

BEING SURPLUS IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA: ING-YEO SUBJECTIVITY AND  
YOUTH CULTURE IN SOUTH KOREA

by

Sangmin Kim  
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Committee:

Director

Program Director

Dean, College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

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by

Sangmin Kim  
Master of Arts  
Seoul National University, 2002  
Bachelor of Science  
Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, 1993

Director: Hugh Gusterson  
Affiliate Faculty, Cultural Studies, George Mason University  
Professor, Anthropology and International Affairs, George Washington University

Fall Semester 2015  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA



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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Boosoo Kim and Chaerip Song, and my parents-in-law, Chungsik Yu and Myungja Woo.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **BEING SURPLUS IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA: ING-YEO SUBJECTIVITY AND YOUTH CULTURE IN SOUTH KOREA**

Sangmin Kim, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Hugh Gusterson

In the late 2000s in South Korea, a social phenomenon emerged of youth who call themselves “ing-yeo,” or “surplus human being.” This dissertation argues that this term is in fact an expression that properly reflects these youths’ political-economic reality and their characteristics in cultural activities. Since the late nineties, with increased productivity through technological development and the introduction of neoliberal policies, Korean society has faced a situation in which more and more youth are unemployed, and, for that reason, have more and more free time in which to participate in useless and meaningless activities. Within this situation, the ing-yeo subjects internalize neoliberal techniques of self-improvement, on the one hand, and practice escape to the fantasy world of the enjoying cynical and self-deprecating, on the other. I investigate how the ing-yeo youths construct their unique cultural identity in the new media environment, though in fragmented and precarious forms, and how the cultural value they create

through their activities is appropriated by media capital. By applying an interdisciplinary approach in cultural studies that connects critical political economy, (new) media studies, and science and technology studies, this dissertation analyzes various discourses and cultural conditions of the youth in crisis. I have also collected some valuable information through a series of interviews with self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects. To illuminate the ing-yeo subjectivity, I explore the political, economic, and technological background of Korean society from which the ing-yeo emerged, the cultural characteristics around the ing-yeo subjects, and the various forms of existence of the precarious youth immersed in new media technologies. I conclude that the ing-yeo's pursuit of perverse cultural enjoyment is based on their self-awareness of their insecure status in the current political-economic reality and their anxiety about the hopeless future.

## INTRODUCTION

In the South Korean (hereafter Korean) film *Maljukgeori Janhoksa*<sup>1</sup> (Yu, 2004), set in Seoul in 1978, the protagonist Hyeon-Su, recently received a very disappointing grade in high school, is severely scolded by his father. Hyeon-Su has had a difficult time adapting himself to the school where he recently transferred. Breaking Hyeon-Su's radio against the wall and throwing his report card on the floor, his father yells at him: "Is this a grade? Do you think it is a grade? Asshole! Going to college with this grade? It's a waste of money! Give up school right away!" Then Hyeon-Su interrupts his father and retorts: "I'm not going to college. Yes, I'll leave high school!" His father slaps Hyeon-Su across the face and curses him: "Do you know what you will become if you don't go to college? It's an *ing-yeo ingan* (surplus human being). *Ing-yeo*. Do you know *ing-yeo ingan*? Go chase yourself if you are going to vex mom and dad like this. Go chase yourself." After stomping out of the room and then running into the dark rainy night, Hyeon-Su goes up to the rooftop of a building. Looking down at the ground, Hyeon-Su's narration begins: "All right. I'm an *ing-yeo ingan*. . . . There was no hope left to me. There was nothing to do and nothing that I wanted to do. . . . At the moment, I felt an urge to jump off the rooftop. I thought I could throw myself simply like rain drops falling down to the ground."

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<sup>1</sup> In English, the title is *The Spirit of Jeet Keun Do: Once Upon a Time in High School*. The film shows how a timid high school kid fights against despicable school violence and grows up.

What do they mean by *ing-yeo ingan*? It seems to indicate the quality of a person who does not have, and thus cannot add, any effective value to their family, community, or society. In other words, it refers to a surplus human being, someone regarded as a useless person or a redundant individual. In the film, becoming *ing-yeo ingan* seems to mean being degraded to a subject of lower social class because of having less education than others. Given that the film is set in the late 1970s, Hyeon-Su might be part of the first baby boomer generation after the Korean War. At the time, social competition gradually intensified in proportion to population growth—especially so in education, which Korean people have traditionally stressed. In his father's eyes, without a college diploma Hyeon-Su would be degraded to a loser, a lower-class citizen, a social misfit, i.e., *ing-yeo ingan*.

However, the college entrance rate at that time was just around 20 percent. If Hyeon-Su did not receive a higher education, he would likely have had difficulty getting a quality job, such as a high-ranked government official, lawyer, teacher, or other white-collar professional. Nonetheless, he could get a job for life at least as an office manager, mid-level public service personnel, or ordinary wage earner, whether blue- or white-collar, i.e., a regular worker. From today's perspective, his father's anger might look a bit excessive and exaggerated—social competition was not severer than today. However, in a Korean society that has been quickly modernizing since the 1970s, the desire for upward mobility through a college education was strong and taken for granted. Parents used to sell family-owned properties and even cows for rice farming to send their kids to university. Sometimes all other family members had to support and sacrifice for the only

college student in their family, generally the eldest son. Given that higher education was almost the only social apparatus available for class mobility, and given Korea's relatively egalitarian education system, it is understandable why Hyeon-Su's father exploded into anger at his son's irresponsible conduct in school. He must have been anxious about his son's future.

Compared with the younger generation in the 1970s and 80s, those born around the 1990s (Hyeon-Su's children would be part of this generation) feel their lives are even more miserable, in that society has become much more competitive and relatively fewer resources are available for them. Indeed, they are those who made the buzzword *ing-yeo* and circulate it these days. Furthermore, those who were teenagers in the late nineties were directly influenced by the historic Asian financial foreign currency crisis, what Koreans call the IMF crisis. With this crisis, youth<sup>2</sup> experienced the contraction of the household economy, increased suicide rates, warlike competition in education and employment, insecure job markets, etc.<sup>3</sup> Since these traumatic events, Korean society has

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of youth and the age groups to which youth belong are varied, depending on national, cultural, and historical situations. Yet "the 15–24-years-old age group was held to be the least imperfect possible grouping of the nebulous population we call 'youth'" (Galland, 2007). However, in Korean context, the youth covers broader age group above the adulthood, approximately from the late teens to the mid-thirties. Sometimes the upper limit of this age group tend to be pushed higher.

<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the entrance rate into higher education has gradually increased: In 2008 the entrance rate into university-level education was recorded at the historical high of 84 percent in Korea, which was the top among the OECD countries. In the past, the path toward the upper (or middle) class was narrow, but success was guaranteed if one had a good higher education. On the contrary, while the doors are now open to anyone, a certain level of education never promises social stability. While it was natural for high school graduates to be in the middle class in the seventies, now it is quite difficult for college graduates to achieve middle-class status. Universities are classified and ranked microscopically based on their reputation, while the employment rate of college graduates has become stagnant, so the competition for education and jobs has intensified. More than ever, educational background has become the major determinant

gone through continuous long-term economic recession and social downturn. If Hyeon-Su and his father were placed in this current situation, how would they do? What would the then-ing-yeo ingan, Hyeon-Su, as a father today, say to his teenage son if his son were hooked on computer games? Today youth are simply enduring the current reality in order not to fall behind rather than struggling to succeed. Between the high education rate and the lowest employment rate, young people now casually talk about their pathetic situation in a bit of a sarcastic way: “I am really an *ing-yeo ingan*.”

The film *Maljukgeori Janhoksa* probably exerted a large influence on the widespread use of the term “ing-yeo” today. However, the movie is not about the ing-yeo in today’s sense, because it depicts the lives of young schoolboys in the late 1970s from the retro-perspective of the 2000s. In the early 2010s, a few films that deal directly with the lives of the ing-yeo—also made by ing-yeo, in some sense—were released. When making these films, the directors (or producers) were in their late twenties or early thirties, and they tried to present the worlds of ing-yeo based on their personal experiences.

*Bulcheonggaek* [The Uninvited] (E. Lee, 2010) is dedicated to one of the legendary online communities, of which the filmmaker was an avid member. The world of *Ingtoogi* [INGtoogi: The Battle of Surpluses] (T. Eom, 2013) revolves around online *ing-yeo-jit* (ing-yeo activities). In *Ing-yeo-deul-ui Hichi-hai-king* [Lazy Hitchhikers’ Tour de Europe] (H. Lee, 2013), four hitchhikers set out on a trip to Europe after dropping out of school.

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of social hierarchy, but educational background is predetermined by the child’s social status. The economic success of global mega-companies, such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundai, does not open the gates for employing young people—those companies are eager to stack cash in their safes rather than investing it in R&D and new employment. While the younger generation suffers from unemployment, the older generation is also devastated by the rampant cut-off.

The ing-yeo has become not only part of popular culture, such as movies, novels, and TV shows, but also of overall society: the term “ing-yeo” has now become a keyword that can explain Korean society since the late 2000s. Within a couple of years of its appearance, it became a buzzword and then an everyday term especially among young people in Korea. In order to understand this socio-cultural phenomenon of ing-yeo, this dissertation explores the following questions:

- How and why did the phenomenon of ing-yeo, such as sarcastic naming and practices, come to dominate the youth culture in current Korean society?
- How are ing yeo youth in Korea coping with, and making sense of, their surplus status, and what role do new media technologies play in their coping strategies?
- How do the ing-yeo’s strategies in turn feed back into the accumulation strategies of new media and Internet firms, and how is value generated from this surplus population?

In this introduction, I will address who the ing-yeo are, how the concepts related to ing-yeo have been used in critical theories, what kind of theoretical frameworks can help us to understand the ing-yeo, and what is the historical background from which the ing-yeo emerged.

### **Who or What is Ing-yeo?**

Ing-yeo, as a term that many and unspecified young Korean call themselves, refers to people whose existence are not recognized as useful or valuable in society. In current Korean culture, ing-yeo (human being) generally means “those excluded from the mainstream; those out of the track of victory and borderlines of stability and security; in a word, ‘the unneeded human’” (Baik, 2011, p. 15). If the term is applied to the younger

generation, it indicates the unemployed and underemployed youth, spending their free time doing nothing productive. The ing-yeo believe themselves to be worthless because society does not recognize them as useful and because, at the same time, they think that they only do what society does not consider useful and needed. Rather than referring to the traditionally marginalized group of people (the lowest class) who are totally excluded by society, the term ing-yeo comes from the self-humiliating complaint about their incompetence and misfortune by the young people whose expectation of stable (middle class) lives is shattered due to the current insecure economic conditions. In this way, they feel that they are alienated and excluded economically from society—they feel ing-yeo. Ing-yeo is a symptom that reflects the precarity of the youth.

On the other hand, ing-yeo refers to the situation, attitude, and practice of the subjects who call themselves ing-yeo. The younger generations make fun of themselves and their situations through diverse activities and play on words. These youths do not hide that they waste too much time and engage in worthless activities, calling their useless practices “ing-yeo-jit.” Their ing-yeo situation that their insecure employment status provides allows them to spend their surplus free time doing various kinds of ing-yeo activities mainly through new media and the network. In many cases, these ing-yeo activities including parody, distortion, and derision provide them emotional release.

In this sense, as we glimpsed briefly, ing-yeo means something (and someone) useless, excessive, or extra to society, and the ing-yeo subject in Korea refers to the unemployed, the loser, or the social failure stuck on entertainment such as online games, habitual web surfing, relentless status updates on social networking sites, digital trolling,

etc., all of which looks useless from the perspective of the established generation. Both the ing-yeo subject and ing-yeo practice are regarded as useless and worthless. Ironically, however, their ing-yeo-jit are sometimes regarded as creative, as well as productive. It is productive not in the sense that ing-yeo can produce something (that society will recognize as) valuable. Whether it is useful or not, ing-yeo can spend their free time making something sharable with others. Though the products of that productive ing-yeo-jit cannot be sold, some ing-yeo ingan are willing to spend their massive amounts of free time making something for fun, which does not have any use value.

It is often regarded as a sort of social resistance for the young people to call themselves ing-yeo and to express their situation through their ing-yeo-jit. However, those ing-yeo-jit seem nothing more than satires and sarcasm on society and themselves. Even though ing-yeo subjects seem to be treated unfairly in society, they have never appeared as a united (political) group or an angry mob on their own. This is because they have never been formed as a single uniform movement.

In addition, the ing-yeo probably cannot be a united group of people because they are distributed throughout the networks. Of course, for the same reason they can easily gather around and mobilize their abilities online. The place in which they expose themselves as ing-yeo and do their ing-yeo-jit is cyberspace—or rather, it is the Internet where ing-yeo people can be constructed as ing-yeo subjects. The play of ing-yeo using the networks and digital media as tools is the source that enables ing-yeo-hood. However, surprisingly, in this way ing-yeo free time is hooked into the trap of current capitalism,

where ing-yeo's knowledge, attention, and affect (emotion) are appropriated. This is the strange paradox of ing-yeo: excluded on the one hand, subsumed on the other.

Although we can simply enumerate ing-yeo's genuine characteristics and the practices they routinely perform, defining the term "ing-yeo" itself will be difficult. Understanding what it means is the first and most challenging part of this research. Since the term "ing-yeo" is a Korean word,<sup>4</sup> we can find a few English words that correspond with it. I will explore the genealogy of the concept of ing-yeo before going deeper.

In Korean-English dictionaries, "ing-yeo" is defined and translated mostly as "surplus." In English dictionaries, "surplus" as a noun means "an amount of something left over when requirements have been met" or "an excess of production or supply over demand" and "more than what is needed or used" as an adjective. There are several words that can be substituted for and complement the term surplus. "Redundant" might be the next candidate: as an adjective, it is defined as "exceeding what is necessary or natural." Other plausible candidates are "leftover," "reserved," "superfluous," and "excessive." Rather than applying the translations, I will use the term "ing-yeo" in this dissertation, at least if it is used in the Korean context. Yet I will apply other terms, too, depending on the situation.

Let us look into a couple of concepts, among others, in detail here to see how they can convey the meaning of ing-yeo.<sup>5</sup> First, the term "surplus" can generally imply the original meaning of ing-yeo currently used in Korean society. The most widely known

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<sup>4</sup> The Korean word "잉여" (ing-yeo) is etymologically derived from the Chinese word "剩餘" (sheng-yu), which means the "leftover," "rest," "remainder," or "surplus."

<sup>5</sup> Here I am dealing with the concepts that might help us to understand not only who the ing-yeo subjects are but also what the term "ing-yeo" means.

use of the term “surplus” is found in critical political economy, especially in Karl Marx’s works, where surplus indicates the surplus value produced by excessive labor (time) in the circulation of capital.<sup>6</sup> Here, surplus, whether value or labor, cannot be useless, though it can be superfluous; it can be understood as one of the necessary driving forces that enable the incessant reproduction of capitalist economy.<sup>7</sup> As Marx (1981) argues, “what the commodity costs the capitalist, and what it actually does cost to produce it, are two completely different quantities. The portion of the commodity’s value that consists of surplus-value costs the capitalist nothing, for the very reason that it costs the worker his unpaid labour” (p. 118). The origin of surplus value lies only in the appropriation of surplus labor invested in the production phase. Thus, “surplus-value and the rate of surplus-value are . . . the invisible essence to be investigated, whereas the rate of profit and hence the form of surplus-value as profit are visible surface phenomena” (p. 134).

The core logic of capitalist accumulation can be found less in the accumulation of profit than in the formation of surplus value.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this surplus has an effective value by being absorbed systematically by someone other than the producers. The producers of surplus feel relative deprivation only if they know the mechanism of

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<sup>6</sup> For the meaning of surplus (value) and the theory of surplus value, see Karl Marx (1952, 1973, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> According to Marx (1981), the value of a certain commodity ( $C$ ) is composed of fixed capital [means of production] ( $c$ ), variable capital [labor] ( $v$ ), and surplus value ( $s$ ):  $C = c + v + s$ .

<sup>8</sup> From the Marxian perspective, the *ing-yeo* might also refer to “reserve,” as in the “reserve army of labor.” For Marx (1976), surplus population of laborer as a necessary condition for capitalist accumulation becomes the reserve army of labor: “. . . if a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost” (p. 784). This understanding of surplus is close to Bauman’s “redundancy.”

unfairness—i.e., exploitation. However, since “surplus” is something that is more than necessary, rather than something that is simply a useless remainder, it propels the whole system by being re-invested into the cycle. This is the very paradox of surplus. At first glance, it seems to be a leftover part, but when we look with care it seems to support the whole.

There is one more concept to consider in order to understand *ing-yeo*: “redundancy.” Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2004) uses this concept repeatedly in his works on modernity and its diverse effects.<sup>9</sup> He claims that the redundant population, which he also calls “human waste” or “wasted lives,” is produced as one of the “unintended and unplanned ‘collateral casualties’” (p. 39) of the modernization process and as a “side-effect of order-building” and “economic progress” (p. 5). Here, “to be ‘redundant’ means to be supernumerary, unneeded, of no use—whatever the needs and uses are that set the standard of usefulness and indispensability” and “to be declared redundant means to have been disposed *because of being disposable*—just like the empty and non-refundable plastic bottle or once-used syringe, and unattractive commodity with no buyers” (p. 12).

In the past, the redundant population in society, which was a social problem, could be thrown out to overseas colonies (“dumping sites”) in the form of migration. However, due to the “new fullness of the planet” caused by globalization or the global reach of the modernization process, now the outlets for the drainage of redundant human waste are blocked (p. 70). As a result, the redundant population must stay and share the

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<sup>9</sup> For the concept of “redundancy” and the “redundant,” see also Bauman (2004, 2007).

social boundary with the normal and useful rest of the population, and thus “the line separating a transient incapacitation from the peremptory and final consignment to waste tends to be blurred and no longer legible” (p. 71). For this reason, it is possible for anyone to be marked as redundant and disposable as human waste. The more serious problem is that, while the unemployed or reserve army of labor in the past could return to ordinary normal life if the blockage were removed, the destination of this redundant population now is nowhere but the waste-yard. Unlike unemployment that is only temporary or momentary, redundancy is permanent, with no solution. However, we need to determine whether *ing-yeo* in the Korean context refers to a group of people seriously alienated from society. In fact, as Paik (2013) points out, rather than being totally excluded from society, the *ing-yeo* are on the border of exclusion and inclusion: they are those who want to be included but failed or were suspended.

Concepts like surplus and redundancy may suggest what Korean youths mean by *ing-yeo*, but no term above corresponds exactly with the way it is used and understood now in the Korean context. This inconsistency may be caused by the equivocality of the term rather than by the problem of translation itself. *Ing-yeo* indeed has something in common with all the other similar terms—surplus, reserve, redundant, etc. However, the *ing-yeo* call themselves such in a casual manner without difficulty, because it seems that there are dimensions of *ing-yeo* that go beyond the strict notions of useless “surplus.”

For this reason, if we begin to think and talk seriously about *ing-yeo*, we confront a problem in fixing the meaning of the term. In short, the primal difficulty of *ing-yeo* research comes from the term’s ambivalence: Is being excessive good, or is it useless,

because one is just leftover? Is it abundance or deprivation? Do ing-yeo call themselves ing-yeo in a favorable sense or not? Does ing-yeo indicate the existence of a person or the status or condition of a person? Are they ing-yeo because they do not need to work or because they do not get a chance to work? Is it an expression of financial affordability allowed to them or social freedom naturally brought about by the deprivation of economic means? Furthermore, is the ing-yeo a subject position or a way of life? If it is not anything else, is it a certain value that is lost or a virtue to be created? To solve this ambiguity in the meaning of ing-yeo, it will be helpful for us to review how the concept of “surplus” or “redundant” individuals has been dealt with in the context of critical theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Although there is inconsistency among the terms related to ing-yeo, including surplus, redundant, etc., much research has been conducted regardless. This research, or these approaches, can be roughly classified into three areas or perspectives. First, surplus value has been one of the main objects of economics since the development of industrial capitalism. Here, ing-yeo means surplus in an economic sense—the economic “value” is ing-yeo, or surplus, as we have seen earlier. This ing-yeo can be expressed as a certain value, that is, a value created through capitalist economic circulation. It is presupposed in Marxist critique of political economy that a value is above all surplus (ing-yeo) value and that capitalism can be sustained only by the creation and exchange—and, first of all, exploitation—of surplus value. The research on surplus value, of course, originated with classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. However, it was only with

Marx's critique of political economy that the nature of surplus value and surplus labor in capitalism was revealed in a scientific way. From Marx's perspective, surplus value is not a simple commercial price or abstract numerical value but accumulated labor (time) that is systematically exploited. Surplus value is both the necessary condition and the result of the capitalist system.

In the current capitalist system where information and communication technologies are highly developed, (surplus) value is created not only from labor time in the factory but also from free time in everyday life. There are many scholars who criticize this situation under the influence of the Italian Autonomists or Workerists, paying attention to immaterial and free labor in current capitalism: Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009), Terranova (2000, 2004), Scholz (2013), Lazzarato (1996, 2014), Fuchs (2010, 2012, 2013, 2014), Dyer-Witheford (1999, 2015), and Andrejevic (2011, 2013), to name a few. What is regarded as surplus can be appropriated or exploited through the unique mechanism of new media that continuously attracts the ing-yeo subjects to the medium. The form of new media or Web 2.0 is not just a pure surface that visually displays an array of information but an invisible structure of dominant ideology codified to function in a specific way to manipulate users' cognition and interaction (Gehl, 2010).

Second, there is a large amount of research on surplus in the areas of philosophy, psychoanalytic theories, semiotics, and perhaps mathematics too. We may not regard them as studies directly concerning ing-yeo, but conceptually they pose questions about something that exceeds the boundary of the established: for example, a semantic remainder after semiotic and linguistic interpretations, a singular being that cannot be

subsumed under the existing binary system, etc. We might include the Derridian “supplement,” Deleuzian “simulacre,” and Lacanian “jouissance” (or Zizekian “surplus enjoyment”) in the list of ing-yeo-like concepts. Here, the element of surplus functions as an inner moment that urges totality itself to ask back the coherence of its organic structure. In other words, it is a blank that does not reveal itself but can bring a crisis or advancement to the whole system.

Finally, there have been studies on surplus life or the surplus “subject.” From this approach, surplus indicates the abject subject, human existence ruled out from social boundaries. These surplus subjects include, for example, human beings disposed of as worthless from society due to poverty or ideologies, second-class citizens who have lost effective social value, and minority (or less-powered) groups, such as the homeless, women, LGBTs, aboriginals, or youth, whose legal rights have been limited. This label might remind us of Giorgio Agamben’s (1998, 2005) “*homo sacer*,” which is influenced by Michel Foucault’s (1990, 2010) theory of the “bio-politic.”<sup>10</sup> We can add various similar sociological and anthropological studies to this list of ing-yeo research: for instance, Bauman’s (2004) “wasted lives” in liquid modern society, the lives of the low-income class in Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2001) investigative anthropology, the “surplus humanity” in urban slums described by Mike Davis (2006), and so forth. Most of all,

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<sup>10</sup> For Agamben, “*homo sacer*” shows the very structure of power or the juncture between power and life that Foucault has been articulating with the concept “biopower.” The logic of sovereignty is not only a logic of capturing life but also a logic of excluding a “bare life” (*homo sacer*) as an exception.

Foucault's late theory on neoliberal governmentality and the process of subjectification within it will provide a useful guide for explaining the ing-yeo.

In this dissertation, I do not deal primarily with the ing-yeo in only one sense excluding the other two—rather, I examine a new meaning of ing-yeo that unfolds from the conjunction of all of them. The way in which surplus is dealt with in an economic sense or from the psychoanalytic perspective plays a significant role in explaining how the young people in Korean society become ing-yeo subjects. However, the main object of this dissertation will be the ing-yeo as human subject, though the ing-yeo do not directly refer to the abject or impoverished population.

There has been considerable scholarly interest in surplus or redundancy in Western societies. The Western use of the term “surplus” is, of course, different from the way in which “ing-yeo” is used in Korea today. Even in the Korean media and academy, it is often hard to find a consistent use of the concept. The self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects also recognize ing-yeo as both an economic condition and cultural activities. Even though we recognize the semantic differences in the term, I do not think those concepts indicate completely different matters. Historically, ing-yeo-like human beings and ing-yeo practices have existed in any society.

There would be a certain point where the clear classifications of ing-yeo become pointless. Ing-yeo life is not unconnected with the economic condition of ing-yeo, as well as with a lack of political representation. Thus, ing-yeo is not just a result of a single reason but of the relations of many factors. Even if we think of it simply from a political-economic perspective, ing-yeo does not come with a single meaning. From the

perspective of capital, surplus is naturally a positive and necessary thing, without which capital cannot incessantly reproduce its cycle. On the other hand, from the perspective of labor, it is what is exploited and consumed, and thus it is perceived negatively or reactively.<sup>11</sup> In the end, however, surplus as capital and surplus as labor cannot be separated. We can understand the nature of ing-yeo by examining such paradoxical characteristics of ing-yeo.

### **Emergence of Ing-yeo Subjects in Korea**

In order to understand what ing-yeo is and how it is important, we need to identify the ing-yeo subject and phenomenon. To identify the ing-yeo, it is required to trace the historical backgrounds from which the ing-yeo emerge and to explore the material conditions under which they are constructed as subject (or non-subject). Here I will approach the emergence of ing-yeo through two (or three) distinct but interlinked perspectives. One is political-economic “regime” changes and the other is discourses of “generation.” While the ing-yeo are the subject produced from the complex political-economic situations on the macro level, they are also constructed through the discourse about them. What I argue here is that neoliberal governance, dominant since around the late 90s in Korea, is crucial for the emergence of ing-yeo, and that the younger generation, which grew up in neoliberal social conditions and is known as 88 Man-won Generation, are the collective subjects from which the ing-yeo are derived.

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<sup>11</sup> Italian Autonomists or Workerists (proponents of *Operaismo*) have worked to overturn this negative image of labor. They tried to glorify the working class and attribute active and positive potential to them. Cf. Negri (1991) and Hardt & Negri (1994).

Korean society has been rapidly and dramatically changed throughout its compressed capitalist development. Looking back at the modern history of Korea, we see persistent changes in politico-economic structures, dominant power relations, and governing entities, which might be called the “regimes,” as well as characteristics of subjectivity constructed correspondingly. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “regime” refers to “a method or system of rule, governance, or control; a system of organization; a way of doing things, esp. one having widespread influence or prevalence” as a modern political term—an “authoritarian government form,” when used negatively. If it refers to the form of government, it not only considers the political form—military dictatorship, democracy, etc.—but also the economic structure and characteristics—developed capitalism, developing economies, etc. In other words, though regime is a suitable term for the overall description of politics and economy, rather than simply reflecting changes in either political or economic structure, it should also consider the politico-economic form, constitutional system, labor structure, and so on.

In Foucauldian terms, regime is a complex concept that embraces both the ruling principle and idea of governing and controlling a society (the political side) and the dominant structure of accumulation (the economic side). In this dissertation, it is synonymous with “governmentality” in a broader sense. As Wendy Brown (2005), following Foucault, puts it, “a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social” (p. 37).

In the Korean context, there have been multiple critical changes in regime. Among them, here we mainly deal with the relatively recent social and historical articulations of Korean society since the 1980s, especially related to the long-awaited democratization of politics (the 87 Regime) and thoroughgoing neoliberal globalization of the market (the 97 Regime). Those are the most recent historical events and still have an immediate and vital influence in current affairs. Here, the 87 Regime refers to the dominant system that ruled Korean society after 1987 when political democracy, exemplified in the direct presidential election system, had been achieved based on long-time labor and civil movements during the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, the 97 Regime refers to the most drastic economic upheaval in Korean history, including full-scale market opening, business restructuring, flexibility of labor, etc., after the foreign exchange (financial) crisis in 1997. Korean sociologist Ho-Ki Kim (2007) distinguishes the two regimes: “While the 87 Regime focused on political and social aspects, the 97 Regime is the period when the shock of foreign currency crisis fundamentally changed national structure and foundation in terms of economic aspect” (p. 182). In addition to the two salient regime changes, some see an 08 Regime, which began with the launch of the neoliberal and conservative government in 2008 coupled with a global financial crisis sparked by the collapse of the U.S. financial market.

However, there is a controversy over which regime is ruling the current Korean society. One position argues that although we have already overcome the 87 Regime, it still wields strong influence over Korean society because it broke the great power relations that dominated Korea for three or four decades (J. Kim, 2009). Another

perspective on regime change believes that current Korean society exists as an extension of the 97 Regime, and that present social and cultural phenomena are based on the capitalistic arrangement of power that began to emerge in the 90s (Sonn, 2009). From the most recent point of view, the 08 Regime seems dominant, and that a new political and economic situation has been formed in Korean society since the 2008 nationwide candlelight demonstration against the rough-and-ready beef trade agreement between the U.S. and Korea, initiated with the launch of the Lee administration (Cho & Suh, 2009).

Through the democratic revolution in 1987, called “the workers’ great struggle,” based on people’s (mainly workers’) tremendous resistance and sacrifice, Korean society appeared to accomplish democratization in politics and overall society, putting an end to military-industrial dictatorship. Under the 87 Regime, laborers, who were previously excluded from democratic political participation and fair economic distribution, became the main subjectivity of the era. During this period, Korea experienced a booming economy due to the Three Low Situation (decreased international interest rates, raw material costs, and dollar value). Accordingly, the importance of the manufacturing industry that had grown for three decades reached its peak around 1988.

However, this economic boom did not last long. “In 1990, Korea’s current account balance started to deteriorate because of rising inflation, appreciation of the Korean won, and the recession of the world economy” (K. Kim, 2006). Then, in 1997, numerous big corporations went bankrupt and into receivership, Korea’s sovereign credit rating was sharply downgraded, the stock market collapsed, and foreign exchange reserves were rapidly depleted. In November of that year, the Korean government asked

for a bailout from the IMF. However, IMF rescue money came with several prescriptions: austerity measures, implementation of financial and corporate reform programs, and so on. Korea was forced to embrace the neoliberal governing system and policies as a solution to the crisis. This economic transformation is called the 97 Regime, under which common global neoliberal practices such as “deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3) were imported and implanted. Here, neoliberalism is not simply a theoretical trend or political-economic theory but the dominant logic—ideology—of global policy-making as well as the principle of the accumulation system, which has been sweeping the globe since the 1970s.

In spite of persistent debates over the precise sequencing of regimes, there is a general consensus among scholars that the introduction of the neoliberal principle—neoliberal reform—is the most extensive and influential event in the contemporary lives of the Korean people. It was through the 1997 financial crisis that a neoliberal ruling system was introduced and established in Korea as a result of strategic choices by the governments. Ho-Ki Kim (2007) argues that the year in which more significant changes came about was 1997, rather than 1987: “rather after the 1997 foreign exchange crisis . . . there have been serious changes in regime” (p. 182), known as neoliberalism. Similarly, political scientist Hochul Sonn (2009, 2010) asserts that the current situation falls under the 97 Regime, because he views the adoption of neoliberalism in Korean society as completed just after 1997, even though the neoliberal system advanced to a new phase

later on. Sociologist Heeyeon Cho (2009) thinks that the neoliberal policies introduced around 1997 fully actualized after the launch of the 08 Regime.

The subjectivity that represents Korean society has been produced, developed, and changed in combination with the regimes as described above. Since the 1960s, the “workers” (laborers) have achieved industrialization as the object (rather than as the subject) of repression and exploitation by state power and big capital. The era of the working class ended with the dawn of the 87 Regime, which was followed by the age of “consumers.” By the early 1990s Korean citizens were represented as consumers in earnest: highly paid celebrities appeared on TV commercials stimulating people’s desire in unprecedented consumer capitalism; the value of residential space such as apartments rose steadily as an object of speculation; the middle-class dream seemed to come true thanks to widespread consumer goods and the accumulation of wealth gained from continual speculation. These social phenomena are described as snobbish in contrast to authentic or truthful (Kim, 2009).

With the coming of the 1997 financial crisis, however, it was not possible for consumers to remain dominant any longer. Laid-off workers and the bankrupt self-employed, who were encouraged to collect gold and dollars to save the nation, filled the streets. Internet cafes, called PC bangs in Korea, sprung up everywhere and thus netizens seemed to replace citizens following the rapid construction of state-led high-speed Internet. The younger generations (in their twenties and thirties at that time), who were adept at using the Internet and digital equipment, made their debut in Korean society or politics in 2002 by making their preferred candidate (Mr. Rho) president (H. Song, 2003,

p. 20). It seemed that Korean society departed from the aftermath of the financial crisis. However, Korean society was steadily entering into the days of long-term stagnation with accompanying social phenomena: the number of non-regular workers approaching half of the working population, the skyrocketing price of real estate, the lowest birth rate in Korean history, the highest suicide rate, the lowest happiness index, and the highest fervor for education. When the neoliberal regime's political influence on society reached its peak in 2008, the young people had to go through the feeling of being defeated, witnessing that their opportunities and the social resources for them were increasingly reduced.

The neoliberal policies that crucially influenced Korean society are typical of Harvey's description above. However, the production of precarious (ing-yeo in this sense) subjectivity was one of the most notable effects of the neoliberal policies. Through intensified social competition, growth without employment, and labor flexibility, those who were newly entering into the society had to encounter and embrace widespread non-regular employment, winner-take-all effect, social bipolarization, and endless pressure for self-development. Among the younger generation, those afraid of their uncertain future and falling behind in the fierce competition appear as the ing-yeo subjects.

The self-negating voice of the ing-yeo subjects comes from the mistaken belief that the cause of their failure (or fear of the failure) is simply their incompetence not the changed economic structure (regime) and the forced unlimited competition in education and then employment. Since the early 2000s, within the context of an economic reality exemplified by respectively expensive tuition, low—even lowered—wages, the high

unemployment rate of young people, high prices, and so on, young people began to call themselves loser, *baeksu*<sup>12</sup>, and *pye-in*<sup>13</sup> in a self-tormenting voice. Following those monikers, then it was around the late 2000s when the term “ing-yeo”—indicating the subject or the phenomenon—appeared among younger generations stuck with a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness. Thus, we might assume that the material conditions of the late 2000s, shaped throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, generated the ambiguous form of the subject, the so-called ing-yeo.

