



The Embedded Hybridity of Ethical Consumerism: At the Nexus of Consumer Justice Movements and Social Economies in South Korea

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Abstract

This study sets out to review South Korea's ethical consumerism, whose main landscape can be characterized as embedded hybridity at the nexus of consumer justice movements and social economies. By emphasizing the analytical utility of institutional complementarity between consumer movements and social economies in contentious politics, this study pursues its expeditionary verification of the historical evolution of Korean ethical consumerism as a logical consequence of the anti-capitalist civic engagements against unjust and commercialized market systems. Taking Hansalim as a classic case of the Korean ethical cooperative enriches our understanding of the hybrid portfolio embedded in ethical consumerism. The Hansalim case addresses an interesting observation that the vaguer the status between consumers and citizens, the more positive embedded hybridity turns out to be. Accordingly, the politics of embedded hybridity relates to the magnitude of the grey zones, rather than a clear rift between black and white.

Keywords: ethical consumerism, consumer justice movement, social economy, hybridity, South Korea, Hansalim

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Introduction

The plethora of socio-economic perspectives on the core values and objectives associated with cooperation, solidarity, and social justice in South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has newly focused on the social economy project reflecting on its significant autonomy from states, profit-maximizing business, and marketization. By contrast, it is cliché to deem consumer justice movements as traditional civic movements, a symbol of citizens' enduring engagement in the circulation process of commercialized products with the primary objective of protecting consumers' economic and social rights and launching consumer enlightenment campaigns. At the intersection of new social economies and old consumer movements, it is a fairly original phenomenon to find a nexus linking them, and further, developing *ethical consumerism*, a moral descriptor for socio-economic activity that is deemed to be more people-centered, rights-based, and redistribution-sensitive, in the Korean context.¹ Indeed, the *hybridity* of the social economy and consumer justice movements in Korea is embedded in the logical outgrowth of civil society engagement in the politics of everyday life (Ginsborg 2005).

How and why are consumer justice movements in Korea bonded with the more proactive and comprehensive *social economy* under the new label of ethical consumerism? Theoretically, the development of ethical consumerism in Korea can be seen as a logical outgrowth of the anti-capitalist nature against the irregulated privatization of the public sphere and the malfunctioned perfection of self-reinforcing marketization. Such a skepticism shared by consumer movements and the social economy is

1. Diverse terms have been used to describe activities for protecting citizens' rights and challenging the overexpansion of capitalistic marketization: social enterprises, social economy, social and solidarity economy, etc. It is fair to state that the term per se has been evolving from private sector-centered approaches (social enterprises) to more solidarity-based perspectives (social economies). This study will use social economy as the comprehensive term, to encompass all different types of social-economy organizations (cooperatives, fair trade organizations, community enterprises, and so forth), but articulate a specific entity when necessary.

advanced as a common platform of institutional complementarity to adapt and reinforce both these areas according to the changing external environments (Crouch et al. 2005; Christoforou 2018). Also, the anti-capitalist nature of both consumer movements and the social economy is able to bring collective voices into action by expanding the social capital of like-minded organizations via brokerage and bonding (Burt 2005). The introduction of social capital further intensifies the hybridity, whose definition relates to the interplay and mutual influence of social economy and consumer movements to secure ethical consumerism.

Practically, therefore, it is critical to identify the Korean context where institutional complementarity is mobilized and materialized through the politics of hybridity along with the borderlines between social economy and ethical consumerism. The concept of social enterprise emerged in the 2000s to describe an alternative civic movement that combined the normally oppositional concepts of social values and economic efficiency. Such an ambiguous hybrid allows us the freedom to map out varieties of social economy-like organizations, while simultaneously hampering our ability to locate them between social values and economic utility through the lens of rigorous analysis. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of cases illustrating the embedded hybridity of Korea's ethical consumerism will allow for a better understanding of its embedded hybridity. Taking the Hansalim case as a best exemplar of the Korean model, this study explores the social reconstruction of alternative globalization via the microscopic perspectives and efforts of consumers' local grassroot initiatives in Korea's civil society.

In a nutshell, this study focuses on the specific hybrid mechanism connecting a consumer justice movement with the social economy through the particular case of Hansalim and explores the current trends and characteristics of ethical consumerism in Korea. For this, the study proceeds in four steps. First, it describes Korea's contextual background, reviewing the origins and development of both consumer movements and social economies. Second, it seeks a theoretical approach to link consumer movements within the purview of social economies, an approach that can possibly be forged by institutional complementarity for the sake of organizational effectiveness in pursuit of ethical consumerism. Third, the

new type of ethical consumerism in Korea is analyzed by an in-depth investigation of Hansalim. Finally, the study recapitulates the key features of the Korean way of ethical consumerism and provides concluding remarks by reinterpreting the status of the Korean ethical consumerism at both the macro and micro levels.

Contextualizing Consumer Movements and Social Economies in Korea

Korean society encountered the advent of consumer movements and the social economy at separate timeframes, whereas Western societies shared the social origins of ethical consumerism from the early nineteenth-century Rochdale Principles of Co-operation (Conover 1959). The Rochdale Principles, set out in 1844 by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in England, have been used as a set of ideals for the operation of cooperatives and have formed the basis for the principles on which cooperatives around the world have continued to operate to this day. It is important to note that the Rochdale Principles became a historic symbol of ethical consumerism as they aimed to combine a trust-based transparent sale of goods and the protection of consumer rights.² Unlike the early exposure of Western societies to the social economy tradition of blending cooperative culture, the Korean context demonstrates an interesting case of a latecomer in that it displays a time lag between consumer movements and social enterprise activities. Accordingly, the developmental paths of consumer movements and the social economy in Korea need to be analyzed in sequential order, to be followed by further investigations into how consumer movements encountered the social economy and developed institutional complementarities for consolidating their hybridity in Korea.

