STRADDLING OVER ALGOCRACY AND CARE DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL PLATFORM ECONOMY IN SOUTH KOREA

SUK-KI KONG

(SKONG@SNU.AC.KR)

SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY ASIA CENTER

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

- The Rise of Algocracy and the Challenge of Care Democracy in South Korea
    - The digital revolution is strengthening the digital platform economy and leading to the rise of an invisible algocracy.
    - Globally, civil society has become fragmented and isolated due to such a rapid transition to the phone-bound or homebound society, which made citizens easily connected through digital platform economy but anti-social incompetent.

- Exploring the Impact of Digital Revolution and Platform Economy on South Korea
    - Big Tech has not only violated privacy but also discouraged citizens' engagement into public issues and then make them suffer from the epidemic of loneliness. In order to overcome Big Tech's invisible algocracy and its side-effects, citizens at grassroots level should get over inside and outside challenges to restore the so-called 'talking politics strategy.'

2. BACKGROUNDS:
PROVOCATIVE CHALLENGES TO KOREAN CIVIL SOCIETY

- Bypassing NGOS and Extreme to Political parties?

- DINK(Double Income, No Kids), How to deal with your care issues?

- Who are your reference groups?

- Do you feel lonely? Loneliness vs. solitude

- What's your hapticality? We live in the Anti-Social Century.

- What do you think your live is Home-bound or Phone-bound?