However, the subject called ing-yeo is not just a simple product of changes in political-economic structure. While the regime shift might frame the material conditions of subjects, it does not fully explain the subjective experience of subject formation. Here I regard the “generation” (*sedae*) as a lens through which to look into the features of the subject shaped by discursive practices as well as the social system. Discourses on generation have been one of the most popular and significant topics among scholars who wish to understand Korean society. This stems from the unique characteristics of Korean academia as well as society. Discourses on ideologies, classes, and regimes in Korean theory-scape have long been restricted due to the specificity of national division of South and North as well as a severely repressive atmosphere and regulations, such as the National Security Law, blocking freedom of thought. In addition, there was a quantitative

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<sup>12</sup> *Baeksu* means people (or a person) who do not have regular job or who do not work—not only because it is difficult for them to get any job but also because they hate to work. They are possibly preparing for employment or in between jobs.

<sup>13</sup> Originally, *pye-in* is a person who stays at home without any social activities, suffering from a chronic illness. Of course, the *pye-in* in this context means those who suffer from a different illness, i.e., that of being overly enthusiastic about particular objects. In that they are indulging in the objects they love and that sometimes their intense enthusiasm hurts their mind and body, they are closer to *hikikomori* (social withdrawal) than *otaku* in Japanese culture.

limit due to the absence of accumulated data and established standards for further analysis on classes. Those are why generation, which seems more neutral than class, has been used widely as tool for researches on social formation in Korea.

As cultural theorist Kwang-Hyun Shim (2010) claims, (analysis of) generation is an effective tool to observe and show the repetitive patterns—namely, identity—of subjects who form a society or an era: as a “collective subject” formed “in dialectical tension with historical structure,” a generation is “swept away by the waves of the common ideology and sensation, with significant historical events undergone together within a certain time frame” (p. 33). However, the amount of research on generation has greatly increased since the early 1990s, and it has become one of the major sociological and cultural approaches for looking into Korean society. Sociologist Ho-Keun Song (2003) argues that “in Korean society, generational changes, in which class and ideological meanings are dissolved, have taken the lead over the social changes,” and thus that “[g]eneration came to the fore as a major impetus for changes, because other factors that operated as momentum in Western societies were respectively attenuated in Korea.” (p. 120). In that sense, we can assume that generation discourses will work as a useful entrance into the cultural and political analysis of Korean society, considering its dynamic characteristics.

It was the early 1990s when generational perspectives began becoming widespread in domestic discursive spaces—whether they were for the academic purposes or for business marketing interests. Around that time, young people who were called

*Shinsedae*<sup>14</sup> appeared. According to cultural theorist Dong-Yeon Lee (2005), it was during this period when a new generation and theories for it emerged at the same time and “when the cultural determination began to be important in changing the characteristics of Korean society” (p. 23). Generation theory or the discursive interest in the younger generation in Korea began with the *Shinsedae*, those who have grown up experiencing democratization in the late 1980s and economic prosperity in the 1990s—they were the children of the 87 Regime. It was during the time this generation came of age that democracy was achieved; the real socialist system collapsed; the economy flourished; the working class was ready to become active consumers; and the age of ideology suddenly became the age of culture.

A decade after the emergence of *Shinsedae*, the 386 Generation discourse was formed from the late 1990s to the early 2000s.<sup>15</sup> The name was given during the general election in 2000 and the presidential election in 2002, when young politicians in their thirties—most of whom were radical student activists in college—emerged as a new political force. Stereotypical images of the 386 Generation formed around their political

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<sup>14</sup> *Shinsedae* literally means a new generation; it must have been an awkward naming for the new generation at that time. In this dissertation, when referring to this new generation and not a newly emerging generation in general, I will use the “New Generation” with capital letters. This New Generation, *Shinsedae*, refers to the then-young generation who were born in the 1970s and spent their twenties in college. It slightly overlaps with the “X-Generation” that followed—though here the X-generation is different from what “Generation X” means in the U.S. For the latter, see Gordinier (2009).

<sup>15</sup> The 386 Generation is generally understood to mean the generation in college in the 1980s, prior to the *Shinsedae*. Sometimes they are called the *Minjuhwa* (democratization) generation. The numbers 3, 8, and 6 refer to what they have in common: in their thirties (at the time this term was coined in the late 1990s); in college in the 80s; and born in the 60s. This naming is limited, however, because they cannot stay always in their thirties. However, this naming is well established without any particular problem. As they get older, they may come to be called 486 Generation and then the 586 Generation—they might be the only generation in the world whose appellation is ever-changing.

participation and historical experience: they played a leading role in the struggle for democracy in the 1980s, and now, as an established generation, they believe they still fight against an absurd reality. Some of them, as part of an elite group, could enter the political world as social compensation for their sacrifice for and contribution to the movement for democracy (Jaheung Park, 2005). However, because members of this generation were judged only by their authenticity (*jinjeongseong*) or truthfulness as well as their contribution to democracy through student movements, the silent majority and many others who could not enter college were excluded. Unfortunately, later the 386 Generation come to betray or disregard the progressive values they advocated for in their youth in order to maintain their vested interests.

While the 386 Generation and *Shinsedae* could get their share in society with relative ease due to economic success and rich social opportunity during the 87 Regime, the following generations, especially the current young people, are suffering from the obstacles such as long-term economic downturn and socio-economic polarization that started with the 97 Regime. Around the late 2000s, a new type of young generation was generated with a quite strange name, not containing hope or the needs of the time but economic precarity: it was what Woo and Park (2007) called the “88 Man-won Generation,”<sup>16</sup> to which I think the *ing-yeo* are directly related. This unfamiliar name for the then-young people in their twenties was based on the estimated average monthly wage of the youth in their twenties (74 percent of the average monthly wage of all the irregular workers in Korea).

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<sup>16</sup> 88 man-won (880,000 KRW) is about 850 USD according to the August, 2010 exchange rate.

In Korean society, two decades after democratization in 1987 and a decade after overcoming the financial crisis of 1997, somehow younger generations came to give up the important things in their lives: mainly due to unemployment problems, many in this so-called “*Sampo Sedae*” (giving-up-three generation), gave up love, marriage, and childbearing. It is quite an unexpected phenomenon. While the state celebrates its economic growth in the age of 2 million dollars of GNI per capita, the younger generation have to give up managing and supporting their family, only making 880,000 KRW monthly. In 2007, when GNI per capita surpassed 2 million dollars, the minimum wage per hour in Korea was set at 3,480 won.<sup>17</sup> With this low income, it is almost impossible for young temporary or part-time workers to prepare for marriage or even to manage an independent household. Given that most part-timers are paid under the minimum wage in reality, they cannot but struggle to survive. Debt-saddled college graduation never guarantees regular jobs. Because irregular work is as disposable as an instant commodity, it is impossible to keep one job or stay in a company for a long time. Overflowing despair that the future will not become better aggravates this generation’s agony amidst a sense that there is nothing government and society can do for them.

According to statistical data, as of May, 2012 the ratio of the economically non-active population (neither employed nor unemployed) among the youth population (age 15 -29) was 55.2 percent. And, according to *Society at a Glance 2014* (OECD, 2014), four out of ten adults were single or had never been married in Korea, the highest among OECD countries. The age of marriage and childbirth has been pushed back about four to

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<sup>17</sup> As of 2014, the minimum wage per hour is 5,210 won, less than 5 USD.

five years compared to the 1990s. Putting stress on efficiency, competitiveness, and “spec,”<sup>18</sup> educational institutions have been turned into factories where surplus population were produced. Universities and colleges have been ranked into a hierarchy, and tuition has risen exorbitantly compared to parents’ income level.

The 88 Man-won Generation cannot get decent jobs after college graduation and military service. According to a labor report (Nam, 2011), as of 2011, young people who are “not in education, employment, or training” (NEET) reached 34 percent of all new college graduates. High school graduates and graduates of local colleges face even tougher competition for employment. While current major economic indicators have reached the same level as the highest records, people’s actual economic sentiments have already plummeted. Although gross national income per capita surpassed 2 million dollars since 2007, income polarization has worsened. Both the birth rate and suicide rate may reflect overall economic conditions as well, because those numbers may suggest how difficult survival is. If we see the two rates in terms of the absence of the possibility of real improvement rather than as criteria for poverty, we can learn how highly Korean society is divided and stratified. Among the OECD member countries, Korea has the highest suicide rate<sup>19</sup> (33.5 deaths per 100,000 people in 2010) and the lowest total

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<sup>18</sup> Spec is the abbreviation of specification, which is used to describe a product’s detailed information such as size, weight, etc. However, in colloquial use in Korea, it refers to a person’s whole ability to get a job—sometimes to enter into higher educational institutions—including academic records, educational background, awards, licenses, internship experience, even study and tour abroad, etc. Extensive use of this term exemplifies the reification or commodification of human—like human capital—in neoliberal Korean society.

<sup>19</sup> Note well that the suicide rate is particularly higher among the youth and the elderly.

fertility rate (1.08 children born to women aged 15 to 49 in 2005): these numbers powerfully indicate the situation.<sup>20</sup>

Woo and Park (2007) argue that these types of social changes were inevitable because the 386 Generation and the established generations closed the door on the last opportunities or removed chances for social mobility when solving the financial crisis in 1997-8 after prosperous economic development in the 80s and the 90s. Throughout the neoliberal reform of Korean society, “the barely remaining safety zone for the next generations just disappeared” (p. 181). Limitless competition in the job market was once believed to be the inner problem of the 88 Man-won Generation, an inevitable particularity of this generation. However, the fundamental problem that young people in their twenties encounter within the fierce competition for jobs does not seem to come from competition *among* cohorts or peers. Woo and Park (2007) argue that the 88 Man-won generation’s “struggle is incorporated into the ‘inter-generational competition,’ the unlimited competition without any scope and rule” rather than “intra-generational competition” (p. 21).

To refute this argument, however, sociologist Kwang-young Shin (2013) claims that the current economic situation should be understood not as the problem of the younger generations only but as class inequality and the polarization of the labor market that all generations are experiencing. Shin submits the results of his analysis of labor-wage data: “Unlike the arguments by the theories of 88 Man-won Generation, the ratio of inter-generational inequality in 2007 among the entire inequality has decreased, when

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<sup>20</sup> For more information on similar areas, see *OECD Factbook* (OECD, 2013).

compared with 1998,” and on the contrary, “still the ratio of intra-generational inequality among the entire inequality is quite large, and especially the inequality within those in their forties was the greatest among the entire inequality” (p. 149). His analysis shows that the problem of inter-generational inequality, the so-called clash of generations, is more or less exaggerated, and that rather intra-generational inequality is the most important factor in the entire inequality of society.

The ing-yeo phenomenon that the 88 Man-won Generation experience is not simply their own or just a generational problem. Rather, the overall problem of class is situated in ing-yeo. What is significant is that the problem of class in the guise of generation cannot be solved by the mere political activities or more individual efforts. That is where ing-yeo’s problem is located. When the problem of a given generation cannot be solved naturally, the most reasonable solution should to let the generation directly concerned try to resolve it themselves. Woo and Park (2007) try to persuade those in their twenties to “unfold the TOEFL textbook, place a barricade, and lift a stone to throw”<sup>21</sup> in order for themselves to overcome this winner-take-all society, but that kind of tactic does not seem to work any longer.

Voting, as a political act, is the way in which the younger generations can directly and easily intervene in the present social situation. However, unlike both the 386 Generation, who were in their twenties in the 80s, and the teenagers who actively participated in the 2008 candlelight protests, it is said that the 88 Man-won Generation have a tendency to show “class betrayal voting”—which is typical of the poor or the

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<sup>21</sup> It is quoted from the cover of the book.

working class. In a word, this generation was blamed for their conservative swing and depoliticization without any effort to improve the situation in which they live. Indeed, those in their twenties cannot afford to be interested in real politics, because they do not have enough time, emotional and economic room, and political power to do so. When they finish the infernal jungle of education that focuses only on the college entrance exam, they encounter the “triangle of despair” (S. Cho, 2009), with 10 million-won tuition, 1 million unemployed youths and 9 million non-regular employees, and misunderstandings of and social indifference to those in their twenties. Within this triangle of despair, this generation cries out that they are the most devastated and alienated group in this society. The sentiment they can bear within this despair is only “cynicism,” which became the basic sentiment of the ing-yeo today.

It is not by chance that ing-yeo or the ing-yeo subject has appeared from this generation, which simply reacts to the world with a cynical attitude and without any hope for the future. Behind this ing-yeo phenomenon, there must be an ideological change or transformation that goes in parallel with the political, economic, and social troubles and devastation they have gone through. To put it in Mannheim’s (1972) terms, the 88 Man-won Generation, based on their common experiences of being born into the same culture and going through the same historical events within a similar life cycle, is realizing their own *entelechy*<sup>22</sup>, psyche, and disposition. In the post-historical age, their *entelechy* seems to be composed of cynicism, loss of dreams and desire, and precarity.

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<sup>22</sup> Mannheim borrowed the term *entelechy* from German art historian W. Pinder’s concept; it means a style of a generation or the core of psychic or spiritual characteristics proper to the generation.

## Objectives and Methods

In this dissertation I argue that the “ing-yeo,” initially just a cynical joke, really become the subjectivity that reflects material and cultural conditions in which Korean youth are currently situated. Rather than being simply unemployed youth and those enthusiastic over useless and meaningless things or activities as most people (including the press and many other theorists) think, I argue that the ing-yeo are those who fail in the subjectification process that the neoliberal capitalist regime requires. As a part of youth culture, the phenomenon of ing-yeo can be observed in diverse areas, especially on new media and the network. This dissertation shows that the young ing-yeo people are successfully subsumed under the neoliberal reformation in the form of the crisis of subjectivity despite their positive capabilities and possibilities of resistance to it through new media.

All the phenomena that go around the “ing-yeo” or “surplus” might not be geographically limited to South Korea. There are ing-yeo-like people who materialize their *ing-yeo-ryeok* (ing-yeo power) through ing-yeo-jit all over the world, and in some sense we could find more ing-yeo-like or more fundamental features of ing-yeo in places other than Korea. I do not think that the ing-yeo phenomenon in Korea is an entirely unique one in the age of the global economy, as well as in our networked society. It is unlikely that only Korean ing-yeo youth are under the influence of neoliberal capitalism and have the benefit of new media technologies. Moreover, as we have seen before, it is not true that surplus subjects can be found only in contemporary Korea. In fact, it is a worldwide tendency that the number of young people who cannot overcome their

persistent surplus status and become helplessly absorbed into ing-yeo-jit has dramatically increased as an effect of neo-liberal economic policies. Basically, being surplus, or being ing-yeo, is related to high unemployment rates and widespread informal employment, with which it is impossible for young people to plan for or even think about their stable future. In many developed and developing countries, the youth are stuck in their precarious living conditions, which might be called ing-yeo in our context. The youth riots in many European countries, the Arab Uprisings, and the Occupy movement can be understood as a sort of resistance to such a global political-economic situation.

However, the reason that this project addresses the ing-yeo in Korean youth culture is, first of all, not only because the phenomenon is intriguing in and of itself, but also because the youth label themselves “ing-yeo” or “ing-yeo ingan” in a self-derogatory sense. This seems nonsensical, however, for the people who proclaim themselves ing-yeo are not those who really look like (or who really are) ing-yeo. On the contrary, the self-proclaimed ing-yeo are the youth who might not look like real ing-yeo. Especially from the perspective of the established generations, the ing-yeo youth might not be poor and abject enough to be called ing-yeo. How do we know if someone is really ing-yeo or not? We cannot find any other standard in determining ing-yeo status except self-designation as ing-yeo. For this reason, ing-yeo seems to be a “performative” term in the sense that the subject exists as ing-yeo only in the case that he or she manifests or declares as such.

To put it more clearly, the ing-yeo can be anyone who proclaims him- or herself ing-yeo and performs so-called ing-yeo-jit. As far as I know, none of the young people around the world have called themselves surplus human beings in such a self-humiliating

sense.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the reason for the significance of the ing-yeo phenomenon in Korea is that the expression or designation “ing-yeo” is the most pertinent one that reflects their real political-economic conditions, whether they recognize it or not. Here, whether the appellation “ing-yeo” is just a word play does not really matter. “The important thing is not the characteristics of ‘ing-yeo play’ but the fact that they call themselves ‘ing-yeo,’ and not sharing something common to them but acquiring identity only by calling themselves ‘ing-yeo’” (S. K. Park, 2010, p. 348). However, the important points this dissertation makes are that the designation of ing-yeo is not only arbitrary or performative but also that ing-yeo themselves have keen insight into their political-economic reality; a certain emotional and cultural commonness (feeling of being surplus) is shared among the ing-yeo subjects; and with their shared identity they are exploring a chance or possibility to face up to the reality they live in.

In examining the problems of the ing-yeo, the aim of this dissertation is twofold. First, it will provide a critical overview of the ing-yeo subjects, the emerging precarious younger generation in Korea, and their political-economic situation as well as cultural practices. Second, it will illuminate the relationship between new media technologies and so-called cognitive capitalism, by which the (labor) power of ing-yeo can be easily and systematically appropriated and, eventually, exploited.

The main interest of this research does not lie in the inner observation of the ing-yeo subjects or who they really are. Rather, beyond the discussion of the diverse definitions of ing-yeo and their socio-cultural implications, this dissertation concentrates

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<sup>23</sup> However, later we will see how the appellation “ing-yeo” can also be understood in a self-affirmative way at the same time.

especially on the relationship between ing-yeo and new media technologies—the role of new media in forming the ing-yeo subjectivity. I ask why these surplus youths and their ing-yeo practices occur in a society where state-of-the-art media technologies are developed and widespread. I suppose that being ing-yeo is caused by their relationship with new media, which functions as an apparatus for capturing and accumulating the lives of the ing-yeo.

In other words, this study is an analysis of Korean society and its culture to understand how the ing-yeo subject or their surplus way of life comes to be generalized, and how the unique ing-yeo culture has been developed through the techno-cultural practices of the younger generations. I think there is a more intimate and essential relationship between the ing-yeo and new media technologies, more so than that the ing-yeo phenomenon in Korea is focused on the Internet and new media. For instance, analyzing Webtoons<sup>24</sup> as a model of the youth subjectivity of twenty-first-century Korea, Su-Hwan Kim (2011) argues:

While thinking about the model of subjectivity of the current twenties, the significance of the ‘Internet’ or ‘Web space’ as their existential foundation can never be overlooked. At least for the youth in the twenty-first-century Korea, The Web is not simply a space for ‘communication.’ It is (essentially, as a society might be) such a semio-biosphere where individual identity is formed or developed, and often lost or perished. When a certain place in the space works as the location for the passersby’s conflict and transportation or their collective

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<sup>24</sup> Cartoons (or comics) on the Web. I address this in the third chapter.

residence, it is natural for it to become an object of extraordinary attention. (pp. 99-100)

Many theories have tried to explain the ways in which media has influenced the formation of the subject and the establishment of subjectivity, or conversely the way in which the subject has constructed society by communicating and interacting within the new media environment. Like other social changes, the process of subject formation can also be explained from the perspective of “mediatization” (Hjarvard, 2008), which sees media as one of the major determining elements of social change. Now it is almost impossible to think about subjectivity and our everyday lives outside of diverse new media technologies and their effects, such as big data, social media, data mining, the Internet of things, and so on. For that reason, this dissertation will explore how the young people become ing-yeo subjectivity by being fragmented and precarious within the new media environment as well as through the neoliberal governing system.

The topic of this research, which tries to connect the surplus subject and new media, is inspired by Clay Shirky’s (2010) book, *Cognitive Surplus*. While reading the book, the surplus youth in the Korean context came to mind. For him, collective knowledge produced and shared via social media, what he calls cognitive surplus, can change and improve our society. I thought that cognitive surplus—what Shirky considers a productive and positive resource for the whole community—could also contribute to the reinforcement of the current capitalist system by being turned into the value to be accumulated. Departing from Shirky’s insight, I supposed that surplus value and the

creative energy produced by the surplus youth, who were the product of the current capitalism, was destined to be recaptured outside of the wage relationship.

Most young people in Korea use the term “ing-yeo,” whether they claim that they are ing-yeo or not. However, widespread usage has made its meaning more complicated and obscure. We will find it challenging to follow the meaning of ing-yeo because this term and the subject as well is still forming and keeps changing. Since this research is not on an already completed subject but on a moving and forming phenomenon, it will run the risk of reducing the living organism into a dead theory.<sup>25</sup> For the same reason, however, it is more appropriate to take the active and influential object of research in order to read the current structure of consciousness and then to capture the complicated relations between media and society in Korea. While I expect more people understand well what ing-yeo means, with this description and definition of the ing-yeo, I do not intend to reduce it to simply a very rare and strange type of subject. Probably, the ing-yeo might be just the ordinary youth around us, without anything special. Thus, rather than describing the ing-yeo subject as only failed subjectivity, this dissertation tries to understand and theorize the overall phenomenon of ing-yeo by examining the ing-yeo’s relationship to their media practices, technologies, and the social and politico-economic system.

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<sup>25</sup> The term “ing-yeo” was the most popular buzzword around the early 2010s. However, as time has passed, it appears less frequently in the press and everyday language of the youth; it has become a universal term, rather than being nifty and edgy as it was in the mid-2010s. At the end of this dissertation, we might find how the concept of ing-yeo is toned down to make room for other buzzwords that reflect their reality more properly.

In order to identify and collect data about the object of this research, first I try to hear the personal voices of the ing-yeo not only through direct interviews with them but also through interviews or published contributions in diverse materials, including newspapers, monographs, reports, and digital media. For the interviews with the self-proclaimed ing-yeo, in most cases I used Twitter to circulate an interview advertisement and to contact anyone interested. During the summer of 2012, I met nineteen young people for interview: fourteen were the self-proclaimed ing-yeo who volunteered the interview, and five were those who I thought were related to or interested in ing-yeo. From the talk for one or two hours, I collected their personal data including school, employment, political inclination, and life patterns, their opinion about the ing-yeo, their media use, specific ing-yeo activities, and so on.<sup>26</sup> After transcribing the recorded interviews, I focused on extracting the unique features of ing-yeo from the conversations that seem to help me to understand the ing-yeo and ing-yeo practices more lively.

In addition to how they aware themselves, the way in which they are recognized in society is also important for identifying ing-yeo culture. To understand how the ing-yeo are accepted and how prevalent they are in society, this research refers to textual and visual materials, including recent newspaper articles, literary works, TV dramas, and films, in which the ing-yeo are depicted and analyzed. With these materials, I sought to understand the basic characteristics that express the essence of being surplus. From the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview questions I referred to in the interviews are attached in the appendices. To protect the privacy of interviewees and informants, I have used pseudonyms and changed their identities.

*otaku* subculture to the fandom cultures<sup>27</sup> of popular music, comics, animation films, and online games, we might discover a variety of surplus subjects.

For this research, instead of a single predominant method, the interdisciplinary Cultural Studies approach is applied, connecting Critical Political Economy, (New) Media Studies, and Science and Technology Studies from an anthropological perspective. I think that the combination of multiple theoretical perspectives is more suitable for identifying the precarious subject and the cultural phenomenon around it. With all these approaches, we can understand the *ing-yeo* properly as a cultural, economic, and technological phenomenon peculiar to the present social condition of Korea. However, this does not mean that each approach is applied in a solid and explicit way to mark its specific domain. Rather, they will contribute together to portray the research object more clearly by connecting the dots provided by each distinctive dimension of research—this is the advantage of an interdisciplinary study. But each theoretical approach targets the *ing-yeo* on its proper scale in the field: political economy concentrates on the macro-social level, ethnographic approach on the micro-subjective level within society, and new media studies on the relational level by elucidating the mediating logic between the political-economic structure and the subjective conditions constructed within it.

Even though there have been some discussions about *ing-yeo* in Korea<sup>28</sup>, none of them elucidated the diverse (economic, technological, and cultural) conditions from

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<sup>27</sup> Enthusiastic and intellectual Japanese fans (maniacs) of popular culture, usually called *otaku*, coincide with Korean *ing-yeo* in many ways. The virtue of *otaku* and *ing-yeo* is to invest a lot of time and passion in their favorite things—whether characters and stories in games or *anime*—in spite of their insignificance and uselessness to others. I will deal with *otaku* and their relation to the *ing-yeo* subject mainly in the fourth chapter.

which the ing-yeo emerged, and no theoretical intervention was made by categorizing various type of ing-yeo subjects involved in neoliberal subjectification process. I hope this dissertation can provide, as the first trial of a holistic approach to the ing-yeo, a vital clue for subsequent cultural research on Korea in regard to the unique development of youth culture and the status of subjectivity in neoliberal society. By showing how a neoliberal governance system was aggressively implemented and how the younger generation was coping with its precarious situation in the guise of ing-yeo subjectivity, this dissertation complements the existing researches on the youth in Korea and contributes to the literatures on neoliberalism and subject formation in neoliberal regime. In addition, the ing-yeo subjectivity in Korea will be a concrete case to show how the local subjects are subsumed under and resisting against the dominant global and neoliberal governmentality.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The chapters of this dissertation examine the precarious life of the younger generation after the introduction of neoliberalism and economic recession in Korea. I argue that the ing-yeo subjectivity widespread among the younger generation emerged from their emotional insecurity as well as economic precarity. Within the dominant regime of neoliberal capitalism, the ing-yeo subjects could construct their own unique cultural identity particularly through the online practices in their surplus time given from their under- and unemployment status. However, what I emphasize is that the labor and

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<sup>28</sup> For those discussions and researches, see the third chapter.

creative capacities of this surplus population are ironically captured and produce value for an economy that has otherwise excluded them.

Ing-yeo is, from the outset, polysemic and paradoxical. In order to understand the ing-yeo—a paradoxical concept, subject, and way of life—we need to create a cultural cartography, or what Jameson (1988) calls “cognitive mapping,” of Korean society by observing and analyzing the networks of discourses and phenomena around the ing-yeo from diverse perspectives throughout the multi-layered social strata. Chapter 1, as a part of this mapping, is an overview of the political-economic conditions in which the ing-yeo subjectivity began to develop. Exploring the current situation in which the younger generation in Korea are located, it chronicles the process of the younger generations’ subsumption under or exclusion from neoliberal governmentality. Thus, ing-yeo in current discussion is something that is originated from the cultural singularities of the younger generation that experience the loss of subjectivity by internalizing neoliberal ideologies and imagine their class only through technological commonality.

In addition to changes in political-economic regimes and the corresponding changes in the youth’s subjectification, the development of technology also conditions the creation of ing-yeo subjects. The dialectical relationship between technologies that define the youth and the younger generation that builds the technological structure within their culture will be dealt with in Chapter 2. The ICT industry in Korea progressed dramatically and simultaneously with the sudden financial crisis of the late nineties. For the emerging younger generations, new media, such as PCs and the Internet, were gateways to escape from the crisis of reality into imagined cyber-communities. This

process is characterized as the youth's cultural enjoyment of their own space and technologies in the environment of the state-led enhancement of ICT infrastructure and the implementation of neoliberal policies.

Chapter 3 focuses on how ing-yeo culture has been formed and enjoyed by the self-proclaimed ing-yeo and the younger generation in general. By analyzing the discourses of the ing-yeo, this chapter illuminates the cultural and economic meaning of being surplus in Korean society. The ing-yeo can be understood from two perspectives: ing-yeo refers to the surplus subjectivity excluded from societal boundaries on the one hand, and their activities and ways of life, which are considered useless and meaningless to society, on the other. The ing-yeo subjects can also be classified into two types: economic ing-yeo (in terms of their social reality) and cultural ing-yeo (in terms of their activities). Although sometimes ing-yeo's cultural activities are regarded as productive and creative, they dream of an association with friends that ensures their sustainable lives, simply enduring the current precarity and being anxious about their destined failure in the future.

The precarious subjects, those who are not fully subjectified subjects, feel they are especially ing-yeo in the new media environment. In Chapter 4, we explore diverse ways in which the subjects become ing-yeo, i.e., the various existences of ing-yeo subjects, including *otaku*, who desire the imaginary; the precarious class that cannot reproduce their lives; the obsessed Internet users captured in the circuit of drive; and those deprived of their cognitive surplus, or who have it appropriated, in the digital age. Throughout such different types of subjectification, this chapter points out that more and more ing-

yeo youths are thrown into the crisis of both economic production and the production of subjectivity within what Dean (2009) calls “communicative capitalism.” By analyzing the relationships between the ing-yeo and new media, I try to elucidate how the ing-yeo subjectivity is established as insecure and incomplete, that is, how society encounters the crisis of the subjectivity.

In the Conclusion, I concentrate on the social situation that follows from the ing-yeo phenomenon, i.e., the social effect of the ing-yeo. Though ing-yeo has been the youth’s own manifestation, in the sense of defeat based on their self-awareness of their precarious status in the current political-economic reality, I ask about the possibility of ing-yeo’s constructive (or more destructive) engagement in current society through the pursuit of perverse cultural enjoyment. I also ask them how they can sustain their lives and continue ing-yeo practices without leaving the infernal society in which no hope of improvement is left.

## **CHAPTER 1. GENERATION WITHOUT EXIT IN NEOLIBERAL SOCIETY**

It is not a simple accident that ing-yeo as both a peculiar subject and social phenomenon has appeared in Korean society at this point in time. This dissertation intends to understand ing-yeo from multiple perspectives, considering it as a significant contemporary cultural matter based on historical and material background. In the introduction, we looked into the concept of ing-yeo as a politico-economic, technological, and cultural phenomenon primarily by examining the origin and use of the term and reviewing extensively the historical backgrounds from which the ing-yeo emerged. We also discussed the possibility that scholarly research on ing-yeo can help explain many social issues and problems, such as power and subjectification, appropriation and accumulation of value, new generations and their use of new technologies, and the like.

Thus, in this first chapter, I deal with the current status of the younger generation, in which the ing-yeo subjects are located; the way in which the current regime or power functions to them in ideological form; and the process of subjectification which is peculiar to them. After the introduction of neoliberalism to Korea from the 1997 financial crisis, life of the younger generation deteriorated due to the flexibility of labor markets and insecure employment. The unemployed and under-employed young people could rely on the discourses of self-improvement, which functioned as a model for neoliberal subject formation in an ideological dimension. I argue that ing-yeo emerges as the subject

that failed to achieve this neoliberal model of the subject. In that sense, ing-yeo is not simply the problem of (the younger) generation but essentially that of class imagined through development of ing-yeo's own technologies.

### **1.1. Self-improvement Culture**

After the introduction of neoliberalism as a new social order by the 97 Regime, the transformation that Korean society experienced was comprehensive and critical, not limited to a specific area of politics, economy, and culture. While until now scholars have dealt with changes that occurred mainly at the level of economy and politics, their current theoretical interests often focus on the qualitative changes at the level of mind and affect—i.e., the so-called “regime of mind,” which means a dominant structure of subjects' thought, corresponding with political-economic regime (H-J. Kim, 2009; Seo, 2014). One of the implications of this transition of intellectual interests is that the ruling regime of neoliberalism functions not only as an economic doctrine or a technology of politics, but also, borrowing Foucault's terminology, as governmentality, which produces and sifts the human subjectivity that conforms to the regime.

The transformation of regime occurs not simply in the material politico-economic dimension—what is called the “base” in Marxist terms—but in the cultural psycho-ideological dimension—the superstructure, which is an immaterial and internalized reality. Although Foucault (2007) did not clearly define neoliberalism as what we

know,<sup>29</sup> he explains the meaning of the term “governmentality” with three factors that are related to the exercise of power. Governmentality is:

the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (p. 108)

If we look into how these three factors of power, i.e., political economy, population, and apparatuses of security, have been combined into one another, we might trace the history of neoliberal power and its governmentality in Korea. Those discourses of regime and generation in Korean society as we have examined them so far were, most of all, the totality of knowledge that makes the population governable as its target or end and uses apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism. To look into the “regime of mind” is less seeing the mind as the inner side of a person than paying attention to the ideological and emotional effect of subject formation, in which an individual can be a subject by internalizing power relations.

When sociologist Hong-Jung Kim (2009) argues that we need to look at the “regime of mind,” he suggests the term “authenticity” as a starting point. According to him, Korean society in the 80s was dominated by the regime of authenticity or sincerity, and for the subject of that time—represented as the 386 Generation—authenticity was the

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<sup>29</sup> At the time when Foucault was analyzing various forms of liberalism in the West in the late 1970s, global neoliberalism began to germinate. For his analyses of liberalism, see Foucault (2003, 2007, 2008).

ideal and dominating value. The regime of authenticity “can be found wherever the essential project of constructing modern subjects, who try to pursue the true lives of themselves and fight against coercive power of exterior norm, exists” (p. 28), and for the realization of this regime of authenticity, “the coupling of the politics of self that seeks the ‘authentic me’ and the real politics that pursue the ‘authentic society’ is required” (p. 29). If the regime of authenticity is what is formed through the unified aspirations of the true self and good society, the 386 Generation in the 80s identified their inner quest for the truth and the good with a revolutionary ideology for a better society.

