일반논문

Place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* through Occupation*

점유를 통한 장소 만들기: 광화문 세월호 광장을 사례로

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This paper draws upon the politics of place-making by examining the dynamics around the occupation of public space, a topic that has received great attention from geographers and urban scholars. This study looks at the case of *Sewolho Gwangjang* at Gwanghwamun plaza in downtown Seoul, a place made both to commemorate the victims who lost their lives in the Sewol ferry (*Sewolho*) disaster of 2014 and as a form of protest by their families. It explores how the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza by the victims' families eventually turned into the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* in the occupied territory as well as how the place was politically claimed as a public space, *Gwangjang*. An actor-oriented approach is taken to illustrate the dynamics and competition of conflicting interests around the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. The main actors comprise both governmental and nongovernmental entities that both intentionally and unintentionally became involved in the making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. The findings demonstrate, first, that the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* was concurrent with the expansion of the occupation and thus there was continuous tension between competing forces. Second, place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* took place through cooperative efforts of key political actors who engaged in and

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was supported and sustained by citizens who shared griefs and ideologies. This research ultimately aims to present a progressive understanding of the occupation of public space by contextualizing it as a place-making process.

Keywords: place-making, public space, politics of public space, occupation of public space

1. Introduction

This paper looks at the politics of public space. It aims to analyze the place-making that results from the occupation of public space through the case of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, a place arranged in Gwanghwamun Plaza as both a memorial for and protest against the Sewol ferry disaster of 2014. This study defines a public space as one that is openly accessible to the general public and that any person may enter, and it considers the plaza to be a place that meets these criteria. Occupation of public space refers to the takeover of a place that is not supposed to be owned by a private party. Based on the theory of place-making, this study focuses on the actors who participated in the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* as well as their collaboration.

Public space has been at the center of academic debates of urban studies for a long time. The creation and management of public space and its use has been a significant agenda. Previous studies on the occupation of public space mainly interpret it as a form of spatial strategy showing political disobedience and rebellion. Despite their contribution to the understanding of the occupation of public space as a kind of social and political action, past literature was limited in that

it has mainly identified such occupations as single acts committed by homogeneous groups. There have been fewer attempts to interpret it using the procedural approach or to focus on the dynamic interaction between the different actors related to the occupations. To fill this gap, this research looks into how the roles and composition of actors change within the process of occupation as well as how they collaborate or negotiate. Through empirical investigation of the case of *Sewolho Gwangang* in Gwanghwamun Plaza, this paper shows how the occupation of public space may expand to perform place-making. The key actors are from both the governmental and nongovernmental sectors.

This research discusses the formation of *Sewolho Gwangang*, which began as a hunger strike sit-in held by the families who lost their loved ones in the Sewol ferry (*Sewolho*) disaster. The Sewol ferry disaster was a tragic accident wherein a 6,835 ton vessel that was carrying 476 people on its overnight journey from Incheon to Jeju sank off the southwestern coast near Jindo, Jeolla province. The accident killed 304 people, mostly students from Ansan Danwon high school who were on a field trip, making it one of the worst maritime disasters in history. The national government and the Park Geun Hye administration was denounced for its belated response to the disaster, and there was widespread social anger and political reactions criticizing its irresponsibility. To ask for a thorough investigation on the disaster, bereaved families occupied the southern part of Gwanghwamun Plaza in the heart of Seoul. They demanded the establishment of the "Special Act on Investigating the Truth of the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster and Building a Safe Society." Since then, politicians from opposition parties, nongovernmental activists, and citizens who sympathized with

the families and commemorated the tragedy have joined in the occupation.

This study asks the following questions. How did the occupation of a public space become place-making? Who caused it, and how did it happen? What was the place initially defined as, and how was this challenged by opposing forces? How did the participating actors collaborate? To answer these questions, the rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, it begins by outlining the theoretical framework through a review of significant discourses from previous literature about place-making and the politics of public space. Then, it briefly discusses research methods and introduces the case of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, tracking the last three and a half years of occupation. The findings are separated into two parts. The first deals with the process of making *Sewolho Gwangjang* and the continuous related tension and controversies that arose between conflicting forces. The second part is about the governmental and nongovernmental actors who contributed to the creation and maintenance of *Sewolho Gwangjang* as well as their cooperation. To present a more dynamic description of those actors, this study pays attention to both those who originally intended to participate in the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* and those who did not intend to but who eventually ended up involved. Lastly, this paper addresses the implications of the findings and their contribution to expanding the debate on urban public space.