2. The Rochdale Principles included the following seven tenets: (1) the openness of the cooperative; (2) the one-person-one-vote system; (3) the merit-based profit distribution system; (4) the limits of capital investment; (5) the neutrality of political and religious policies; (6) cash dealing; and (7) the promotion of education and capacity.

Consumer Justice Movements in Korea

Normally, consumer movements have their origins in civil society's efforts to identify and modernize consumer sovereignty as an expansion of citizen rights in the area of consumer-producer relations. The concept of consumer sovereignty has gradually expanded from a reactive stance of hammering down *caveat emptor* to proactive involvement aimed at empowering consumers (Mayer 1989).³ In Western democracies, following the first official endorsement of consumer rights by the Kennedy Administration in March 1962 (Aaker and Day 1971), consumerism or the consumer movement began mushrooming in the 1970s and continued to develop and diversify across various sectors and areas of expertise.

The sporadic introduction of consumerism to Korean civil society also came in the 1960s, though the country's actual consumer movements in this initial period were fragmented and marginalized due to the lack of managerial skills and the limited understanding of consumerism under authoritarian governments (M. Kim 2006). In the 1960s, Korean consumer movements were primarily forged and operated by women's organizations, such as the Korean Women's Association, established in 1964, and the Korean National Mothers' Association, established in 1965. The participation of women's associations in the early stage of consumer movements, however, helped define civic engagement for consumer-related activities as a secondary concern, sidelined by high-priority agenda items of South Korean civil society in the 1960s. Consumerism in the 1970s became politically neutralized, and was even used to promote a pro-government commitment to the protection of consumer rights, given that women's associations and consumer movement organizations were easily mobilized and controlled by the government's financial intervention. In 1978, the Economic Planning Board (EPB) endorsed the official affiliation of the

3. The phrase *caveat emptor* and its use as a disclaimer of warranties arises from the fact that buyers typically have less information about a good or service they are purchasing than the seller (M. Kim 2006). The conceptual description of this situation is known as "information asymmetry," wherein defects in the good or service in question may be hidden from the buyer, and known only to the seller.

Korean National Council of Consumer Organizations (KNCCO) with the EPB, and provided government subsidies to the KNCCO, which had been established by four women's organizations, including the Korean YWCA, the National Council of Consumer Education, the Korean Woman's Federation for Consumer, and the Korean National Council of Women (T. Kim 2008).

With both the Gwangju Uprising of 1980 and the June Uprising of 1987, the decade of the 1980s was a critical juncture in South Korea's democratization process. The period also saw a sea change in the internal capabilities and external status of consumer movement organizations. The positive impact of the country's pro-democracy movement on consumerism enabled non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take up the distorted *chaebol*-centered marketplace and the protection of consumer rights as the most serious issues facing civil society during the democratic transition in terms of economic and social justice vis-à-vis the government and big firms. Given that the post-1987 period was called the *era of consumers*, the politicization of consumer movements not only triggered some NGOs (for instance, the Citizen Coalition for Economic Justice in 1989) to focus their mission on consumer sovereignty and economic justice, but also prompted the government to take reformative measures and establish the Korea Consumer Agency (KCA) in July 1987 and enact the Consumer Protection Law in 1980. The KCA, financed fully by government endowments, played a particularly significant role as a public organization supporting consultation, training, and research on consumer justice and consumer rights protection.

From the 1990s, Korea's consumer movements scaled up the purview of consumerism beyond the narrow boundary of economic recompense for the violation of consumer rights. The focal point of the country's consumer movements thereby became much more comprehensive, dealing with all aspects of everyday life that were in some way linked to consumption. The consumer movements of the 1990s became *complex* movements combining the roles of watchdog for the violations or transgressions of private firms and internal coordinator for connecting consumer sovereignty with "life politics" (M. Kim 2006, 174). Politically, this complex network of consumer movements pursued the centralization of consumer movement

organizations in big cities, while strategically seeking to expand its collective network to likeminded NGOs in the other sectors (Lee and Kim 2019).

Nevertheless, the overstretch of strategic networking between consumer organizations and other NGOs generated two challenges to the consumer justice movement in post-2000 Korea. First, the blurred borderline between the consumer movement and non-consumer areas resulted in an identity crisis that would destabilize the original motive of consumer organizations of working for consumer sovereignty. Following on this, the second issue concerned finding an alternative scheme for sustaining its original identity of consumer protector as well as finding an appropriate partner for pursuing socio-economic agendas relevant to the consumer justice movement. In this regard, the rising social economy in Korea promised to be a great candidate for partnering with the consumer movement organizations in a synergistic way.