“Authenticity as both a regime and an apparatus has a unique logic of subject formation” (p. 31), which can be explained with the three factors of subject, inner world, and public horizon. In other words, on the one hand, the subject in the contemporary culture of authenticity constructs the inner world, or what Charles Taylor (1991) calls “the place of the dialogical” (p. 34) between the ideal and what the self believes is its own identity. On the other, the subject of authenticity participates in a historical “horizon of significance” through which subjective truthfulness is manifested. Following Taylor’s discussion, Kim (2009) notes that “the subject pursuing authenticity is formed as both self-reflective and participative one by the dual action of ethical reflection and moral demands” (p. 34). However, after the late 90s, when the 386 Generation began to be incorporated into the established and leading generation of society, this very authenticity also appeared distorted, hence the advent of a new regime of mind that considers individual fortune and health, i.e., well-being, the best value in society. Kim claims that this signaled the collapse of the ethos of authenticity:

The ethos of authenticity, which reached its peak in the Great Struggle for Democracy in 1987, collapsed critically by a new attitude toward life—animalistic (American) ethos on the one hand and snobbish (Japanese) one on the other—that appeared within the process of neoliberal globalization out rightly driven after the establishment of IMF regime of 1997. (p. 66)

His figurative use of terms like animal and snobbery is derived from a footnote in French philosopher Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel. These two figures are presented as possible forms of life after the end of history as well as representations of the human being, based on his personal impression during travels to other countries.<sup>30</sup> Animalistic life, what he saw in the post-WWII U.S., is "a type of the self whose desire is planned, driven, and consumed only by others' desire," thus it always lacks introspection or self-reflection. It is like a bare life, "just enjoying the feeling of satisfaction with its physical survival giving comfort and convenience" (p. 58). On the other hand, Japanese snobbish life put more value on ostensible form and regulation, negating natural or animalistic life. However, snobbish life also depends on the other-oriented structure of life, as the animalistic life does. It is because for snobbery anything can be meaningful, but only when his or her inner world is exposed and displayed on the surface—only when it is "mediated by the other's gaze" (p. 60). In the post-87 Regime or the 97 Regime, when the ethos of authenticity disappeared, audacity and shamelessness—and furthermore, the dissolution of the self-reflective inner world—was substituted for it. This subject without

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Alexandre Kojève (1969), pp. 158-62.

shame and self-reflection is the “optimistic, bright, and sufficient” (p. 68) existence governed or taken care of by the bio-power that makes people survive (*faire survivre*).

The boom in self-help and self-improvement culture after the new millennium in Korean society fitted well with this snobbish subject. All the self-help books instruct and command the youth to do this or that, convincing them of what is required for a successful life. The most infamous form of command was “be crazy about *x*.” The mechanism of self-help discourses was: understand the distressing situation that you are in; change your attitude to life as well as your way of living in this or that impassioned way; then, keep trying to update yourself, and this will lead you to the success. As Kim (2009) points out, “all the self-help books are attempting the formation of the ‘snob’ subject who finally fits for ‘secular success’ or ‘aggressive survival’” (p. 81). Self-improvement culture is nothing but the categorical imperative of neoliberal governmentality of the self—or, technologies of the self—ordering the readers to endeavor intensely, win in the competition, and become the owner of their lives, whatever the process may be.

Various types of discourses on youth with or after generation theories are by-products of the contemporary project of neoliberal governmentality. Population as the target of neoliberal power of government is neither the individual subject as the object of sovereignty and discipline nor the docile subject who conforms to organizational logic or class structure. Rather, the neoliberal subject this age calls for is the self-empowering individual, and the ideal required for this subject is entrepreneurship. The new way of subjectification is embedded in the self-improvement culture, compelling an individual to

manage him- or herself as if a corporation. Restructuring the accumulation of capital and distribution required during the transition to the neoliberal regime of capital in Korea was ultimately the problem of how to transform and re-engineer the life of laboring subjects. Likewise, creating a self-improving subject was one of the necessary procedures in the fundamental transformation of Korean capitalism. The youth or the younger generation would be the most important—and rising—target of neoliberal subjectification.

Although the current younger generation seems to enjoy material affluence compared to youth in the 1970s and 1980s, they began to embrace the economic recession more seriously but as a crisis on the individual level. They came to believe that the cause of their economic insecurity is their own problem—incompetence in a competitive society. In this situation, discourses of self-improvement or self-development emerged to encourage those under- and unemployed young *ing-yeo* subjects. Looking back at recent social trends, a large number of books and cultural content dealing with the youth has been published. These are meant as consoling gestures from the established generation to make the younger generation happier. Discourses on the youth were distributed through various media, such as a bestselling book, *Apunikka Cheongchunida* (*Youth Because It Hurts*) by Nan-Do Kim (2010), a new type of public talk show, “*Cheongchun Concert*” (Youth Concert) initiated by a few social leaders, entertainers, and scholars, a TV entertainment show, “*Cheongchun Bulpae*” (Youth Never Loses), and so on. In addition, bookstores were flooded with ambitious but furious essays and critiques by the youth themselves as sort of sequels to 88 Man-won Generation discourses—*Real Cheongchun*, *First Half of the Twenties*, *Returning My Youth*, *I Am Not*

*a Youth that Exist in This World*, just to name a few. However, their own voices were not strong enough to shake the world and let it move. After the success of Nan-do Kim's *Apunikka Cheongchunida*, all kinds of mentors and healers, posing as sages, appeared: from priests, whether Buddhist or Christian, to politicians, novelists, comedians, professors, and even so-called professional self-improvement coaches. As Micki McGee (2005) argues in her *Self-Help, Inc.*, "the tremendous growth in self-help publishing parallels an overall trend of stagnant wages and destabilized employment opportunities for American workers" (p. 12). In this way, we can assume that the self-help craze in Korean youth culture is deeply related to their insecurities or precariousness, their pressing lives in which secure employment and stable families are no longer possible. McGee points out:

A sense of personal security is anomalous, while anxiety is the norm. To manage this anxiety, individuals have been advised not only to work longer and harder but also to invest in themselves, manage themselves, and continuously improve themselves. (ibid.)

If there is something peculiar to Korean youth, it is that they have to keep up the self-improvement relentlessly—in order to get into higher-rank colleges, to get decent jobs, and then to get higher scores from labor assessment tests.

What are all these youth healing projects and self-help culture for? First of all, consolation and healing functions like technologies to take care of those young ing-yeo subjects, the 88 Man-won Generation, who were hurt and became lost and downhearted. Rather than treating them with oppression and discipline and making them obedient and

docile laboring subjects, the self-help culture as a sort of a security apparatus makes them self-managing subjects through healing and self-improvement: they become self-supporting independent human resources, human capital, and free laboring subjects. Ing-yeo would be the label applied to those who were unable to achieve this model of preferred personhood. Who can console the disappointed youth, and why is it the youth who must be healed? Youth-healing culture is a new cultural industry to produce self-help discourses on the one hand, and a bio-political strategy of subjectification to constitute new laboring subjects—here, ing-yeo subjects—and govern them on the other. Consolation for the youth is requested, not because the younger generations need it, but because there is a need to console them: it is socially requested. Discourses of consolation and taking care come down to those of self-improvement in the end. The young ing-yeo generation, hurt and discouraged in everyday life, must be healed, cheered up, and made ready to challenge something again. Disappointment and resistance seem to be meaningless and useless to them. Only being born again as the “active citizen” and the “flexible laboring subject” (Seo, 2013), internalizing the human “spec” required by capital, would be a useful way of life. Currently, self-help culture in Korea is carried out in both directions of inner (psychological) healing and superficial (physical) makeover, i.e., plastic surgery. The core of these two methods of self-help consists of regaining ambition and challenging spirit and thus the youth, which reflect the desire of the animalistic and snobbish subject.

Today must be the age of snob, whose aim in life is to achieve material success. For the youth of the 88 Man-won Generation, snobbery is a desperate conduct of life:

there is no need to feel any moral discomfort in gratifying their snobbish desire. The youth need only to be healed through consolation, manage their time, health, and relations as the managers—or entrepreneurs—of themselves, try to get higher “specs” than others, and then enter the labor market. However, is it simply that they are to follow the neoliberal orders of self-help and then win the games of the “struggle for recognition” (Honneth, 1995) and limitless competition?

## 1.2. Subject without Subjectification

It was almost common among the youth from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s to describe themselves by the names *baeksu*, *pye-in*, or losers—which sounds like a self-humiliating gesture. Now, since the late 2000s, the widespread words the youth use for themselves are *ing-yeo* and *deokhu*. As we have already seen in the introduction, the emergence of the *ing-yeo* human is not new. Even in the post-Korean War era and the period of modernization, the title of “*ing-yeo* human” was attributed to individuals who became lethargic and felt a lack of ability due to either the collision between two grand ideologies or the dictatorship of development led by the state.<sup>31</sup>

Around the time of the 97 Regime, there were a couple of designations for the “surplus” types of human beings who emerged. Among them was *baeksu*, which literally means “empty hands,” those who are generally jobless and stay at home and thus are penniless due to non-employment. *Baeksu* is generally used for incompetent (young) people unemployed. *Pye-in* is the name for those who are abnormally obsessed with

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<sup>31</sup> A short novel, *Ing-yeo Ingan* [Superfluous Men] by Son (1996 [1958]) is one of the first texts that describes the prototypical characteristics of the surplus human in Korea.

something and thus unsociable and incarcerated in their own world. Although *pye-in* is a type of subject that has spread over the Internet, like *ing-yeo* (especially in online communities like Ddanzi Ilbo and DC Inside), popular use of the term occurred much earlier than *ing-yeo*.

While *ing-yeo* is a phenomenon simultaneous with the global financial crisis of 2008 initiated by the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the U.S., *pye-in* might have a certain connection with the financial crises in Korea and other Asian countries in 1997. If *pye-in* were just a local subjectivity in a Northeast Asian country, the *ing-yeo* subject is a symptom of globalized economic instability. The *ing-yeo* became socially withdrawn and indulged in what they could rely on and find “healing” in within the depressing reality of unemployment and failure of employment. Similar social phenomena in Japan are found in the names of *hikikomori*, *otaku*, and *nanmin* (refugees) or other types of working poor (Zielenziger, 2006; Allison, 2013). Recently the *pye-in* and *ing-yeo* subjects were born again with the names *odeokhu*, *odeok* or *deokhu*<sup>32</sup> derived from the Japanese subculture mania *otaku*. People classified under those types of subject identify themselves as fans or enthusiasts of anything they like, which is one of their most distinctive characteristics that other older generations cannot understand. These youths are not all and always social failures or unemployed, but they have something in common in that they are immersed in something that is—as others think—useless, non-productive, and irrelevant to their livelihood.

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<sup>32</sup> Those are linguistic acculturations of Japanese ‘*otaku*’ in Korean.

Ing-yeo would be the representative designation for all other types of failed life of youth. Now, although ing-yeo appears to be a name for only a certain type of people, it embraces and surpasses all its predecessors' features. After *baeksu*, *pye-in*, and *dukhu*, today's major trend in subjectivity among youth is ing-yeo (Gil-Ho Lee, 2012, p. 52). Ing-yeo might be the inheritor of *baeksu* and *pye-in*, but it also covers many broader aspects than them. It embraces more than what *baeksu* and *pye-in* ostensibly look like. It does not simply mean the youth who keep failing to find employment, idling away their time doing nothing, and losing the will to work. Diverse types of subjectivity and characteristics can be included within the name ing-yeo. Referring to the discussion of subcultural subjectivity in the U.S., ing-yeo is like a nerd or geek to some extent, and maybe a hipster sometimes.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps identifying it would be as ambiguous as defining hipster. However, in that ing-yeo subjects do not have a particular favorite fashion brand, food, local area, leading figures (celebrities, for instance), or trends in subcultural fields and popular arts in common, the border of their identity is much more unclear than that of hipsters. Thus, we might assume that ing-yeo subjects are composed of heterogeneous elements from cultural, political, economic, and social domains as much as hipsters are.

Although there are many specific moments and conditions from which the ing-yeo subjects emerge, few people recognize them as special in Korea; they are not regarded as a serious social problem. In other words, it is not striking even when people call themselves *ing-yeo ingan* (surplus human) and their activities *ing-yeo-jit* (surplus acts). Being ing-yeo has never been thought of as dangerous, anti-social, or revolutionary,

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<sup>33</sup> For the critique of hipster, see n+1 foundation (2010).

except to some intellectuals who try to study them seriously. The *ing-yeo* are ordinary people around us, and the term *ing-yeo* is a kind of harmless moniker. Today young people are not afraid of being called or calling others *ing-yeo*; rather, they outspokenly use the term to ridicule both themselves and others. This subject is characterized by its precarity rather than dangerousness. It is possible, however, that their precarity, which results from economic slumps and poor social support, could endanger society in the future if the material conditions that keep producing the *ing-yeo* do not change.

But, in the current global economic crisis, are there any young people in the world who do not suffer from their economic conditions to varying degrees? Is there any country, whether developed or developing, that is free from the problem of low employment rates and informal labor in this global hegemony of neoliberal capitalism? In this situation, is it only the younger generation that becomes *ing-yeo*? Thus we can assume that the *ing-yeo ingan* is a type of young people we might find anywhere around the world: they are merely “nobody” or perhaps referred to as “anybody” around us, neither dangerous nor threatening.<sup>34</sup> The symptom (or even syndrome) of these unremarkable, banal, and harmless young people who call themselves that pathetic appellation can be found easily in Korea, as I have already indicated in Introduction. However, what is puzzling is that calling someone “*ing-yeo*” might not be a serious act of disrespect, unless it is directed at “real” *ing-yeo*-like “abject” subjects, such as the poor,

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<sup>34</sup> This does not mean that the *ing-yeo* human is a universal or general subject, but that *ing-yeo*-like characteristics in the youth can be found in most developing and leading countries as a global phenomenon.

the homeless, the disabled, and the like.<sup>35</sup> It is improper and unscrupulous to call actually abject ing-yeo subjects surplus. What does it mean then that young students gloss over such a name for themselves while giggling and chuckling with only a slight sign of shame? Why do they make fun of their own pathetic circumstances?

In that it is a cynical but humorous self-referential appellation, ing-yeo is following the way in which *baeksu* and *pye-in* survived. These names are different from the generation concepts—X-Generation, N-Generation, G-Generation, etc.—produced and distributed by official institutions and the established generations. While various generation names are assigned from the outside by academic, commercial, and journalistic discourses, appellations like ing-yeo, *pye-in*, loser, or *otaku* are given by those on the inside to themselves. What does this mean, then? It does not mean that the latter are autonomous because they decide how they will be called. Rather, this proves that they are in dire need of others' recognition—it is about a kind of struggle for recognition. The self-humiliation with self-referential appellations comes from their fear of being recognized as such by others. In this sense, they justify what they are now by calling themselves those names. As such, they inoculate themselves in advance against something that could return to them at some point as a reproach.

Indeed, although these subjects are regarded as unproductive and negative people, in reality they are not always already excluded from society. Returning briefly to the metaphor of snob and animal, they are not simply the snobbish or animalistic

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<sup>35</sup> Some scholars point out that ing-yeo problem in the elderly generation is more serious than in other generations. As we are rapidly entering into an aging society, the ing-yeo problem across generations requires further investigation.

unemployed youth. Although they seem to have failed and are still failing in their lives, it is not that they did not try hard enough. The digital culture theorist, Wook-Inn Paik (2013) categorizes snob and ing-yeo as two sides of the same coin: While snob is “the subjects who are accumulating and consuming by being captured within the regime” (p. 3), ing-yeo is “the [human] being(s) who are deferring to be snob among those who tried to take part in snob group and to attain snob status but failed” (p. 4). According to Paik, the ing-yeo is not a counterpart or supplement of the snob, but the being who always desires to be included, even though excluded now, in the regime of the snob. This snob world is the regime in which ing-yeo subjects are required, and they desperately expect to join. Practically speaking, ing-yeo subjects are not incompetent; it is simply that their material foundation to be a snob is suspended. This suspension can last as long as ing-yeo subjects continue running in neoliberal self-help culture and working on technologies of self-management—those that ask me to successfully change myself and to enter into the established regime.

As was mentioned earlier, the self-proclaimed ing-yeo is not only directly caused by economic poverty or complete exclusion from society.<sup>36</sup> At the very least, it is college students who use this term most often—not elderly people living in a slum area, for instance. As Y. Han (2013) puts it, loser culture is “located somewhere between political enlightenment and self-abuse” for college students “who did everything as they are told, then won in competition, and yet do not have any hope for the future.” And, for those

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<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it is unclear whether the appellation of ing-yeo refers to their economic destitution or to the way they act or live. Thus, we need to analyze and discuss their types and characteristics; we will deal with this topic in detail in the next chapter.

who are “the winner in academic clique [*hakbeol*] society and become ing-yeo ingan at the same time,” there is “such a paradox that they are not the neediest people in society” (pp. 130-1) in the loser culture. Ing-yeo subjects, mostly college students, who seem to be on the course to social success rather than failure express their sense of relative deprivation by identifying themselves as ing-yeo. Thus some might doubt that the ing-yeo is a certain cultural fad—like hipsters, for example—prevailing only among some young Koreans. If it is only a discursive and cultural “phenomenon” among young people calling themselves ing-yeo, not an actual problem of surplus “subjects,” why is it so important to us?

Concerning this cultural phenomenon of young people belittling themselves through self-humiliating naming, although they are not “real” ing-yeo human beings, I interpret it as a sort of symbolic—and imaginary—metaphor for the new characteristics attributed to them and the new situation they face. Rather than indicating the substantial subject, ing-yeo is a way of self-presentation in which diverse social emotions are expressed in the name of ing-yeo. The social emotions are, instead of subjective feeling, the externalized feelings of self-awareness during the subjectification process: precarity, insecurity, deprivation, humiliation, etc. in the age of neoliberalism. A new form of neoliberal capitalism reshapes the way of constituting the subject as well as the way of imagining the self. Thus, the ing-yeo youth’s contradictory naming of themselves involves changes in their self-recognition, self-representation, and self-expression.

However, will it be possible to regard ing-yeo’s self-recognition is kind of “misrecognition” in that it relies on the imaginary recognition of reality and themselves?

As Louis Althusser (2001) sees the subject as constituted through misrecognition of the ideological “interpellation,” the ing-yeo subject would also be today’s ideological effect. Applying this interpellation theory of ideology to our problem, so-called neoliberal ideology possibly made the current younger generations cognizant of the approaching economic and political frustration, calling themselves “ing-yeo!” or letting themselves be called surplus. By interpellating them as ing-yeo subject, does neoliberalism notify the ing-yeo of their social status, which has been degraded to the surplus level within an unlimited competitive society? To put it in another way, by letting them be aware of how they will be, does neoliberalism make them reproduce the current regime as the subjects in existing social formations? We can relate this issue to the Lacanian assumption that the subject is formed as the result of a lack, whereby the subject desires: The desiring subject is constituted by misrecognizing the self for the others and by experiencing a fundamental lack or rupture from it. Althusserian and Lacanian models of subjectification, however, do not seem to explain well how the ing-yeo subject is formed and where their subjectivity is located in the current neoliberal Korean society.

On the other hand, Slavoj Žižek (1989) points out the need to distinguish the post-structuralist subject position from the Lacanian one:

In ‘post-structuralism’, the subject is usually reduced to so-called subjectivation, he is conceived as an effect of a fundamentally non-subjective process: the subject is always caught in, traversed by the pre-subjective process (of ‘writing’, of ‘desire’ and so on), and the emphasis is on the individuals’ different modes of

‘experiencing’, ‘living’ their positions as ‘subjects’, ‘actors’, ‘agents’ of the historical process. (p. 174)

He suggests Foucault as the “great master” of post-structuralist analysis of the subject. If the Lacanian subject is the effect of a fundamental lack, the Foucauldian subject would be the historical result of an arrangement of power exercised by apparatuses and technologies.

According to Japanese theorist of contemporary European thought Yoshiyuki Sato (2014), for Foucault, while disciplinary power constituted docile subjects through the internalization of norms, neoliberal power since the 1970s has constituted the self-managing or self-governing subjects through the internalization of market principles. Individual subjects who cannot adapt themselves to this neoliberal model of subject formation are thrown away without mercy. Those subjects rejected from society—they are neglected rather than abandoned, to be more exact—are *ing-yeo*, *pye-in*, and *baeksu*. The *ing-yeo* youth’s failure to internalize neoliberal market principles is not caused by their incompetence and their ignorance. The *ing-yeo* youth’s overall anxiety is mainly caused by the fact that their endless “spec” building, entrepreneurial mindset, and the mobilization of all the social, cultural, and economic capital do not guarantee them to a job.

If we trace the concept of “human capital” coined by the Chicago School in the 1970s, which provided the theoretical foundation for American neoliberalism—well analyzed in Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008)—the principle of contemporary government and subject formation will be clearer. The theory of human capital seeks to

analyze “work as economic conduct practiced, implemented, rationalized, and calculated by the person who works” (p. 223) instead of labor as the value-creating work. So the worker, rather than selling his labor power, earns the wage as an income, which is “quite simply the product or return on a capital” (p. 224). Here labor can be defined in terms of a worker’s human capital, “so that the worker himself appears as a sort of enterprise for himself” (p. 225). Under neoliberal economic conditions, the working subject emerges as “*homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself” (p. 226). In that way, according to Sato (2014), neoliberal power, “by completely marketizing the social body . . . internalizes the market principle to the subject through the market effect and produces self-managing subjects easily governable” (pp. 84-5). As the entrepreneurs who own and manage their own human capital, these self-managing subjects compete with other subjects. Perhaps the ing-yeo is either the subject who could not be subsumed into this category of *homo oeconomicus* or the subject who has failed in this competition with other self-managing subjects. In other words, ing-yeo subjects are those who neoliberal power cannot easily marketize by internalizing the market principle within them—or, rather, they are those who were left aside, for they deserve little consideration to make them into effective self-managers. In short, the ing-yeo subjects are those who failed in the subjectification process. What if, however, these subjects, who failed in subjectification and thus are the subject without subjectification (subject that is no subject), are in fact the real, authentic, and prototypical subject of today?

As Foucault (2000) writes, when a form of power makes individual subjects, we can find two different meanings of subject: “subject to someone else by control and

dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (p. 331). If we differentiate the subject that constitutes power from the subject that is constituted by power, the ing-yeo failed as constituted subjects on the one hand, but nothing is known about their potential as constituting subjects on the other. In Deleuzian terms, subjectification is the subjection process through which power forms the arrangement of desire. A counter-agent of this subjection, i.e., what is not able to be subjectified, would be the “body without organs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987), which escapes a certain structure in which only one function is repeatedly required and then stops being a fixed form of organ, organization. Ing-yeo seems to be out of the subjectification process and sometimes struggling against it. Nonetheless, ing-yeo does not seem to be moving toward extreme anti-production or anti-subjectification.

Can ing-yeo be the leading subject of resistance to the established order? This is why Korean progressive intellectuals and movement blocs are interested in the ing-yeo subject. As Paik (2013) mentioned above, ing-yeo subjects want to be snobs but are not allowed to enter that circle, so their social status is temporarily suspended and deferred. Hence, the answer to the question of whether ing-yeo subjects can be organized and politically unite on their own is in the negative. They have not yet sufficiently become snobs. Nonetheless, Paik thinks that ing-yeo embraces the positive potential:

New politics of ing-yeo subjects can start only from the ‘discordant condition,’ not from the maintenance of order and pursuit of stability. When they are

beginning to ask different positions beyond what are allocated to them or ask new share for them, small movement for liberation of ing-yeo can start. (p. 27)

Yet ing-yeo is neither formed as an obedient subject nor constituted as a resisting one. Although they are ordered to be laboring subjects and to imagine themselves as self-improving entrepreneurial subjects, all they really can do—and all they are allowed to do—is “simulate” the impending doom and gloom of the future in advance. When Lee and Kim (2013) discuss the echo generation, the children of baby-boomers in Korea, they argue that the most commonplace psychological trait found among those in their mid-twenties to early-thirties in the early 2010s—especially among young men—is that they “just wrap up after simulating even significant possibilities for their lives in their imaginations” (p. 16). These younger generations used to give up actual trial or direct experience easily after only imagining, imaging, and predicting life results, as if simulating them with computers or video games—they quickly calculate what they can gain and lose. They became accustomed to their use of simulation and imagination to judge reality. They can imagine themselves as laboring subjects but they cannot be employed in reality. In other words, for ing-yeo subjects, self-help and self-improvement is the only simulation allowed for them.

Thus, today’s power and capital has its goal not as the making of laboring subjects but as letting them imagine and desire indefinitely the status of laboring subjects. As Bauman (2004) notes, while the unemployed could theoretically return to their place, i.e. work, the redundant—i.e., ing-yeo or surplus subjects—do not. For ing-yeo, only the freedom to imagine is provided. The laboring subjects in the established generation are

no exception—they endeavor to survive and not be abandoned by capitalist demands, performing self-management and self-organization without stopping. Being ing-yeo among the 88 Man-won Generation is the realization of ing-yeo's vision of the self who must simulate the condition in which they can exploit their own human capital.

All those who have been called *baeksu*, *pye-in*, loser, and ing-yeo are the subjects who do not fit neatly into the neoliberal subjectification model and generation theories we dealt with above. Their status is meaningful because, rather than being subjected to power, they have escaped or digressed from the subjectification process itself. They are not the subjects who stand for this age, and they do not even represent their generation. They are the subjects as such who are neither completely alienated from nor involved within the system, showing only indistinct features of subjectivity at the edge—thus, the subject without subjectification (subject which is no subject). They are barely subjectified in mysterious ways: their method of sustaining their status as subject is to internalize others' gaze and to acknowledge themselves as losers and hopeless beings. It is the subject on the other side of the same neoliberal subject, i.e., the self-improving subject or the self-managing subject. Because they have failed or refused to be constructed as such an entrepreneurial subject, they are branded ing-yeo, loser, *baeksu*, and *pye-in*. However, these types of subject are rampant, especially among the youth and the younger generations. No matter how competitive they are and no matter how hard they try to follow what the self-improvement books instruct, the current capitalist regime is powered by the people's fear of being dropped from the normal track. However, it does not mean that these younger generations are especially easy prey for today's neoliberal capitalism.

What neoliberal power/capital requires of laboring subjects is not limited to unemployed job seekers' qualifications, abilities, or attitudes. The neoliberal power/capital determines ways to manage and govern laboring subjects both inside corporations and throughout the whole society.

In such a situation, the appellation of ing-yeo is not confined to the younger generations. Within this regime, in which neoliberal governmentality has become the generalized logic of society, the problems of the younger generations are not separable from those of class. Ing-yeo is the class problem unfolded in the form of the generation problem of the youth. As once mentioned above, it is not true that ing-yeo subjects are incompetent and hopeless, without anything valuable. Moreover, they are not simply the mass of the youth waiting for the opportunity to enter into the group of snobs by internalizing the neoliberal doctrines of winner-take-all through infinite competition and being in subjection to them. However, those would be the only options that are allowed for their survival in this world without alternatives. Thus, we must consider their culture, in which their subjectivity is constructed as a culture for survival. Only with an understanding of their historical background and material conditions might we fully understand their ing-yeo culture and all their ways of life, including their pleasures, entertainment, production, consumption, social relations, and so on.

### **1.3. Imagination of Class through Technology**

As a method to identify the traits of the ing-yeo subject, it may be meaningful to rely on generation theory to some degree. However, here generation theory will not mean more than introducing the younger generations both as the subjects creating and

developing technologies of their own and as the objects through which the contemporary technologies are realized. Also, because ing-yeo spreads into the general everyday culture of Korean society rather than being limited to a specific generation, perhaps there is no need to identify the ing-yeo subject only as the younger generation, and no need to emphasize the technology and the culture of specific generations. While each generation living in the same era may experience society in a certain way, there is a “cultural base” exceeding this specificity in terms of the general structure. Therefore, it is often pointless to define the younger generation through various names, such as the X-Generation<sup>37</sup>, N-Generation, or even G20 Generations and P-Generations. Assuming that the younger generations have fundamental differences with past generations or future generations by emphasizing the differences in their ways of enjoying culture or participating in politics and the economy entails the danger of neglecting their structural or class universality and commonness. Literary critic S-K. Park (2010), who finds ing-yeo at the intersection of politics and poetry, argues that the appearance of ing-yeo in Korean society has to do with the problems of class rather than the problems of generation:

Since it [ing-yeo] is not the trait of the ‘generation’ but the common experience for all people in the late capitalist South Korean society, it exceeds the scope of generation. Whether what they experience is Yugioh cards rather than Gundam, StarCraft rather than Street Fighter, what is important here is that the base of the similar political and cultural experiences is forming a new class imagination across the uneven communities of class. (p. 356)

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<sup>37</sup> The X-Generation in Korea is quite different from that in U.S. or Western society, though it has some factors in common. Cf. Gordinier (2009).

Even if the forms of culture experienced by respective generations are different from one another, in what form will the new class traits exist, crossing class differences as well as penetrating all the generations? The phenomenon that we call ing-yeo seems to have a certain imaginary commonness that exceeds the limitations of class, even though it maintains class traits. The younger generation's way of life, linked so closely with the utilization of technology, and the politico-economic frame of modern capitalism imposed on the younger generation has presaged the emergence of ing-yeo, the "imagination of new class," which is a class that is not a class, a subject that is not a subject in overall Korean society.

Likewise, the process of making ing-yeo that virtually overlays the class image on the subject has progressed steadily. We must not understand this process as a smooth ride in which the younger generation enthusiastically accepts and worships new technologies and takes them as a symbol or fetish of their own. We must not take this process from non-political perspectives of the acceptance and alteration of specific technologies in a certain society. Today's technology, rather than being a simple tool that we use, has been dehumanized to be defined as processes with autonomy (Stiegler, 1998). Perhaps the ing-yeo activities of the ing-yeo are the result of adjusting themselves to the process of new technology. New technologies are presented as something very charming, and humans learn them, enjoy them, play with them, and alter them. In other words, we participate in technology's own expansion process. This process progresses as though it is natural; technology is already nature to us. For both the younger generation and the older

established generations, the new media technology has become the technology of life that must be mastered.

However, obviously the new technology given to us has a history. I believe that the knowledge-based economy and the ICTs, assumed as the driving forces for future growth, have come to dominate the current culture of our society since the end of last century: as the tools for the accumulation of capital as well as governing techniques, on the one hand, and as the tools with which people create and consume meaning and pleasure, on the other. Most of the logic and the means that rule the current ing-yeo culture are traces formed through the process of accepting the new media technologies of the Internet and the PC in our society.

However, I do not believe that the technology introduced, operated, and dispersed in the past has fundamental causal relationships, such as one-to-one correspondence, with the traces of the technology today. In other words, what our society has practiced in the meantime may be an internal construction of what Foucault dubbed “technology of the self” created by accepting the exterior instrumental technology, though Foucault discusses the development of technologies of the self while tracing ancient Greek-Roman philosophy and early Christian spirituality. For Foucault (1997 [1982]), the technologies of the self:

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 225)

To Foucault, this technology of the self has to do with the aesthetic-ethics of one's existence, with which one is taking care of oneself, altering one's life, and ultimately achieving oneself as a work of art. In another book, Foucault (1990 [1984]) explains the technologies of the self as "art of existence," which are:

those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. (pp. 10-11)

The term "technology" as I use it here—and as we generally use it today—is not what Foucault intended to mean. For him, technology, derived from Latin 'technē,' refers to practical knowledge or aesthetic-ethical ability to practice. However, here I use this term very broadly in order to embrace its ambivalent meaning: on the one hand, contemporary science and technology, and on the other hand, practical knowledge of life. And, in some sense, we need to bear in mind that both sides of technology cannot be completely divided. In that way, what I try to deal with in this dissertation is fundamentally the aesthetics of technology as well as the ethics of the youth.

The young people of Korean society have developed specific technologies of the self of their own as the digital information era has bloomed. They have changed their ways of life, using the new media and communication technologies introduced by the state and multinational corporations in the globalization process embedded within the regime of the New Economy. Such changes could be experienced while they were mastering new technology by learning to manipulate it, on the one hand, and while they

were adapting themselves voluntarily or unconsciously to the rules of the dominant technologies of the overall society, on the other. Whichever it is, they believe that they have become more creative, free, and liberated rather than believing that they are subordinated or controlled by the technology.

In order to describe the situations in which young Koreans become creative and free through their use of media technology, and all the technologies defined as the rule to govern and transform them, I would like to call them the “technologies of the youth,” following Foucault’s “technologies of the self.” The technologies of the youth are not only the techniques of the government conducted through knowledge and power, but the technologies of pleasure, meaning, and communication enjoyed and created by the youth themselves. Through these technologies, the youth recognize themselves as subjects within the communities that they believe they belong to, find others, and seek their own identities. This ‘virtual’ community is not another world that exists as a fantasy, but a great social system within which people today are formed as the subjects and the youth recognize themselves as the subjects. During the process of creating and destroying the ‘virtual’ communities, the youth have learned, shared, and developed many various technologies to take care of themselves.

The technologies of the youth are significant as an index to show us its users’ patterns of behaviors and thoughts of the time and the cultural meaning of them. These technologies are also important because it is possible to deduce from them the orders and arrangements of people’s behaviors and thoughts in the whole society. They provide us the clues on how the subjects were formed through certain social processes and power

relations; these clues will be discussed in this chapter. I believe that spotlighting the various technological and cultural aspects that have caused the youth to appear as ing-yeo in our age will reveal the various power relations operating here.

## CHAPTER 2. NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES FOR ING-YEO

In this chapter, I look into the history of technological development since the 1990s, when the Internet and digital computing tools were first introduced into Korean society. Then I discuss how the young generation accepted, enjoyed, reformed, and altered these technologies, and conversely how this generation was dominated by them only to become ing-yeo. Of course, as the younger generations were replaced and changed, their technological experiences and the culture created by them changed accordingly. The life of the ing-yeo subject did not arise from the technological experiences of one or two generations but from the accumulation of the cultures of several generations<sup>38</sup> for several decades. Therefore, in order to explore the ways of life of ing-yeo subjects who emerged from the end of the 2000s to the early 2010s, especially the internal logic of their online activities, possibilities, limitations, and traits, we need to trace both the ways in which the new media technologies prescribe lives of the younger generation and the ways in which the younger generations construct their own culture through new media technologies.

For that reason, this chapter begins with the 1990s, when ICTs were introduced into Korean society and when the IT industries and the policies regulating it were

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<sup>38</sup> Here the term “generation” refers to a social group experiencing and sharing the same cultural and technological changes for a relatively short period, not to a biological unit formed for a long time, such as the parents’ generation and children’s generation in family households.

beginning to be arranged. What is crucial here is to understand how state-led development of information technologies and network infrastructure functioned in the 1997 financial crisis that overwhelmed the whole Korean society. I focus on the way in which the ing-yeo subjects are produced and disposed during this period. At the same time, I explore how those ing-yeo subjects constructed their own culture based on the available technologies and the networks of friendship while overcoming their economic insecurity and social crisis.