2-1. Glocal Crises in Korea

- Lowest fertility rate (total fertility rate of 0.75, world's lowest, 2024)
- Suicide rate (27.3 deaths per 100,000, 1st in OECD, 2019)
- Life Expectancy in South Korea is 84.3 years (male 81.4, female 87.1 2024 Korean Demography)
- Approaching Hyper Aging Society (20 % of population 65+, 2024 December)
- Individualism: 35.5%, (single-person household, 2023) 13.3% (four people household, 2023)
- Disintegration of local rural communities; central-local divide; municipal revitalization
- Digital platform economy: Irregular worker, Precariat (gig worker)
- Climate crisis/ disaster and Resilience
- Migration and Diversity & Inclusion
- COVID-19 Pandemic Socio-economic impact on Mental health & Loneliness
- Ukraine war (2020) & Israel-Hamas war (2023)
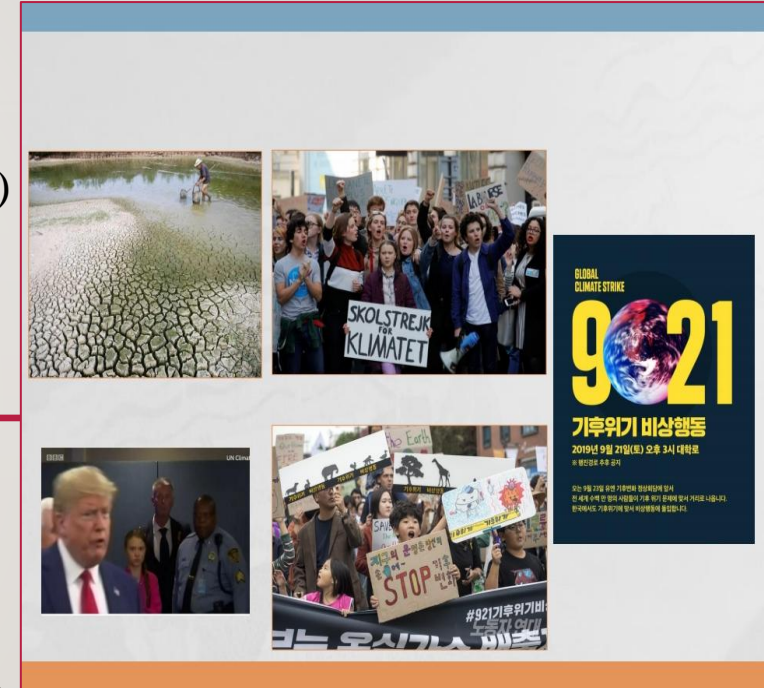
2-2. Digital Revolution and Information Regime
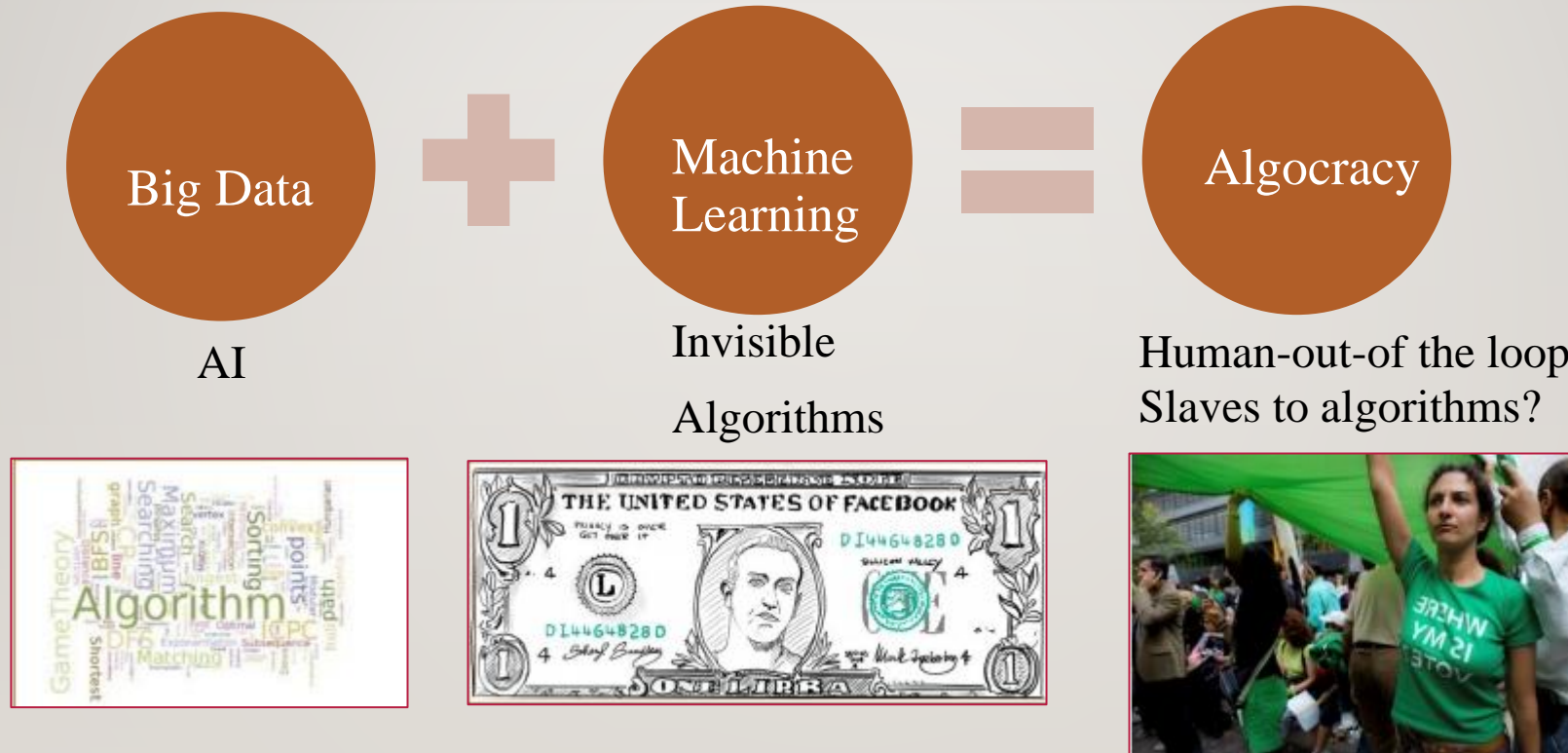
- Mojos (Mobile Journalists) vs. Fake News (ex)

  Extreme YouTuber for Money

- Illusion of Sharing Economy and Mass production of gig workers

- Emerging Platform Workers: Strugglers, Strivers, and Successors, in *Hustle and Gig* (A. J. Ravenelle, 2019)

- Big Tech's Invisible Dominance

- Digital Literacy & Sousveillance

Source: www.joongang.co.kr/article/23419421#home

2-3. ALGOCRACY

- *Everything in life is datafied and controlled by algorithms.*
- *Digital platforms are spaces of both threat and opportunity.*
- *Platform workers are vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation.*

Big Data **+** Machine Learning **=** Algocracy

AI

Invisible

Algorithms

Human-out-of the loop
Slaves to algorithms?