2. place-making and the Politics of Public Space

The core arguments of this study are based on the fundamental idea

that space is a product that is socially constructed(Lefebvre, 1991; Brenner, 2000; Purcell, 2002; Prigge, 2008; Schmid, 2008). This socio-spatial perspective allows a much wider spectrum when interpreting space and provides good insights for political geographers as they examine different spatial practices that are relevant to social contexts.

Place-making, which is one of the most critical themes in human geography, refers to a set of processes through which people work together to design space into something more desirable. It is a group of social, political, and material processes by which people interactively create and recreate "experienced geographies"(Pierce et al., 2011: 54). More than just building hardware infrastructures, place-making aims to create and develop symbolic identities that define a place's social meaning and "a sense of place"(Lewis, 1979; Jive'n and Larkham, 2003; Aravot, 2002; Campelo et al., 2014). Considering that place-making involves not only building the infrastructure but also a series of spatial strategies that create and develop the symbolic identity and meanings of a place, it is an extension of the argument that space exists as a social construct.

Place-making embodies politics since each actor has different perceptions of and normative intentions regarding space. Martin(2003; 2004) emphasized the significance of the politics of place-making in learning how people conceive of spaces and analyzing how they act when motivated by socio-spatial re-ordering of the urban environment. While people experience the concrete, material dimensions of a place, their cognitive understanding of it conceptualizes its image and identity(Entrikin, 2003; Martin, 2003; Pierce et al., 2011). Irving(2009) stated that the rhetorical process of place-making includes various intersections of people with spaces. Naming and labeling also exerts rhetorical power in place-making

because a specific term or name given to a place imparts particular features by evoking certain images that affect people's consciousness(Tuan, 1991).

Public space is an urban space in which these place-making politics are well represented. Issues around public space have been popular in urban studies literature for a long time. The functions of public space have been considered imperative as significant elements of urban life (Baldassare, 1983; Carr et al., 1992; Mitchell, 1995; 2003; Madanipour, 1999; Gehl, 2011; Shaftoe, 2012; Bodner, 2015). In particular, the importance of places like plazas and agoras, which are used as venues for political demonstration or debate, has been recognized in that it allows citizens to actively participate in politics. The symbolic and realistic meanings of such public spaces were strengthened with the growth of democracy and expanded civic engagement(Fraser, 1990; Harvey, 1992; 2008; Mitchell, 1995; 2003; Drucker and Gumpert, 1997).

Previous studies on public space were also greatly influenced by socio-spatial perspective(Mitchell, 1995; 1997; Valentine, 1996; Casey et al., 1997; Low, 1996; Ehrenfeucht et al., 2007). Literature on the politics of public space has noted that the attributes of space as a social construct are particularly evident in public space. The scholarly debate(Zukin, 1996; Mitchell, 1995; Madanipour, 1999; Carmona, 2010; Low and Smith, 2013; Bodnar, 2015) accumulated over the years shows that the question of where to draw the distinction between public and non-public space is neither universal nor enduring but is embedded in a specific social context. Studies(Fraser, 1990; Harvey, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; Madanipour, 1999; Kohn, 2004; Carmona, 2010; Varna and Tiesdell, 2010; Németh and Schmidt, 2011; Young, 2011; Németh, 2012; Low and Smith, 2013; Vallance et al., 2017) raised questions over what constitutes the properties of

'public' space and what constitutes the most critical aspects of a good public space.

Despite the divergent approaches proposed, convergence appeared in that public space accompanies qualities that are different but interrelated in some ways; public space is made not only by physically designing accessible open space but also through political interaction. First, public space is defined by equally granted legal rights regarding access to the place for all citizens without exclusion(Franck and Paxson, 1989; Fraser, 2008; Low and Smith, 2013). In other words, anyone can physically exist in public space. This usually comes from the land's public ownership(Marcuse, 2005), the national or municipal control of its use, and institutional management(Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1998; Németh and Schmidt, 2007). Design-oriented approaches to the physical configuration of public space take openness as a prior factor, such as the nonexistence of a barrier that hinders anyone from coming to the place(Kayden, 2005; Varna and Tiesdell, 2010). The other attribute of public space concerns a metaphysical issue. It has more to do with people's perception of public space beyond just categorizing it as either publicly or privately owned. Another key characteristic of public space is that it is a place for citizens to gather and express themselves. Embracing differences and allowing debates over controversies all constitute another significant determinant of urban public space. These form the contested nature of public space as an arena of discursive interaction and as a site for competing virtues and potential disorders(Fraser, 1990; Zukin, 1995; Mitchell, 1995; Kilian, 1997; Harvey, 2008).