## **2.1. State-led Construction of ICT Infrastructure**

The development of the Internet and new media culture in Korea can be properly understood through the complicated relationships among ICT industries with governmental support, the industrial and cultural boom in the information industry, and the politico-economic shifts fused with information technology. Present ing-yeo subjects and ing-yeo activities in Korean society can eventually be traced to early digital culture, because it provided the initial criteria for how Internet users experimented with their technologies and why their activities and performances have persisted in their current form. What is interesting to observe from the emergence of the younger generation after the 90s is that they are intertwined with their “cultural techniques”<sup>39</sup> or the “new” media in which their original values are embedded. Some criteria for classifying a new generation could be based on the type of media technologies coupled with them.

During the early 1990s, the younger generations experienced cyber, digital, or

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<sup>39</sup> For the term “cultural technique,” see Parikka (2014), Siegert (2015), and Winthrop-Young (2014).

Internet culture as a form of popular culture that occurred with the democratization of the political regime, the globalization of the economy, the liberalization of culture, and the popularity of high-tech. They experienced the emerging technologies of the Net and the generalization of digital instruments as serious cutting-edge technologies, on the one hand, and as interesting equipment for diversion, on the other. The emergence of the *Shinsedae* (New Generation) is linked to the social environment of being able to enjoy the contemporary global culture. Though the *Shinsedae*, appearing in the early and the mid-nineties, cannot be called “digital natives”<sup>40</sup>—they were not immersed enough in the digital environment yet—the youth of the 90s were much more accustomed to the computer and the network, considering the “PC boom” and the initiation of full-scale PC communication services via dial-up Internet access in the late 80s before broadband service<sup>41</sup>. At least, they were introducing and using the new media technologies that were the most cutting-edge then.

Fundamental changes in the capitalist mode of production sprouted from the development of ICTs, but at the same time the new capitalist economy needed to develop and utilize the new ICTs further. How could Korean society, which had just achieved economic success through industrialization based on heavy industry, participate in the advanced global capitalist system mostly led by developed economies? How was Korea

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<sup>40</sup> The real digital natives of Korean society are called the “N-Generation” or the Network Generation, and they (then the youth in their teens and twenties) emerged from the late 90s to the early 2000s.

<sup>41</sup> Starting with the Korean electronic mailbox service of Korea Data Communication Corporation in 1987, services such as KETEL (Korea Electronic Economic daily TELEpress) of 1988, Chollian of Dacom, Hitel of Korea PC Communications, KT-mail of Korea Telecommunications, Pos-Serve of Posdata, and Inforserve of Korea Net were in service. Afterwards, in the 90s, their services were converged into Hitel, Chollian, and Naunuri. For the early history of PC communication in Korea, see Ahn (2014).

able to achieve what other developing countries in a similar development stage could not? In short, it was due to state intervention. The strategic promotion policy of the information industry at appropriate times by the state enabled the early adoption and development of ICTs in Korea.

Behind the successful development of ICTs in Korea, there was the state-led information infrastructure construction project from 1995 to 2005, across the civilian government, the people's government, and then the participation government (K. Lee, 2012). Before the Korean government participated in information infrastructure construction, it focused on alleviating regulations on the Internet and mobile communication industries and on supporting big *chaebol* and small venture corporations in related fields. As the first civilian government was established in 1995, the Korean Information Infrastructure (KII) was launched, modeling after the National Information Infrastructure (NII) of the U.S., so-called "Information Highway" project. Then, the "Framework Act on the Informatization Promotion" was enacted and implemented vigorously until 2005. Even before the policymaking and the establishment of the system, the government tried to construct the National Basic Information System (NABIS) within administrative, educational, and financial institutions, facilitating the supply of PCs and providing free education programs to primary schools, government branches, and so on. Also, through service competition among various communication business operators, the government facilitated the development of general environments in which users are granted quality enhancements and low prices, and alleviated related regulations as well. This strategy, by building the state-led environment for using computers and the Internet,

was meant to promote the increase of users and the growth of the industry in all aspects of society: For the small countries, especially for those in East Asia then called the “four tigers” (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea), rapid transformation from industrial society to knowledge-based society was a necessary step, as if one upon which their national fates were staked.

According to the *National Informatization White Paper* published by the National Information Society Agency (2011), the Korean government prepared for the social paradigm shift from the industrial to the information society from the 80s: It established the basic plans for the national information networks and the comprehensive plan for the information society in the late 80s and launched the Ministry of Information and Communication as the primary government authority to implement those plans in the mid-nineties. The fundamental system to leap into the information society was built by organizing policies and laws and investing in public sectors, on the one hand, and constructing physical infrastructure by the telecom companies and successfully boosting the electronic components and semiconductor industries (Samsung, Daewoo, and Hyundai), on the other. The foundational themes that represent the overall nation’s informatization projects changed with time, because the technological tasks and environment with which the state must cope kept changing on a national level. For instance, we can look at the basic keynote of the government’s informatization projects through changes in the concepts used in policies, laws, and regulations. Due to the 1997 foreign exchange crisis and the changes in the informatization environment, the first basic plan for promoting informatization was renamed “Cyber Korea 21,” which was

enacted as the second basic plan for promoting informatization. Entering the twenty-first century, the concept of “cyber” came to the forefront. In 2002, “e-Korea Vision 2006,” the third basic plan for promoting informatization, sought to construct “electronic government” (eGov) as the biggest project, connecting administration information systems among the central and regional governments and digitizing the various administration systems. In 2003, the prior third basic plan was revised into “Broadband IT Korea Vision 2007,” and the electronic government roadmap was set out in new terms. In 2006, the “u-Kora Basic Plan” was connected to the prior basic plans for promoting informatization, and the term “ubiquitous” arose as a new keyword for policies. Various projects with names like u-Life, u-City, or u-Tradehub, based upon the information and network infrastructure, aimed for the thorough realization of nation-wide informatization at a microscopic and daily level.

In 2008, the new administration changed “Basic Plans for Promoting Informatization” to “Basic Plans for National Informatization.” Here, strange projects with names such as “green informatization” and “national strategies for green IT”<sup>42</sup> appeared. The government began to pay attention to Web 2.0 and the importance of the creation, management, and sharing of web content. In 2010, with the sharp increase in smartphone usage as a result of the introduction of the iPhone and other mobile devices to Korea, the terms “smart” and “mobile” started appearing in many government policies and projects. Alongside such phenomena, the government expressed immense interest in

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<sup>42</sup> The Lee Myung-Bak administration, which began in 2008, was based on the conservative camp that had regained power after the ten years of the Democratic camp’s rule. It sought to revitalize the national economy with government businesses such as nationwide large-scale construction projects, but paradoxically always tried to cover them up with the “green” (eco-friendly) images.

the “convergence”<sup>43</sup> or “fusion” of IT industries and other fields such as biotechnologies and nanotechnologies. With the popularity of mobile and smartphones, there was a “social” boom. Since 2011, the “social,” coupled with the “smart revolution,” has been the leading paradigm for technological innovation in the media and communication industry. As an extension of it, in 2012 the Park Keun-Hye administration recommended the concept of “creative economy” as the key paradigm that will lead and change the future, suggesting that the development of digital content and new ideas based on creativity and imagination will be the driving force for the Korean economy.

Mainly due to twenty years of national strategic projects on informatization, construction of information infrastructure, and the extension of ICT businesses in the private sector, the current number of Internet (including mobile communication) users in Korea in 2014 has exceeded 40 million, and over 80 percent of the population uses the Internet. The informatization projects led by the state provided an optimal technological environment in which anyone could access information and services in various areas through the Internet and any type of IT business is available, whether startups or large corporations. To evaluate the status of informatization in Korea based on a few international indices, Korea would be one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of the efforts of the government, the participation of the people, and the general degree of development of informatization, though it may somewhat lack competitiveness

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<sup>43</sup> This concept of “convergence” seems to replace hybrid, which once had been popular. There is the intention of stimulating imagination and creativity that are less likely to occur in one isolated field, and then extracting something original and novel from it. This has some connection with the popularity of the term “consilience,” which emphasizes the communication and the unity among various fields of sciences.

(see **Table 2.1**). In other words, the nation's destiny-staking leap toward a knowledge-based information society for the past 20 years has been completed somewhat successfully.

Table 2.1

*Ranks of Korea in International Informatization Indices*

[Organization] Name of Index	Purpose	Rank of Korea (Number of Countries)						
		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
[UN] E-Government Development Index	Measuring national capacity and will to use e-Government	-	-	6 (192)	-	1 (192)	-	1 (193)
[UN] E-Participation Index	Measuring level of citizen's participation to policy making	-	-	2 (192)	-	1 (192)	-	1 (193)
[ITU*] ICT Development Index	Measuring degree of information society and digital divide	-	-	-	2 (154)	3 (159)	-	1 (155)
[WEF**] Network Readiness Index	Measuring degree of using ICT for economic development	14 (115)	19 (122)	9 (127)	11 (134)	15 (133)	10 (138)	12 (142)
[WEF] Global Competitiveness Index	Measuring national competitiveness in technologies at large	12 (125)	7 (131)	13 (134)	15 (133)	19 (139)	-	18 (144)
[IMD***] World Competitiveness Ranking	Measuring national competitiveness in ICT	6 (53)	6 (55)	14 (55)	14 (57)	18 (58)	14 (59)	14 (59)

*Note.* \* ITU: International Telecommunication Union; \*\*WEF: World Economic Forum; \*\*\*IMD: International Institute for Management Development. Adapted from National Informatization White Paper by National Information Society Agency, 2013, p. 57.

However, there were negative and adverse effects along with these successes. First, in a situation in which the government leads investment regarding the driving forces for future industries, the overall direction of the industries is set according to the government's core investment fields, which merely reflect technological trends. In this case, most of the capital and human powers tend to be concentrated in the same field. Therefore, it became difficult to create original technologies that were free from the

standards already set by the leading countries in technology. Also, due to the perfunctory implementation of big government projects, there have been disparities between the quality of information and services anticipated by the people and their actual experiences. Furthermore, with the expansion of the economic, sociological, and cultural influence of the Internet, adverse effects have been produced as well, such as the information gap, information harassment, exposure of privacy, excessive use of the Internet, and information surveillance by the powers. More than anything else, the emergence of the ing-yeo subject and the spread of ing-yeo activities are the latest phenomena that have accompanied the advent of the information society, though it is too early to judge whether they are positive or adverse effects.

## **2.2. 1997 Financial Crisis and Introduction of Neoliberalism**

The state-led process of development that led to the current information society was not that smooth. At the end of 1997, when the KII project was in progress, Korean society encountered an unanticipated obstacle: the infamous foreign exchange crisis that occurred simultaneously among several Asian countries. The financial crisis and the bailout by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was not only the emergency situation that coerced Korea into changing the economic nature of society, but also a chance to expand the ICT industry prepared from the early 90s, change the national economic frame, and boost economic growth by overcoming the crisis. Something like what Naomi Klein (2007) called the “disaster capitalism complex” brought about the privatization of many organizations and functions in the public sector, the mass restructuring of labor by the conglomerates, and active and fast intervention through policy revisions. Based on the

anxiety and the fear of the people, unprecedented fundamental changes were brought to Korean society.

The worst economic crisis in Korean history made the economy, which had grown steadily throughout the modernization and industrialization processes, suddenly and profoundly plummet. Though we cannot assert that the cause of the crisis had direct links to domestic politics, it was the result of irresponsible neoliberal globalization strategies and the failure of the foreign exchange management policy in the Kim Young-Sam administration.<sup>44</sup> Paradoxically, the crisis pushed the Kim Dae-Jung administration<sup>45</sup> to introduce rapidly and enact full-scale neoliberal globalization and financial policies, to which they might have been opposed. The Korean government applied for a bailout loan in November 1997, and in the presidential election in the next month, Kim Dae-Jung was elected. Thus, as soon as it had taken over power, the Kim Dae-Jung administration had to devote its best efforts to overcoming the crisis, and it finally paid off the loan from the IMF in 2001.

In this process, uncountable small and medium-sized businesses disappeared through bankruptcy and insolvency. There was a case in which a hundred businesses went bankrupt in a day. Even conglomerates disappeared or disintegrated through workout, bankruptcy, M&A, and overseas disposal.<sup>46</sup> Public services were privatized<sup>47</sup>,

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<sup>44</sup> Effectively, the Kim Young-Sam administration was the first civilian government in Korea, though the conservative forces dominated it.

<sup>45</sup> It was the first government regime change by the Democrats in Korean political history.

<sup>46</sup> The giant conglomerates such as Samsung, LG, Hyundai, Daewoo, and SK were broken up and sold for parts to foreign firms.

<sup>47</sup> The privatization process of KT (Korea Telecom), one of the largest public enterprises in Korea, was completed throughout the 90's financial crisis and IMF bailout period. It exemplarily shows how the state and global institutions such as the IMF and the WTO accelerated neoliberal

the capital market was opened up, and layoff became unrestricted due to the weakening of dismissal regulations. The IMF forced the Korean government and corporations to get rid of outdated regulations and management methods and to accept the “Chicago style,” which involved “privatized basic service, independent central banks, ‘flexible’ workforces, low social spending and, of course, total free trade” (Klein, p. 340). The IMF demanded especially rigorous conditions regarding labor flexibility in Korea: it requested, for instance, layoffs of approximately 50 percent of the workforce in the banking sector. In February 1998, the Korea Tripartite Commission (of labor, management, and government) agreed to introduce a redundancy (layoff) system that enabled mass dismissal.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the corporations increased the proportion of experienced or contractual temporary workers rather than hiring new regular workers, legitimately evading various costs arising from lifetime employment, such as pensions, health insurance, and other benefits. As a result, the labor market became bipolarized and the number of non-regular workers compared to regular workers started to increase rapidly.

Indeed, we may mark the economic crisis in the late 90s as a critical socio-economic and political condition in which the *ing-yeo* appeared at last in the late 2000s. Numerous scholars attest that the circumstances of the 1997 financial crisis worked as a

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privatization of public sectors (state corporations) and eliminated all investment restrictions in the rapidly changing environment of the economic crisis. Cf. D. Y. Jin (2006).

<sup>48</sup> Before the presidential election of December 1997, the then-president (Kim Young-Sam) and the three presidential candidates had a meeting at the Blue House. The purpose of the meeting was to write pledges to carry out the requirements of the IMF (such as accepting labor flexibility, layoffs, etc.) without delay when elected as the president. President Kim gathered these and sent them to the IMF, and then the IMF decided to grant a bailout loan based on these promises.

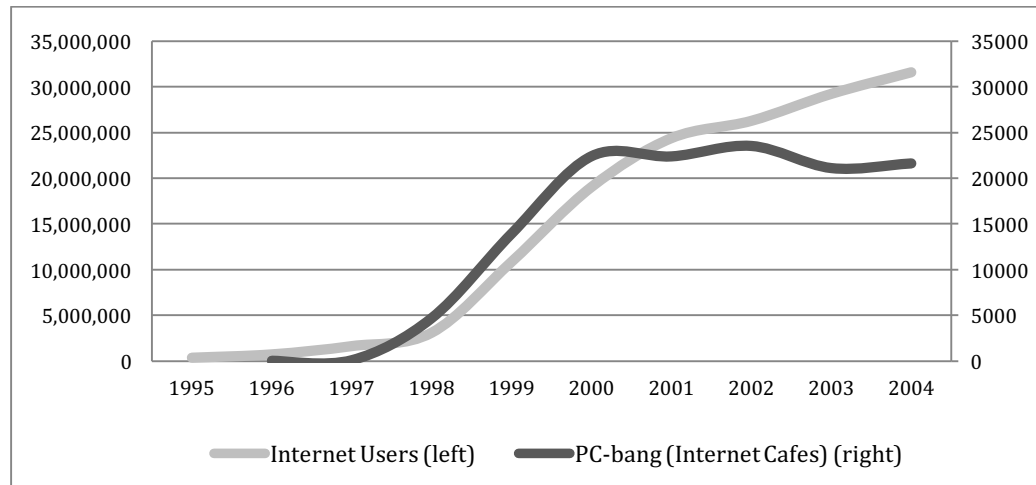
trigger for Korean society to be formed concretely as an information society (H. Cho, 2007; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009; Jin, 2010). It is true that the number of domestic Internet users increased exponentially from late 1997 to 2001, during (and despite) the financial crisis. From certain perspectives, due to the well-prepared long-term economic development plan that involved technological enhancement like the KII project, Korea was able to escape promptly from the IMF's control and focus on securing future growth engines through cutting-edge technologies. Because the government and the market concentrated on alleviating regulations for the mobile and Internet industries and promoting the distribution of high-speed Internet, Korea emerged as the most powerful IT country in the world in terms of distribution of the high-speed information network and the number of Internet users, to such an extent that it was called the "broadband miracle" (Hazelett, 2004). Having grown into a powerful player in the field of hardware manufacture, such as semiconductors and electronic communication devices, Korea ranked as one of the most developed first-world nations in the ICT field.

If we compare the number of domestic Internet users before and after the 1997 financial crisis, the growth rate is surprisingly high during the period. The analysis report for the Korea Network Information Center by T. Park (2000) counted five factors in the rapid increase of domestic Internet users. First, from a social perspective, the anxiety about being left out from the new social flow, the national nature of "fast, fast," and the venture entrepreneurship boom with governmental support under the IMF system led the people to participate enthusiastically in the information society. Second, from a cultural perspective, the number of PC bang (Internet café) increased with the spread of online

games for youth, and in the peculiar apartment culture in which more than the 40% of the population resides, the LAN construction of the apartment unit was feasible. Third, from a policy perspective, cheap communication was made possible both through the series of informatization and network construction projects launched by government and through the introduction of competing policies in the communication industry. Fourth, from a technological perspective—though it may overlap with the policy perspective—the overall ICT environment advanced through state-led Internet infrastructure construction, the fostering of the ICT industries, and the early introduction of cutting-edge technologies (e.g., GIS, global roaming, internet broadcasting, etc.). Fifth, from a business perspective, investment in start-ups and small venture businesses was expanded, and domestic online businesses were recognized as alternative and complementary services to the offline industry, which received positive evaluations from foreign investment institutions such as Goldman Sachs.

From the analysis of such aspects, we are able to deduct that the complex interplay of economic, technological, and cultural factors brought about the rapid increase of Internet users in Korea. What we must pay attention to here is how the cultural aspects are related to the economic and technological aspects. There is the relationship between the explosive increase in the percentage of the population using the Internet and the spread of online games among youth, as well as the boom in PC bang businesses (See **Figure 2.1**); the relationship between the total unemployment rate (mostly those laid off during the reconstruction process) and the youth unemployment rate (including never-hired youth) (See **Figure 2.2**); and the comparison of the two data,

the number of Internet users and the number of the unemployed.



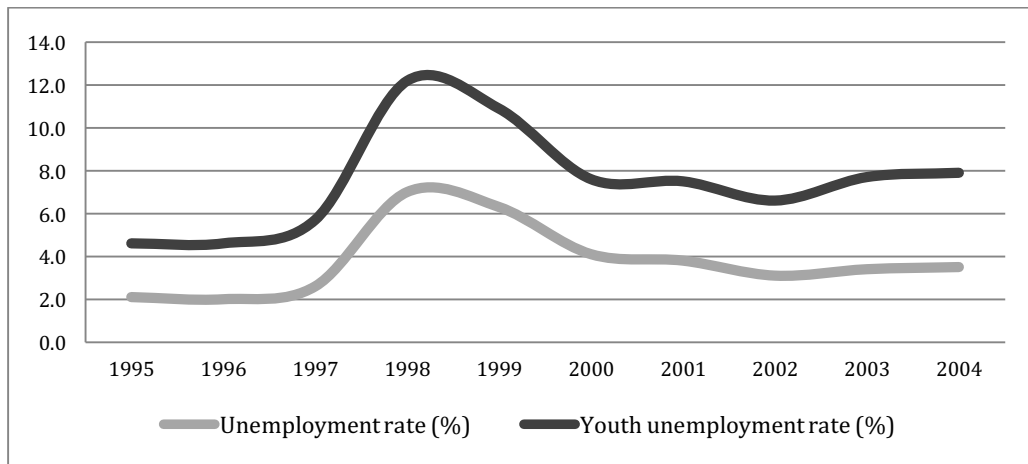
*Figure 2.1.* Number of Internet Users and PC Bangs in Korea.

Adapted from Korea Internet and Security Agency (KISA) and Statistics Korea (KOSTAT).

The number of domestic Internet users increased by 3.5 times, from three million in December 1998, right after the financial crisis, to ten million in December 1999. The number of PC bangs showed an explosive increase from 3,600 in 1998 to 12,000 in August 1999. Also, in that period the annual increase rate in Internet users was between 160 and 220 percent, higher than the annual 100 percent increase in the U.S. (T. Park, 2000). On the other hand, according to the time-series analysis of the “Economic Activity Census” in KOSIS (Korean Statistical Information Service), the unemployment rate surged from 2.6 percent in 1997 to 7 percent in 1998. Counting only the unemployment rate of the youth (15 to 29 years old), the figure surges from 5.7 percent in 1997 to 12.2 percent in 1998. Considering this data does not include those preparing to be hired or

those who have given up on searching for employment, the actual unemployment rate would have been higher.

Where did all the unemployed youth go? The statistical data of the unemployment rate then and the concurrent surge in Internet users seem to suggest the relation of social tradeoff between the two. If the financial crisis led to massive unemployment rates and redundant workers, those who were laid off during reconstruction could have been led to the world of independent businesses (self-employment) or become part-timers in the ICT industry (e.g., PC bang), on the one hand, and to online games, such as StarCraft and Lineage—the world of fantasy—on the other.



*Figure 2.2. Unemployment Rates.*  
Adapted from Statistics Korea (KOSTAT).

It is plausible to suggest that the new technological developments provided a convenient solution for such a massive political-economic dislocation of the various ing-

yeo subjects (the unemployed and jobless). The new media of the Internet and the PC functioned as a playground and toys for the ing-yeo (*baeksu* or *pye-in*) who did not and could not work. These media technologies were also alternative means for their social relations and communications. For the state and capital, the development of the computer industry and promotion of digital culture became an important public enterprise for the overwhelming ing-yeo (redundancy) problem—on the one hand for production, and on the other hand for consumption. However, this process of managing the ing-yeo subject is uneven. On the one hand, neoliberal economic and technological policies consign the much more numerous losers to a life of peripheral work and precarity, while they open opportunities for a small number of winners (i.e., youthful technology entrepreneurs), on the other.

PC bang businesses and venture start-ups grew congruently, and the miracle of Silicon Valley, with companies such as Yahoo, Google, and Apple, let everyone dream of a rosy future in which anyone could be successful through software programming or coding simply with a single computer. Many youths and young entrepreneurs were encouraged by the government to participate in the information communication industry coupled with the knowledge-based economy. The legendary successes of several venture corporations, such as Naver, Daum, Cyworld, NC Soft, and Ahn Lab, made each party dream of different goals: jackpot opportunities and hope for the ing-yeo, cheap investment for capital and industry, and long-term economic enhancement and management of ing-yeo labor for the state.

The neoliberal policies of the open economy, flexibility of labor, deregulation,

privatization, survival of the fittest, and polarization matched well with the information technologies, with which individual competence is sufficient for economic success.<sup>49</sup> It seemed as if individuals were granted opportunities to take part in massive economic activities and accumulate wealth with relatively small investments and facilities, as well as with only their individual intellectual abilities and creativity. Investment capital, which had lost its investment market during the financial crisis, started investing in small venture IT corporations founded by young entrepreneurs. The government enacted laws to allow young people to do their military service in IT corporations instead. Therefore, the creative and competent young workforce flowed into the IT industry.

Furthermore, since 1999, the president (and later, the Ministry of Government and Home Affairs) has awarded annually hundreds of young creative and competitive talents the name of “New Intellectuals” (*Shinjisikin*). However, fostering the projects of venture businesses and the New Intellectuals campaigns could be understood as a method of neoliberal subjectification pushed forward by the government during the “dot-com boom,” in tandem with the financial crisis (J. Song, 2009). The discourse of “self-management” or “entrepreneurial spirit” that was widespread before and after the crisis (and not limited to the youth) is a part of the “aggressive cultivation of the liberal self,” which consequently legitimates the “notions of self-sufficiency framed underemployed youth as a population responsible for their own success or failure” (p. 100). According to Jesook Song, making (or governing) this self-sufficient subject was meant to enhance and

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<sup>49</sup> The being and activities of the ing-yeo, fused with the information technology, is a general phenomenon in post-industrial societies and the neoliberal globalization process, rather than being limited to Korea.

present the underemployed youth as employable:

Productive welfarism in a South Korean neoliberal welfare state fostered a particular welfare subject (such as underemployed youth) as an investment in and cultivation of a ‘productive’ labor population mode. With empowered individual agency, individuals became responsible for their own employment and survival. These autonomous individuals became micro-engineers of ‘productive’ labor as a whole and involved themselves in the appropriation and exploitation of surplus labor power. (p. 99)

While the New Intellectuals award and the support for start-ups served to create new models for youth, the “Information Labor Project” was a more concrete program to manage and aid the massive underemployed young population and redundant labor and address their precariousness. The Information Labor Project was a temporary public work program launched by the Ministry of Information and Communication<sup>50</sup> for the low-income group and underemployed but overqualified youth. This project brought about “employment effects” by employing especially the jobless (*baeksu*) youths who were skilled in media technologies such as the Internet and the PC. The Information Labor Projects included “Construction of Database for Korea’s Law,” “Construction of Database for Electronic Library,” “Construction of Database for Geotechnical Information,” “Expansion of Institutions Utilizing Health Insurance EDI,” “Construction

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<sup>50</sup> This ministry was initiated as a substitute for the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication in 1994. Later in 2008, during the reorganization of government bodies, it was discontinued and its jurisdiction was divided between the Ministry of Knowledge Economy, the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the Korean Communication Commission.

of Defense Logistics,” and the like.

These projects were generally concentrated on database or system construction in order to employ a massive number of people with fewer costs. The evaluations of these projects were very positive: for instance, according to the second evaluation of the investment effects of the information labor project in 2000, during the last two years (98-99) 54 projects were conducted with 24 government agencies, a total budget of 146.6 billion KRW was invested, and the total production ripple effect from the projects was evaluated at 475.5 billion KRW. Also, by hiring an average of 16,000 unemployed people every day (in addition to an indirectly hired workforce of 12,000), these projects were evaluated as having contributed to advancing the digitization of the nation’s key information, especially databases in the public sector, while solving unemployment problems at the same time. As the result of investing the state budget in the right place and at the appropriate time, these projects brought about not only the synergy of informatization effects and hiring effects, but also the additional effects of the growth of small and medium-sized IT corporations and on-site education.

As examined above, the process of overcoming the financial crisis was an opportunity to strengthen the foundation of Korean society in the 2000s. However, it is difficult to say whether the short-term government relief projects for the redundant and the underemployed youth have been effective. Though these government projects did create higher employment rates for a while, it was impossible for them to enhance the structure of employment. Rather, by proving to the jobless and the underemployed the efficiency of temporary non-regular jobs, the projects may have legitimated such non-

regular employment as acceptable and affordable. At any rate, the ing-yeo (or surplus and redundant) labor produced during the financial crisis was disposed of in many ways: the massive number of laid-off workers—usually called the “early retirees” or “voluntary retirees”—rushed into PC bang businesses and IT-related self-employment, and the under- and unemployed youths were either worshipped (if they were highly valued human resources) as venture entrepreneurs and new intellectuals or mobilized (if they had lower abilities) into low-paid information labor. However, we must remember that behind the new intellectuals and the rhetoric of the knowledge economy, there were the StarCraft warriors who had filled the PC bangs of the nation and the countless *baeksu* who had pioneered the online communities. The current reality, in which elementary students dream of being professional gamers rather than intellectuals, is left over from this period.

### **2.3. Networks of Friendship: PC Bang and StarCraft**

In the fall and winter of 1997, during the traumatic financial crisis, the old Jazz standard “A Lover’s Concerto” by Sarah Vaughan filled the streets and the radio broadcasts. A Korean film *Jeopsok* (The Contact), which used the song in its soundtrack, was awarded Best Picture at the Grand Bell Awards, one of the most prestigious movie awards in Korea. This movie depicted the thin emotional tie between a producer of a radio show and a shopping guide at a TV shopping channel who were connected through online chat on the PC *tongshin* (Internet communication via dial-up).<sup>51</sup> The PC *tongshin* then was filled with numerous virtual communities and communications, and the desire

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<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the title of this movie translated into English should have been *The Connection*, not *The Contact*.

to contact unknown others could be realized through text-based Internet Relay Chat (IRC), commonly called online chat. A famous line in the film, “One is going to meet those who they are destined to meet,” left a vague feeling that ambiguous social anxiety might be overcome through online communication. However, while Koreans believed that the craze for the new ICTs and the rapid transformation to the knowledge economy would present the gift of economic prosperity, an unprecedented financial crisis was approaching. Had it been a coincidental connection, the relationship between the financial crisis and the new economy in tandem with ICTs would not have seemed so bad. Yet the crisis left terrible scars on Korean society.<sup>52</sup>

The expansion of neoliberalism, in terms of both discourses and social relations, was eventually achieved in the process of overcoming the national crisis of the late 90s, which saw deindustrialization and the introduction of the knowledge-based economy (support for the ICT industry, investment in the construction of information infrastructure) and the liberalization of trade and markets (flexibility of labor, deregulation of foreign capital). The spread and settlement of neoliberal discourses and relations became the basis for the establishment of a new rule, called the 97 Regime, after the demise of the 87 Regime, which was the era of democratization and the middle class.<sup>53</sup> In the 2000s, after being freed from IMF control, it seemed as if the problems of the financial crisis did not stick in the people’s collective memory; it was simply remembered as a trauma that marked modern Korean history. The pain and scars of many individuals and families that were sacrificed to social reconstruction were regarded as

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<sup>52</sup> The scars from the crisis reached us only after the end of the production of the movie.

<sup>53</sup> For the changes and characteristics of the regimes, refer to the introduction.

unavoidable and left as individual responsibilities in the face of the great global logic of power. Soon after the crisis, Koreans could watch a TV commercial in which an actress exclaimed “Everyone, be the rich!” with a big smile in BC Card’s New Year’s advertisement for 2002.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Korean society met another era of growth and prosperity, at least until the backlash of the global recession in 2008 (Kim & Jaffe, 2010).

Overcoming the economic crisis and the advent of the information society were simultaneous. From the 2000s, when the 97 Regime took firm root in Korean society and started to influence its reality, society had advanced into the full-fledged network era. As mentioned above, the major solution in the process of reformation during the crisis was a sort of generalization of un- and underemployment (making the *ing-yeo*) throughout the society: while the government’s efforts for the mass unemployed focused on aid through public labor projects or the promotion of venture spirit and entrepreneurship, the place where the *ing-yeo* population actually went were PC bangs, both for fun and for business, and the virtual world of online games.

As the early retirees started to be self-employed, PC bangs and computer-related self-employments vitalized the jobs for the unemployed and even consolidated the base for the Internet industry. PC bangs equipped with high-speed Internet began to establish themselves as the place for e-mail, chat, video chat, search, virtual community activities, and online games such as StarCraft and Lineage.

Especially, as the massive unemployed youth produced rapidly during the economic crisis became the ‘long-term sojourners’ in the online world, the

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<sup>54</sup> Regarding IMF and consumerism, see Nelson (2000), 178ff.

cyberspace began to be heavily crowded. (H. Cho, 2007, pp. 21-2)

The relations between the un- and underemployed and the development of the Internet in Korea form a vicious circle, even though it seems as if there were a synergetic effect. The state and capital expanded the information infrastructure; the unemployed *ing-yeo* became more immersed in the fantasy created by the Internet; the venture corporations grew to become conglomerates by developing new markets, i.e., software, platforms, and entertainment, based on data and content created by the unemployed *ing-yeo*. It is an irony that the unemployed *ing-yeo*, excluded from the regular production system, were the actual creators of the resources (data and information) that fed the new type of production system. At any rate, those who hold up and construct the base structure of the current new media or ICT industries were the *ing-yeo*, *baeksu*, and the underemployed youth.

The young *baeksu* who gathered in PC bangs to play online games and the laid-off middle-aged generation who started PC bang businesses are connected with each other through new media, such as online games and virtual communities. Their connection—or the new social relationship—was established as rental relationships for the super short-term, in that the users were only paying for the occupation of the space for short periods of time while using the Internet services available. The young unemployed youth needed to dispose of their superfluous *ing-yeo* time, and the PC bang businesses owned the equipment and the spaces to consume this useless time. Thus, a new mode of exchange occurred between them. In the space called PC bang, the purpose

of the owner is gaining the maximum short-term rental fees for the “bang”<sup>55</sup> equipped with PCs and Internet, while playing Internet games or making virtual friends is the formal purpose of the users. Therefore, gaming and making friends serve as the bait to attract users into the rental spaces of PC bang. The higher the quality of and satisfaction with the provided services (the types of games installed, the Internet speed, the bang’s atmosphere, the specifications of the computers), the bigger the demand for the rental spaces.

A PC bang is a typical Internet café, in which anyone can use cutting-edge computers on partitioned individual desks at relatively inexpensive prices. Originally, PC bangs were only for those without computers or Internet connections at home, and for some adults playing online games or navigating other entertaining activities on the network. However, they later changed into places in which teenage students, and even elementary school students, play online games, usually in a group or team after school to avoid their parents’ interference and enjoy each others’ company. PC bangs were often called Game bang. Since it was possible to snack, eat meals, smoke, and even sleep on the chairs in PC bang, numerous PC bang *pye-in* hanging out there all day were created.

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<sup>55</sup> A “bang” refers to a room and it is pronounced as “bahng.” The space called bang is traditionally a unit in houses (e.g., like bedrooms), but through the process of modernization, it also began to mean the commercialized space divided by partitions in bars or amusement facilities. There is various type of bangs in Korea: for instances, there have been Da Bang (tea rooms or cafés) since the early twentieth century, Noraebang (karaoke), Jimjil Bang (sauna or spa), and DVD Bang, which appeared after the 80s, and even perverted spaces such as Kiss Bang have appeared in the 2000s.