The Social Economy in Korea

According to the conceptual definition of social economy, social economy perspectives identify spaces with the potential to cultivate economic and political subjects who are guided by motivations of care, ethical concern, and collectivity (Gibson-Graham 2003, 2006).⁴ Social economy perspectives provide three key elements in the process of forging a social economy: (1) the scope for ethical negotiation that exists among different actors, internal and external to the community; (2) the scope for constructive co-existence wherein diverse elements of an economy can be cobbled together in ways

4. Although the definition of social economy may vary from country to country, we can discern the following common components (Defourny and Develtere 2000, 15–16). Social economy includes all economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily co-operatives, associations, and mutual benefit societies, whose ethics convey the following principles:

- (1) Placing service to its members or to the community ahead of profit;
- (2) Autonomous management;
- (3) A democratic decision-making process; and
- (4) The primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of revenues.

that are socially transformative; and (3) the scope for cultivating relations of interdependence and care and practices of mutual assistance (Bergeron and Healy 2015; Lévi-Strauss 1966). While the social economy refers to the overall prioritizing of people and work over capital or profits beyond the conventional economic sense (Utting 2015), the social economy can further develop into the solidarity economy, which focuses more on solidarity among partners. Social economy organizations exist to cater to the preferences and needs of their members. They create and enjoy a trade-off between cooperative benefits and identity, on the one hand, and competitive advantage and market share on the other (McMurtry 2015).

The existing literature on social enterprises in Korea posits that the emergence and development of social economy in the Korean context can be reviewed as a *state-driven* social enterprise model (Defourny and Kim 2011; Bidet and Eum 2011; Bidet et al. 2019). As Table 1 shows, the Roh Moo-hyun government legally authorized the Social Enterprise Promotion Act in 2006 in order to certify and subsidize new entry organizations for the social economy. The Lee Myung-bak government then introduced the Framework Act on Cooperatives (FAC) in 2011, which led to the explosive mushrooming of cooperative start-ups. Those two legislative actions have guided cooperatives, mutual societies, social enterprises, community associations, and foundations to promote new cooperative movements, spread the social economy concept nationwide, and expand social economy networks at the local level.

Despite strong government intervention, voluntary initiatives of cooperative movements were forged after the country's political democratization in 1987, with a particular focus being on organic food, medical care, and childcare. The 1997 Financial Crisis sparked new cooperative movements providing the working poor with employment through the establishment of worker cooperatives. The boundary of social economy, despite the uneven balance of power between state and society, was incrementally expanded through the voluntary and collaborative efforts of social economy actors and likeminded NGOs (Kim and Im 2015). Social economy organizations, therefore, were eager to overcome state-driven restrictions by partnering with NGOs from the other sectors without

Table 1. Major Events in the Development of the Social Economy Sector in South Korea

1988–2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New cooperative movement after political democratization in 1988 • Worker cooperative movement after the financial crisis in 1998 • Introduction of National Basic Livelihood Security Act (1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence and development of consumer cooperatives (organic food, medical, and child care) • To provide the working poor with employment by establishing worker cooperatives (construction, clothing, cleaning, etc.) • Emergence of self-sufficiency enterprises by government-supported self-sufficiency promotion program for the working poor: cleaning, recycling, care service, etc. • Introduction of a policy for creating social service jobs and emergence of non-profit organization providing the jobs
2006–2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enactment of Social Enterprise Promotion Act (2006) • Civil society's increasing awareness to social enterprise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of social enterprises certified and subsidized by the government • Policy for social enterprise is promoted by many ministries in both central and regional governments • Emergence of organizations to support social enterprises
2012–present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Framework Act on Cooperatives (2011) • Spreading out of social economy concept over the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The act allows citizens to establish traditional cooperatives and social cooperatives • Start-ups of cooperatives burgeon explosively • Local governments increasingly involved in promoting social economy, including cooperatives, social enterprises, and community activities • Emergence of social economy networks at local and regional levels

Source: Jang (2017, 2, 603).

abandoning their innate values of social justice (T. Kim 2008; Shin 2009). All in all, the growing number of social economy movements in South Korea intended to consolidate their influence on the country's civil society and economy.

Institutional Complementarity for Embedded Hybridity

In the theoretical sense, when it comes to the intersection of social economy and consumer justice movements, there are at least two prerequisites for binding these two streams of ethical consumerism into a hybrid entity. First, both social economy and consumer movements, to some degree, must share common ground in terms of the objects of their struggles, which creates structural opportunities for cooperation. To borrow the theoretical platform of contentious politics of Tilly and Tarrow (2007), each actor locates issues of ethical consumerism within the nexus of politics, contention, and collective action. Our focus should be on that convergence of collective action, contention, and politics because the area of their overlap has distinctive and potentially dangerous properties, but also the potential to open opportunities for all actors to cooperate in pursuit of their common yet differentiated interests. Also, in many cases, social movements are used to cover most if not all of the overlap between contention and collective action, whenever it occurs in the field of politics. Likewise, both social economy and consumer movements share these areas of overlap as opposition fields equipped with contention and collective action within the properties of politics. Nevertheless, neither consumer movements nor social economy seeks to deny the possibility of transforming the spaces of opposition into cooperative spaces in which all sides work to successfully reduce political contentions while magnifying affirmative collective actions.

Accordingly, the second theoretical condition for this constructive hybridity relates to *institutional complementarity* between social economies and consumer movements. Any useful concept of complementarity needs to incorporate an overt assumption on the relevance of efficiency constraints for institutional development between actors involved in search of mutual benefits (Crouch et al. 2005). By implication, this assumes loose rather than tight coupling of system elements, allowing for change in individual institutions without the negative returns caused by efficiency pressures from supposedly complementary institutions. Within institutions, further development of this combination of social economies and consumer movements entails the interrelated worth of two concepts, institutional

complementarity and institutional hierarchy (Utting 2015). The major emphasis of institutional complementarity is normally placed on the structural transformation and the endogenous co-evolution of institutional forms, whereas that of institutional hierarchy is on the structured pyramid of political power to stabilize the exogenous orderliness of institutions. In this regard, stakeholders participating in complementarity processes will promote any synergistic nexus for the co-evolution of institutional progress, rather than increasing the potential of institutional hierarchy (Yi et al. 2021).