As has been stressed in past place-making literature, the key to discussing how to conduct the place-making of a public space is to address how to implement its "publicness." It is essential to create a

spatial identity that can be shared and imagined by people. Open access to public spaces ensures that the political actions taken in places such as plazas are exposed to the public, and the place is repeatedly taken and reconstructed by political actors who conduct such political activities. In other words, what allows diverse politics to take place is driven from the inherently political and potentially competitive nature of public space. Thus, the place-making of public space entails diverse spatial strategies and political practices by numerous actors who reproduce such dynamics.

3. Occupation of Public Space

The occupation of public space refers to the seizure or takeover of a place that is not supposed to be owned by a private actor. As a form of spatial strategy for political disobedience and rebellion, it has been widely discussed in the geographical literature as well as in many other social science academia in the context of social movements. The political orientation of the occupation of public space is highly relevant to the fact that public space, especially places such as open plazas, allows political demonstrations to be seen by a larger population. In that sense, occupation is an insistence on being seen, known, and heard by others, and it is a strong, radical signal of political refusal(Mitchell, 2012).

Preliminary discourse on the occupation of public space has mainly been rooted upon the narrow conviction that occupation of public space lessens that space's public identity(Punter, 1990; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993; Kohn, 2004; Németh and Schmidt, 2011). This idea considers the occupation

of public space and its publicness to be incompatible, so few studies discussed the two concurrently. Rather, studies on the occupation of public space have mainly paid attention to its close affinity with privatization. Identifying the occupation of public space as its privatization is defined as the use of public space for what we regard as private acts, such as bathing or sleeping(Mitchell, 1995). The widely-known 2011 Occupy Movement that spread from Wall Street, New York also received ambivalent judgement from scholars. While the movement was appraised regarding its goal of fighting against wealth inequality and its cohesiveness, it was also criticized for illegitimate privatization of public space. Iconic images of the movement were described as a group of tents and a few signs that implied people were living there, such as food, clothing services, and medical facilities(Mitchell, 2012). In contrast, Kohn(2013) refuted criticism by reexamining the meaning of public and private based on the populist model. She pointed out that the Occupy Movement raised political mobilization through drawing more citizens into politics outside of institutional structures.

Though previous literature contributed much to the understanding of public space occupation as a kind of social and political behavior, their dominant presumptions relied on limited broader academic discussion. The literature mainly defined the occupation of public space through the lens of the territory's privatization and as a single action by the same group. They overlooked interpretation of the occupation of public space as a whole process comprising a group of spatial strategies and dynamic interactions between heterogenic actors. To fill this gap, this paper approaches the process of the occupation of public space by focusing on the various actors who appear in different stages of development in public space occupation. It conceptualizes how the

expansion of public space occupation turns into a new stage of political protest through place-making. By focusing on diverse interactions within the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, this paper argues that the occupation of public space does not necessarily inhibit the nature of public space but is a representative spatial practice that reveals its innately competitive politics.

4. Case Introduction: *Sewolho Gwangjang*

Sewolho Gwangjang was originally formed by the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza by the families of the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster. This location was where the families initially went on a hunger strike to urge the government to make progress in their investigation of the accident's cause. The bereaved families occupied the southern part of Gwanghwamun Plaza about three months after the ferry sank. Gwanghwamun Plaza is located in the center of downtown Seoul. Seoul City Hall, the Blue House and the central government building are nearby, which makes the image of this place considerably important. Bereaved families occupied the southern part of the plaza, in front of a statue of Admiral Yi Sun-Shin. They asked for the establishment of a special law that would allow the installation of a committee with independent authority to investigate the accident.

A few days after the occupation and the hunger strike's start, the Seoul city government arranged ambulances, rescue workers, and nursing staff in Gwanghwamun plaza in case of emergency. In addition, 11 tents were provided at the occupied zone by the city government in response to requests from the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the

〈Figure 1〉 Victims' families on a hunger strike   〈Figure 2〉 *Sewolho Gwangjang*

Source: *Joongangilbo*, 7.14.2014.   Source: *Hankyoreh*, 7.10.2015.