Because of the cheap rate, the unemployed or the jobless often stayed for a long time, and even homeless people utilized the place to sleep and wash.<sup>56</sup>

They have often attracted public attention due to the social problems that happened within: deaths from poor health after playing online games without rest and meals for a few days, deaths of children left home alone by game-crazed parents, violence from trading and snatching game items, and the sugar dating (*wonjokyoje*) of young girls through Internet chat. Nevertheless, PC bangs were not recognized as dangerous or a place outside of ordinary life. In some sense, they were considered relatively safe, comfortable, and convenient places, or as sort of regional community spots, because they could be found in every corner of the whole nation.

Earlier we explored the causes of the rapid expansion of the Internet and ICTs throughout Korean society from the perspectives of political economy, such as the state-led information infrastructure construction and the financial crisis. From the social and cultural perspectives, however, it was PC bangs that contributed immensely to the development of the Internet and ICTs in Korea. First of all, we can say that “the rise of online gaming in Korea is synonymous to the birth of the PC bang” (Huhh, 2008, p. 29) or that “the rise of the PC bang was a shift concurrent with the growth of the Internet and gaming culture” (Hjorth, 2011, p. 121). PC bangs were able to expand their own networks by connecting online and offline relationships through the medium of multiplayer online games. We cannot help but discuss a certain online game as a specific medium that explosively expanded not only the physical spaces of PC bangs but the

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<sup>56</sup> Similar social problems are ongoing with the “Net café refugees” in Japan. For the Net café refugees, watch Fukuda’s (2015) documentary film online, *Japan’s Disposable Workers*.

cyberspace of Korean Internet users as well. It would be no exaggeration to say that the expansion of Korea's Internet is heavily indebted to this game. The game to be discussed is StarCraft, the RTS (Real-time Strategy) game launched by an American online game corporation named Blizzard Entertainment in early 1998—when Korean society was suffering severely from the financial crisis. StarCraft was more groundbreaking and influential than any other game from the Korean online game industry. Although other Korean games, for example Lineage<sup>57</sup>, were also very popular in the Korean online gaming community, they could not compare to StarCraft. The original StarCraft was so popular in Korea that almost half of the global sales (4.5 million copies) were sold in Korea (Olsen, 2007). It was the first and only game to be considered the “national game” of Korea.

From 1998 to 2000, approximately 10,000 new PC bangs opened every year, and in 2000 there were 20,000 PC bangs nationwide (See **Figure 2.1**). These PC bangs attracted users and gamers by sponsoring their own StarCraft tournaments and inducing regional gamers to compete offline with one another through the PC bang franchise network and the like. Also, as promotional events to attract customers, they helped construct game guilds through the offline social network of the local PC bangs and supported RMT (real money trading) among gamers. Such on- and offline network expansion of StarCraft by the PC bangs played a pivotal role in the invigoration of professional online game leagues and the construction of e-sports industries (Huhh,

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<sup>57</sup> It is a medieval fantasy MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), published in the same year by a Korean online game corporation, NC Soft. It is notable that the game is still being played today in 2015.

2008). The popularity of StarCraft led to the launch of e-sports channels that broadcast the tournaments of popular professional gamers on TV. StarCraft's success played a crucial role in the explosive expansion of Korean PC bangs and Internet networks, and vice versa. Of course, the game of StarCraft itself is a well-made piece. It was popular for its plausible worldview and narrative as well as fine graphics and not-so-complex operational method.

StarCraft was an important turning point in the history of online gaming as well as the history of the Internet in Korea. Looking back on StarCraft and PC bangs after their glory years, the important achievement of the combination of online games and PC bangs was the elevation of the status of online games from useless and trivial pastimes to a considerable universal entertainment media. The games, whether video, digital, or online, that had been considered temporary amusement for children and adolescents and disparaged as valueless were transformed into a huge industry and a genre of subculture (E. Cho, 2013). Computer games became serious cultural media on which youths and adults spent their free time and for communication with others. More significantly, with the tremendous popularity of StarCraft and PC bangs, the “gaming subjects”<sup>58</sup> could be found all over the nation. This does not simply mean that professional e-gamers are popular and earn as much as sports stars, or that there are many adolescents causing social problems due to online games—for instance, so-called online game addicts. Though the government tightened regulations on online games to stop users' excessive immersion, games have infiltrated daily life and are regarded as a leisure activity, as if

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<sup>58</sup> I discuss the “gaming subjects” in section 1 of chapter 4.

playing games were something like watching TV. Among the youth, playing online games in their own rooms or in PC bangs after school and watching online games tournaments broadcasted on e-sports channels with friends on weekends became ordinary ways of enjoying digital culture. Online gaming has become a dominant media activity and cultural practice in the daily lives of Korean youth, though they have not realized it. The emergence of the “gaming subject,” which forms part of ing-yeo subject, reflects changes in how Koreans, especially the youth, organize, consume, and manage their time online as well as recognize, act, and communicate online.

However, which cultural factors have led the youth into the world of online games such as StarCraft, and into the space of PC bangs? Florence Chee (2006), who has performed sociocultural observations on Korean PC bangs, borrows the concept of Oldenberg’s (1997) “third places,” or the places “that are neither work nor home, but are places of psychological comfort and support” (p. 230) to explain the space of PC bangs. PC bangs have attracted Korean youths as a third place, a daily space that is not school/work or home, allowing them to feel comfortable with their friends while playing games together.

In this third space, they construct another community to which they belong and in which they seek solace. This community is a space that might be called the “fourth place, situated within the third places of PC bangs” (p. 231), a term coined by Chee to describe the space within online games. The space of the PC bang is the third place, both constructing the physical (offline) community for those who have gathered for the Internet connection for games and at the same time serving as a gateway into cyberspace,

the imaginary (cyber) communities constructed by reciprocal actions (for instance, the community within online games). In other words, the youth in Korean society have moved into the fourth, virtual space where their desires, interests, and comforts exist, via the third space called PC bangs, and have constructed their own worlds there. If they really tried to escape from their homes, schools, and workplaces and move towards the third or even the fourth space, what was special about the new space, the new communities that they constructed and in which they immersed themselves?

Although almost all the Korean youth could access the Internet at home in the early 2000s, they tended to play online games in PC bangs. Why did they choose PC bangs instead of home, a place where we would assume they would be more comfortable? For the young PC bang users in Chee's interviews, the reason for playing games at a PC bang as opposed to home is that "he could smoke at PC bangs, whereas at home he could not (his parents did not like it)" and that a PC bang is "more comfortable than home" (p. 232). Even a young man who is not enthusiastic about, or at least not good at, playing online games wants to stay at a PC bang just to be with his friends. For these youth, it was not the fast Internet connection but rather the sense of intimacy or the fostering of friendships that made them flock to PC bangs. The common way to promote friendship and sociality for them was playing online games together. Therefore, whether it be the online community of gaming or the offline space of the PC bang, what these youths needed the most or considered the most important might be the sense of being together or belonging—the sense of community. Pressure from the competitive educational system as well as long and intense labor at the workplace in Korean society

would be at the bottom of that promoting friendship through online gaming. The PC bangs were the optimal space for relieving stress from school, home, or work with friends or peers who understood such stresses. There would be no better place to be free of the interference of parents or bosses, to be free of the stress of study and labor, and to spend leisure time while promoting friendship with peers.

Such a sense of belonging or promotion of friendship is considered an essential factor in Korean society, and not only among students and youth. It is only after the formation of intimate relationships between individuals that other activities are likely to happen. Such a phenomenon is related to the fact that there are exceptionally many online communities<sup>59</sup> for the sole purpose of socializing. Among the top five categories of the Internet communities (also called cafés) on two portal sites, Naver and Daum, surveyed in 2007, the number of communities for socialization is outstanding, followed by games and hobbies. The number of online communities in the two portal sites is approximately eight million, and among them about two million are categorized under socialization. Furthermore, “almost 80 percent of Korean Internet users participate in Internet cafes to share hobbies and socialize with people who have common interests for around 6.1 hours a week” (Yoo, 2009, p. 219). According to a survey on Korean Internet communities conducted in 2012 by market research institution Trend Monitor, Korean Internet users’ most joined community category was “friendship” (39.3 percent), followed by traveling (22.9 percent), cooking and restaurants (22.3 percent), fashion and beauty (22.1 percent),

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<sup>59</sup> In Korea, most of the Internet communities are under the services of portal sites such as Naver, Daum, SK Communications, etc. Those online communities are often called Internet “cafés,” though they may be confused with PC bangs. As they are called “cafés,” we may guess that their main purpose is socialization among members.

and games (21 percent). Three out of ten respondents operated one or two online communities themselves, and among the communities, those categorized under socialization were the most common, with 40.9 percent, and the number increased steadily after 2009.

Moreover, according to a comparative study of Korean and Japanese online communities (Ishii & Ogasahara, 2007), “Korean online community users are more likely to have access to a real-group-based community than their Japanese counterparts” (p. 255) and “the Korean nationality . . . leads to a higher level of social bonding in Korea” (p. 256). An interpretation could be that Korean online communities are the extensions of offline communities and what users hope to gain from these online activities is mainly social bonding or making new friends—that is to say, social networking—rather than information. Of course, compared to individualistic cultures in the Western world, a collective culture based on *hyeol-yeon* (kinship), *ji-yeon* (regionalism), and *hak-yeon* (school ties)<sup>60</sup> is more dominant in East Asia, especially in Korean society. Therefore, whether through multiplayer online games and guilds, the small and large communities related to portal sites, or social networking sites for the expansion and spread of relationships, it is natural for Koreans to build cyber communities in various ways in pursuit of sociality and intimacy rooted in real-world bonds and connections. However, their imagined online communities are not far removed from the offline imagination of reality.

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<sup>60</sup> Here, the suffix “-yeon” refers to the special bond or tie among people.

## 2.4. Imagined Cyber Communities

Online activities focused on socializing show how Korean users have maintained coherence between the on- and offline relationships in their everyday lives.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the online world has been considered the extension of the offline world, and the offline world has been regarded as the foundation of the online world. Therefore, even though users are immersed emotionally in the online communities and mobilize their fantasies, it seems as if their online activities represent and repeat their offline relationships to reality.

The Korean youths, who benefited from consumerism after democratization and from state-led informatization, but experienced the crisis of living through the financial crisis, were enthusiastic about digital network communication and accepted it as their principal way of life. Communication through online communities especially has influenced their identity formation. Among the small and big online communities and services that have appeared and disappeared since the 90s, I examine only Cyworld (social networking site) and DC Inside (online community) here as representative cases. As prototypes of the Korean Internet usage experience, they have greatly influenced current network culture and customs, within which a variety of *ing-yeo* practices as well as the emergence of *ing-yeo* subjects can be explained.<sup>62</sup> They predominated in the Korean cyber world in the 2000s. Through these online service and cyber community, youths enjoyed building social relationships in entirely new ways and invented their own

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<sup>61</sup> There may be no big difference between calling it coherence or dependency.

<sup>62</sup> The various surplus practices in networked culture, so-called "*ing-yeo-jit*," will be discussed in the next chapter.

use of language, circulating newly coined words and expressions. In other words, what youth constructed through those cyber communities was their unique cultural identity, by which we can understand the process of becoming ing-yeo. On the other hand, I will look into the expansion of participatory culture in and through those communities in terms of proliferation of ing-yeo culture.

Cyworld is a Korean social network service founded in 1999.<sup>63</sup> It had nationwide popularity to the extent that it had approximately ten million members in 2004, and 20 million in 2007. Users are allotted a “minihompy,” a personalized platform (a form of microblog), and a “miniroom,” a visualized space they can decorate with photos, icons, and music and to which they can even invite friends (See **Figure 2.3**). Through “*ilchon*,” the process of making friends, and the function of “*padotagi*” (riding on waves), users can build social relations with offline friends, family, acquaintances, and friends’ friends and expand their relationships.

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<sup>63</sup> Cyworld was often called Cy. Here, the term Cy refers to “cyber” and, at the same time, “*sai*” in Korean, which means relationship or between. At that time, the genre of the social network service was not formed yet, so it may be appropriate to understand Cyworld as an altered form of online communities.



Figure 2.3. Cyworld's Minihompy.

As Larissa Hjorth (2008), a new media researcher in the Asia-Pacific region, states, Cyworld shows a typical Internet form that is customized and localized to Korean society:

Unlike in the USA in which communities such as Myspace, Friendster, Flickr, Facebook and media content sites such as YouTube have thrived, the Korean customization of the internet has taken socializing to a new level. . . . Cyworld has managed to create a form of co-presence that speaks to particular localized forms of individualism, mobility and social capital. The significance of sharing, from buying virtual gifts for a friend's mini-room, to the reproductive labour of cultivating a sense of care cultures, is apparent. (p.96)

As seen in the aforementioned case of PC bangs, Cyworld also exemplifies the coherence between the on- and offline worlds as a characteristic of Korean Internet usage. It is an

example of “Korea’s localization and ‘domestication’ of the internet that has ensured its success in everyday urban life” by functioning as “a mirror world of the offline with the possibility of users exceeding their offline identity online and vice versa” (p. 97). Though it is important that game players sometimes choose characters wholly different from their real appearances and that users hide their identities, in Korean society there is a tendency that reality—and one’s real identity in reality—strongly prescribes the way in which online subjects communicate, create relationships (and communities), and construct identities. In the example of Cyworld, too, we can easily find that the form of online communication in Korea is bound to that of offline communication, as are most of the other online community activities. It is important to add, however, that the parallelism of the on- and offline worlds results considerably from institutional regulations, rather than simply Korean’s cultural traits; these include, for instance, the resident registration system<sup>64</sup>, the online real-name policy, and the like.

As a service that integrates personal mini-blogs and social networking sites, Cyworld places the individual at the center and builds around it a network with others. Cyworld is a platform that grants much more authority and freedom to the users than the prior online communities: the users, as the actual operators of their own personal allocated space, are responsible for managing and transforming the individualized minihompy or miniroom.<sup>65</sup> As the operator of one’s own cyberspace, the user can

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<sup>64</sup> As a national ID system, the Korean resident registration system assigns a unique 13-digit resident registration number to any citizen at the time of one’s birth registration.

<sup>65</sup> Although Cyworld showed a unique cyber space as a visually enhanced social networking site, it was not developed into a virtual world which had an independent economy and verisimilar

decorate the miniroom by placing user's avatar and furniture or raising a pet dog within it.

To the younger generation, then, it was unimaginable not to have Cyworld's minihompy: it was much more than a Facebook account is today. In their analysis of Cyworld, Kim and Yun (2008) point out that Cyworld activities, called *cy-jil* or *cying*, have two important motivations: "first, to maintain their social networks and, second, to reflect on themselves" (p. 306). The reason that the youths conduct *cy-jil* is because it satisfies their "self-relation" and "interpersonal relations." In other words, Cyworld provides users with opportunities for self-expression or checking their self-identities, and functions as a tool for expanding personal and social connections. More than anything, it seems to grant maximum freedom to the users, for it is based on visual social media platforms in which an individual can easily operate, manipulate and adjust his or her own social environment.

However, much effort is required for the user to maximize self-expression and continuously build and maintain various relationships. Although Cyworld was not as flooded as other social networks are now and did not have as many people routinely immersed in it, the excessive exhibitionism or bluffing and competitions to have as many *ilchon* as possible reached serious extents. The status of an individual can be evaluated based on relationships with *ilchon* and friends, how they communicate, and what kinds of presents they have received and given. The personal status section in the minihompy shows statistical graphs of affection, kindness, relationships, and charisma, and that

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description of space like Second World. For the anthropological exploration of virtual worlds, especially Second World, see Boellstorff (2008).

visual platform causes excessive competition among users, as if they are playing a game. *Cy-pye-in* (cy-holics),<sup>66</sup> those who spent excessive amounts of time in Cyworld by updating their own information, tending to their minihompy, and surfing around the minihompy of their *ilchon*, were not so odd among the younger generations—it was similar to the current Facebook craze.

Cyber attacks, cyber bullying, and public shaming happened incessantly, with voyeuristic stalking, malicious comments, cyber-bulling, and digital persecution through the exposure of personal identities. For instance, the *gaettongnyeo* (dog poop girl) incident in 2005 is rather well known: a video clip and photograph of a young Korean woman who failed to clean up after her pet dog in the subway train in Seoul spread quickly on the Internet. According to *The Economist* (2005) article covering the incident, “Web-users throughout the country co-operated to reveal her identity, and for weeks the woman . . . became the number one hate figure among the country’s cyber community.” This incident shows how cyber violence, depreciation, and hatred against women and minorities occur through online communities and social networking sites.<sup>67</sup> While individuals’ freedom of expression grew unprecedentedly through the formats of online communities and social networks, cyber violence, such as malicious comments and the revelation of others’ identities (defended from the perspective of freedom of expression),

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<sup>66</sup> The term “*pye-in*” spread through DC Inside, which will be dealt with below. Afterwards, it was used in various popular cultures and subcultures, and they may be considered the precedent for the *ing-yeo*.

<sup>67</sup> After this, the viral infamy and degradation of women such as *doenjang-nyeo* (bean-paste girl) and *loser-nyeo* (loser girl) occurred quite often. The culture of defaming women was widespread throughout the Internet in Korean society, even after the 2010s. This kind of culture often evolved into online verbal violence and hate speech as well as men’s persecution complex. We may need further research on this topic, yet this dissertation deals with it only in part.

grew as well. Those incidents and users' collective activities through the social networking site, Cyworld, were a harbinger of the ing-yeo activities.

From a different online community in Korea, we may be able to discover another unique aspect of Internet culture in the 2000s that led to ing-yeo culture. DC Inside, often called DC in abbreviation, is one of the largest online community sites and was established in 1999 in Korea. The site began as an electronic goods review site providing information regarding digital equipment to its members; "DC" meant digital camera. Due to the "galleries" in the form of forums that allowed users to provide information about new electronics (such as digital cameras, camcorders, and laptops), upload photos on the sites, and communicate with other users, it was able to attract an enormous number of users in the early 2000s. Galleries are sub-communities categorized by various topics, from politics, society, academics, and the military to a celebrity, an online game, a TV show, and so on. The number of galleries increased steadily, and there are currently approximately 1,500 galleries. Since a gallery can have any sort of topic imaginable, galleries are still being created, and sometimes they just disappear. In that sense, the characteristics of DC are quite similar to 4chan.org in the U.S. or 2ch.net in Japan, which are anonymous thread bulletin boards. According to the corporation's introduction to the service, the number of daily unique visitors in 2015 is approximately 1.7 million so far, and the number of daily page views is 55 million, which is the largest number of visitors among the domestic Internet communities.

In the early 2000s, when DC Inside was popular and grew rapidly, text-based Internet services were converted into the image-based Web. As the use of digital images

in online communication grew, people's ability to manipulate digital images also increased. It is possible to see how a digital camera forum grew to be the largest online community site if we check the growth of the digital camera market in Korea: the sales of digital camera grew from 0.3 million in 2002 to 2.92 million in 2005—almost doubling every year (M. Song, 2005, p. 104).

The galleries of DC Inside were in the form of the bulletin boards and forums of the early Internet period, but just as physical art galleries generally exhibit images, users had to upload images suited to the topic of the gallery or the posts. The operators deleted posts without images. However, it later became necessary to post and upload photos or images with no direct relation to the content of the posts, especially by copying or altering funny images without permission.<sup>68</sup> This convention was referred to as “*jjalimbangji*,” or “*jjalbang*”<sup>69</sup> in short, and most Internet users accepted as natural using and altering existing images without permission or creating new images when uploading posts to the online community. *Jjalimbangji* is significant at the symbolic level, not a literal level: In order to make postings receive more attention, the attached image became more important than the content of the text. For the young users of the galleries, various high-quality—but useless and meaningless—*ing-yeo-jit* were regarded as more important than the messages being delivered.

Because the user's level (rank) was given and advanced according to the number of postings as well as the view count and recommendations by other members, users

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<sup>68</sup> Copying images and texts from elsewhere is called “*peomjil*” (scooping).

<sup>69</sup> *Jjalimbangji* literally means the prevention of being cut off. Soon it began to designate an image or photo that would prevent the post from being cut off within DC Inside. Later, *jjalbang* began to refer to digital images in general.

often uploaded stimulating texts, titles, or *jjalbang* to attract other users and increase the count of views, clicks, and recommendations. Even general, amateur users could manipulate images and handle software like Photoshop. Though explicit and violent images were often used, the general trend was funny images; among the *jjalbangs* that were popular then, the most famous was “*gaejugi*,” an image of a white smiling puppy holding onto a bamboo tree (See **Figure 2.4**). This image was, like LOLCat in 4chan, parodied and shared in many other sites and online communities.



*Figure 2.4.* Gaejugi, the Mascot of DC Inside, and Its Parody Image.

Also, as *jjalbang*, political parodies were common in DC Inside. Whenever there was a political or social issue, DC users had fun parodying movie posters to ridicule the

issue or problematic figures. It therefore seems as though political critiques were replaced by political parodies using images. Perhaps that was a more efficient way to disseminate political issues. Serious critiques no longer created meaningful sensations, since they were recognized as the exclusive legacy of the social activists of the past—they were something outdated. To the public online, enjoyment and hedonism with parody and manipulation of images were more vital than knowledge and enlightenment. Such vulgar parodies and Internet memes formed the basis of what we call *ing-yeo-jit* now.

Youth were able to skillfully operate digital tools such as computers, digital cameras, scanners, and software, spending more and more time on online communities while playing, creating things, and communicating with others. By creating a vulgar, lowly, cheap, and childish culture, they were trapped within that cultural space to the extent that they became *pye-in* and *ing-yeo*. The delicate, elegant, high-level, and expensive things of mainstream culture were derided and belittled as boring and hypocritical—in a word, they were not “cool.” To compare DC Inside with Cyworld in terms of the users’ propensities, Cyworld was an outlet of hypocrisy while DC Inside was one of dysphemism. According to Yu-Sik Kim, the CEO of DC Inside:

DC [Inside] is a place where you can honestly put forth your opinions without having to exercise hypocrisy. Many people say DC is the breeding ground for evil internet [*sic*] users, but on the contrary, it is a space where one can feel the warmth of humanity. I think that every place people live in is virtually the same. DC users’ inclination is just the same as ordinary internet users; the only

difference is that while such [a] tendency is hidden in other websites, it is pretty much exposed in DC. (S. Kang, 2008)

DC Inside's environment, which guaranteed users' expressions without hypocrisy, contributed to its development into a community of political satire. DC Inside, as an online community in which users freely express their opinions on various topics, was a medium in which unfiltered expressions such as political opinions, insults, sexual jokes, and emotional excretion were communicated immediately. Within the enormous community, which was an aggregation of various hobbies and groups, it looked as though the users (participants) had actualized a cultural space, a space of free expression and communication. Even though the methods of expression, processes of communication, and contents were not clean and ordered, at least such managing policies and users' attitudes were accepted by the youths as something cool.

However, it was always problematic that the community of DC Inside invested more in emotional excretion than the distribution and transmission of information and the submission and deliberation of opinions. Explicit content, emotional expression of opinions, public shame, derision, and insult were this community's middle names. Emotional expressions and political critiques were often indistinguishable. Nonetheless, the most extreme social and political criticisms were submitted through this outlet. Any hot issue in the infamous galleries spread quickly and widely enough for even the general public to know what was critiqued, parodied, and derided overnight via other communities, whether online or offline, and the press. The jargons and coined words created and distributed in specific galleries of DC Inside often spread to the other

galleries and online communities, and to overall society shortly thereafter. Quarrels among the users caused an even wider buzz, spreading the issue further. Funny and geeky images, manipulated pictures, and even meaningless words like “*ahaethaet*”<sup>70</sup> dominated the domestic Internet culture, and “*haoche*,”<sup>71</sup> a conversation style no longer used in contemporary conversations, started to become popular. DC Inside was a fun playground to reconstitute and reinvent the visual and linguistic codes of culture in online Korean society in the 2000s.

This allowed DC Inside to attract far more visitors in addition to its numerous numbers of fixed users. The production and distribution of buzz pushed more users and visitors to the community already full of users. People were able to face all kinds of information at high and low levels from the anonymous amateurs, or the so-called “collective intelligence,” babbling incessantly about popular topics and cool jokes. To compare Cyworld with DC Inside once more, while Cyworld was a platform based on friendship and socialization, the users of DC Inside actively rejected friendly activities, suggesting the adverse effect of friendship on the continuation and expansion of the community. The users of DC Inside believed that socializing activities, including the disclosure of personal offline information or confirming friendships or fraternalism by meeting offline, would distract them from online community activities and turn their attention to real-world relations and affairs. This would lead to the withdrawal of members and thus have a negative effect on the continuation of the community.

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<sup>70</sup> It is similar to the sound of laughter but is the combination of consonants and vowels not used in actual life. The pronunciation of this word is not even certain.

<sup>71</sup> An honorific way of conversation that was used among the Confucius scholars or the noblesse in the old Joseon dynasty.

However, the spontaneous strategy of prohibiting socialization among members led in actuality to discrimination (especially the violent discrimination and banishment of female members), the prevalence of non-friendly relationships, and rigid exclusiveness rather than the expected flexibility of the space. Regarding the logic of rejecting all types of friendly relationships while wishing for the continuation and reproduction of the community, G. Lee (2012) understands that “at this very point, the people’s styles of ‘giving’ and ‘war’ connect [with] each other” (p. 213), as he wrote in the sole academic book on DC Inside. The users of DC Inside are not communicating but conducting both giving and war; the online warfare and cyber-attacks are not limited to inner quarrels but extended to a war of community vs. community and even nation vs. nation.<sup>72</sup> The methods of the war, conducted by the massive number of visitors to the website, are varied, from the overload of traffic that causes the server to crash to massive numbers of aggressive postings and replies (usually with disgusting texts and images) to network hacking such as DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks. Here, the war is “related to the will to preserve one’s own territory” (G. Lee, p. 119), the place where one’s own identity forms. Practically, the wars are caused by the differences between the galleries, communities, and nations. Differences in politics, style, perspective, expression, and

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<sup>72</sup> Small- and large-scale quarrels and battles have always existed among the galleries in DC Inside, and war often broke out between DC Inside and other large communities concerning hegemony and specific issues. However, the greatest warfare occurred when nationalistic emotions came into play. In a rage provoked by chauvinist and nationalist issues from Japanese online communities such as 2chan (and anti-Korean groups like *Zaitokukai*, etc.), large Korean communities including DC Inside conducted joint cyber-attacks on Japanese websites and communities on their Independence Day. Of course, it was also common for Japanese online communities to attack Korean communities expressing anti-Japanese sentiments. The right-wing and exclusive tendencies of the network will be dealt with in the last chapter.

tendency make users recognize their opponents as enemies, and users establish their identities by attacking exterior opponents based on these differences.

From an everyday perspective, however, the general methods for sustaining the community can be found in the giving rather than the war. Community is above all a space of production and creation. Nerdy curses and macho bravado, *otaku*-ish analysis, and untiring ing-yeo-style texts, cartoons, or composite images (whether sloppy and shoddy in quality or not) are continuously given to the community as sort of gifts. The gifts offered can be popular or notorious. Either way, popularity and notoriety increases the awareness of the producers. Enthusiastic followers give tributes back to the (in)famous gift givers in the form of parodies or re-creations of the gift in even higher quality than the original. In this way, the leader and the followers are classified and the reciprocal politics of gifts is created. When powerful content, such as a bold argument or fun image produced by ing-yeo-jit, is distributed and shared through networks as gifts, they have the effect of increasing the influx of new people, which enables the re-creation of the community. Furthermore, in order to raise awareness of their own galleries and community, the users of DC Inside invade and conquer other communities by giving them (i.e., posting) hateful and loathsome texts, images, and videos. Giving and war develop into a relationship of mutual cause and then become indiscernible.

The politics of the online community operates in accordance with its internal logic (war and giving), but it is also interlocked with the real politics of the offline world. Throughout the political terrain of Korean society during the early and mid-2000s, both on- and offline politics grew due to the participatory culture of the people, whether

citizens or netizens. Now, we may ask the following questions as to the meaning of the activities of online communities in real politics: Can we acknowledge the users (members) of the online communities as the subjects of politics? Can we understand online communities as new fields of politics? Can we regard communication within online communities as the possibility of an alternative form of political action? The netizens' various online activities, whether in games, social networks, or forums, that were established and solidified during the development of online communities in Korea have produced extensive political "effects," just like activities in offline reality. The netizens exceeded the limits of the citizens simply within the net and acquired citizenship in real politics.

Based on her observation of the *pye-in* of DC Inside, Hui-Kyong Pang (2005) argues that a whole new field of politics has been opened due to the online community. The users of DC Inside, especially the ing-yeo subjects called *pye-in*, have developed new entertainment cultures possible only in the online community and have transformed their cultural play into political activities in offline reality. Although the residents of the online community ordinarily seek their own pleasure by creating and generating new images and languages for parody and sarcasm, it should be emphasized that in times of need they actively intervened and participated in a series of social agendas and incidents. Pang asserts that "the possibility of political practices or actions may be found not only in the mature discussions in accordance with the rational and logical order, but also in the deconstructive and desultory movement of desires" (p. 71).

The mass participation and intervention in real politics through various online

media services, including DC Inside and other big communities such as “Agora” from Daum Communications, were regarded as natural. On the one hand, politics in the network and online subjects emerged as the only alternative at a time when the progressive social movement of the 80s and the 90s was dilapidated, even though the characteristics of the networked subjects were not enlightened and rational from the real political perspective. On the other hand, however, the nature of the netizens vigorously pursuing their own pleasure and explicitly expressing their desires may be the main factor in reinventing the new meaning of politics, although further examination is needed as to whether the emerging politics would contribute to the advancement of overall society based on rational discussion and deliberation.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) notes that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (p. 6). Even online communities, though they are not customary communities on the ground, require an imagined identity among their members. At the dawn of the modern era, communication technology such as printing was required for the formation of a nation-state from the imaginary community at the level of the nation. Now, the virtual community online enables the imaginary connection between members and their community. Therefore, perhaps there is no reason for us to call these online communities “virtual.” All online communities require the unified imagination, i.e., identification, of the members with their communities, in that all communities are imagined. Nonetheless, what the members imagine (identify) about their online communities does not always

reach consensus—rather, it seems that their imagined communities online are based on a kind of discordance.

To the younger generations who experienced the consumer culture, democratization, and economic crisis of the 90s, all the digital devices and the network they lived in were part of complex techno-cultural constructions established under a special temporal (historical) circumstance. In terms of this techno-cultural construction, we have looked into PC bangs, StarCraft, the personalized social network Cyworld, and the anti-enlightening avant-garde community of DC Inside. Those technologies from the same historical background are the heterogeneous “impure technologies” (Lee et al., 2014): They have been established by the subjects with heterogeneous yet common characteristics, and at the same time they contributed to shaping the heterogeneous people online into subjects. In that sense, the technologies examined here should be understood as the “tools of subjectification” as well as the “technologies of the youth,” as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter. The new technologies enjoyed by the younger generations in Korea after the mid-nineties are something given or allowed within the huge regime of world capitalism and state power. In other words, these technologies are the “technologies of the self” for the active subjects who take care of themselves by using, transforming, and recreating them. At the same time, however, they are the “technologies of governance” that locate and take care of the subjects (the users) within current power relations.

This chapter examined how Korean society led the field of digital information technologies and communication networks through massive state-led politico-economic

projects and enterprises under complicated social relations, and how the younger generations began to form their own ing-yeo subjectivities and performances through archetypal ing-yeo activities in the process of accepting these new technologies as their own. The complex interaction of politics, economy, technology, and culture was a historical process from which ing-yeo-jit has been established. The ing-yeo subjects are immersed in the technologies of the youth they accepted, on the one hand, and they have tried to overcome the reality in which they live by constructing their own imagined online communities, on the other. The next chapter will examine how the ing-yeo subjects have developed what we may call “ing-yeo culture,” in which their helplessness is internalized and their enjoyments and desires are fulfilled at the same time. Beginning with the ing-yeo’s self-recognition, we will focus on the opposing perspectives on ing-yeo culture and their diverse cultural activities. By observing what the ing-yeo are and how they live, we might find the ing-yeo’s precarious reality through a sort of deprivation of their identity and value.

### CHAPTER 3. ING-YEO CULTURE

We have tracked the political-economic and technological background through which ing-yeo was created in Korean society from the late 1990s. Throughout this process, we verified that the ing-yeo did not simply happen to be thrown into the world but they rather have been created and established as a product of complex interactions of various elements and actors through complicated paths. In order to understand the ing-yeo as we know them today, we focused on how Korean society introduced and developed a neoliberal governance system and new media technologies through the 1997 financial crisis and how the younger generation accepted these technological frameworks to cope with their ing-yeo situation.

In this chapter, I examine how ing-yeo have formed their own culture and enjoyed it. For this, first we will look into ing-yeo's "regime of mind" (H-J. Kim, 2009) or "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1978) through readings of a variety of texts on ing-yeo and by ing-yeo as well as through the analysis of my interview with ing-yeo subjects, which will show how ing-yeo subjects understand themselves. Then, by analyzing what is understood as ing-yeo by ing-yeo themselves, I explore the cultural and economic meaning of ing-yeo in Korean society. Naturally, this will reveal two perspectives—economic and cultural ing-yeo—from which society looks at ing-yeo. Then we will categorize and classify ing-yeo's acts and activities, investigating what they do in their

everyday lives. Analyses of ing-yeo's activities, behaviors, and peculiar performances can identify ing-yeo in the most concrete way. Finally, I go back to the ing-yeo's inner world, inquiring into their emotions and feelings in their precarious reality. We will see how their inner world has been plasticized and transformed according to hot socio-cultural changes and the cold politico-economic order. In this way, we might understand both the external and internal characteristics of ing-yeo culture.

### **3.1. Self-recognition of the Subject as Ing-yeo**

When we think about ing-yeo culture, it is not limited just to a culture of ing-yeo subjects or to a culture of speaking about ing-yeo. As we have seen in the first chapter, the ing-yeo subject—even the ing-yeo human being—represents the (non-)subject who cannot be fully subjectified based on the governing principles of society. Furthermore, it symbolizes the possibility of life in which youth without an alternative are thrown into the age when flexible labor and the self-improving way of life are generalized. The variety of socio-economic indices based on the analysis of statistical data, such as the aging population, falling birthrate, level of happiness, etc., predict that the future of youth is uncertain and even gloomy. Even without any analysis of data, the reality they face in everyday life makes the youth doubt the future and even hopes for the future—the minimum wage of under five dollars an hour cannot buy a cup of cappuccino.