3. Tripartite Relationship:

3-1. NGOs as a Wild Card

Tripartite Relationship

Citizenship 10 Accountability Requirements

- Respect for Human Rights
- Independence
- Transparency
- Good Governance
- Responsible Advocacy
- Participation
- Diversity/ Inclusion
- Environmental Responsibility
- Ethical Fundraising
- Professional Management

Source: *INGO Accountability Charter 2014*
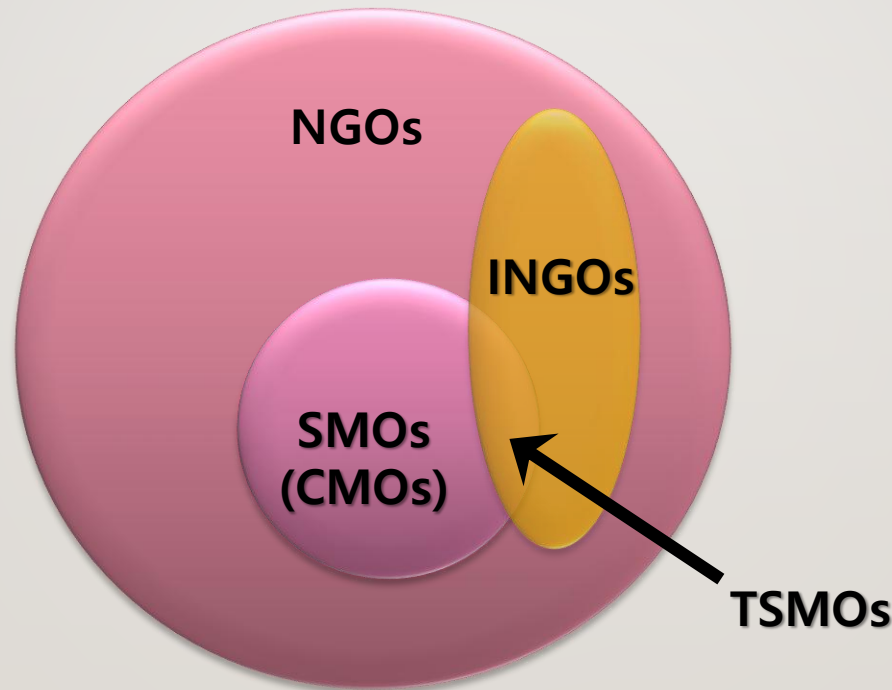
Source: J. Smith et al. 1997: 13 (revised)

States, Parties, and Social Movements

Edited by Jack A. Goldstone

J. Goldstone 2003

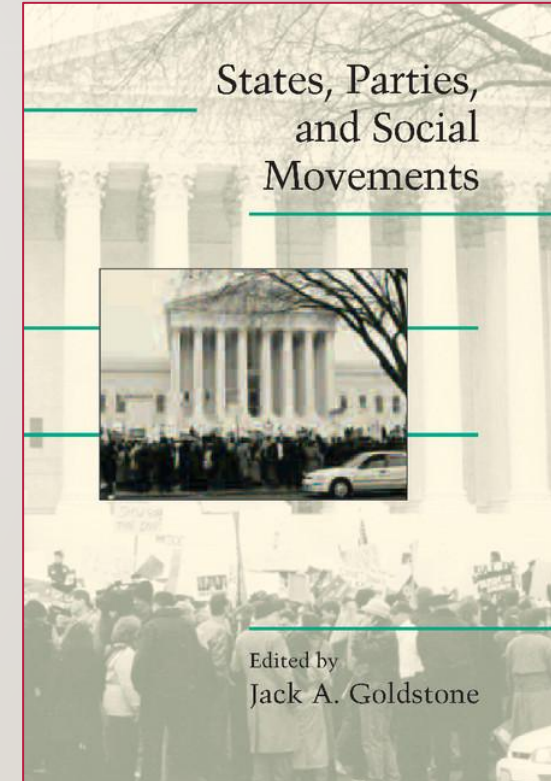# 3-2. Reflecting Governance:
How to Bring Participatory Governance Back In

- Perseverance & Resilience
- Innovation & Social Value
- Governance (Good, Transparent, and Democratic ..)
- Engagement & Citizenship (bottom-up)
- Communication & Talking Politics (W. Gamson, 1982)

- The virtuous cycle of persistence-communication engagement-participation-innovation
- Intermediate supporting organization, top-down versus bottom-up approach
- The relationship with government and business, critical conflicting and competitive partnership

Seongmisan Community, Mapo-gu, Seoul

EZ House and COOP, Nowon-gu, Seoul

IMPACT ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

'Catch-up' and Top-down Strategy

- Digital platforms undermine traditional forms of civic engagement.