Ministry of the Interior(now the Ministry of the Interior and Safety) to care for the safety of families and citizens who were fasting in the extreme summer heat. Installation of additional tents in Gwanghwamun Plaza widened the occupied territory up to about 750m^2, and the place was named *Sewolho Gwangjang* by the organization formed by the victims' families and activists. Since then, the place has been used as a location for both commemoration and political demonstration run by the nongovernmental organizations who work to solve issues surrounding the tragedy.

5. Research Method

This study looks at the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* by mainly focusing on its related actors. It mainly discusses how different groups, public and private, with disparate organizational structure interact and collaborate to conduct place-making and how their activities were challenged or interfered with by the opposing forces. For the analysis, the data are collected from archival analysis, empirical

research from interviews, participant observation, and fieldwork. In terms of archival analysis, I looked into newspaper articles that reported past incidents, relevant public documents such as legal documents, ordinances, and rules, and internal approval request documents, especially those available through the Seoul Information Disclosure Service. Moreover, newspaper articles and press interviews of public officials and other significant agents are reviewed. Posts and comments in online communities were used as sources to look up the construction of the opposing discourse against *Sewolho Gwangjang*. The inter-viewees are from diverse groups: city government officials, a city councilor, people who served as conscripted law enforcement officers drafted by the government from 2014 to 2015, and lawyers from *Minbyun*(Lawyers for a Democratic Society), a politically progressive NGO that strives to further the development of democracy in Korea. Informal interviews with a number of activists from the 4·16 organizations, including the 4·16 Network and 4·16 Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society(hereinafter referred to as the 4·16 family organization), were mainly held during the participation observation. In-depth interviews were conducted through formal requests and meetings.

6. Politics and place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* through Occupation: What Turned a 'Tent' into a *'Gwangjang'*?

This part of the paper discusses the place-making process of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. I look at how the occupation during the Sewol families' hunger strike ultimately turned into the place-making of *Sewolho*

Gwangjang as well as how the place was claimed to be a kind of public space, *Gwangjang*. There are two main points to focus on. One is the series of place-making strategies taken by the supportive actors in order to politically claim *Sewolho Gwangjang* as a form of plaza. The other is the conflicts around *Sewolho Gwangjang* between supporters and opponents.

The place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang* was the result of the expansion of the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza by the families of the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster. Through this place-making, the political demonstration that demanded a proper investigation of the Sewol ferry's sinking and criticizing the irresponsibility of the national government came to a whole new phase.

The design of *Sewolho Gwangjang* had gone through changes. The most significant change was the 11 newly installed, additional tents from the city government. Before, the Sewol families' occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza started by occupying only a small area with one tent. People who visited the site had to surround the tent to meet the families. The occupation area became much bigger after the city government provided the additional tents. Though the city government gave the tents to the families, how they were placed in the plaza was decided by the bereaved families and activists, who decided to set the new tents into two vertical rows. This structural shape with two rows of tents lined up on each side of the Gwanghwamun Plaza has not since changed.

Their spatial strategy was not to layer the tents and to make effectively 'close' their occupation space but rather to make it 'open,' so the tents were placed at both ends of the Gwanghwamun Plaza so that citizens could come and go between them. Due to the change in

overall physical appearance of the occupation, *Sewolho Gwangjang* became relatively more pedestrian friendly. People who visited the place no longer had to surround a small tent, which caused physical discomfort to pedestrians and hindered the plaza's open accessibility. In addition, by moving the position of the altar that was formerly in front of the statue of Yi Sun-Sin, they made the central aisle as well as the entire plaza more open. One of the interviewees, a member of the civic organization who was in charge of managing the affairs of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, mentioned that the organization tried to restore the accessibility to Gwanghwamun Plaza as much as possible so that anyone who did not favor the occupation could still pass by.

In addition to physically making the place look more like a plaza, rhetorical strategies were used to encourage people to perceive the place as a kind of a public plaza, like the name *'Gwangjang'* indicates. I argue that the name *'Sewolho Gwangjang'* itself is evidently a greatly politicized label that evidently implies the supportive actors' claims on it. The political intent behind making public space is embedded and distinctly manifested in this term. By designating the place as a *Gwangjang*, activists and the victims' families intend that their occupation be perceived as more public. What the civic activists and families did was transform *Sewolho Gwangjang* into a more communicative place where people can commemorate and commiserate. Compared to the way in which the hunger strike occupation was managed, they focused more on adding places such as a memorial altar, a café, an exhibit, et cetera. Moreover, several memorial events were held at *Sewolho Gwangjang*.