However, the problem is that no matter how serious the analysis of their social reality, the younger generation cannot but give a response like, “So, what do you want me to do?”—nobody has an answer to this. The youth understand their situation all too well.

Despite their understanding of this reality and their self-recognition as ing-yeo within it, they may be asking seriously “what to do,” not as cynicism, but as a desperate question.

The youth, who emerged as consuming subjects in the 1990s, changed into the subject without desire or the subject who cannot desire after the late 2000s. It is hard for ing-yeo subjects who have not yet entered into the economic realm of production to make their own lives independently. While the number of those who do not have consumption competency has increased, the gap in cultural tastes among them has receded due to the dissemination and generalization of new media technologies. Although the features of bipolarization of class—whether intra-generational or inter-generational—are becoming more and more evident, the wave of mass and popular culture reaches everywhere even more equally and homogenously. The misery of economic desire was compensated by the satisfaction of cultural desire. While economically disadvantaged young people desire only stable employment, even to the point of giving up love, marriage, and childbearing, what is given to them is just meager pay from non-regular two-year contract jobs that are disposable at any time. For youth who can be identified as ing-yeo economically, saving is impossible—most are already in debt from student loans; even though they are employed, their savings and finances are not even enough to purchase a house for family.

There seems no alternative at this stage. The only survival strategy is to spend on nothing. To spend on nothing, which is different from cutting down on expenses, is possible, because there is no extra money to spend. Thus, ing-yeo subjects now make and enjoy the most inexpensive culture, or the culture of minimal spending, as best they can. However, this does not mean that they tend to become incompetent but content idlers, or

slackers. Because a group's cultural enjoyment is based on the economic and technological limits available, mobilizable, and affordable to them, ing-yeo's culture cannot but depend on their no-alternative and no-spending ways of life.

Ing-yeo subjectivity has entered into the official and public sphere with the discourses of generation—more precisely, under the pretense of the generation theory. It was not until the discussion of the 88 Man-won Generation, embedded with worry and advice for the young generation, that the discourses of the ing-yeo phenomenon began to be produced by those who intended to intervene in theories of reality and theoretical reality.

Generation theory has been reinvigorated around the ing-yeo subject since the late 2000s. Scholarly interest in ing-yeo in Korea is basically an extension of generation theories and youth studies. However, ing-yeo discourses have recently been extended to include autobiographical works by ing-yeo based on their experiences. For the most part, these texts include all the analyses and critiques of the disappointing problems of the social structure on the one hand, and personal experience of ing-yeo and complaints about doom and gloom on the other. In a word, ing-yeo discourses reflect the way in which the 88 Man-won Generation understands the social structure and recognizes itself in this society, i.e., their regime of mind.

Although the discussion of ing-yeo subjectivity began to appear in the form of generation theory, ing-yeo is quite different from generation. In other words, we need to differentiate ing-yeo discourses and generation theory to a certain degree. While a generation is based on the same biological background and common historical

experience, ing-yeo is generated from the singular—though later universalized—self-recognition of the youth that arises across generational features. The naming of ing-yeo, i.e., surplus, implies its imaginary universality beyond the limitation of class, yet maintains features of class. So, ing-yeo is not just limited to the problems of a certain generation; it includes the problems of structure that transcend all generations. For example, today we can find the most distinctive characteristics of ing-yeo among the 88 Man-won Generation, but someday they might not be the surplus generation any longer, as the 88 Man-won Generation ages.<sup>73</sup> Then, their children could be more ing-yeo-like than any other generation. However, a generation in their youth is not always ing-yeo. Is ing-yeo not the only possible way of self-identification in the age when a (younger) generation stops functioning as an alternative generation, or when the discussion of generation itself is meaningless?

The discursive engagement in which ing-yeo is expressed through the prism of generation theories would be what I call the ing-yeo discourses or discourses of ing-yeo. These ing-yeo discourses will show fundamental differences from previous generation theories that included all types of generations. While generation theories were generally something “conceived” from outside or above by the established generations and then “applied” to the younger generation, ing-yeo discourses are what the ing-yeo themselves “invented” from inside and then spread over the whole society. Of course, we need to consider the other discourses of healing, mentor, and consolation, as we dealt with in the

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<sup>73</sup> In fact, it is hard to argue that we can find most of ing-yeo among this generation, because, as pointed out earlier, there are more actual—and economic—surplus population among the elder generations than others.

first chapter—but the formation of these discourses, as a combination of management (human capital) and knowledge (the art of living), slightly overlapped with generation theories and ing-yeo discourses. Perhaps all the discourses on generation, self-improvement (healing), and ing-yeo have something in common and evolve in different directions, influencing one another.

Cultural and sociological studies on ing-yeo have accumulated since the late 2000s, and scholarly attention to this issue has been much broader than public interest. Beginning with the book *The Public Humanities from the Perspective of Ing-yeo* (Baik, et al., 2010), subtitled “Survival Guide for the Youth in the Age of Global Crisis,” many books dealing with the topic of ing-yeo have been published, including *Why Isn’t It the Youth* (Eom, 2010); *Mediology of Friendship* (Lim, 2012), subtitled “Media Movement Planned from Ing-yeo Power and Low-Tech”; and *We are DC* (Lee, 2012), subtitled “DC, Ing-yeo, and Anthropology of Cyberspace.” In addition to these, we can add a few other books written by young authors themselves: *There is No Country for the Youth: Young Commentator Han Yoon-Hyung’s Investigating Life of Ing-yeo* (Y. Han, 2013) and *Ing-yeo Society: Sociology for the Redundant Lives* (Choi, 2013). Recently, *Snob and Ing-yeo* (Paik, 2013), a compilation of ten articles on the ing-yeo phenomenon, integrated studies on the topic in Korea until then. Starting from a single problem of ing-yeo, this dissertation would extend its scope to provide a comprehensive point of view from which material and cultural characteristics of Korean society can be understood in the age of neoliberal capitalism where new media technologies are highly developed.

Ing-yeo discourses have also been a hot topic in the general essays and autobiographical writings by the youth. Furthermore, there has been lots of attention to the ing-yeo phenomenon from the minor press and independent journalists: the independent (bi-)monthly magazine, *Wolgan Ing-yeo*, which declares it is “of ing-yeo, by ing-yeo, and for ing-yeo”<sup>74</sup>; the local FM radio program in Mapo, Seoul area, *Ing-yeo-nikka Cheongchun-ida* (Youth Because It Is Ing-yeo)<sup>75</sup>; and other podcasts like *Ing-yeo Ssarong* (Ing-yeo Salon) and *Naneun Ing-yeo-da* (I am an Ing-yeo). Mainstream journalism could not attempt this kind of work, which is the opportunity for ing-yeo subjects to raise their own voices through the media and to share a feeling of common consciousness or solidarity with many other ing-yeo companions. Though they were not so successful in popular culture, there is a pop song, *Ing-yeo Ingan* (Ing-yeo Human), by an indie musician; a TV show (a so-called drama in Korea), *Ing-yeo Gongju* (Ing-yeo Princess); and even a smartphone application, called *Naneun Ing-yeo-da* (I am an Ing-yeo). As mentioned in the introduction, films about ing-yeo are steadily being produced—although they are not hugely popular, they have contributed to the improvement of public awareness of ing-yeo. At a glance, it seems that society has enormous interest in ing-yeo subjects and this phenomenon. However, as if they were

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<sup>74</sup> The editor of the magazine is self-proclaimed ing-yeo, who failed several times to get a job in journalism, and so finally decided to make an independent magazine for ing-yeo youth like her. The magazine is only funded by ing-yeo friends’ subscriptions and maintained by their voluntary contribution to it.

<sup>75</sup> The title of this program is a fun parody of Kim Nan-Do (2010)’s (in-)famous bestseller, *Apeunikka Cheongchun-ida* (*Youth Because It Hurts*). This radio program was also serviced in podcast format.

storms in a teacup, these discourses and voices have not been strong enough to shake the world.

It seems as if there are two separate dimensions that produce, share, and distribute ing-yeo discourses, and the two rarely meet. On the one hand, there is a subjective dimension of folklore in which ing-yeo subjects themselves create their content; on the other hand, there is an objective dimension of analysis in which ing-yeo is observed and criticized. There does not seem to be any direct exchange between them. The ing-yeo discourses by ing-yeo themselves are produced, shared, and distributed on- and off-line, primarily in their everyday lives—their routine dialogues and jokes with their friends are the main source of ing-yeo discourses. Words about how and why they have become ing-yeo, what makes them endure their ing-yeo lives, and so on have spread across a myriad of online communities, forums, and bulletin boards since the late 2000s. Some stories were introduced into the mainstream media out of curiosity. Later, those ing-yeo discourses were absorbed into popular culture and mass media—in general, they were treated as an interesting new cultural trends. However, the media tend to describe and criticize social problems related to ing-yeo, such as youth unemployment and other generational issues.

While the discourses of ing-yeo were produced abundantly by ing-yeo themselves and by the media, the state and capital have never been interested in the ing-yeo phenomenon. From the perspectives of power and capital, ing-yeo culture is generally considered a sort of subcultural topic, and thus it falls outside their interests. For them, ing-yeo subjects do not have enough competency to influence the consumer market, and

do not show any possibility of doing so. In addition, ing-yeo's self-mocking atmosphere or so-called *byeongmat* emotions<sup>76</sup> is recognized as low-grade and subversive, a joke by the youth. Ing-yeo discourses are generated from the subculture and then spread through popular culture. However, even though they rise from the bottom up, it is hard to say that they reflect and represent the identities of subcultural subjects. Ing-yeo subjects are too diversified to be called subcultural subjects. It would be easier to find differences than something in common among them. Because the various groups of subjectivity, such as college students, subcultural audiences, the lower class, non-regular employees, NEET, and so on constitute the whole ing-yeo discourses, there is no one united and homogeneous figure of and discourse on the ing-yeo subject. In this sense, ing-yeo is formed within heterogeneous and horizontal relations, with generational identity partly covering and disguising class location and difference.

However, we must note again that, even though state power and capital do not directly create ing-yeo discourses, they are not irrelevant to the subject formation of ing-yeo. The subcultural subjectivity of ing-yeo, including *pye-in*, loser, and *otaku*, is the creation of themselves, inasmuch as it is defined by the material base on which society is built and ideologically interpellated by state power and capital. In that the subject is produced by subjectification, the process of subjection or subjugation (*assujettissement* in French) how could any subject or subjectivity not be the effect of power/capital? No matter what elements the subjectivity of *pye-in* or *otaku* consists of, they cannot be the products of the current power relations and politico-economic system. The state or the

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<sup>76</sup> *Byeongmat* describes a feeling when something is out of sense and absurd. We will deal in detail with the term and this sense of absurdity later in this chapter.

regime of political economy is deeply related to subject formation—the constitution of the regime of mind. Within the government’s policies on science and technology, political economy, education, and culture, as well as capital’s requests and desires reflected in those policies, ing-yeo subjectivity has been constructed. Ing-yeo subjects have plunged into the established structure of competition while internalizing the process of subjection or subjugation, and sometimes they believe they are outside the established structure when they are actually just struggling and resisting against it from the inside. Many ing-yeo discourses bemoan how much the ing-yeo youth are forced into the structure of competition and must voluntarily participate in the process of subjectification. They also ask why the ing-yeo cannot avoid those forces and how to escape from them. In this sense, ing-yeo discourses are embracing both the recognition of the precarious world that surges toward them and the self-recognition in such circumstances.

After the astonishing popular success of the book *88 Man-won Generation*, Woo (2009) wrote a sequel book, *Hyeokmyung-eun Ireoke Joyonghi* (Revolution is Silently This Way), once again for those in their twenties, “the weakest link in our age” and “children of neoliberalism.” Subtitled “88 Man-won generation’s setting of a new ground,” this book is based on his experience with the students in his class in college. He argues that the 88 Man-won Generation or those in their twenties “will be degraded into the social misfits who missed socialization process through labor” (p. 25) if they do not bail out the status quo by the self-empowerment movement and keep silent about the exploitation of their youth. Thus, he encourages the 88 Man-won Generation to step

forward and expects them to stand against the rotten society. However, as we can see in the writings of the 88 Man-won Generation themselves in an addendum to Woo's book, despite their hope, the world they see is ultimately the factory in which ing-yeo human beings are mass-produced, and they are those who delude themselves into thinking that they will not be ing-yeo—although they are already so. According to a student:

For those in their twenties who pretend to be unconcerned with 10 percent increase of tuition in a year but equip themselves with membership card to get 10 percent discount for a triangular *gimbap* [seaweed covered rice snack] at the convenience store, how many grapes will be allowed in society? If they look for restaurant information and coupon book service for only 5 to 10 percent discount and they have no interest in sanitation and food quality of the school cafeteria, how much can they enjoy benefits? If they try to keep consuming the products someone else already packed, they will not get out of ing-yeo status, neither so useful nor so useless—I mean the ing-yeo human beings, for whom the society does not feel responsible to pay and from whom the society can easily wheedle money. (pp. 240-1)

As such, the ing-yeo youths cling to all the small and private benefits, while they miss and ignore big and public exploitation. The reason that they remain in ing-yeo status is because they feel satisfied with easy, ready-made consumption and seek small and immediate gains. They know it very well. That is why the cynicism of calling themselves ing-yeo began to emerge. Although they aware of all the social absurdity and irrationality, action does not occur from their recognition. They spend much more time

on education, but they are just denounced as “the dumbest generation” (Bauerlein, 2008) and analyzed as “downstream-oriented” (Uchida, 2013).

Passion is the most common part of the advice—or perhaps the orders or commands—mentors and healers give to the youth. Youth have to show and prove that they can make up or overcome their incompetence with their passion for what they aim at. “Real *chungchun* [youth]” are fighting in the battle of “spec” competition in order to achieve their dreams. As a would-be actor, a would-be mixed martial arts star, a non-regular employee in the private education sector, a part-time baker dreaming of being a TV script writer, and so on, each of them makes great efforts with passion to find his or her value within the given reality (Youth Community Union, 2011). While passion must be what the subjects actively invest in to make their dreams come true and to achieve self-fulfillment, now passion became something required by others as a necessary condition for a new challenge, like “spec.” Corporations ask job seekers how much passion they have for the job, and the preachers of self-improvement urge people to triumph over adversity with passion: In such a society, “passion becomes labor” (Han, Choi, & Kim, 2011). In a society in which even passion is required, improved, and exploited as labor, it does not seem hard for the youth to describe and imagine themselves as *ing-yeo*, surplus humans.

Regarding this issue, we can assume a narrative as follows: *Ing-yeo* is a sort of “image of the subject imagined.” Is it not an imaginary subject that is conjured up by what has been oppressed in the past and at the same time reflects the fear for the future, in the age when possible material prosperity and promoted consumption have de facto

ended? The younger generation now simulates—or imagines in advance—its future with the image of “ing-yeo,” a status of human being that nobody wants to be. Anyone can refuse to work voluntarily, but none of them intends to be a wasted life—a life like waste materials. How hard all of them tried and are trying to avoid ing-yeo status! The great enthusiasm for education and college entrance rate might prove it. Ing-yeo is what they do not want to become. As we can see in the ing-yeo discourses, however, all of them know how easy it is to degenerate into what they hate to become. It seems that they cannot but simulate in advance their future insecurity, in the face of difficult employment opportunities with college diplomas, low labor costs, worn-out emotions, etc. One reason for this simulation would be an inoculation for the future: Because it is obvious they will be surplus in the future, they mitigate the shock in advance by playing the role of ing-yeo in the present—what the youth call costume play.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.2. Economic and Cultural Ing-yeo**

Most of the discourses on ing-yeo in Korea are about what kind of subject the ing-yeo really are and in what kind of situation they are placed. Generally, there is a tendency to approach ing-yeo from the perspective of “subject” or “generation.” In other words, the primary social concern over ing-yeo consists of the question, “Who are they?” which reflects in part the socio-economic worry about them as victims of economic stagnation and instability in the labor market. However, aside from the designation of ing-yeo in terms of their socio-structural status, we can look at ing-yeo as a way of life or an attitude

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<sup>77</sup> Costume play, usually called “cosplay,” is for avid fans to wear costumes and play roles of characters in subculture such as animation, movies, video games, and comics.

toward life. Rather than defining the ing-yeo as a subject, this considers ing-yeo as a way of living unique to ing-yeo. Someone who lives like ing-yeo, doing—or performing—the activities of ing-yeo, is the very ing-yeo. In this sense, ing-yeo is an ing-yeo subject only in relation to a set of ing-yeo practices.

In the contemporary cultural context in Korea, ing-yeo refers to a useless subjectivity excluded from society or that society has deserted, on the one hand, and to a way of life or specific acts—usually because their acts are also considered useless to society—on the other. So some might say, “I am ing-yeo, because I am now jobless and spending my parent’s money doing nothing,” and others might say, “I did *ing-yeo-jit* [the act of ing-yeo] last night doing something insignificant [in others’ eyes] but enjoying it any way.” To integrate these two aspects of ing-yeo in a sentence: Ing-yeo is the status of being a subject that “feels” useless. Ing-yeo can be understood as a subject who is trying to keep doing what she or he likes to do (or sometimes doing nothing) even in a very precarious situation in which no stable income or secure job is ensured.

Whenever I read the writings about ing-yeo and exchange my opinion with others who are self-proclaimed ing-yeo, I feel confused in many ways. It is because they are talking about ing-yeo in their own ways, from different perspectives, and with distinctive definitions. In fact, when the media and the public say “ing-yeo,” they mix the two aspects of ing-yeo we saw above. Sometimes it is uncertain which ing-yeo they mean. Even when they focus on the ing-yeo subject, it does not seem that they are talking about the same subject.

Thus, in order to understand ing-yeo in depth, we need to classify ing-yeo subjects in two types. On the one hand, ing-yeo is an “economic ing-yeo.” In this case, ing-yeo’s marginal situation in the economy is emphasized, and it is used to describe the younger generations, like the 88 Man-won Generation, who are alienated from decent employment—in a state of *alba*<sup>78</sup>, part-timer, working poor, non-regular employee, the unemployed, or eternal job applicant. This economic ing-yeo is defined involuntarily, regardless of one’s own will. Put simply, being an economic ing-yeo is not related to subjective will, because most people want stable employment, which is quite limited (scarcity), and whether being economic ing-yeo or not is almost already determined by the parents’ financial power (inherited wealth).

On the other hand, if we emphasize ing-yeo’s way of life or lifestyle, one is a “cultural ing-yeo.” Under this category, we can list all kinds of *otaku* of anime, comics, digital games, and other pop cultural products, which are mainly influenced by Japanese subculture, as well as the enthusiastic participants in many huge online communities, forums, cafes, and ordinary Internet users accustomed to everyday information surfing and hunting. As *ing-yeo-jit*, we might enumerate all the activities conducted through so-called Web 2.0 platforms: posting, replying, reviewing, blogging, lurking, social networking, podcasting, and so on. Cultural ing-yeo is different from the economic one, in that it is based on voluntary participation.

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<sup>78</sup> *Alba* is derived from the German *Arbeiter* (worker), but in Korea it especially means part-time or temporary workers, whose pay only partially contributes to their living expenses. *Alba* jobs are mostly assigned to the younger generations, high school and college students in particular. Because it is not a regular employment form, *alba* earn below the minimum wage set by the law in many cases.

Dong-Ki Kang (2012), who was the producer of the local radio program *Ing-yeo-nikka Cheongchun-ida* (Youth Because It Is Ing-yeo), classifies ing-yeo in a similar way. He argues that ing-yeo subjects can be divided into two types, depending on “economic stability” and “subjective choice”:

If economically secure living is possible supported by parents, one can spend ing-yeo [surplus] time ing-yeo-ly [leisurely]. It is the very ing-yeo ing-yeo-able. It is the case that one can achieve what they want in reality to some degree with enough free time that does not require economic activity. On the other hand, economically insecure ing-yeo is not ing-yeo-ful though one is ing-yeo. In a position of maintaining studying and *alba* for survival at the same time, ing-yeo as a being never have ing-yeo-ful everyday life. . . . In this case, the rate of acknowledging oneself as ing-yeo is not that high. (Kang, 2012)

Economically stable youth are ing-yeo in the sense that they can spend their extra ing-yeo time leisurely. Otherwise, despite being ing-yeo, they could not have enough ing-yeo time in order to make a living. If this is the case, economically stable ing-yeo subjects have greater possibilities to do more culturally ing-yeo acts, because they have more ing-yeo time that does not have to be invested in the maintenance of livelihood. This ing-yeo time may be wasted away, but it will surely provide flexibility and the possibility to be ahead of their competitors. In fact, the ing-yeo subjects who struggle with financial difficulties cannot call themselves ing-yeo—who can define them as ing-yeo ingan?

If we categorize ing-yeo according to its spontaneity, there are the ing-yeo who want to maintain ing-yeo-jit and the ing-yeo who dream of ‘tal-ing-yeo’ [escape from ing-yeo]. The former can be found among those who aim to live a life out of capitalist economic activities—they also can be found in so-called ‘munhwa-pan’ [field of culture]. At the risk of financial insecurity, they became ing-yeo by their own decision, giving up ‘normal life.’ . . . The latter became ing-yeo regardless of their intention, because they failed to be employed in the age of job instability. They always dream of tal-ing-yeo. Even though they are scorning themselves as ing-yeo, they want to escape from ing-yeo. (ibid.)

We might doubt why one would want to be ing-yeo voluntarily, but many young people working in the creative industries choose to be a voluntary ing-yeo without being regularly employed—their labor form is called *yeoljeong nodong* (passion labor), because their passion is the only driving force for their labor. These voluntary ing-yeo subjects are those who can—and sometimes must—give up their livelihood for what they like to do and who want to match their livelihood and job. They are creative professionals, such as indie musicians, web designers, or screenwriters, but most of them cannot earn enough to make a living. On the other hand, those who maintain ing-yeo status involuntarily try to get out of their current situation as soon as possible. They desperately try to find stable employment because ing-yeo status is not what they want.

To prevent confusion, classifying ing-yeo into two types (rather than four) might be more meaningful here: economic ing-yeo and cultural ing-yeo. While economic ing-yeo is determined by one’s financial or economic status, cultural ing-yeo reveals itself

through cultural acts or lifestyle. These two aspects of ing-yeo are deeply related to the perspectives from which we look at the ing-yeo—whether to regard ing-yeo as a specific subject or as a particular way of life and set of cultural characteristics. If we focus on ing-yeo as a subject, then we cannot help bringing up social and economic stratus, i.e., social class. However, if we interpret ing-yeo as a mode of behavior or an attitude toward life, we tend to see the importance of ing-yeo on a cultural level, asking what they do and how they exercise and enjoy the ing-yeo life. Thus, there must be a discrepancy between these two perspectives to some degree.

Although there obviously are ing-yeo subjects and their experiences can be shared with others, it is no easy task to find people who are really ing-yeo in reality. At some point, there is no one who is not ing-yeo, but otherwise ing-yeo does not seem to be a real existence. There are numerous self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects (endonym), but to define someone else as having an ing-yeo existence (exonym) would be counted as insulting the person. For example, among the nineteen ing-yeo subjects—whether self-proclaimed or recognized as such—whom I interviewed during the summer of 2012, I could rarely find the economic ing-yeo, who were suffering from serious financial difficulties, on a personal basis. Of course, most of the economic ing-yeo are either unemployed or exposed to the precarious labor market, because their families do not have enough accumulated wealth to fund and support their children. Unsurprisingly, the majority of self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects were not in grave financial trouble, even though they might not be well off. In other words, the self-proclaimed ing-yeo are cultural ing-yeo in most cases, rather than the economic ing-yeo. Generally speaking, those who can—and

tend to—enjoy a great deal of free time, which is granted by economic stability, must be cultural ing-yeo. Nonetheless we cannot neatly separate these two aspects of ing-yeo. Economic ing-yeo can be cultural sometimes, and vice versa. The important thing to note is that the way in which the two aspects of ing-yeo overlap reveals the material and cultural cross-section of Korean society.

Most of the ing-yeo subjects we deal with here might be the cultural ing-yeo. That does not mean that there are no ing-yeo subjects in the economic sense or that we do not need to deal with the economic ing-yeo. Rather, I believe that the ing-yeo can be realized only as cultural ing-yeo. It is through culture that ing-yeo subjects, even if they are financially impoverished ing-yeo, reveal their ing-yeo characteristics. Indeed, the existence of ing-yeo in the economic sense can be substituted by, as we saw earlier, the 88 Man-won Generation for the time being, or just the poor youth. The economic ing-yeo rarely emerge as concrete living beings in front of us, though they exist in reality. They are the subject insofar as they are latent. In other words, we can recognize them in reality only when their characteristics are exposed and expressed culturally. As seen earlier, the ing-yeo subjects who are also from the 88 Man-won Generation are neither fully subjectified subjects nor those who failed in subjectification.

It is only as the cultural ing-yeo that they can reveal themselves before us. To put it differently, it is when ing-yeo subjects are realized in the realm of their everyday lives that they understand themselves as ing-yeo and are recognized as the special subjects as well. If this is the case, why do the cultural ing-yeo regard themselves as surplus subjects? In what material conditions do they live and what makes them ing-yeo in a

cultural sense? After all, they have at least have grown up in middle-class families. As they are not in a financially serious situation, they are respectively free from economic obligation for the time being. However, this does not mean that they do not have full-time regular jobs. Regardless of their employment status, they enjoy ing-yeo practices. Judging from interviews with self-proclaimed ing-yeo, they are willing to be (cultural) ing-yeo even after they successfully escape the (economic) ing-yeo status. Most of them are living in Seoul metropolitan area and graduated college or are at least college students.

In the case of Keun (male, late twenties) who is a full-time researcher at a shipbuilding company, he keeps watching Japanese animations and sharing his knowledge of them with his friends from college. Since he is still single and has no girlfriend, he lives in his parents' house.<sup>79</sup> However, it does not cost much to be cultural ing-yeo—his ing-yeo practices are, if not collecting valuable items like rare toys, easily available with digital media and through the Internet. Su-Yeong (female, early thirties) has a dream to be an author or journalist, but she is working at a bar as a part-time server. As a cultural ing-yeo, she enthusiastically enjoys watching American TV shows and making Korean captions for them. She does not have a plan to get married and set up home, since she wants to keep doing ing-yeo practices without being disturbed by anyone. Some cultural ing-yeo like Ju-Ryeon (female, early twenties), a college student, have never had a job. She is completely reliant on her parents for support as many of Korean college students are. Whether they work full-time or not, the cultural ing-yeo are those who are not financially impoverished.

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<sup>79</sup> Even though the young people are economically independent, they tend to live with their parents if they are single.

However, the use of the expression “cultural” means that we are paying attention to the enjoyment of popular culture, everyday life, the inner world of the subject, etc., but not disregarding the political and economic principles and dominating structure of this society. Rather, with the term “cultural,” we might see how these dominant politico-economic principles and structure is churning out individual identity and everyday life, the total frame of human life. In this sense, we are trying to begin from the concreteness of reality and then reach the theoretical abstractness, rather than vice versa. We will therefore consider the “cultural” as embracing the “economic” rather than the other way around.

The relationship between the cultural ing-yeo and the economic ing-yeo has never been clearly discussed or identified by other Korean scholars and journalists. It is important to see how the two ing-yeo are related with each other and how the concept of ing-yeo has been transformed within this relationship. In most cases, by ing-yeo they meant to designate either the cultural ing-yeo or the economic ing-yeo without differentiating the two ing-yeo categories. Even ing-yeo themselves are hardly aware what it means to regard themselves as ing-yeo. The designation of ing-yeo was originally for the surplus human beings, those who were economically impoverished, thus excluded from and marginalized in the society. When the younger generation were exposed to and coping with the global financial crisis and neoliberal governance, in which they experienced economic precarity, they took the designation of ing-yeo for themselves. Even though they were not “real” ing-yeo yet completely excluded from the society, they felt that their precarious subject position was close to the real surplus human being. In

this way, the younger generation grown up in the late 1990s and the early 2000s began to identify themselves as the economic ing-yeo in the late 2000s.

At the same time, however, those who pursued a set of cultural practices, what would be called ing-yeo-jit such as online game play, socialization in cyber communities and Internet cafes, etc., in their surplus time, tended to call themselves ing-yeo, regardless of their economic situation. They are not economically ing-yeo in that they are not precarious in an economic sense; they are supported by their middle-class parents. Nevertheless, they feel that they are ing-yeo and opt for that subject position, proclaiming themselves ing-yeo. They are what I call the cultural ing-yeo in this dissertation. However, I do not regard the cultural ing-yeo simply as an imaginary subject position. At a certain point, the way in which the cultural ing-yeo practice and enjoy ing-yeo-jit through the new media technologies can be interpreted as the younger generation's coping strategies to the neoliberal governance, under which they only can be unemployed or under-employed, i.e., the economic ing-yeo. I will deal with the point where distinction between the cultural and economic ing-yeo are meaningless in the next chapter.

The cultural ing-yeo refer to those who are defined as ing-yeo through their ways of living, i.e., cultural practices, beyond their economic stability. To learn about the cultural ing-yeo, we will approach their daily life theoretically, especially *ing-yeo-jit* (ing-yeo practices), including their play and pleasure, labor, pastimes, leisure, communication, etc. Furthermore, when we discuss cultural ing-yeo, the emphasis is not on "ing-yeo" but on "cultural." This means that the identity of ing-yeo can be understood

as situational, in process, or in the making. Again, there is no clear-cut division between the economic ing-yeo and the cultural. If there is a division, it is just a division in the way of looking at it, or the perspective. For that reason, we do not have to presume that there are stand-alone subjects as cultural ing-yeo who are completely independent from the economic. Also, there are no quantitative or qualitative criteria for determining ing-yeo-ness. That is why the most important—maybe the sole—basis for ing-yeo-ness lies in their own recognition or acknowledgement as ing-yeo. Thus, we can say that those who regard themselves as ing-yeo become—or obtain the identity of—ing-yeo by performing ing-yeo acts, behaviors, and activities.

From the voices of the ing-yeo themselves, we can assume that ing-yeo is not an economically determined identity (a class) but an identity that is combined from diverse cultural characteristics and acts that are defined as ing-yeo by the ing-yeo themselves. The self-mocking designation of ing-yeo is sometimes regarded as grumbling about their circumstances by those who are well-off. In an interview, Sang-Hun<sup>80</sup> (male, early-thirties), who works in the marketing department in a fashion-related company, straightforwardly expresses his negative impression of the concept of the ing-yeo subject:

Those who have no problem in their future after graduating from the top universities in the capital area tend to designate themselves as ing-yeo in a self-deprecating sense. In fact, there are so many ing-yeo people in a really negative sense, who do not have any channel [to improve their (economically) deteriorated

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<sup>80</sup> I knew him as a mutual follower on Twitter beforehand and asked him for an interview because I thought he was a kind of ing-yeo. But he said that he was not ing-yeo, though he gladly agreed to an interview with me.

lives]. So I do not see it positively to exaggerate themselves by saying “I am a ing-yeo.” I think that it is ugly.

He argues that those who call themselves ing-yeo are not the real ing-yeo and that real ing-yeo people do not have any chance to call themselves ing-yeo in reality. He has an aversion to ing-yeo subjects and even discourses, because for him, those who seem to be well off insist they are ing-yeo. Another interviewee, Do-Kyun (male, late twenties) is currently looking for a job. As a self-proclaimed ing-yeo who is interested in the topic of ing-yeo, he thinks that ing-yeo people are neither rich nor poor. He argues that the general economic level of ing-yeo, including himself, is the middle class:

Regarding the economic level of people who regard themselves as so-called ing-yeo, I think that it is neither very low nor very high. It seems close to the major social group or class that generally constitutes popular culture. And it seems to be the Internet that those who are indulged in ing-yeo-jit use the most.

One thing that I found from interviews with self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects is that their own economic insecurity is not a necessary condition for their self-definition as ing-yeo. To declare themselves as ing-yeo without hesitation is possible because they recognize themselves as “cultural ing-yeo” rather than “economic ing-yeo.” In an interview with Jae-Yoon (female, late twenties), who studied graphic design in college and worked in the field of design and planning after graduation for a while, she says that she never wants to enter graduate school, nor does she have a plan to get a formal job. To my worrying question of whether she has any work or fields she is interested in, she answers:

Too many! Now, it seems that I am infatuated with studying philosophy. So I organized a study group of philosophy with my friends. And what I wanted to do the most after quitting the job was moving my body [physical activities]. So I enjoy improvised dancing with friends on the grass barefoot without any music. And I like to make clothes and poems, too.

Because she does not have any income, she asks her parents for money to spend or borrows her elder brother's credit card. Of course, she lives in her parents' house. So, she does not spend extra money other than on books, and she cut down her expenses to the extent that she makes her own clothes. She spends most of her time in yoga, improvised dance, philosophy study, and body study, which includes topics like the politics of sexuality, evolutionary biology, etc. When I make a puzzled look, as if I to say that I do not know what you really do, she responds that those are the very features of an ing-yeo who does not put an emphasis on anything. We might regard her as a voluntary ing-yeo—so she has no will to escape from her current ing-yeo status. Rather, she is dreaming of “sustainable ing-yeo-jit.”<sup>81</sup> How can she sustain her ing-yeo life without earning a living? It seems that one can keep doing sustainable ing-yeo-jit only when one becomes cultural ing-yeo, because the ing-yeo with economic difficulties can hardly continue the ing-yeo-jit that they want. What good is the ing-yeo if one cannot do ing-yeo-jit?