In fact, any attempt to transform opposition fields of contentious politics into contributing factors for institutional complementarity should include proactive interchanges of positive feedback for the institutional co-evolution of both social economy organizations and consumer movement organizations. On the one hand, a social economy is able to provide quasi-market-based repertoires that can help consumer groups justify involvement in commercial activities through which they might pursue social entrepreneurship and solidarity-centered profits. Even if social enterprises are unable to make any serious dent in the dominance of private firms, their mere presence in plural economies is a great help in terms of the macro-effects of not only constraining profits, predatory pricing, and the creation of oligopolies, but also facilitating choice and innovation. On the other hand, consumer movements are able to offer political opportunities wherein social economy organizations can equip themselves with politicized collective actions to challenge excessive marketization. In short, it is fair to claim that old consumer justice movements and new social economies become effective partners by exchanging their complementary strengths for each path of institutional development. The collective ethics of consumer movements and the market-related nature of social economy are each seen as necessary conditions for creating the complementary hybridity embedded in reciprocal qualifications and strategic benefits.

Korea's Ethical Consumerism: The Case of Hansalim

Such a theoretical notion of institutional complementarity can be applied to

the Korean context in order to attest its practical feasibility by detecting the synergistic nexus of social economy and consumer justice movements in their mutual pursuit of an ethical consumerism. To this end, greater attention should be given to the internal and external strategies (or repertoires) of both sides in the search for their institutional complementarity within the space of contentious politics (Evers 2001). While advocates of social economy generally see such trends in social economy-state relations as consistent with their demands for a more enabling policy environment for social economy, they are also hypersensitive to processes of instrumentalization, bureaucratization, and cooptation, all of which can undermine core social economy principles, not least of which is autonomy. If consumption patterns were to change in ways conducive to sustainability, social economy organizations could position themselves as the natural providers of goods and services in response to these new considerations of the consumer-citizen.

As discussed above, Korean society, in the most recent decade, has been observing the rapid emergence of ethical consumerism, a mixed bag of traditional consumer movements and new social economy organizations. On the one hand, the rise of ethical consumerism in Korea can be seen as a logical outgrowth of the strategic transformation pursued by consumer justice movements seeking to adapt themselves to a changing external environment. On the other hand, social economy is the other half of the mosaic of ethical consumerism in the sense that its moral code highlights the social value of consumer behavior in contrast to the profit-maximization of economic efficiency. In consequence, the historical evolution of ethical consumerism in Korea is to discover the overlaps between social economy and consumer movements within the convergent areas of contention, collective action, and politics. Those overlaps should be further investigated in terms of institutional complementarity, which can guarantee the co-evolution of participating agencies and partner institutions. In a nutshell, a complementary hybrid, embedded in consumer movements and social economy, logically assumes that there should be mutual benefits for both sides, thereby increasing the potential for an integrated organization.

Identifying a hybrid form of ethical consumerism, therefore, means

detecting the complementary intersection of opposing fields, including the strategies and repertoires used for collective action, between consumer justice organizations and social economy organizations (Kalm and Uhlin 2015). The key profile of the opposition fields in social economy organizations can be summarized as the *societal* embedded in its economic characteristics. Accordingly, such opposition fields consist not only of strategies for advocating the social aspects of the economic behavior of social enterprises, but also specific and technical repertoires expressing the organization's stances opposing for-profit activities in which the societal is not taken into consideration. In this regard, social economy organizations as suppliers are expected to engage with socially responsible sellers who do not want to cause any harm to consumers. Social economies, consequently, recognize areas of struggle shared by consumer justice movements and use them as collaborative *playgrounds* wherein they might improve relations with consumer agencies by successfully adopting consumerism for social justice as one of their main repertoires.

Meanwhile, on these fields of opposition, consumer movements undertake collective action to protect consumer rights and secure consumer sovereignty against the market-based overexpansion of for-profit companies. Consumer justice movements can enjoy benefits from the social economy by controlling the quality and ethics of private for-profit companies, thereby adopting the ethical code of social enterprises in order to defend the positive transformation of consumer movements in accordance with the social economy. Likewise, social economy also benefits a new leeway grafting knowhows of right consumption and good practices of consumer movements onto social enterprises' economic nature, thereby specifying the behavioral directives of social economy organizations.

Assuming mutual benefits for both the social economy and consumer movements via institutional complementarity in the converged areas of contentious politics, we can now explore Korea's empirical cases of such hybrid organizations working for ethical consumerism. Given that Korea's ethical consumerism mainstream requires mutual advantages for both consumer justice movements and social economies, the typology of Korean ethical consumerism must share to some degree such an embedded

hybridity. For example, Eastern Asia's social economy, by and large, comprises the following five modalities (Defourny and Kim 2011): (1) trading non-profit organizations (NPO), (2) work integration social enterprises (WISE), (3) non-profit cooperatives, (4) NPO-for-profit organization (FPO) partnership, and (5) community development enterprises. All five types of ethical consumerism are able to provide the space of institutional complementarity for social economy and consumer movement organizations, because they are equipped with the overlapping features—opposition strategy and repertoires—consisting of ethical consumerism. In particular, Defourny and Kim (2011) suggest that the three modalities of NPO-FPO partnership, non-profit cooperative, and trading NPO address the Korean case better than the other two, in that they can represent the social feasibility and economic efficiency at the same time.