Citizens' reactions to the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza were mixed. Opinions supportive of the occupation and the Sewol families'

〈Figure 3〉 A binge party held by 'ilbe'   〈Figure 4〉 Citizens staying late at night
                                              in *Sewolho Gwangjang* to protect it
                                              from demolition

Source: *Money Today*, 03.26.2015.   Source: *OhmyNews*, 01.31.2015.

claim agreed that the occupation should remain. Normative arguments
stated that the families and civic organization should yield in order to
restore the diversity of issues brought up in Gwanghwamun Plaza. At
the same time, people who are less supportive assert that the occupation
has been creating too many discomforts for citizens, both emotionally
and in terms of access to Gwanghwamun Plaza, that are no longer
tolerable. It can be seen in the number of complaints received by the
city government. In the first year following the start of the occupation
in July of 2014, 60 of the 88 requests asked for the demolition of
Sewolho Gwangjang and 28 demanded that the place be left untouched.
Whether the occupation is legitimate or not was the main issue of the
controversies. Once, even the city government officials, including
Mayor Park Won Soon, were accused by a group of politically
conservative NGOs of violating the citizens' rights to use public space
and selectively giving special privileges to the Sewol families.

  Ever since the victim's families staged a sit-in occupation at
Gwanghwamun Plaza, the debate about it has not ceased. Political
conflicts clearly have been visualized through the happenings at the
plaza. For example, during the hunger strike, a crowd of about 100

people including members of *'ilbe'*, which is a far-right online community, mocked them by staging an eating protest wherein they served hamburgers and pizzas in front of the striking families. They even mocked the victims who died in the water using fish cakes and made a performance of eating them. There were several incidents of physical attacks to break the tents. The leader of a far-right community, *Seobuk Cheongnyundan*, gave a threatening speech in public, stating that their members would come at night and forcibly demolish the tents of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. In response, more than a hundred citizens gathered to protect *Sewolho Gwangjang*, but the attackers ultimately did not show up. Members of a politically conservative nongovernmental organization, who were participating in a rally claiming that the impeachment of the former president Park Geun Hye, crushed and burned the figure at *Sewolho Gwangjang* that was a tribute to the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster. One interviewee from the nongovernmental organization, the 4,16 Network, said that someone even urinated inside the memorial altar.

   As affirmed in literature, the public identity of places such as agoras and plazas is made, remade, and even strengthened by the ongoing tension between conflicting values. The claim of the victims' families and other activists that *Sewolho Gwangjang* is something similar to a public plaza can be supported by the notion that one aspect of the core spatial identity of public spaces derives from their contested quality. I understood that those who created *Sewolho Gwangjang* intended to materialize this characteristic through their actions. This is implied by the words of one activist, a senior staff member of the 4·16 Network:

   It was our goal to create this place (occupation site) as something other

than just a site for our own political struggle. We wanted people to join us. We thought it (making *Sewolho Gwangjang*) would be absolutely more powerful to let people 'in,' even if it aroused much more tension at the same time. All the things, past memories good and bad, are kept in this space, and we think they are meaningful(Interviewed May 8, 2018).

7. Actors of place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*: Who made the place-making possible?

There were various kinds of actors who contributed to the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, both governmental and non-governmental. Some of them were willing to actively participate, and others did not initially intend to actively participate but ended up indirectly contributing. This study looks at each political actor's role in the place-making and focuses on the collaborative movements and alliances between them.

The major actors are as follows. Public actors primarily consisted of the Seoul city government, the Seoul city council, and the police. First, the Seoul city government supported the movement by providing tents and medical personnel for safety reasons at Gwanghwamun Plaza while the bereaved families were on their hunger strike. The city government made a significant contribution to the expansion of the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza because it provided the fundamentals necessary to make it physically look like a public space. Moreover, the legitimacy of the occupation relied on the fact that the tents occupying the plaza were provided by the entity with the authority to manage and control affairs at Gwanghwamun Plaza. During the interview of a government

official from the general affairs department who has been in charge of the administration of the Sewol ferry disaster work, he confirmed the following:

> It was humanitarian assistance that we (the city government) gave the families tents. It was in the middle of July, the hottest time of the year, so the (national) government actually had requested that we (the city government) first provide support since Gwanghwamun Plaza is under the jurisdiction of the Seoul city government. However, they (the national government) gave us no specific guideline, so it was the city government's decision to support them (the occupiers) by providing new tents(Interviewed May 29, 2018).