Because the economic ing-yeo have to work for a living, they do not have enough ing-yeo (surplus) time to stick to cultural ing-yeo-jit only. On the other hand, however,

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<sup>81</sup> This colloquial term has nothing to do with environmental protection. It literally means that one wants to continue ing-yeo activities as long as one wants without interruptions from other social and economic responsibilities.

economic ing-yeo subjects, if they have ample ing-yeo time due to their un- or underemployment, have nothing to do but enjoy cultural ing-yeo-jit.<sup>82</sup> The practice of ing-yeo-jit seems like walking a subtle tightrope between economic and cultural ing-yeo. However, if ing-yeo subjects, despite their financial troubles, enjoy cultural ing-yeo-jit, it is because they really like it. And if they practice and enjoy cultural ing-yeo-jit more than ever, even after they find employment and escape (economic) ing-yeo status, they must be born as cultural ing-yeo from the outset. They simply like the ing-yeo practices. In this sense, it seems that the term “ing-yeo” cannot be defined from an economic perspective.

However, we should note that economic ing-yeo does not always mean those who are financially insecure. Their parents’ economic level (social class) and their own un- or underemployment are not the necessary conditions of economic ing-yeo status. The status of economic ing-yeo refers to the politico-economic situation in which the lives of individual subjects are degraded to the level of ing-yeo, rather than indicating the economic status of individual ing-yeo subjects. Within the social structure or politico-economic regime that individual subjects cannot overcome, even with desperate efforts, individual subjects are reduced to and defined as economic ing-yeo. Those individuals who cannot avoid the forced deprivation of economic rights and exclusion from the regime of economy can only become ing-yeo subjects.

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<sup>82</sup> This might be a kind of logical contradiction, which I will deal with in the next chapters. The most accessible cultural ing-yeo practices to those economic ing-yeo subjects would be ing-yeo-jit through and within the Internet, the cheapest and easiest way of communication and entertainment. Various new media platforms, such as social networking services, function as tools to capture, accumulate, and integrate the fragmented ing-yeo times, practices, and information (data) that those cultural ing-yeo subjects create—or waste—during their ing-yeo-jit. That is why we look into new media or information technologies as one of the conditions that enables ing-yeo subjectification and ing-yeo culture as well as an apparatus of ing-yeo, in the next chapters.

The life degraded to ing-yeo is the result of the internalization of the governing system and its apparatuses that promote ing-yeo throughout society. Here, the process of internalization is that of neoliberal governmentality: internalizing the winner-take-all logic of competition via self-improvement, on the one hand, and naturally accepting failure or defeat in the competition on the other. Although the youth are willing to win the series of competitions in order to reproduce the life of the middle class like their parents' generation, they also admit that deprived opportunities and narrow circumstances are fair results if they are defeated in these competitions. For them, any results given according to their competence are fair enough, even though the starting points differed. In that way, the defeated become the economic ing-yeo who put up with social absurdities as given.

The concept of "economic ing-yeo" is not only the result of a macroeconomic system applied to individuals but also the effect of individual internalization of the dominant social system. Generated by neoliberalism, the economic ing-yeo are those precarious and surplus individuals who did not win the competition for secure employment. However, those who feel themselves surplus and identify themselves with the economic ing-yeo's position, creating an imagined identity based around un-waged creative works and communication, are the cultural ing-yeo. The economic ing-yeo overlaps with the cultural one in this way. Both are closely connected each other, and they are essentially one. Ultimately, the ing-yeo are those who identify their ing-yeo activities with their underlying economic situation. Thus, we still need to note that ing-

yeo activities are not completely independent from economic factors. Rather, the cultural ing-yeo's ing-yeo-jit and practices make a new type of economy.

### **3.3. Ing-yeo Time, Ing-yeo-ryeok and Ing-yeo-jit**

Ing-yeo subjects are very heterogeneous people and their ing-yeo-jits are also composed of diverse types of activities. Although we are trying to generalize their activities as ing-yeo-jit, they encompass a wide range of acts, not limited to wasting their time and making something useless. Above, we asserted that ing-yeo is composed of the activities they perform, the ing-yeo-jit, rather than being determined only by their economic situation. Are there therefore as many sorts of (cultural) ing-yeo subjects as there are diverse ing-yeo-jit? How do they construct their identity through these various types of ing-yeo acts? Here we are going to approach ing-yeo-jit not as individual deviations or expressions, but as socio-cultural activities—in this way, these activities are not simply understood as play and a waste of time. What we have to do, rather than just ask who or what the ing-yeo are, is to ask what the life of ing-yeo is like, how ing-yeo life is constructed through ing-yeo-jit, and what the meaning of being ing-yeo is.

First of all, ing-yeo-jit refers to the various ways of using ing-yeo time. Ing-yeo time is an essential prerequisite for ing-yeo-jit, and the composition of ing-yeo-jit forms an ing-yeo subject. Ing-yeo time defines ing-yeo-jit and the ing-yeo subject. Ing-yeo subjects have no choice but to have ing-yeo time. In other words, because they are given enough ing-yeo time, they turn into the ing-yeo subject. Informal laborers, NEET, the voluntarily and involuntarily unemployed, students who are temporarily free from labor responsibilities, and long-term job hunters have relatively abundant ing-yeo time, because

they are not bound to a fixed schedule. It is not limited to them, however; those who have regular employment also have ing-yeo time, which is usually called leisure time, depending on the intensity of labor and the working hours. In any case, the time that is not—and cannot be—invested in productive labor/work is used as ing-yeo time. In many cases, ing-yeo time is used for potential working time, such as for job searching and self-improvement. For those who work regularly, ing-yeo time is so precious that they save it for themselves and their families or use it to recharge.

According to a report by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism on Korean leisure activities (2014), a Korean's average leisure time per day is 3.6 hours on weekdays and 5.8 hours on weekends and holidays, which had increased slightly from two years earlier. For the last year, the most popular individual leisure activity was watching TV (51.4 percent), followed by using the Internet and social networking sites (11.5 percent), walking (4.5 percent), and playing games (4.0 percent). It seems these activities are somewhat passive. If we look into the type of leisure activities, they were listed in order of relaxing (62.2 percent), hobbies and entertainment (21.2 percent), and sports (8.6 percent). In terms of the type of leisure activities, the percentage of passive activity was higher than others. More than half of Koreans spend their leisure time watching TV. Although, of course, leisure time is not coincident with ing-yeo time, the pattern of using leisure time might be deeply related to the use of ing-yeo time.

Another report on how people use their twenty-four hours, by LGERI (2010), shows a slightly different result. Based on analysis of raw data collected by the National Statistical Office, the report focuses on the composition of leisure time in the whole day,

rather than simply checking the use of leisure time. In the survey, the activity category is divided into three “life times.” First, there is necessary life time, which is for the sustenance of the individual: time for sleep, meals and snacks, personal hygiene, medical health management, etc. Second, there is required life time, which includes work, study, housekeeping, taking care of family, transportation, etc. Third, there is leisure time that the individual uses freely, including participation and community service, social activities, and other spare time. As of 2009, the average daily use of time by adults over twenty was analyzed as: 10 hours 38 minutes (44.1 percent of a day) for necessary time; 8 hours 35 minutes (35.5 percent) for required time; and 4 hours 48 minutes (20.4 percent) for leisure time. Within leisure time, media use (2 hours 9 minutes) was the highest, followed by social activities (43 minutes) and sports and outdoor activities (28 minutes). Time for media use decreased slightly from the 2004 survey, probably because the survey categorized only traditional media, such as TV, newspapers, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and radio, as media. In this survey, new media communication and consumption, including information-seeking through the Internet, text messaging and social networking via smartphone, and online gaming, were classified under different sections like social activities or hobbies.

Thus, we might assume that time for traditional media use was decreased and that, instead, more and more people spend more time on online entertainment, such as searching the, online shopping, blogging, online gaming, etc.<sup>83</sup> In the same vein, people

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<sup>83</sup> In fact, however, time for watching TV has not changed much compared with twenty years ago. Average time for daily media use was 172 minutes in 1996, 155.2 minutes (minimum) in 2004,

spend less time on traditional hobbies such as reading, chess, and the like. Social activities outside the house have decreased, but time for watching TV and movies or reading books inside the house has also decreased. The thing we need to pay attention to is that the time that has been saved from these activities is not used for other activities—if people have extra time, they just take a rest. The time for doing nothing has increased to 38 minutes.

If we look into the ing-yeo subject's ing-yeo time, the result is no different. In my interviews with ing-yeo subjects, the unique thing I found regarding their use of media was that most of them do not watch TV, especially live broadcasts. For the younger generation, watching TV together with the whole family in the living room is no longer part of their lifestyle. On the one hand, this means that their daily time usage is more fragmented than traditional youth and that their TV time should be invested in self-improvement or part-time work. On the other, they are accustomed to choosing the programs and shows they want and watching them on laptops or handheld devices via VOD, IPTV, or torrent sharing. For that reason, conventional audience measurement is not a valid method to rate programs if it does not include viewer ratings from DMB, VOD, IPTV, and the like. With the development of new media technologies, the patterns of media consumption and communication are rapidly changing in a new direction that tends to underline more flexible consumption and user-centered communication.

For ing-yeo subjects, however, ing-yeo time is not leisure time that is separated from necessary and required time. For example, ing-yeo time for the unemployed is not

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203.3 minutes in 2006, and 176.9 minutes in 2013. Even though the numbers fluctuate, the report of Korea Press Foundation (2013) evaluates that there are no dramatic changes.

spare time left after job-seeking and preparing. For them, the whole life time feels like ing-yeo time. Because their time is not used productively for something and not sold in the market, they think that it is discarded as useless in society. Since the ing-yeo's time is indeed superfluous, their ing-yeo time is perceived as surplus. It is ing-yeo time that is abundant to the ing-yeo. However, it is not considered worthwhile by anyone.

Ing-yeo subjects have plenty of surplus time, but not all of it will be used for ing-yeo behavior and ing-yeo-jit. In order to do ing-yeo-jit, they must first have ing-yeo status full of ing-yeo time, but then *ing-yeo-ryeok* (ing-yeo force/power) is required. However, ing-yeo-ryeok is meant as the capacity (ability) to do ing-yeo-jit, rather than excessive physical force. It might be easiest just to spend surplus time doing nothing, but it is no fun if it does not involve effort. Ing-yeo-ryeok is the basic capability required to be able to do ing-yeo-jit. It does not mean to do nothing, but on the contrary, to be fallen so seriously on something. Simply put, it has little use or value for others.<sup>84</sup> Even though it is useless, if someone makes something unusual using the ing-yeo-ryeok, for example, coin stacking or elaborated doodle that requires a lot of time and energy, he or she may feel a sense of contentment and receive acknowledgement and compliments from others. Ing-yeo subjects full of ing-yeo-ryeok can attract attention by creating something humorous or provocative that catches the eyes of others. However, how can they create something, and what should it be? The most affordable and accessible tools for them are the Internet and the computer—in other words, digital new media. For instance, according to *Korean Social Trends* published by the Statistical Research Institute (2014),

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<sup>84</sup> Here is the point where ing-yeo and *otaku* are interconnected. The thing they create and produce with enthusiasm can be recognized and evaluated only internally.

the utilization rate of equipment like smartphones has increased dramatically from 3.8 percent of the population in 2010 to 68.8 percent in 2013. As of 2013, among the population over the age of 13, seven out of ten people use smartphones. The smartphone usage rate among young people in their twenties and thirties is more than 95 percent. For the younger generations, using new communication tools that can connect and communicate anytime and anywhere has become as natural as breathing. Therefore, it is natural that the younger generations, who easily use their ing-yeo time doing ing-yeo-jit, are called the digital generation or “net generation” (Tapscott, 2009). However, this means more than the fact that digital equipment has become widespread. Beyond the question of how familiar the youth are with new digital technologies and devices, this means the transformation of overall society: the transformation of institutions such as education, labor, consumption, and family.

For ing-yeo subjects, new media is more than simply an available, affordable, and accessible means of communication. New media technologies are the wonderful tools that enable them to build the best culture available and enjoy it. With these fantastic tools, ing-yeo subjects invest their ing-yeo time and power into ing-yeo practices. Workers normally produce goods from machines in factories by investing their working hours and labor power; however, ing-yeo-jit do not always produce something as valuable as the goods produced by labor.<sup>85</sup> To compare with labor once again, ing-yeo subjects are consumed doing ing-yeo-jit, while laborers consume their labor power while

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<sup>85</sup> I will deal with Dallas Smythe’s analysis of “audience labor” in the next chapter.

they work. Considering these two directions of ing-yeo-jit (or time), I will approach it by classifying the “productive ing-yeo-jit” and the “consuming ing-yeo-jit.”

The most passive way of doing ing-yeo-jit is just to waste time away. The ing-yeo subjects simply spend or consume their ing-yeo time, and nothing is produced from it. This type of ing-yeo consumption can be called “consuming ing-yeo-jit.” In that there is no productive outcome, it is exhaustive—but this is the traditional way of consuming ing-yeo time. The most common activity is watching television.<sup>86</sup> As watching TV—not using the Internet—accounts for the highest proportion of Koreans’ utilization of leisure time, it might not differ significantly in other countries. When Shirky (2011) mentions TV-watching in his first chapter, it is related to surplus or leisure time. According to him, just as gin soothed people weary from heavy labor in the early industrial age in the United Kingdom, television plays gin’s role now at the time of transition to a post-industrial era: “During this transition, what has been our gin, the critical lubricant that eased our transition from one kind of society to another?” His answer is: “The sitcom. Watching sitcoms—and soap operas, costume dramas, and the host of other amusements offered by TV—has absorbed the lion’s share of the free time available to the citizens of the developed world” (p. 4).

Watching TV is one of the most common ways of spending free time in most of the developed countries of the world, as well as Korea. “TV quickly took up the largest chunk of our free time: an average of over twenty hours a week, worldwide” (p. 5) and “Americans watch roughly two hundred billion hours of TV every year” (p. 10). What

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<sup>86</sup> In addition, we need to think more about whether movie-going, listening to the radio, or even reading books can be counted as all passive consumption, i.e., as the consuming ing-yeo-jit.

Shirky argues is that this consumed/ing ing-yeo time and knowledge—what he calls “cognitive surplus”—can be collectively and collaboratively used to do something beneficial for the whole community. How much of a waste of all this surplus time and ability is it if we spend our free ing-yeo time watching TV or doing ing-yeo-jit?

However, ing-yeo time can be consumed or depleted not only through old media, such as television, but also through new interactive media, such as computers and digital devices. Even new media does not automatically turn users into active participants. Of course, because new media “remediates” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), most of the features of old media and passive media consumption, such as watching TV, are subsumed in new media activities via computers and the Internet. In other words, new media will also be a good tool (like TV) for consuming ing-yeo-jit. For example, even through new media we can do traditional passive media consumption through TV, movies, music, radio, newspapers, reading, games, etc. Thus, it is clear that new media is a good tool for consuming ing-yeo-jit. However, new media also enables consuming ing-yeo-jit that is different from traditional media consumption activities, mainly entertainment media consumption. Surfing the Web to find new information and lurking around online communities and social networking sites to learn what is buzzing—these might be examples of a new type of consuming ing-yeo-jit. In contrast to the old ways of news consumption, such as morning newspapers or evening TV news shows, now whenever we have ing-yeo time we can access real-time news and other concerns that stream through the Internet. If circumstances permit, we can be exposed to the stream of such

information all day long. The consuming ing-yeo-jit via new media is the easiest way of spending ing-yeo time.

Nonetheless, ing-yeo subjects do not simply think that this consuming ing-yeo-jit is nothing but a waste of ing-yeo time. Although at this point they are ing-yeo subjects who surf the Internet and get distracted by all kinds of information in unavoidably fragmented ing-yeo time, they do not consider this ing-yeo-jit itself completely useless. To a Webtoon writer, Ludvico (2013), who is now “mass-producing laughs based on individual chore life,” ing-yeo-jit is “related to numerous content and ‘*deokjil*’ (*otaku* activities) that have been enjoyed.” An experience of collecting and sharing with his friends all the pornographic content available when he was a teenager, memories of indulging in Japanese adult video games and of being immersed in B-rate kid’s movies in which comedians played: retrospectively, these days were full of ing-yeo time for him. To the writer of today, however, this ing-yeo life and time in the past were not idled away but were a time of learning, as Ludvico recalls:

What is clear is that the base of storytelling on which I stand now is owed to the numerous bad foods [I consumed] in part, and that those thoughts and knowledge grown out of ing-yeo days that seemed useless function now as a major key to weave plots of cartoons. The rich repository of ing-yeo knowledge that looked like a pie in the sky works like effective fuel for creation.

Even novelists, filmmakers, musicians, and cartoonists, often referred to as creative professionals, acknowledge that “the fear of ing-yeo is my power” or “ing-yeo-jit is labor.” The time of the past it seemed like we idled away became the resource that makes

me creative now. Indeed, what is known as consuming ing-yeo-jit is not completely consuming and exhausting in the end. Although many ing-yeo subjects think that their ing-yeo-jit—the way they spend ing-yeo time—is wasteful, in fact that is not always the case. In many cases, ing-yeo time that is invested in ing-yeo-jit is actually used to create something. The result of ing-yeo-jit, although it is the work of an amateur, can receive quite a few responses in many cases. Productive ing-yeo-jit, different from consuming ing-yeo-jit, enables connection with others via the results of creative works: the biggest example is sharing via UGC (user-generated content).<sup>87</sup> Ing-yeo subjects produce content as amateurs by spending—or investing—their ing-yeo time. In fact, all the things generated by the use of interactive media and users' collective participation in the Web 2.0 platforms are the products of productive ing-yeo-jit. To the list of productive ing-yeo-jit we may add, for example: personal journals and memos on blogs, political comments on newspaper posts, parody videos on YouTube, selfies on Facebook and Instagram, all kinds of Q&A's, images, videos spread and shared virally, etc.

However, spontaneous creation and sharing of users' content via the Web, which began around the mid-2000s, is a worldwide social phenomenon. Can we simply reduce these global new media practices to somewhat productive ing-yeo-jit? The new media environment likely provides optimal conditions for productive ing-yeo-jit. As the optimists of the Internet were excited about the ability of the Web 2.0, it fostered a revolutionary opportunity for amateur individuals to use its participatory platforms.

Thanks to the democratized media, amateurs as fans, consumers, and ing-yeo subjects

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<sup>87</sup> Here, the meaning of the term “productive” is more about the creative intention than simply the material output. I will examine the concept of “audience/user labor” in the next chapter.

“are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content”  
(Jenkins, 2006, p. 290).

Participatory culture is exemplified by fan culture or fandom. Scholars in the field of cultural studies, such as Henry Jenkins and John Fiske, have contributed to this subject. Fandom has been always related to the audience’s active participation in producing or creating their own things derived from cultural products they like. As John Fiske (1992) explains:

all popular audiences engage in varying degrees of semiotic productivity, producing meanings and pleasures that pertain to their social situation out of the products of the culture industries. But fans often turn this semiotic productivity into some form of textual production that can circulate among—and thus help to define—the fan community (p. 3).

However, enthusiastic fans’ textual and visual re-production activities have become much more extensive than 30 years ago. The recent development of ICTs has especially influenced many of the changes in fan culture. With the development of the Internet, fans’ activities are not limited to simply consuming pop culture content. In other words, the digital new media environment enables, more than ever, productive participatory culture in which all the activities of parody, re-interpretation, modifying, and sharing are at users’ fingertips. For instance, in the digital environment, fans can more easily come into contact with and produce information related to stars they adore; communication within the fan community is more active with online media; and fandom and fan culture have become more visible in society. Of course, although there was fandom and fan

culture even before the invention of online media, the emergence of the new media environment, where virtual public spheres, cyber-communities, and transnational networks are open, enables completely new methods of communication among fans.

Let us look at the example of the South Korean pop star Psy, whose music video “Gangnam Style” was massively parodied worldwide in 2012. Although the video itself was immensely popular on YouTube, it is almost impossible to imagine how many parody videos were made and uploaded to YouTube and how many people made their own styles and shared them for fun. Since its debut in July 2012, “Gangnam Style” has become the most-watched video on YouTube, reaching over two billion views. More than 17 million videos parodying it can be found on YouTube. The scale and scope of its success is remarkable considering not only its own global success but also its viral parodies. We could, rather, call it the success of the parody itself. Beyond just enjoying watching and sharing the original video, the users/producers of the parodies interpreted, modified, and reproduced it on their own—in this way, they appropriated the enjoyment of the original video and then, as a result, contributed to the expansion of the size and scale of overall YouTube traffic. This participatory culture is based on “the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user-created content, and some kind of shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers” (Jean Burgess & Joshua Green, 2009, p. 10). In some sense, it was a historical moment when people around the world realized how they can enjoy transforming, remixing, and sharing digital content on their own via social networks—they experienced what participatory culture is.

It is in the form of the fan club or community that many Korean fans try to support and communicate with celebrities in popular culture whom they idolize. It is common in fan culture for fans and stars to join together in social participation and contribution. For example, some stars, along with their fans, expressed their condolences and raised funds for the families of victims of *Sewol* ferry disaster in April 2014; in a campaign for the protection of environment, fans dedicated a park named after a star to a city; fans donated blood donor cards in the name of a star to celebrate his birthday. As Shirky (2010) witnessed by chance, nearly a million members of a boy band (Dong Bang Shin Ki) fan club in the K-Pop scene participated in the candlelight demonstration against the beef importation agreement between the US and South Korea in 2008. This is one of the examples that illustrate how fandoms use the Internet as a means for productive social activities.

However, participatory culture does not always appear in the form of a “gift,” whether a donation or parody. Sometimes it is revealed in the form of “war” in which, for instance, anti-fans and trolls post hateful comments and pictures for no good reason. Perhaps, in terms of social repercussions, war will be greater than gifts.<sup>88</sup> Whether done with good intentions or not, can all kinds of activities through participatory culture and fandom be described as productive ing-yeo-jit? Some self-proclaimed ing-yeo subjects whom I met in interviews also indulged in fan culture. A college student from one province to Seoul, Ju-Ryeon (female, early twenties) is content with capturing and collecting an idol star’s images and videos that are either aired on TV or uploaded to an

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<sup>88</sup> G. Lee (2012) deals with ing-yeo-ryeok in online communities, especially DC Inside, from the anthropological perspective, using terms like war and gift.

online fan community, because she cannot afford to buy a concert ticket. And, by reprocessing and then uploading the images and videos to the community, she reaffirms her enthusiasm for the star and also contributes back to the community. Fan activities tend to expand a fan's social capital within their communities (Fiske, 1992).

A part-time worker in the publishing industry, Su-Yeong (female, early thirties), is a female *otaku*, a so-called *fujoshi*. She avidly engages in fan practices, especially over an American TV show and its male main character. One of her recent *deokjil* is making Korean subtitles for an American TV show. For her, the most important thing throughout the fan activities, what I think of as productive ing-yeo-jit, is to create something:

To produce a creation during *deokjil* is called doing 'yeonseong,' and the people who do *yeonseong* are called 'yeonseong-ler' [creator].<sup>89</sup> And, those who do not create but just enjoy are called 'sobi-ler' [consumer]. Because my friend and I made it, we would be 'yeonseong-ler.' I write and draw cartoons, and sometimes sell them at the event.

Those productive ing-yeo-jit, called the "secondary creations," by *fujoshi* are influenced by Japanese fan culture.<sup>90</sup> As a trend in a sort of subculture, their activities usually take place secretly, even though recently a small number of female ing-yeo subjects have

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<sup>89</sup> The term *yeonseong* refers to the alchemistic arts or activities, and it was originally used in a Japanese manga. Here, it means the creative activities that produce texts or images. It especially refers to fan arts—so-called secondary creations (spin-offs or derivatives) in Korea—based on the transformed narratives or characters of original animations, films, or TV shows. In that it is an active way of enjoying popular culture, it is worthy of note.

<sup>90</sup> They enjoy doing *yeonseong* (modifying) of their favorite characters and narratives regardless of the social evaluation of the texts. They create a sort of fan-fic (fan fiction) or fan arts usually by modifying the original works and putting the characters in a significantly different environment, especially a male homosexual situation—they call this sort of fan art BL (Boys' Love), also known as *yaoi* in Japanese.

participated in comic markets and fan conventions. The *fujoshi* artists are proficient in dealing with digital devices like drawing tablets or drawing software like Photoshop. Some of them are professional designers skilled in producing digital content, such as storytelling, Web design, etc. Online communication, usually through closed communities, is the main means to connect them.

Whether they are avid fans, *otaku*, or *fujoshi*, large numbers of ing-yeo subjects are doing (productive) ing-yeo-jit by participating in the popular cultural industry as an active audience. While they can be defined as a passive audience when they do the consuming ing-yeo-jit, they become an active audience through the productive ing-yeo-jit: for example, we might compare them to downloading (consuming ing-yeo-jit) and uploading (productive ing-yeo-jit). However, with the current situation of the media, it is getting harder to distinguish productive ing-yeo-jit from consuming ing-yeo-jit or active audience from passive audience. For instance, Su-Yeong enjoys watching American TV shows as a passive audience and, at the same time, creates derivative fan art or subtitles as an active audience. From just her ing-yeo activities, such as obtaining information online and distributing (or sharing) her creations, we cannot easily determine the boundaries between the consuming way of ing-yeo-jit and the productive one. She connects production and consumption through sharing: because she obtains information and works already shared by other audiences in her community and then redistributes them after reworking or transforming the original, we might call her activities “re-production.”

So if provided adequate mechanisms, the products provided by others' productive ing-yeo-jit can be consumed by my consuming ing-yeo-jit, and conversely I can rework as productive ing-yeo-jit the products obtained by consuming ing-yeo-jit. Here happens the self-completed circulation of ing-yeo-jit. For instance, let us consider a usual situation in which ing-yeo-jit circulate: someone creates and uploads a fun *jjalbang* image in an online community (productive ing-yeo-jit); all members enjoy and share it with other communities (consuming ing-yeo-jit); other members re-create and parody it (re-productive ing-yeo-jit); then it becomes viral. Thus, in this way, ing-yeo-jit constitute the cycle of the popular culture industry (production – distribution – consumption – (re)production).

The most important thing to note here is that production and consumption through ing-yeo-jit, which seem useless, generate a new kind of ing-yeo value and meaning. This ing-yeo value can be produced only by inherent human “life” itself, the result of human labor. Thus, the intrinsic value of life created through ing-yeo labor—ing-yeo-jit, whether the productive or consuming mode—is appropriated through the popular culture industry.<sup>91</sup> While productive ing-yeo-jit is to be appropriated as ing-yeo labor, consuming ing-yeo-jit can be appropriated in the form of audience, user, or consumer attention.<sup>92</sup>

Through new media tools, participatory culture seems to turn a passive audience into an active and productive audience. Although the participating subjects (audience)

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<sup>91</sup> In the next chapters, I will deal with the issues around how user activities and their personal information in new media and social networking services generate “value” and how this value can be appropriated by global media companies.

<sup>92</sup> The audience's attention becomes an indefinitely extractable and exploitable resource for the media and culture industry. Cf. Smythe (2001) and Fuchs (2012) on audience labor and audience commodity.

feel their activities and participation are active, and thus they pursue more active and productive ing-yeo-jit, in reality user-generated content becomes “free labor” in a digital and immaterial labor form (Terranova, 2000; De Kosnik, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). All kinds of ing-yeo activities feed the media and culture industry.

As a result, productive ing-yeo-jit is eventually consumed in the cycle of capital. Ing-yeo subjects can hardly produce substantial goods or value except self-satisfaction and social capital within their community (recognition by their peers)—although it is not altogether impossible to achieve more, as we can see in some cases of filmmakers and artists who spent a long time struggling as ing-yeo. However, the value of information and creations produced by numerous ing-yeo subjects is consumed during the appropriation process. In that the boundaries between production and consumption have been blurred, those two types of ing-yeo-jit generate one effect: life becomes ing-yeo, what I call the “surplusization of life.” As critical media theorist Christian Fuchs (2014) argues in his recent discussion on digital labor, “all human time tends to become surplus-value-generating time that is exploited by capital” (p. 127).

Since ing-yeo activities will be subsumed under global media capital, no matter what these activities may be, ing-yeo subjects might think that they should not do anything productive. Do they have to invent new ing-yeo-ryeok that cannot be exploited by anyone, or do they have to keep doing ing-yeo-jit in the belief that it will eventually help them?

Psychiatrist Ji-Hyeon Ha (2013) points out that it is also important for us to waste our time watching meaningless gags and useless acts performed by characters in

entertainment TV shows. He argues that we “should realize that ‘ing-yeo time,’ which seems useless, has enough meaning,” and calls this spending of ing-yeo time “active inactivity” (p. 121). Ing-yeo time and attitude, when spending time doing nothing special, can provide a good opportunity to come up with innovative ideas. For that reason, ing-yeo must be re-assessed more positively. From this point of view, if being ing-yeo cannot be avoided, counting it as a resource for creation and innovation would be more productive and beneficial for the subject. However, from another perspective, it is another obsession that the ing-yeo should be turned into a productive power by reorganizing it: perhaps ing-yeo could be required as a necessary foundation for a creative and innovative mind. Considering that our age calls for convergence, creative economy, and liberal arts, there must be an urgency that even ing-yeo-ryeok should be turned into productive power.

### **3.4. Anxious and Precarious Life**

As mentioned before, the term “ing-yeo” is a self-deprecating expression for the uselessness that the youth feel while they spend their free time doing nothing special because they do not have a chance to work. It is quite different from the type of economic ing-yeo human from the development of industrial capitalism, such as the social misfits and the incompetent. Now, in this neoliberal era in which the possibility of social mobility has been limited and regular permanent employment is increasingly difficult, regardless of their capabilities, some youth have evolved into the routinized ing-yeo human: Life is much more uncertain, competitive and precarious. This ing-yeo life prevalent among youth today can no longer be called simply economic ing-yeo. The

youth experience this routinized ing-yeo life as something with which they can manage to get along, what with entertainment TV shows, idols in the music industry, communication with online friends, time-consuming things provided by the Internet, or dazzling online games. However, in this life they are just getting by—it does not get better. With the transformation in the form of capitalism, there have also been great changes in our emotional side. There are several examples of this: emerging problem of emotional labor, social trauma suffered throughout the IMF financial crisis in the late 1990s,<sup>93</sup> the sudden and prevailing social trend of healing culture, and so on. While it was authenticity that dominated the regime of mind in Korean society in the 80-90s, with the overall restructuring of society after 1997 we have entered into the post-regime of authenticity in which only survival matters. Now, in the 97 Regime in which authenticity has collapsed, “animal” and “snob” have taken the place of the subject on behalf of “human.” In this post-modern world where authenticity and grand narratives have perished and everything has been animalized, the subject like *otaku* acquires the ontological sense of security by recognizing the reality as surrounded by the characters of games and cartoons (H-J. Kim, 2009; Azuma, 2009, 2012). The anxiety about survival can be avoided through the rearrangement of the lightness and cuteness of characters extracted from a database. What else will they need?

In this situation, ing-yeo is the reflection of the anxiety and incompetence of the middle-class youth who face the crisis of their material base for reproduction. Likewise, the 88 Man-won Generation was a representation of the anxiety of those in their twenties

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<sup>93</sup> See Song (2009) to learn more about the emotional trauma as well as political and economic trauma to Koreans during the 1997 financial crisis in Korea.

about the apocalyptic future in which they earn only 88 man-won (about 850 USD) as a lifetime monthly wage (Y. Han, 2013). They are anxious about the future that is coming at a rapid pace and feel hopelessness that they will degenerate or already have degenerated to the precarious working-class. Rather than fighting tooth and nail, however, their anxiety and feeling of precarity make them wish for a quick solution applied from the outside or by other unexpected crises. Instead of resisting mainstream culture or seeking an alternative, they take an ambivalent attitude toward it—they settle into and abhor it at the same time. The feeling of anxiety and precarity covered up with self-deprecating enjoyment is deeply related to the emergence of mentor, youth, and healing discourses.

Furthermore, we can assume that the vigorous activities in online communities and other related issues on the Internet have to do with the anxiety and precarity to which the youth are accustomed. While they ordinarily seek momentary fun in their online communities, they check online forums and other opinion blogs when any serious issue arises, to see how others think about it. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the younger generation identify themselves with people from online communities. The ing-yeo subject is something constructed—and identified—through activities in online communities. In this context, we can understand the ing-yeo's sensibilities or emotions as well as their cultural codes. Here, let us look into ing-yeo emotion in two forms: 1) humor, cynicism, and self-deprecation; and 2) anxiety, insecurity, and precarity.

Above all, in the observation of ing-yeo subjects, the most conspicuous emotional and cultural codes lie in self-deprecation, humor, parody, and cynicism. Humor should

not be accepted as it is—a fun factor of humor can be revealed only through cynicism. In fact, the self-designation of “ing-yeo” is just for fun, but the meaning of it can only be understood in the context of cynical responses to reality and circumstances. To this cynical attitude toward the world and themselves, the youth present the name of *byeongmat* (S. H. Kim, 2011; Wi, 2013).

The term “*byeongmat*” refers to the readers’ or audience’s feelings that are usually experienced as out of context, awful, and weird.<sup>94</sup> S. H. Kim (2011) suggests that *byeongmat* is a unique sensibility in ing-yeo culture, originating from various types of popular Webtoons.<sup>95</sup> It is a natural response to the terrible content or form of a Webtoon: it is like saying “absurd, stupid, or idiotic.” *Byeongmat* occurs when the narrative is totally ruined by characters’ nonsense activities: for example, in cartoonist Imalnyeon’s Webtoon, when a bus passenger mistakenly set a fire on the bus with a cigarette, the other passengers suddenly shout out “Let’s go to the Blue House” and then the driver says “Ok!” heading to the presidential residence. Originally, it was used as a derisive expression for the posts encountered on the Internet. Later, when the term was connected to Webtoons, it was widely used in this subcultural field and then turned into a unique style in the popular culture and entertainment industry. At first, S. H. Kim thinks that the space of the Web and the media (or genre) of the Webtoon plays an important role as a

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<sup>94</sup> *Byeongmat* literally means “a taste of the handicapped,” and it implies the reader’s bad feeling about the content as if it were made by someone handicapped—though not really handicapped. Thus, since the term contains a depreciative expression of the handicapped, it cannot be used in any official dialogue. In this sense, it might not be proper to use the term “ing-yeo” in formal communications, because it is a way of belittling people.