- Platform workers are alienated and marginalized.

- Disconnection from local community events and participation.

- Emergence of social polarization and exclusion of minorities.
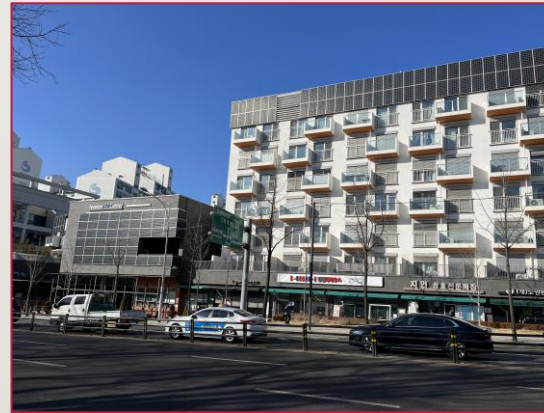
Energy Zero House, Nnowon-Gu, Seoul

Saemangeum Solar Energy Projects
Gunsan, Cheollabuk-Do

3-3. CHALLENGES TO DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY & KOREAN CIVIL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

- Weakened deliberative democracy due to algorithmic control.

- The disappearance of true political discourse and public engagement.

- The MZ generation is more isolated in digital spaces, lacking real-world engagement.
    - ① Revitalizing activism: change, challenge, conflict but not dynamism
    - ② Resisting invisible domination of digital platform (Alogracy) as sousveillance.
    - ③ Balanced approach to 'MZ generation (Career & cause development)
    - ④ Virtuous or vicious cycle to resource mobilization (extension to interest group)
   - ⑤ Reclaiming rooted cosmopolitan citizenship

4. CHALLENGES TO CARE DEMOCRACY

- Self-Individualization (not individualism) and platform dependence undermine local community engagement.

- Building trust through direct interaction is crucial for care services.

- Over-reliance on digital platforms can lead to self-alienation.

- The privatization and commodification of care services deepen social inequality.

4-1. ANTI-SOCIAL CENTURY:
TAKING POLITICS VS. PHONE-BOUND LONELINESS

- Care democracy is about active participation and mutual care within local communities.

- A sustainable care model requires local cooperation and engagement.

- Post-COVID-19 society is more reliant on digital platforms, but care needs personal, localized connections.

- Without trust and physical presence, care services become unsustainable and impersonal.

Hapticality: it is a series of processes of looking at, meeting, understanding, respecting, and cooperating with others. Cooperation presupposes diversity, inclusiveness, and openness. Listening to others with recognition and respect.

shutterstock.com · 1670426605
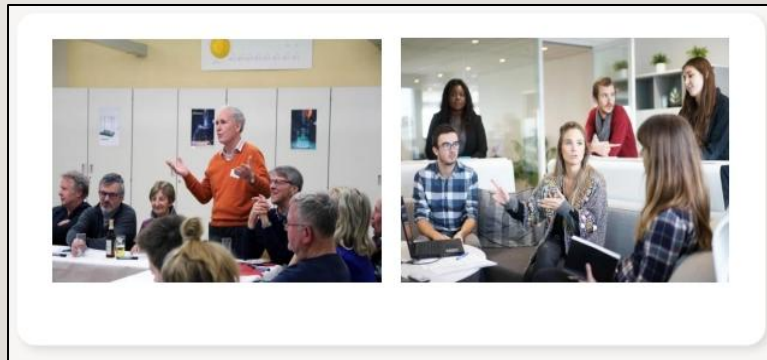
ANTI-SOCIAL CENTURY: PHONE-BOUND AND HOME-BOUND LONELY LIFE

4-2. SEEING OTHERS AND LISTENING DEMOCRACY:
LIFE-LONG APPROACH TO CARE DEMOCRACY

- *Democratizing Global Economy: The Role of Civil Society,* J. A. Scholte (2003)

  - Public Education: civility and awareness

  - Public Debate: deliberation and persuasion

  - Public Participation: engagement and involvement

  - Public Transparency: openness and accessibility

  - Public Accountability: monitoring and responsibility

- *Seeing Others,* M. Lamont (2023)

  - Listening Democracy (B. Han, 2023)

  - Citizen with Civility: Gap between Neighborhood and Citizenship (Kong 2017)