Though the public official did not admit outright that the city government deliberately gave tents to the occupiers to support their political stance, it was verified that the action of doing so was a decision made by the city government. In addition, he added that because the special law had not yet been enacted[1] at that time(July 2015), it was difficult for them to organize the budget for its use. Despite this difficulty with finding a reasonable cause for spending tax money, the fact that the municipal government decided to purchase those tents can be interpreted as a manifestation of political intent.

The Park Won Soon administration, which had a political tendency opposite that of the national government of President Park Geun Hye's regime, kept protecting Sewolho Gwangjang from political attacks.

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[1] "The Special Act to Remedy the Damage Caused by the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster, Assistance Therefor, etc." was enacted in July 2017.

Mayor Park Won Soon himself took fairly explicit political action to shield the Sewol families' occupation. At a press interview prior to 2015, there was an investigation going on, and some conservative NGOs accused city officials, including the Mayor, of violating the citizens' right to use public space. He refuted this claim: "Considering the suffering of bereaved families, why does it have to be difficult to permit tents?" Lim Jong Seok, the Deputy Mayor at that time, in response to a complaint that the occupation infringes on citizens' access to the plaza, defended it to the press as follows: "It (supporting the tents) is a rightful duty of the city government. The tents cannot be forcibly demolished."

Secondly, among all of the local assemblies, the Seoul city council was the first to enact an ordinance to commemorate the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster. The full name of the ordinance is the Seoul Metropolitan Government Ordinance on Commemoration of Victims of the 4·16 Sewol Ferry Disaster. It was passed by the city council in September 2017. The ordinance relies on its legal basis to the national law, the "Special Act to Remedy the Damage Caused by the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster, Assistance Therefor, etc." The key of this ordinance is that it clearly specifies the obligation of the Seoul city government to memorialize the victims who lost their lives. Article no. 3 says "The Seoul Metropolitan Government's Mayor(hereinafter called the 'Mayor') is entitled to provide necessary measures to ensure that the commemoration of the victims of the 4·16 Sewol ferry disaster shall be continuously pursued in order to raise public awareness of human dignity." During the interview, when I asked the city councilor who proposed the ordinance about what brought him to do so, he replied that it is best that practical memorial events be carried out on the local

level. The councilor acknowledged that the mayor showed willingness to remember the disaster and care for the victims as well as the bereaved families several times, and that he was supportive of *Sewolho Gwangjang's* occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza by deliberately protecting it from being accused of privatizing the plaza. However, he emphasized the importance of the power of this legal basis by adding that in the case of Seoul, since *Sewolho Gwangjang* is situated in Gwanghwamun Plaza, a concrete legal basis applied at city level is needed in order for *Sewolho Gwangjang* to be managed and retain its legitimacy as well as for the city government to responsibly support it.

The articles of the ordinance are described fairly ambiguous, and it was discovered during the interview that this lack of clarity was politically intentional. The city council member stated the following:

In order to pass the ordinance, because the issue is too sensitive, it was better not to put any specific line mentioning the 4·16 organizations' occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza. In article no. 4 in particular, the part where it lists what qualifies as a 'commemoration project' that can receive support from the city government is are vaguely written. Though it does not mention *Sewolho Gwangjang* directly, they are intentionally written with comprehensive terms to provide a broad legal basis for flexible support. We needed it to organize the budget(Interviewed May 25, 2018).

In 2018, 250 million won of the city budget has been prepared for the purpose of the commemoration and memorialization of the Sewol ferry disaster based on the ordinance. The fourth anniversary memorial events that were collaboratively hosted for three days by the Sewol

organizations and the city government in Gwanghwamun Plaza were paid for by the city budget, using about 150 million won in total.

Thirdly, the final public actor to talk about is the police. The political intention of the police seemed to be relatively less active than that of the city government or the legislative role of the city council. Yet, through the interview with men who served as conscripted policeman drafted by the government between 2014 and 2015, it was confirmed that there were some informal instructions not to forcibly quell the families' occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza. One of the interviewees said:

Senior staff were repeatedly ordered to be patient as much as possible in any possible conflict. We were not even allowed to look in the families' or citizens' eyes, especially when we were at *Sewolho Gwangjang* or demonstrations by the victims' families. We did not hold any shield like we usually did in any other protests that might give an offensive, suppressive appearance. Instead, we linked arms side by side. People now hold smartphones at the rallies, so if anything goes wrong, it could possibly breed resentment in society. Although they had not disclosed what all those small instructions really meant, the troops could obviously read that this (the Sewol ferry disaster issue) was a very politically sensitive topic beyond comparison(Interviewed in May 14, 2018).

