocate pollution-generating industries from Seoul. The resultant perversion of the initial plan for Ansan thus shows how the utopian impulse always contains room for manipulation and distortion. On the other hand, more recent urban development has shown how the ambiguity inherent in the idea of utopia can be utilized in reverse to promote social justice and political participation. While the failure of traditional articulations of utopia may spread cynicism and shade the very impulse with pejorative connotations, I have tried to show that a more flexible definition of the term may help counter such fatalism. Likewise, the concept of global citizenship, which advances the idea of cosmopolitanism in a productive new direction, may be valuable in countering the spread of ethnocentric views and other repugnant forms of essentialism.

Admittedly, there are many unfavorable conditions which prohibit the actualization of borderless citizenship in Ansan. Most migrant workers still suffer from socioeconomic discrimination and unstable immigration status. Notwithstanding the South Korean government’s attempt to promote multicultural understanding — as by hosting various cultural events — inconsistent and opportunistic enforcement of immigration law emphasizes how such efforts fail to treat migrants as more than an economic necessity. While multicultural events can add flavor to the experience of street life in Ansan, they may do little more than generate interest in superficial cultural forms, such as traditional clothes and musical instruments. Furthermore, increased crime has led to reports in the popular media that describe the area of Borderless Village as home to uprooted drifters. Despite the absence of the homeless, the abject residential environment of Ansan is far from a safe haven for members of the global community.

However, the presence of negative externalities should not preclude a conceptual reconsideration of the relationship between utopia and social practice. As the case of Ansan illustrates, the failure of a plan or design scheme does not necessarily take away the transformative potential generated by changes in spatial patterns. Conversely, the successful completion of a social project does not guarantee the fulfillment of a utopian dream. If dystopias of globalization can bring increased inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural homogenization, utopias of globalization can bring transnational political mobilization, heightened environmental consciousness, and a demise of cultural essentialisms.

The time when formulaic solutions were presented as viable options is long past. Flexible adaptations according to local context as well as the selective inclusion of controversial spatial practices can build conditions for the formation of a vibrant community. What is needed is the ability to tap into the ambiguity created by volatile forces of globalization. Only then will contemporary versions of the Brave New World start to reverse course.
REFERENCE NOTES

3. While Thomas Friedman has argued that globalization brings the desirable destruction of impediments to free competition, Joseph Stiglitz has argued that it will aggravate global economic inequalities. See T.L. Friedman, The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century (New York: Audio Renaissance, 2005); and J. Stiglitz, Globalization and Its Discontents (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).


5. K. Kumar, “Aspects of the Western Story of Huh Seng, which comes to Seoul to find her. They return to the village together after realizing there are no places for them in Seoul.


8. For instance, The story of Kildong Hong (洪吉童傳), written by Huh Gyoon in the late Chosun dynasty, ends in the establishment of a utopian nation called Yool-do, where class hierarchy and other forms of social injustices are abolished. In another novel, Story of Huh Seng (洪生傳), a utopian nation is established on an island where a group of destitute farmers-turned-thieves are given new opportunities. Both Kildong and Huh Seng are characters with strong desires for social reform.


10. In the novel, Kil-nyoh (the female character) moves from a rural village to Seoul only to end up as a prostitute. Sangleun (a male character from the same village) comes to Seoul to find her. They return to the village together after realizing that there are no places for them in Seoul.


13. According to Gunhwa Jeong, 41,022 cases of construction defects were discovered in the 514-kilometer section of a sewer pipe, which occupies a staggering 46 percent of the whole sewer pipe in Ansan. See Jeong, ed., Kundae Ansan ui Hyungung kwa Baljun, p.30.


17. Park, Yiyoomin Shinhak gwa Gookgyung Upnun Maul Silchun, p.40.

18. Among many weaknesses of the Industrial Trainees System, the ambiguous status of trainees encouraged workers to desert the designated workplaces in search of better wages. It was substituted later with the Employment Permit System in 2004.

19. Jeonse is a kind of lease system unique in South Korea. Instead of monthly rents, a tenant pays a lump sum deposit for a year or two. After the end of the lease, the tenant receives the full deposit back. The deposit amount varies from place to place. It can range from 20 to 30 percent of the market value of the property to up to 80 percent depending on the availability of housing.


22. Martin Albrow argues that the concept of citizenship has more value when it is understood as an accomplishment rather than a status. He differentiates citizenship from nationality by emphasizing the performative aspect of the former. See M. Albrow, The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

23. Harvey, Spaces of Hope.


33. Park, Yiyoomin Shinhak gwa Gookgyung Upnun Maul Silchun, p.156.

34. The clean-up day is the third Saturday of each month.

35. Falun Gong (FLG), also called Falun Dafa, is a religious movement begun in 1992 by Li Hongzhi. While the movement includes qigong exercises to improve health,


37. Goshiwon were legalized in July 2009, defined as either a second-type neighborhood living facility or accommodation facility depending on the lot size.