Ethical consumerism in Korea runs along a spectrum based on the relative weight placed on social economy relative to consumer movements (Table 2). On the extreme left are consumer movements whose emphasis on consumer justice predominates over social economy, whereas on the extreme right can be found donations and sharing, as they are purely a type of philanthropic altruism. All the other types of ethical consumerism can be situated in between these two poles of the spectrum. The greater consideration an ethical consumerism organization places on the social underdog and minorities, the greater the probability of it being on the right side of the spectrum. By contrast, ethical consumerism organizations would take the option of consumption movements that are located on the left of the spectrum. In brief, ethical consumerism *per se* in Korea can be found along spectrum of the social economy-consumer movement nexus. One can fairly state that the organizational identity of ethical consumerism in Korea can be envisaged as an expression of civil society formed between consumers and citizens (Kong and Lim 2017). The position of ethical consumerism on the dimension of ownership (private or public), as well as on the dimension of organizational purpose (social or commercial), enables social agencies of ethical consumerism to maneuver on the margins of their diverse modalities, while simultaneously burdening them with roles that are ever shifting along with their multiple boundaries.

Table 2. Major Modalities of Ethical Consumerism in Korea

Consumer Movement	Proactive purchasing of goods and services that inflict no harm on people, animals, or the environment
Anti-consumption Movement	Proactive anti-consumption regarding goods and services doing harm to people, animals, or the environment
Green Consumption	Consumption behavior that takes into consideration that behavior's impacts on society and the environment
Local Consumption	Consumer movements emphasizing the consumption of local products produced by local communities and companies
Fair Trade	Social movement whose stated goal is to help producers in developing countries achieve better trading conditions; members of the movement advocate the payment of higher prices to exporters, as well as improved social and environmental standards
Ethical Cooperative	Autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise
Community Currency Movement	Modernizing and developing systems to promote traditional networking for mutual cooperation via locals at the community level
Minimalist Approach to Life-style	New movement to voluntarily minimize the materials necessary for livelihoods
Donations and Sharing	Consumers sharing with or donating to fellow community members without expectation of recompense

Source: Cheon, et al. (2010), with modifications by author.

Against the general structural backdrop of Korea's ethical consumerism, an in-depth analysis of classical cases is required to deepen our understanding and discover the best case for use in further comparative studies. For this, we will be looking at Hansalim, one of the most well-known and oldest ethical cooperatives in Korea. In advancing Hansalim as the best practice of Korean ethical consumerism, we will identify the Korean pattern of ethical cooperative combining consumer movements within the frame of social economy with a particular focus on the self-investment structure for the social economy or local communities, progressive consumer movements opposing business groups and government policies, and a new type of ethical self-corporate social responsibility (CSR) via investment.⁵ In fact, the

5. The name Hansalim derives from a combination of the Korean terms *han* and *salim*. The

modality of ethical cooperatives has become a primary configuration of the mainstream method of relating consumer justice movements to social economy in Korea.⁶ Among these, Hansalim is a representative case in terms of its nationwide reach to local communities, the multiple targets of its civic engagement, the historical origins of its establishment, and its extended involvement in social economy activities. For our analysis of Hansalim's ethical consumerism, our focus here is mainly on the following three areas in which the hybridity of Hansalim's institutional complementarity can be discerned: first, its strategic repertoires and activities; second, the internal/external structure of its governance and policy implementations; and third, information sharing and its external relations.⁷

The cooperative Hansalim was established in 1986 as Hansalim nongsan (Hansalim Agricultural Products). In three years, Hansalim completed its initial institutional foundation by not only launching the Hansalim Producers Association and the Hansalim Community Consumer Cooperative in 1988, but also publicly announcing the Hansalim Manifesto

term *han* can mean great, one, whole, and together, and can be extended to reference all living things on earth. The term *salim* carries two meanings: first, domestic work caring for homes, families, and children; and second, the rescue and revival of life based upon the social philosophy of protecting all life. Thus, in terms of its philosophical conceptualization, and based on the meanings of its component terms described above, Hansalim advocates the protection of human lives from the harmful effects of industrial civilization. It negates the mechanical development of industry and the sciences, which have created environmental pollution, dependence upon scientific knowledge, and social exclusion and fragmentation, and indeed carry the potential for the total destruction of nature and life. Hansalim, therefore, aims to save and defend the natural order of humankind and the ecosystem, and further, to promote ecological balance, social justice, peaceful unification, and human self-realization through social engagement. For more on Hansalim, refer to http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?page_id=4 (accessed May 9, 2022).