The police department was extremely careful not to cause any problems and kept its relatively passive mode most of the time. This attitude or the position of the police may seem like they have been passively permitting the occupation of *Sewolho Gwangjang* in

Gwanghwamun Plaza in the sense that their main incentive has been focused on not causing violence. When there have been attempts to break into *Sewolho Gwangjang* and tear the tents, however, they have stepped in and suppressed it. For example, when *ilbe* held its binge party in front of the fasting Sewol families, additional troops guarded the area in case of emergency. Moreover, after the incident wherein people had burned the figure at *Gwangjang*, the police department confirmed that they decided to station police there for 24 hours to protect *Sewolho Gwangjang*.

The nongovernmental actors are the organizations comprising the victims' families, civic activists, and supportive citizens; the 4·16 organizations including the 4·16 Network, 4·16 Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society, and other politically progressive organizations, such as Lawyers for a Democratic Society. The nongovernmental actors undertook the practical activities of the occupation. The very first step of the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza was the families' hunger strike.

The 4·16 Network, a nongovernmental organization made up of activists and citizen members who donated, cooperated with the families' organization because they shared the same political agenda of urging the government to reveal the truth and investigate the actual cause of the disaster. The practical management of *Sewolho Gwangjang* was also in charge of the 4·16 Network. One of the activists whom was interviewed said that they do most of the "actual work" around *Sewolho Gwangjang* while the symbolic meaning and its core identity has been made by the families. The 4·16 Network also participated in renovating *Sewolho Gwangjang* about a year after the Seoul city government's provision of an additional 11 tents that are more durable and changing

the entire structure to be a more open space. The organization covers more than half of the financial cost of maintaining the occupation. A decision-making body that the activists refer to as the "Gwanghwamun committee" was informally organized and deals with issues, particularly those regarding the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza. The "*Sewolho Gwangjang* situation room," "truth greeting place," "yellow ribbon workshop," and "tent café" that comprise the four major elements of the *Gwangjang* as well as the organization of the families have determined the main agenda regarding the place's design. Meanwhile, legal support surrounding *Sewolho Gwangjang* has mainly been provided by *Minbyun*. They have dealt with many cases against those who have attempted to break into tents and destroy the place.

Empirical findings have shown that the dynamics emerged at multiple levels among these diverse agents while going through disagreements and negotiations. Meetings have been arranged between government officials and the nongovernmental actors at the city hall building, *Sewolho Gwangjang*, or the organization office at irregular intervals when there was a need, such as preparing for memorial events held in Gwanghwamun Plaza. At these meetings, they also discussed *Sewolho Gwangjang*. For example, during the renovation period of the *Gwangjang*, the city government approached families and the 4·16 Network and made special recommendations to make the place more authentically clean and to turn the site into a more communicative public area. Accepting the request, the 4·16 organizations decided to fill the public space with an exhibition zone, café, yellow ribbon workshop, and such. One of the main agendas about which both sides had different opinions was the additional three tents that were installed during the first renovation in 2015. Although the Seoul city government

has been supportive and willing to help the victims' families, it was difficult for them to permit them and not take any action against them considering the strong pushback claiming that the occupation was illegal. The city official said the following in the interview:

> In our (the city government) point of view, it has been more of a burden to keep those three tents that we have not authorized. We could. We actually have been delaying any sort of action that would acquiesce to the complaints that we have received from citizens who do not want to see it there in the plaza. Still, we have let the occupation keep its space for years(Interviewed May 29, 2018).

The interviewee seemed a bit tired while talking about it, which made me assume that the tension had lasted a fairly long period of time. However, they could not come up with a complete reconciliation that both could agree with other than to make the Sewol organizations pay fines for the three disallowed tents, in which case they are paying fines instead of removing them. According to an activist who has been in charge of the overall management of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, the Seoul city government even promised in a recent meeting to renovate *Sewolho Gwangjang* and to bring forth specific design plans.