  - Altruistic Individualism (S. Chung 2023)
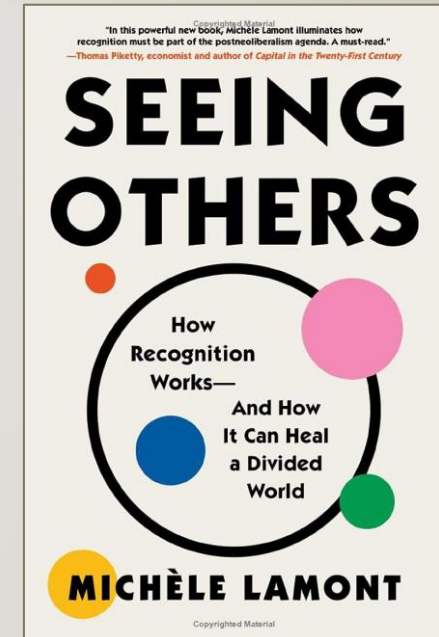
4-3. TRANSNATIONAL CAPITALIST CLASS VS. ROOTED COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP

Transnational Capitalists (TCCs) Disappearance of local communities/ sense of belonging/ cooperation and coexistence/ solidarity.

Rooted Cosmopolitans Citizenship: enhancing regional resilience, horizontal leadership and a light community & open community creative cooperation processes.

5. Searching for Alternatives

FREE
THE
RIVERS!
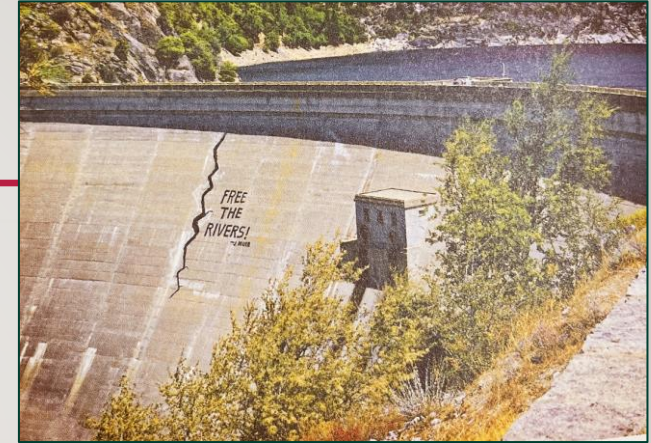
Change-maker at Heyground, Seongsu Alley, Seoul

Source: Zero-waste Organic Market, Kyoto © S. Kong

5-1. LIGHT COMMUNITY STRATEGY ALGOCRACY

Digital Innovation
- Information & Database Building and Sharing
- Accessibility
- Voluntary Engagement

Sharing Economy
- Citizen's participation as a Pro-Sumer
- Decentralized and Horizontal approach
- Trust and disciple thru peer review
- Flexibility & work-life balance

Light Community
- Fluidity, Openness, lightness
- Creative Designer at life-projects
- Networked thru weak ties
- Revitalizing social value

Gig Economy/ Platform Economy
- Exhausted Hustler
- Removed from the Community
- Deactivated

Source: Ezio Manzini. 2019. *Politics of the Everyday*, New York: Bloomsbury

Light Community Model for Community Care

- Not recovering a sticky and heavy community.
- Rebuild a community with more freedom of entry and exit
    - An experiment in an open, flexible, and light community (Fluidity; Openness; Lightness)
- Politics of Everyday and Everybody Design (Life Projects)
    - Experiments in daily life at local community (Life Projects)
    - Residents themselves organize projects (Project-making)
    - Rediscovering the resources of cooperation and reciprocity at locales (Exploring)
    - Strengthen the sense of belonging through cooperative process (Collaborating)
- Designing and Transforming Everyday Life
    - Acting →Transgressing → Transforming

Source : Ezio Manzini. 2019. *Politics of the Everyday*, New York: Bloomsbury.

Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation (Ezio Manzini, 2015, MIT)

5-2. NEW EXPERIMENTS IN EAST ASIA:
SOCIAL ECONOMY, LOCAL FOOD, ECO-TOURISM, ZERO WASTE, HOME CARE, ALT-SCHOOL

Sinya Ominami (Kamiyama, Tokushima

Ikuko Saito (Kamiyama)

Hidehiko Mita (Tateyabashi , Gunma)

Dokoru Sensei (Kamiichi, Toyama)

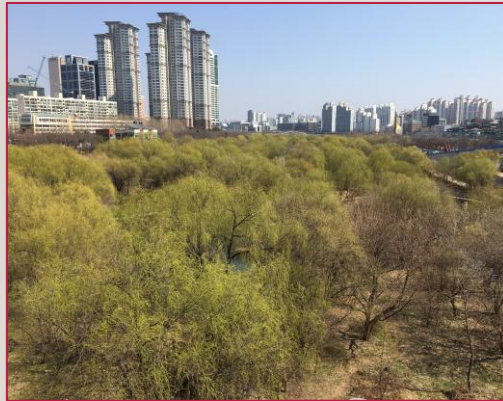Terumi Azuma (Kamikatsu, Tokushima)

Joanne Cho (Coop-Hangang , Seoul)

Dr. San-Ju Yu (Doulan, Taitung)

Kyoko Sengoku, Tanabe, Wakayama)

SOCIAL COOPERATIVE HANGANG IN SOUTH KOREA:
ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO Community care

CARE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY IN TAIWAN
DR. SAN-JU YU & DOULAN HOME CARE IN TAITUNG

Dr. San-Ju Yu (둘란/Taitung)

6. CHALLENGES AHEAD: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREAN SOCIETY

- The rise of digital platforms and AI risks eroding democratic participation and community life.

- The Light Community strategy offers a new way to combine digital and physical spaces for better care and democracy.

- Grassroots Democracy and Civic Engagement
  - J. A. Scholte's Civic Engagement in Promoting Democracy
  - E. Manzini's Light Community Strategy: Towards Robust Local Governance From Below
  - Promoting Hapticality Beyond Loneliness
  - Rooted Cosmopolitan Citizenship Beyond Digital Platform Economy
  - Active Engagement (Sousveillance) Against Algocracy

REFERENCES

Aloisi, Antonio and Barlerio De Stefano. 2022. *Your Boss is an Algorithm: Artificial Intelligence Platform Work and Labor*. New York: Hart Publishing.

Danaher, John. 2016. "The Threat of Algocracy: Reality, Resistance and Accommodation," *Philosophy & Technology* 29(3): 245-268.

Gamson, Wiliam. A. 1982. *Talking Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Han, Byung-Chul. 2022. *Information Regime*, (translated by Daeho Chun), Paju: Gimm-Young Publishers. (In Korean)

Kong, Suk-Ki. 2012. "Politics of Cosmopolitan Citizenship: The Korean Engagement in the Global Justice Movements," *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 16(1), UK: Routledge.

Kong, Suk-Ki, Soo-Bok Cheong & Hyun-Chin Lim. 2023. *Critical Reflections on Korean Civil Movements and the Urgent Challenges*, Seoul: ZININZIN. (in Korean)

Lamont, Michele. 2023. Seeing Others: How Recognition Works and How It Can Heal a Divided World, Atria/One Signal Publishers

Lim, H. & Kong, S. 2020. "Civic Engagement in the Energy Transition since Fukushima in South Korea," *Korea Observer* 51(3), 463-483.

Manzini, Ezio. 2022. *Livable Proximity: Ideas for the City that Cares*, EGEA Spa: Bocconi University Press.

_____. 2019. *Politics of the Everyday*, New York: Bloomsbury.

Ravenelle, Alexandrea J. 2019. *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Scholte, Jan. A., 2003. *Democratizing the Global Economy: The Role of Civil Society*. Coventry, UK: Center for the Study of Globalization and Regionalization.

Tronto, Joan C. 2021. *Caring Democracy*, translated by H. Kim & S. Na, Seoul: Parkyoung Publishing Company.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs.

Q & A

KONG Suk-Ki (PhD from Harvard University) is a research professor of Asia Center at Seoul National University. His research interests include political sociology, social movements, civil society & NGO studies, and social economy with focusing on Korean NGOs' transnational activism, local community and citizenship, grassroots democracy, social innovation, and civic empowerment. His researches are published at several journals including *Human Rights Quarterly, Citizenship Studies, Korea Observer, and Korean Social Science Journal.* He has contributed to a couple of book projects such as *Asianization of Asia* (2024), *Future Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West: Care of the Self (2023)*, COVID-19 in East Asia and Aftermath (2023), *Citizenship and Migration in Europe and Asia (2012).* He has also published various books about Korean civil society and NGOs (in Korean).