6. Along with Hansalim (<https://shop.hansalim.or.kr/om/main.do>), Korea has several major social economy organizations in the form of ethical cooperatives: I-Coop (<http://www.icoop.or.kr/coopmall/>); Dure-Coop (<http://dure-coop.or.kr/>); Ssamjinongbu (<http://farmingisart.tistory.com/>); Womenlink (<http://womenlink.or.kr/>); and Indramang-Coop (<http://www.indramangcoop.or.kr/>) (accessed May 9, 2022).
7. The main sources for this case analysis of Hansalim are its newsletters, published by the headquarters of Hansalim for internal information sharing and external promotion of its activities (Hansalim 1986–2018).

in 1989, which states Hansalim's philosophy on human life, an expression of its ideas on the crisis of industrial civilization, mechanical ideology, the creative evolution of life, the universe and life within human beings, and its own role. In three decades (from 1986 to 2017), Hansalim, under the slogan of "meaningful daily action to save the earth" (*jigu-reul sallineun tteutgipeun saenghwal silcheon*), has steadily expanded its ethical consumerism activities by extending and deepening its internal/external networks and engaging in social issues in a proactive way. By 1995, Hansalim had already gained an historic 10,000 members, with that number rapidly increasing to 200,000 by 2009.

First, let us examine Hansalim's hybrid ethical consumerism, embedded in both social economy and the consumer justice movement, by exploring its strategic repertoires and activities. Hansalim began its activities as an ethical cooperative that can be categorized as a social economy organization. The primary function of Hansalim is to connect consumers with farmers in local rural communities via direct channels and distribution networks for agricultural products under the three big slogans of "Save our Table" (*bapsang salim*), "Save our Agriculture" (*nonggeop salim*), and "Save our Life and Earth" (*saengmyeong salim*). On top of this principal activity, it further expanded its repertoire into the consumer justice movements, by which has grafted civic engagement onto its original social economy work. Hansalim's consumer movement was mobilized by igniting the "Save Korean Wheat Campaign" in 1991, and it has unremittingly intensified its engagements through a variety of social movements and campaigns (Table 3).

As Table 3 shows, the repertoires Hansalim has developed and pursued are quite expansive and can be categorized into seven areas: (1) campaigns against GMO (genetically modified organisms), (2) movements to save farming and defend food sovereignty, (3) campaigns for school meal services, (4) cooperatives, (5) international solidarity, (6) anti-nuclearization campaigns, and (7) other social issues. It is worth noting that Hansalim has endeavored to scale up its action agendas from cooperatives, which are seen as the original social economy mission, to new areas more likely to concern social and political issues. This expansion has enabled Hansalim to not only become one of the major social interest groups in Korea's civil society, but to

Table 3. Hansalim’s Repertoires for Civic Engagement

Type	Activities
Campaign against GMO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement against GMO (2000) • Inauguration of National Action against GMO (2016) • Petition for Anti-GMO Movement (2016) • Launching the Hansalim GMO Investigation Group for Domestic Products (2018)
Save our Agriculture and Food Sovereignty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save Korean Wheat Campaign (1991) • Campaign against Imported Rice (2006) • Movement for Saving our Barley (2012) • Movement against Rice Tariffication (2014)
School Meal Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petition for School Meal Service Ordinance (2003) • International Conference of Seoul Public School Meal Service (2017)
Cooperatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hansalim established as a cooperative (1988) • Save Our Wheat Cooperative (2012) • Hansalim Sunlight Generation Cooperative (2012) • Hansalim Shipping Cooperative (2015) • People’s Fair Trade Cooperative (2017)
International Solidarity Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising campaign for North Korean People (1997) • Donations for Afghanistan refugees (2001) • Donations for flood victims of Typhoon Rusa (2002) • Delivery of 310 bags of rice (Unification Dining Table/Rice of Life) to North Korea (2006) • Aid for Haiti and Pakistan (2010) • Donations for climate disaster in the Philippines (2013) • Donations for Nepal earthquake victims (2015) • Completion of Nepali Maharaximi Secondary School (2016) • Aid for Dalit organic farming cooperatives in India (2017) • Clothing recycling movement for Pakistani schools (2017)
Anti-Nuclearization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement against Taiwanese nuclear waste into North Korea (1997) • Hansalim Denuclearization Declaration (2017)
Other Social Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign against snow sledge parks on Cheonggye Mountain (1992) • Campaign for Earth Day (1996) • Fundraising campaign for the Foundation for Justice and Memory of Japan’s Wartime Sexual Slavery (2016) • Declaration of the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye (2017)

Source: Compiled by the author.

consolidate its status and functions as a major social economy organization. In short, the Hansalim’s extended outreach beyond its original missions has become a great asset and augmented its influence on other social economy

organizations and its consumer movement partner organizations.

Next worth noting is the power of Hansalim's embedded hybridity deriving from its internal management structure and the entailing connectedness between local consumer and producer associations.⁸ Given that Hansalim is a cooperative established jointly by producers and consumers, its governance structure incorporates the dual components of local consumer branches and producer associations under the single umbrella of the Hansalim Federation. As mentioned, Hansalim was originally registered as a consumer cooperative in 1988, but developed into a social economy organization connecting consumer cooperatives and producer associations due to the fact that it holds firm to its principle of organic agriculture and has been active in exchange activities between producers and consumers, as both are part owners of the cooperative.⁹ With this in mind, Hansalim went beyond the market order and began direct trade between rural producers and urban consumers of healthy foods, such as organic rice and fertile eggs. Such a direct exchange of organic agricultural and processed products between consumers and producers within a single social enterprise became a mainstream model for Korea's cooperative movement, earning Hansalim renown as a cornerstone of the Korean cooperative and consumer movements.

Not surprisingly, the dual components—not only the coexistence of

8. As of 2012, Hansalim membership had grown to 350,000 household consumers, 93 producers, and 2,000 farming producer members in 21 regions throughout Korea.