Although it has been a long time since the occupation of the plaza began, volunteers still come to make yellow ribbons and many citizens still visit. People sometimes place flowers and walk through the aisle of *Sewolho Gwangjang*, looking at the citizens' notes memorializing the deaths hanging on the figure that stands in the center of the place. One activist said, "We would never have come this far if it were not for the citizens who have joined with us. This place (*Sewolho Gwangjang*)

would have been torn apart"(interviewed May 10, 2018).

The first year of *Sewolho Gwangjang* was the hardest time for the supporters. According to the activists, there were even threatening calls warning that somebody would burn *Sewolho Gwangjang*. Citizens then gathered at *Sewolho Gwangjang* and stayed up all night to protect it. It is worthwhile to note that the *Sewolho Gwangjang* was produced under the support of the citizens who sympathized with the grief and ideology of the victims' families, symbolized by yellow ribbons. Citizens hung yellow ribbons on their bags, cellphones, laptops, their social media profiles, et cetera to show that they are still remembering. Moreover, the Sewol ferry disaster and the former government's irresponsibly belated response was one of the main agendas of the candlelight rallies of 2016, demonstrating about the impeachment of former President Park. These long-lasting emotions and shared ideologies support the existence of *Sewolho Gwangjang* and the maintaining of its occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza.

8. Conclusion

This research described the process of the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. This study used the actor-oriented approach to discuss how various actors from both the public and private sectors collaborated and contributed to the making of a public space in Gwanghwamun Plaza.

This paper came up with two major findings. First, *Sewolho Gwangjang* was created and socially perceived as a public space along with the development of the occupation of Gwanghwamun Plaza. I argued that claiming the identity of the occupation as a public space

is related to the inherent nature and politics of urban public space in that it is hardly stable but potentially competitive. Since a public space is where competing virtues become visualized and seen, people use public space as a way to gather and express themselves by conveying political opinions. The occupation by the families that took place in Gwanghwamun Plaza was apparently a politically intentional move in the first place. Multiple attempts were made to make the place resemble a public plaza and to strengthen its identity as such. The negative attacks and conflicts that followed the formation of this public space were also tolerated. Though the normative debate surrounding the publicness of Gwanghwamun Plaza caused conflicts between supporters and opponents, the idea that such politics are embedded in the nature of an urban public plaza that causes conflicts somehow provided a rationale that indirectly supported the occupation.

Second, both governmental and nongovernmental actors either were willingly or unwillingly involved in the place-making of *Sewolho Gwangjang*. The key actors were the Seoul city government, the city council, the police, the 4·16 Network, and 4·16 Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society. It was worth discovering that Seoul city, the Mayor of which belonged to the opposition party, was relatively active in supporting and protecting *Sewolho Gwangjang* by providing the tents that brought about immense change and provided legitimacy. The support of sympathetic citizens enabled the entire process of producing *Sewolho Gwangjang* as well as its long-term maintenance despite incessant conflict.

This paper ultimately has theoretical implications for and contributes to the debate on the occupation of public space by contextualizing it into a process of place-making. It is meaningful to refute the normal

belief that undoubtedly relates such occupation with the privatization of public space. In addition, this case study leaves much to be further discussed regarding urban publicness. By discussing the case of the place-making of Sewolho Gwangjang, this study projects that the occupation of public space does not necessarily diminish its publicness. This might give more progressive insights into understanding occupation outside the framework of laws and legality.

국문초록

점유를 통한 장소 만들기: 광화문 세월호 광장을 사례로

진예린

　이 논문은 서울 광화문 세월호광장에 대한 사례 연구로, 지리학자들로부터 큰 관심을 받은 도시 공공공간 점거의 역학을 분석함으로써 공공공간 장소만들기 과정을 그려낸다. 2014년 4월 세월호 참사로 목숨을 잃은 희생자들을 추모하고 사고의 진상규명을 요구하기 위해 만들어진 장소인 세월호광장에 대한 관찰을 통해 공공공간의 점유가 확장되어 장소만들기 전략으로 사용되는 사례를 분석하고자 한다. 논문은 행위자 중심 접근 방식을 사용하여 세월호광장 만들기에 참여한 다양한 도시 행위자들의 정치적 의도와 역할을 설명한다. 이를 통해, 공공공간의 점유와 공공공간의 사유화의 담론을 분리하고 이를 도시 장소만들기의 이론적 틀 안에서 분석한다.

주요어: 공공공간, 공공공간의 정치, 공공공간 점유, 장소만들기

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