9. Hansalim's organizational philosophy for connecting producers and consumers is anchored in the notion of *han*—meaning one, whole, together—which facilitates and strengthens the exchange between urban and rural areas, consumers and producers. The Hansalim producers believe that humans and nature, as well as urban and rural areas, share a mutual bond in the string of life. Likewise, consumers need to understand the mind and devotion of producers when they consume products. In a deteriorating environment, where it is increasingly difficult to prepare healthy and organic meals for families due to climate change, natural disaster, vicious markets, and an endangered agricultural sector, Hansalim aims to be proactive in facilitating direct trade between producers and consumers on the philosophical basis of life-giving agriculture. In this regard, Hansalim's makes daily efforts to promote healthy lives and to conserve nature through healthy and sustainable production and consumption. For more on Hansalim's mission, refer to http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?page_id=26 (accessed on May 9, 2022).

producers and consumers but also the combined posture of cooperative activities and consumer movements—embedded in Hansalim’s hybridity have generated the dual structure of its governance in two aspects. First, Hansalim’s governance is constituted at the dual level of central headquarters and local branches. The Hansalim Federation Headquarters (HFH) plays a central role in orchestrating its diverse cooperative actions and other activities—consumer justice movements, organized outreaches for solidarity, and so forth (Fig. 1). HFH organizes the annual general meeting in which all local Hansalim and coop members can join to deliberate and make decisions on key issues, under the guidance of the Board of Directors and with the administrative assistance of the Secretariat. In dealing with each major agenda of its national planning, HFH sets forth specialized committees and meetings under the Board of Directors, and those committees and meetings also coordinate action agendas with local Hansalim branch organizations and their local committees. As seen in Figure 2, the governance structure of local Hansalim organizations (LHO) is also synchronized generally with that of HFH in terms of policy coherence and cooperative effectiveness.

Along with the vertical alignment of HFH and LHO, another connection is horizontal, through the alignment of consumers and producers via the Hansalim Producers Association (HPA) (see Fig. 3). HPA is a member organization of the Hansalim Federation, representing producer communities via structural coherence with HFH and LHO. The institutionalization of direct trade and exchange of organic farm products between producers and consumers is aimed at building up the movement of peaceful living that has always been Hansalim’s dream. Such collective action by consumers and producers easily develops into production justice movements as well as consumer justice movements. The best practice in production justice movements can be seen in Hansalim’s campaigns against GMO and its support for organic farming.

Since its foundation, Hansalim has bolstered its hybridity in terms of its governance through a nimble-footed establishment of internal institutions in response to changing external environments. Beyond its original mission in cooperatives, Hansalim proactively embarked upon launching institutional matchmakers to link external demands with internal

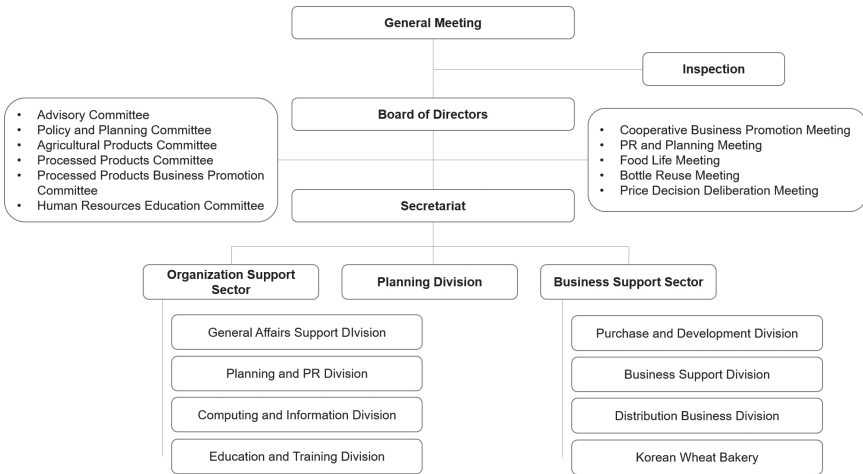


Figure 1. Governance structure of the Hansalim Federation Headquarters

Source: http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?page_id=16 (accessed May 5, 2022).



Figure 2. Governance structure of local Hansalim organizations

Source: http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?page_id=16 (accessed May 5, 2022).

preparations and responses, thereby strengthening its civic engagement in social issues.

As summarized in Table 4, the Heuk Salim Institute (*heuk* meaning earth or soil in Korean) was established in 1993 to set up a research group on environmentally friendly methods of agriculture in Korea with the goal

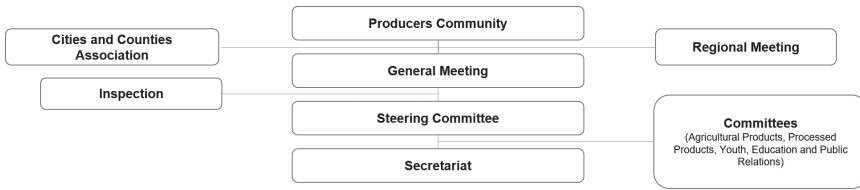


Figure 3. Governance structure of Hansalim Producers Association

Source: http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?page_id=16 (accessed May 5, 2022).

being the supply of eco-friendly fertilizer and farm materials. Then in 1994, Hansalim, in collaboration with other agricultural cooperatives, took the lead in the establishment of the Korean Federation of Sustainable Agriculture Organizations (KFSAO). In chairing KFSAO, Hansalim was regarded as one of the leading cooperatives in the development of environmentally friendly sustainable agriculture, the direct trade of organic farm produce between producers and consumers, and an alternative roadmap for Korea’s rural areas. In 2002, Hansalim launched the Moshim and Salim Institute to spread the culture of life movement and promote it as the major civic engagement of Hansalim. It also launched the Hansalim Business Association in order to improve the efficiency of the direct trade of organic products and support local Hansalim organizations and the HPA. In 2011, the HFH was officially promoted as the representative organization of all the business and activities of Hansalim, and furthermore Hansalim set up the Citizens’ Radioactivity Center (CRC) and held a forum about radioactive contamination and the ensuing food crisis in 2013. In sum, Hansalim has continuously adapted by adjusting its internal system to the changing conditions of the external environment and has taken the initiative in launching innovative campaigns and movements with like-minded cooperatives of Korean civil society.

Finally, how Hansalim has promoted its identity as the leading cooperative combining social economy and consumer movements requires further explanation, namely how it shares information among LHOs and manages its relations with external partner cooperatives. There are three major channels of information-sharing through which Hansalim aims to

Table 4. Hansalim Internal Institutions to Meet External Demands

Year	Institutions
1993	Heuk Salim Institute
1994	Korean Federation of Sustainable Agriculture Organizations
2002	Moshim and Salim Institute Hansalim Business Association
2008	Hansalim Press
2011	Hansalim Federation
2012	Anseong Distribution Center
2013	Citizens' Radioactivity Center
2015	Hansalim Foundation Hansalim Training Institute Hansalim Agricultural Products Analysis Center Hansalim Best Product Center
2016	Farmland Salim and Conservation Corporation Hansalim Order Customer Service Center
2017	Hansalim Funding

Source: Compiled by author.

promote a series of regional production stories and the activities of local communities and LHOs. Such channels are critical instruments for Hansalim to fulfill its repertoires, expand its solidarity with domestic and foreign partner institutes, and reinforce its participations in social movements beyond its original purview of cooperatives.

The first channel is *Hansalim Story*, its official newsletter and annual report covering the varied activities of the HFH, LHOs, and HPA for previous year and their plans for the next.¹⁰ Anyone interested in Hansalim's activities and history is able to access all reports on the Hansalim webpage. Second, along with *Hansalim Story*, Hansalim established the Anseong Distribution Center in 2012, which it manages as a new institute researching on the thoughts of life and launching courses on ecology, the environment, and citizen autonomy for both Hansalim members and the general public.

10. For more information on *Hansalim Story*, refer to <http://eng.hansalim.or.kr/?p=540> (accessed May 9, 2022).

Since 2008, Hansalim has also operated Hansalim Press, its official publisher printing the organization's periodicals as well as other books. Those publications of the Hansalim Press are the final products reflecting Hansalim's philosophy on life, nature, and the human condition, as well as its on-the-ground activities. Finally, with its offline channels, Hansalim effectively utilizes major social media—Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.—as channels for promulgating its activities and events to both its members and the public in a very rapid way.¹¹ Through this, Hansalim communicates with more people, while also seeking alternatives for a better world through participation in civic rallies and protests in alliance with NGOs.

Concluding Remarks: Between Consumers and Citizens

This study set out to review Korean ethical consumerism and the *embedded hybridity* that can be forged at the nexus of consumer justice movements and social economies. By advancing institutional complementarity in contentious politics as an analytical framework, it examined the historical evolution of Korea's ethical consumerism as a logical consequence of the country's anti-capitalist civic engagement against unequal and non-transparent market systems. In particular, it has sought to deepen the analysis of Korea's involvement in ethical consumerism by taking Hansalim as an exemplar of Korean ethical cooperatives.

Here, embedded hybridity is referenced as ethical consumerism in the context of state-society relations, as well as an adapted survival strategy by ethical cooperatives faced with changing external structures. At the macro-level, the historical development of Korea's ethical consumerism can be identified as a strategic outgrowth embedded in the intersection between the state's intervention-from-above and civil society's social movement-from-below (T. Kim 2008). Korean cooperatives and consumer movement organizations are asked to comply with government guidelines and institutional pressures, while they are also asked to marshal collective action

11. <https://www.facebook.com/hansalim1986/> (accessed May 9, 2022).

against government intervention by allying themselves with other like-minded partners. At the micro-level, Korean ethical cooperatives, including Hansalim, face a double jeopardy, a consequence of their transitional position on the border between consumers and citizens (Kong and Lim 2017). The failure to identify the status of ethical cooperatives as citizens or consumers hampers them from clarifying their functions and strategies and drops them into a trap of confusion when they are asked to decide which status is best for engagement in social issues.

However, this vague position can also be leveraged to underpin Hansalim's embedded hybridity combining social economy and consumer movements, allowing it to evade that identity crisis between consumers and citizens. Such a vagueness can be helpful not only for consumer justice movements in their encounter with social economies, but also for social economies, allowing them to better forge voluntary communities embedded in a hybridity full of grassroots initiatives. When local citizens communally participate in socioeconomic activities, it is easy for local communities to utilize social networks for civic engagement on social issues, and to combine cooperatives and consumer movements. As the case of Hansalim vividly demonstrates, there is the possibility of positive hybridity in a vague status between consumers and citizens. Accordingly, the politics of embedded hybridity are related to the magnitude of grey zones, rather than any clear rift between black and white.

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