<sup>95</sup> Webtoon is a series of cartoons (or comics) published and circulated via the Web—usually authors update chapters weekly. Several online portal sites, such as Naver, Daum, Olleh, and Nate, have their own Webtoon portals composed of hundreds of Webtoon series distributed for free. For the Webtoon industry in Korea, Cf. Park (2009).

sort of space for subject formation, especially for the Korean youth in the twenty-first century: The Web is “the semio-biosphere where individual personality and subjectivity is ‘shaped’ and ‘growing up,’ and sometimes ‘lost’ or ‘dissipated’” (p. 99). The Webtoon functions within the Web like “the space of dispute, communication, or collective residence among comers and goers” or a “problematic place” (p. 100).

Many people visit and enjoy the Webtoons published on portal sites: Webtoons get at least 400,000 clicks per episode (S. H. Park, 2009). Such large-scale traffic gives publicity and brand advertising revenues to the portal site itself. Furthermore, through free distribution of content, secondary content productions, such as users’ (or readers’) comments and communications as well as the voluntary proliferation of content like ‘*pumjil*’ (clipping and sharing without permission), have the effect of expanding the possibility of control of the media to the users. Many participants in my ing-yeo interviews also picked Webtoon watching/reading as an example of their ing-yeo-jit. It is related to the Webtoon’s form and content (i.e., moderate length, narrative, picture quality, laughter, etc.), which are made reasonably enough to satisfy readers with one or two episodes in a short fragmented ing-yeo time. Because Webtoons are easily accessible (free and online), do not take much time (short and fast storytelling), do not require excessive concentration (simple picture style), and do not consume much emotion (humor and *byeongmat*), they have become one of the most popular entertainment media forms among the younger generations. In this way, a few distinctive styles in the genre have developed, and the most distinguishing one is the so-called *byeongmat*.

The typical characteristics of the *byeongmat* style in Webtoons are as follows: an unpredictable storyline and destroyed narrative followed by an exorbitant ending, a seemingly insincere drawing style, and an active parody as an intervention in reality. However, *byeongmat* Webtoons with these characteristics are not the fictional world of fantasy that meets the desires of readers through the fictional narrative. Rather, according to S. H. Kim (2011), the Webtoon is a place where “giggling laughs intersect with bittersweet cynicism for a flash” because the readers cannot but realize that “in the end, game and reality are not so much different” (p. 119). Webtoons give us *byeongmat* with their lousy content and format. However, at the moment when we realize that reality is also a sort of *byeongmat*, we encounter a strange circumstance in which we are not able to cry or laugh but just smirk.

Like the ridiculous self-awareness of *ing-yeo*, *byeongmat* also refers to the subjective recognition through cynical humor that does not make sense at all. It is an expression of self-reflective cynicism after *ing-yeo* subjects realize that reality is absurdly un- or surrealistic and that they are incompetent and inconsiderable. So why did the code of humor and playfulness of Korean youth emerge only through cynicism? Why can humor not be accepted as it is? For the large online communities in Korea, such as DC Inside, *Wutgindaehak* (Humor University), *Oneul-ui Yumeo* (Today’s Humor), or *Ilgan Best* (Daily Best), users’ amusement, laughter, humor, and cynicism were the major growth engines. The elements of amusement and laughter function like triggers and catalysts for collective communication via the Internet, and the users of and participants in these communication technologies have contributed to the expansion of the Internet’s

various cultural values. It was likely the elements of humor and cynicism that began the diverse cultural activities of ing-yeo-jit on the Internet.

From the early stage of Internet development in Korea, visual parody and laughter-causing memes were so popular that almost of all the early online communities, especially DC Inside (the prototype for these communities), could grow based on users' productive ing-yeo-jit; inversely, these communities have had a great effect on the proliferation of the *byeongmat* culture of humor and parody in society at large.<sup>96</sup> DC Inside, which started as a digital camera review site in 1999, operates sub-communities (called "galleries"<sup>97</sup>), bulletin boards, and thread-based formats that are divided into a number of sub-topics. Galleries are like cyber battlefields where anonymous users with a wide variety of interests gather, create new linguistic trends, and cause all kinds of accidents and incidents on the Internet. The emotional code of humor, parody, and travesty is necessary in this cyber community in which almost all Internet jargon, including ing-yeo and *byeongmat*, is produced. However, what is the meaning of this

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<sup>96</sup> DC is an acronym for Digital Camera. DC Inside is the largest online community site in Korea and has a very similar culture and platform to 4chan.org in the U.S. and 2ch.net in Japan. We will deal with the cultural features and meanings of DC Inside as an online community in the next chapter.

<sup>97</sup> According to G. Lee (2012), a gallery is:

a category set within DC Inside, and its form is not quite different from any online bulletin boards in other communities. However, its peculiar feature is that users are obliged to upload digital images or videos [with the post] as befits its name. Because of this feature, gallery, receiving positive responses from users, has become the core area of DC Inside where all kinds of parody and creations were uploaded. As of January 2011, more than 1,000 galleries exist and each gallery has its own theme and name. (p. 26)

In many ways, DC Inside illustrates the mutual coupling of visual culture and digital culture: it was originally an online review site for digital cameras and other equipment; it was the early 2000s when digital cameras were widely introduced to Korea; a gallery requires attaching images in order to write a post; gallery's name itself for the sub-community; a large number of parody images through the galleries become famous social icons, etc.

emotional code? Su-Hwan Kim (2011) interpret the phenomenon of humor and derision as somewhat resistant or subversive. Nonetheless, because this phenomenon is fundamentally based on cynicism, we can find more or less different explanations for it.

As we have seen in the section in which the term “ing-yeo” was defined, self-deprecation or self-mocking is the most basic emotion for the ing-yeo. By expressing themselves as the object of trivial jokes before the others, the ing-yeo identify their existence in contemporary culture. This reminds me of what Austin (1962) calls a “performative” utterance. One can be ing-yeo only when calling oneself ing-yeo. If others, whether close friends or parents, seriously designate them as ing-yeo, they might feel deeply insulted, because this time ing-yeo would refer to economic ing-yeo, or the helpless subject—the homeless, for example—who is a social failure. However, for the self-proclaimed ing-yeo, designating oneself ing-yeo has a completely different meaning. Here, the purpose of this cynical self-deprecation or self-depreciation is not to have a masochistic sense of shame or defeat. Likewise, the cynical expression does not go toward the outside reality for the purpose of social critique. Rather, it purports to undermine ing-yeo’s anxiety by making fun of oneself or by using a cynical expression for oneself.

On the other hand, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the biggest fears of the 88 Man-won Generation come from the uncertainty of the future, or, in other words, the awareness of the reality that it is already impossible to reproduce the life of a stable middle class, as their parents once had. According to *Korean Social Trends*, the proportion of NEET, who are not in education, employment, or training, among the

population over the age of 15 and under 35 topped ten percent for the first time in 2013 (Statistical Research Institute, 2014). The number of NEET without the intention for employment already exceeded one million in 2011. The employment rate—not unemployment rate—of the youth population was only 23 percent as of 2012 (Nam & Kim, 2013). In some sense, what the ing-yeo fear the most might not be the anxiety of becoming ing-yeo in the future, but the terrible realization that they are already ing-yeo.

Now, youth are confronting the reality in which they have to consider insecurity not as a constraint but as an opportunity. However, the bigger problem is that, afraid of the persistent state of ing-yeo, they tend to continue their indecisive and precarious status, which might ultimately lead to being ing-yeo. This is similar to the working poor's situation: The harder they try to avoid their status, the worse their living conditions become. Ironically, they need to maintain the provisional status of ing-yeo in order not to fall into the bottomless pit of the real ing-yeo.

The ostensible cause of prevalent NEET among youth is oversupply of highly educated personnel in accordance with high university enrollment. However, the reason for remaining in NEET, especially NEET without intention for employment, is something else: in situations where low wages, high competition, and low employment rates persist, youth seem to judge it reasonable to avoid continuous job searching activities and remain in NEET, because remaining in the labor market as a non-regular employee would give a bad signal to possible regular employment. Once they immediately enter into the unstable

economy of temporary workers, part-timers, and freeters<sup>98</sup>, it is almost impossible to return to a stable economy of secure and full-time employment. For that reason, they try to stay at least in their *ing-yeo* status, in order not to be pushed back to the margin and to catch even a limited chance someday, although at the same time they always want to be included in the established society. This might give us a hint as to why they show an ambivalent attitude toward the dominant culture and regime, complacency and abhorrence at the same time. Their frustration evokes a feeling of both shame and anger. Therefore, cynicism is inevitable for them. As Peter Sloterdijk (1987) said, “when they know the truth about themselves and, in spite of this, ‘go on as before,’ then they completely fulfill the *modern* definition of cynicism” (p. 102).

### 3.5. In Search of Happiness

In Japan, where the prevalence of freeters and NEET due to a long period of economic stagnation has been a serious social problem since the early 1990s, a new type of the youth has emerged called the *Satori* Generation<sup>99</sup>, which seems to be a counterpart of the *Sampo* Generation in Korea. *Satori* means a mental status spiritually awakened and

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<sup>98</sup> Freeter (usually pronounced as *furita* in Japan) is a portmanteau that combines free and *arbeiter* (worker). It refers to the youth in part-time jobs or non-regular employment in general.

<sup>99</sup> *Satori* is a Buddhist term in Japanese, meaning spiritual or religious enlightenment or illumination, and is derived from ‘bodhi’ in Sanskrit. The *satori* generation refers to the youth, born in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, aged teens to the mid-twenties, who spent their adolescence during the long-term downturn after the collapse of the bubble economy, but grew up with decent and affordable education. The most remarkable feature of this generation is a stoic consumption pattern. According to *The Japan Times* (March 31, 2013), the young people of the *satori* generation are characterized as:

“[T]hey don’t *want* anything. They don’t drive cars, don’t wear brand name clothing, aren’t active in sports, don’t care about career advancement, can’t be bothered earning more than enough to cover basic needs, don’t travel, don’t fall in love much, don’t dream of a better life, don’t make plans for the future.”

enlightened: Like Buddhist monks, they try to be happy by refraining from worldly passions and earthly desires. The youth in Korea might have been in this generation since they are called the *Sampo* Generation—the term “*sampo*” means that they gave up three important elements in their lives, which are love, marriage, and childbirth. For them, there is no need even to be cynical any longer. In this way, it is observed that the ing-yeo people, whether in Japan or in Korea, tend to abandon what is essential for their lives, faced with fear and anxiety for their precarious reality. Thus, if the given dire reality is unavoidable and beyond recovery, those who are precarious are inclined to choose to endure the status quo by becoming complacent and being content with it. Of course, this is not really satisfying. One cannot change the world with only complaints about reality—but they do intensify the confusion and pain. Rather, the only solution available to the youth is to believe that they are satisfied with the current situation: what Koreans call “mental winning.”

The reason why young people have replaced anxiety with happiness is well explained in *The Happy Youth in a Desperate Country*, a book by a young Japanese cultural theorist, Noritoshi Furuichi (2014). According to a Japanese survey the book cites, while more than half of young people in Japan feel “happy,” at the same time they entertain an idea that they are “unstable.” “Despite pessimistic talks, such as ‘we are in a society of disparity’, ‘increased non-regular employment’, ‘generation gap is so serious’, etc. that are never ending, the young people as the directly concerned party are now feeling ‘happy’” (p. 133). Most people would be puzzled by this finding. Furuichi accounts for the reason for this ironic optimism as follows:

Now, when one thinks of oneself that ‘I will not be able to be happier than this,’ one cannot help but say, ‘This is a happy moment.’ When humans would have been better not betting on a big hope for the future, they will say ‘happy now’ or ‘satisfied with the current status.’ (p. 134)

Here, what “happiness” means is that life is completely self-satisfied and consummatory; it does not imply that life overflows with happiness. Rather than achieving great objectives far in the future, one can feel satisfaction by enjoying the surroundings of one’s life now and here. However, these happy young people in a desperate country are not the heroes of a touching story who are overcoming hardships. Furthermore, it might be incorrect to understand them as a hesitant and pragmatic generation or as less interested in advancement—although this is ostensibly right. It is the result of rational judgments that we should be satisfied with what we have now, based on the enlightenment that in the future life will not be better than it is now. It is not because they dislike love, marriage, and childbirth or lack the ability to participate in them that the *Sampo* Generation in Korea and the *Satori* Generation in Japan give up such important things. Because the external material environment is not conducive for personal prosperity, they cannot help but modify their internal situation or abandon their future plans reluctantly, but in a very rational way. Oh (2014), in the Korean foreword for Furuichi, writes that “Japan is desperate and Korea is ‘more’ desperate,” because “resignation like ‘because the future of the situation is hopeless, let’s be happy even in our reality’ is not allowed to the young people” in Korea. Pointing out that the high suicide rate and elderly poverty rate in Korea is overwhelming compared to other

countries, he argues that there are other causes of the impossibility of happiness even in frustration. In order to obtain jobs, young people in Korea are even using the “pursuit of happiness” as a “spec” to meet employment requirements:

The doors for employment have been narrowed and the average competence of job seekers has become beyond the level of human. . . . People are now aiming for niche markets. The ‘happiness’ becomes a spec in this way. In Korea, the case of ‘the happy young people’ is thoroughly used as the subject matter for personal statement for employment, meaning more than itself. It is in the ways that they learned the ‘challenging spirit’ through travel, experienced ‘corporate social responsibility’ through volunteer work, learned how the organization operates even through their small community activities, and the like. . . . So was created ‘fabricated’ happiness. Thus, in Korea, one line in personal statement, ‘I have lived freely,’ is a decisive competitive advantage to thrust others away. (Of course, this ‘spec of happiness’ is not competitive any longer because it reached the saturation point. However, ‘since everyone does it,’ they cannot help but do so. (pp. 11-2).

This is a society in which young people should refrain from and restrain their basic needs in life and fabricate even their feelings of happiness. Here, the problem of the youth is revealed as that of the whole society in general. The internalization of the neoliberal logic of competition, the formation of the entrepreneurial subject in perpetual self-improvement, and being snobs and ing-yeo (surplus) as a way to survive: These are rugged thorns and ways that young people cannot get around.

Yet the ing-yeo generation has not given up being (really) happy. Behind their unhappiness and anxiety, there are social pressures that they should be geared to the standard that the previous generation—their parents’ generation, in particular—achieved in their ascending economy. Although the established generation advises the youth to lower their expectations for the job and take on an ambitious and challenging spirit, the kind of jobs they are thinking of and got through themselves do not exist any longer. Thus, the ing-yeo youth cannot but plan to live differently than previous generations. The situation in Korea since the late 1990s coincides with the so-called “lost two decades” since the 1990s in Japan: the middle-class dream has been broken and young people who cannot be formal members of the society have increased. The number of young people in Japan who say that they feel happy and rewarded “when [they are] with friends or colleagues” (Furuichi, p. 139), not with their family members, continues to increase. Taken together, the only way to solve the problems of the youth in this descending economy is for the youth themselves to stand up and overcome their problems through the community and through solidarity within it, helping each other (Amamiya, 2011; Uchida and Okada, 2014).

In this context, Korea’s young people, who often give up the important conditions of life, practice and experiment by living together (with friends) in their own communities. They try to invent professions that have not existed, establish cooperative unions to work together and help one another, and create local communities where they can set up a new base for living. Among other things, the cooperative union is the realistic alternative with which the young people can live their lives without belonging to

the framework of the mainstream economy. In an ing-yeo interview, I met an indie musician, Dae-Seong (male, late twenties), who is a founding member of an independent musicians' cooperative. "Because cooperative union is an association and an enterprise at the same time," he says, "balance between business and association is required."

According to him, after belonging to the union, the indie musician members' standard of living has improved overall. Being an indie musician in Korea is to take a risk in many ways, because the indie music market is very small compared to the mainstream industry. Even though one decides to be a musician only because of a passion for one's favorite music, it is much more difficult to continue on this track. Instead of wishing their music will be popular and be incorporated into the mainstream, these indie musicians are willing to live their own "sustainable" music lives with their friends who, albeit a small number, love their music and agree with their way of life and thoughts.

Su-Yeong (female, early thirties), who was introduced as *fujoshi* above, joins in an e-book publishing (cooperative) community in order to do her favorite jobs, such as writing and editing, but still makes a living as a part-timer at a bar. She does not want to achieve the relative stability and profitability that comes from adapting oneself to large companies and public organizations. "Even though I cannot live the lives of the mainstream in Korea by giving up economic stability and income," she asserts, "only when I live as I want" will happiness come. Je (2014), who wrote *A Guide to Nomads Working in the Downhill World*, also participates in this cooperative union. She is trying to find a new work ethic—and the conditions for happy working—in the current period in which a long-term world economic downturn continues and the conditions and means of

labor have changed. If no job or workplace guarantees us stability, and if what we really need is not to make money and keep a job as an activity, but to work happily, then, she thinks, “we need more ‘useless works,’ ing-yeo-jit, because it is exactly the way that can be fun without going through money and market” (p. 116). Even though their work is happy ing-yeo-jit and not the means of earning, inasmuch as it is work as we define it, those experiments pursuing work and fun at the same time will be successful. Even if it is what they do with friends with the same thoughts and goals, it will be more valuable.

Someone (female, estimate late twenties) in the audience at a seminar where I was invited as a speaker in 2013 told me that there is a group of organizations called “Ing-yeo Alliance<sup>100</sup>.” The members of the alliance are the “creators of living” who call themselves ing-yeo, and they enjoy doing creative activities such as handicrafts and ecological projects at a few alternative spaces. Their projects include making soap and cosmetics with natural materials, crafting household items like furniture by hand, and building open software tutorials from which amateurs can learn coding. These ing-yeo subjects can help others and themselves by producing and creating what they need with their own surplus labor and by sharing it—whether the product or labor—with other friends who need it. By stopping being a passive consumer, these ing-yeo subjects try to find and keep their value as creators. We may call these ing-yeo subjects the ‘producing guerillas’ in our consumer society.

As we have seen, a variety of projects in everyday life, through cooperative unions and alternative spaces, enable an association in which the youth can sustain their

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<sup>100</sup> This alliance is not an actual unit of organization, but the members of each organization call theirs as such.

ing-yeo lives doing ing-yeo-jit. Rather than deprecating oneself by consuming the time of ing-yeo and spitting out cynical jokes, they are taking care of themselves through associations and alliances by contacting friends who have similar concerns and sharing their knowledge and even troubles with them. In this era of no alternative, is it not the only survival strategy to sustain ing-yeo-jit with friends for as long as possible?

## **CHAPTER 4. PRECARIOUS SUBJECTS IN NEW MEDIA**

The term ing-yeo is in fact an expression that properly reflects the ing-yeo youth's political-economic reality and their characteristics in cultural activities. The discourses of ing-yeo by the ing-yeo are also a sort of self-deprecating and cynical response to the insecure world and their circumstances within it. In some ways, their cultural ing-yeo activities are gestures for liberation to overcome their surplus situation in fictitious ways. They try to enjoy the plentiful free time they have due to their ing-yeo status by performing active ing-yeo-jit. However, lasting precarity and long-term economic recession make it impossible for the ing-yeo subjects to (re-)produce their stable lives. For those ing-yeo youth, it is an irreversible trend to give up hope and settle for the present in the face of the future steadily growing worse. Nevertheless, some ing-yeo youth are trying, slowly yet steadily, to find ways to associate with others in order to build sustainable lives.

This chapter will trace how the youth of Korean society, who do not have opportunities to participate in mainstream economy but are immersed in their own technologies, became the ing-yeo subjects with precarious status. For this purpose, I explore the processes of becoming ing-yeo in the current capitalist system combined with new media technologies. Here I ask the role of daily new media platforms such as social networks, online communities, and online games, which draw and capture various kinds

of surplus information and activities. I carefully examine how the ing-yeo subjects are exploited, i.e., how the value produced from their ing-yeo activities using these new communication tools in their daily lives is exploited by new media capital. As a result, we will be able to see clearly what it means to become ing-yeo in the current information society and how the precarious ing-yeo's lives in the present culture have been transformed in such a new media environment. What I argue in this chapter is that new media technologies play a significant role in feeding the life and labor (value) of the ing-yeo subjects back to the realm of production.

#### **4.1. A Feeling of Being Surplus**

In the previous chapter, I mentioned the “gaming subject.” This subject does not refer to the subject showing psychopathological symptoms by enjoying online or video games for long periods of time or having difficulty in living a normal life due to being too focused on games. Even when referring to online *pye-in*, it does not actually mean the subjects who are excluded from society and confined into their closed, personal spaces because of personal disability or disease. Even though their lifestyles are similar and they suffer similar symptoms, it would be too exaggerated to treat these *pye-in* as medical patients or social outcasts. I consider their expression of themselves, such as *pye-in* or ing-yeo, as one possible “attitude” toward their culture and social reality. Expressions of *pye-in* and ing-yeo are honest inner reflections, and at the same time cool, but quite passive, resistance against the devastating reality of the outside world.

The gaming subjects are those that accept games as more realistic, prefer to be connected or maintain social relations through games, and take games as criteria for

viewing and judging the world; it would also be fine if “game” were substituted for other new media technologies such as the Internet, online communities, or social networking sites. To ing-yeo subjects in the information society, digital media is the yardstick of viewing and judging the world and the tool for connecting and maintaining social relations. While such an environment is natural for ing-yeo subjects, the problem is that it became difficult for them to discover firm identities, so that they cannot be the active ones who manage their lives. Such a crisis of identity surely does not mean the impossibility of subjectification in the digital media age, the impossibility of the formation of humanity, or, furthermore, the destruction or the end of humanity. It simply means that the process of subject formation, the path in which one’s identity is established, and the ways of communication with others has become dependent on computerized and networked digital machines and technology. It is important that such a self-identification process through the mediation of exterior apparatuses accompanies a feeling that one’s experience of something real is missing. For example, as Sherry Turkle (2011) mentions, “In virtual worlds and computer games, people are flattened into personae. On social networks, people are reduced to their profiles” (p. 18). It is a feeling as if the self does not grow and move forward within that process, though the subject is continuously doing something with those technologies.<sup>101</sup>

This would be the feeling of being or becoming surplus (ing-yeo). It originates at first mostly from one’s economic circumstances, such as unemployment, economic

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<sup>101</sup> This feeling is deeply related not only to the result of subjectification mediated by the “technologies of the youth” that we followed in the second chapter, but also to the foreseen failure of “self-improvement” as the neoliberal way of subjectification that is examined in the first chapter.

incompetence, hopeless everyday lives, and the like. However, it is also rooted in the feeling of deprivation of subjectivity brought by production, consumption, and communication through mechanized recognition and computerized algorithms in the current era of digital media and networks. We may only “imagine” ourselves as if we were the owners of the technologies operating and controlling computers and networks.

However, such a loss of identity is not experienced only as painful tragedy or agonizing reality. For the ing-yeo subjects, the smooth mobility between reality and the virtual world might be experienced as a certain ecstasy (Baudrillard, 1988). The online world is a space where this ecstasy is effectively produced, shared, and consumed. From this, we may be reminded of what Benjamin (2008) describes as the fascination of technologies with which modern audiences feel a certain freedom. It also reminds us of what Brian Holmes (2002) suggests is “flexible personality,” while describing the implementation of a new labor regime brought about by the New Economy and the development of new technological apparatuses, and epitomized as the new social paradigm. The ing-yeo subjects who become flexible in various fields are those who were excluded from the production cycle despite their abundant and superfluous productivity. They try to develop their own creative ing-yeo activities through the given production technologies, i.e., the technologies of youth. That is why ICTs are regarded as one of the conditions of ing-yeo culture and as tools for the ing-yeo subjects.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, ing-yeo human beings have been formed within the environment where new media technologies are developed. Perhaps the ing-yeo being is a certain aspect of the inevitable subjectification that is a

concomitant phenomenon with the development of new media technology under a capitalistic system. In fact, it is unclear whether the one is a cause of the other or an effect—just like how the technologies of the youth are the technologies that the youths desired, enjoyed, and created and at the same time those that define, regulate, and alienate them. However, the problem lies in that the process of coevolution of technology and mankind is not purely beneficial to both of them. From a Marxian viewpoint, alienation is evitable between technology (machine) and human beings. Capitalistic society exploits human labor to produce surplus (or surplus value). Given this, is the feeling of being or becoming surplus in a society infiltrated by new media inevitable, just as the alienation of human beings from technology is? However, the “feeling of being surplus” to which I refer might not be something I can directly experience. It is not a direct feeling of being victimized in that my surplus value is deprived or exploited by someone or something else. It rather is what the ing-yeo experience as a certain lethargy or instability from unclear causes.

If we take the concept of “image of the subject imagined” mentioned in the previous chapter, the ing-yeo is the result of one’s economic insecurity and unstable future. Currently, because they can manage to get along one way or another, they might feel happy but they are not sure—or rather, they choose not to think about—if they have any possibilities in the future. It is important that they do not hold any hope but feel happy now.<sup>102</sup> Enough entertainment resources are provided to the ing-yeo, and the time for enjoying those resources is given as well. Even though they vaguely sense the fact

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<sup>102</sup> Paradoxically, this happiness is not a feeling of euphoria and bliss, but a sort of sense of self-satisfaction from the current status that would not change any longer.

that they have entered a long-term period of low growth, the instability they feel is offset by the effect of cultural abundance. However, the ing-yeo youths, as the subjects that are no subjects<sup>103</sup>, simply begin to simulate their virtual identities, the image of the subject imagined. Furthermore, digital natives are those youths who were born and raised in such an environment of imagination, fantasy, and simulation. In their insecure lives, what those ing-yeo youth create and produce through media consumption is accumulated as value for capital, while their way of life—how they work and communicate—is excluded as not suitable for society.

We might regard those ing-yeo subjects as the precarious class or the “precariat”<sup>104</sup> in the digital age, since most of these youths withstand the severe ordeals of various economic circumstances in current capitalism. The precariat is, in Standing’s words (2011), “a class-in-the-making” rather than a “class-for-itself.” Rather than the traditional working class or industrial workers, the precariat are those who face multiple related and overlapping insecurities in the labor market, employment, skill reproduction, income—in other words, life under neoliberalism.

## **4.2. Precariat: Subject of Impossible (Re-)Production**

The precariat has been growing tremendously, as various precarious labor and employment forms such as non-regular (temporary and one-time employment) and

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<sup>103</sup> That is, the subject that is not fully subjectified.

<sup>104</sup> The precariat is a neologism combining an adjective “precarious” and a noun “proletariat.” It is originally derived from the European labor movement in the 1970s, and many scholars, especially in France and Italy, tend to use it in order to identify proliferating precarious workers as a new kind of political subject. In Japan, the term is usually found in the movement to improve the lives of “freeters” in the casual labor market (Amamiya, 2011). In Korea, the term “non-regular employment” is used extensively instead of precariat.

indirect (dispatched and contractual) employment have become common globally. The number of those who were called the working class in the era of industrial capitalism continues to shrink, because most of the currently developed societies of neoliberal capitalism, in which flexibility is a basic economic stance, have reduced the amount of long-term, secured, and fixed-hour employment available. Those who drop out of the stable working class are transferred to the class of precariat. Standing believes Korean society has already reached the peak of precariat:

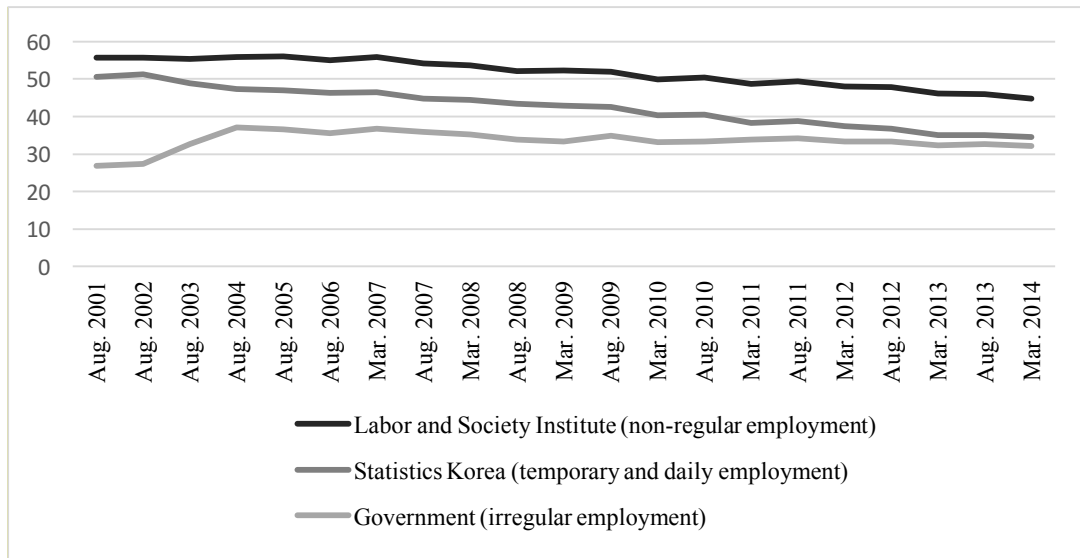
In most countries, the statistics show that the number and share of national labour forces in temporary statuses have been rising sharply over the past three decades. They have grown rapidly in Japan, where by 2010 over a third of the labour force was in temporary jobs, but the proportion may be highest in South Korea, where on reasonable definitions more than half of all workers are in temporary ‘non-regular’ jobs. (p. 15)

The appearance of the precariat in Korean society corresponds with the socio-economic conditions for the creation of *ing-yeo*, previously examined in the introduction and the first chapter. Numerous neo-liberal policies—ensuring labor flexibility, liberalization of mass dismissal, assurance in restructuring, etc.—were introduced during IMF rule after the economic crisis in 1997. As a result, non-regular employment has flooded Korean society, which seems to be producing new kind of working class. Capitalist and state power did not settle the gap between regular and non-regular employments but rather established bipolarization by creating tensions between the two classes and pushing the regular workers to be an “aristocratic working class.” As a result, society has accepted

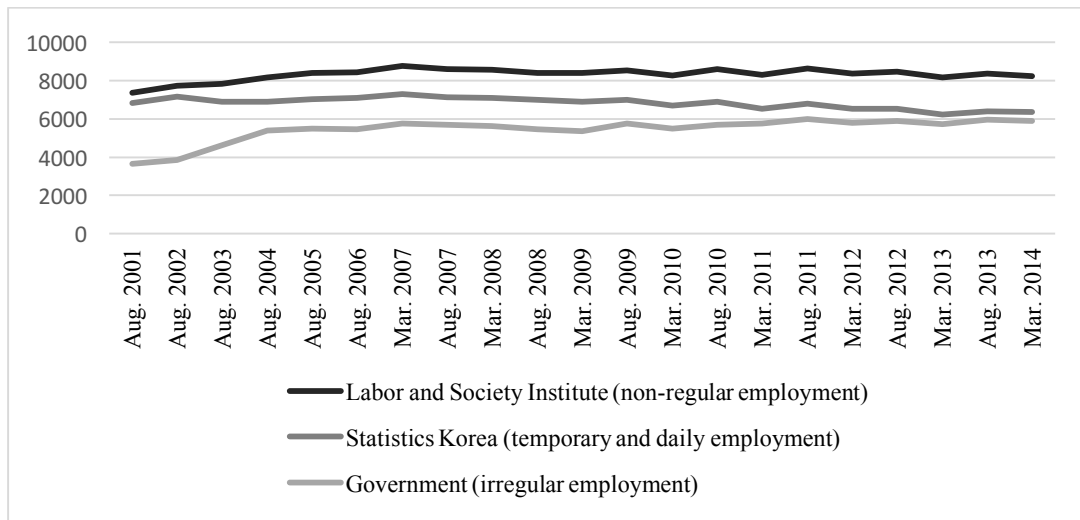
non-regular employment as natural and reasonable. Then, as Standing states, the ratio of non-regular employment has become more than half of the labor market.<sup>105</sup> The ratio of non-regular employment, since its introduction in 1997, reached its peak in the early 2000s, but seems have slowly decreased since then (see **Figure 4.1**). However, the number of non-regular workers seems not to be decreasing at all (see **Figure 4.2**). Considering the number of non-regular precariats who were abnormally increased and maintained, according to J.K. Lee (2011), it seems that “[the] precariat infiltrates into the working class and seems to change the way of existence of the whole working class itself” (p. 333).

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<sup>105</sup> According to official data from National Statistical Office, as of 2014 the number of non-regular workers is 6 million, and the proportion of non-regular workers among the total waged workers is about 33 percent. The number of non-regular workers is increasing, although the proportion is decreasing slightly. The statistical data explains that the criteria for non-regular employment is broader than other countries, since non-regular employment includes temporary workers (including fixed term), part-time workers, and irregular workers (temporary agency, stay-at-home, on-call workers, etc.). However, according to a researcher in the Korea Labor and Society Institute, Y. S. Kim (2014), the government’s official data (from Statistics Korea and Ministry of Employment and Labor) underestimates the number of non-regular workers due to a mistake in the classification of non-regular. She argues that non-regular employments will reach almost a half of the entire employed population if those who are close to the poor class in reality, small-scale self-employed, special employment (logistics service, construction and transportation, insurance, care assistance, caddy, surrogate driving, etc.), non-registered indirect employment (dispatched, subcontract), in-house subcontract, and those undocumented employment (part-time) are all included in the data.



*Figure 4.1. Rate of Non-regular to Whole Employment (%).*  
Adapted from Y. S. Kim (2014).



*Figure 4.2. Number of Non-regular Employment (thousand).*  
Adapted from Y. S. Kim (2014).

The issue of non-regular employment in Korea is quite serious compared to other countries; it is the most devastating of the OECD nations. Not only is Korea's ratio and number of non-regular employed high, but mobility between non-regular employment and regular employment is extremely limited. That is, the labor market divide is too rigid, so social cohesion is greatly weakened. One of the prominent questions concerning the dynamics of career trajectories is whether temporary employment function as "stepping-stones" to regular and secure employment or as "traps" for permanent unstable jobs. "Overall the empirical literature seems to confirm that there are a significant number of non-regular workers who, while seeking a permanent job . . . find it difficult to escape their precarious status and to transit towards open-ended, regular contracts" (OECD, 2014, p. 183). In the case of Korea, the transition rate from temporary to permanent contracts is very low: only one or two out of ten temporary workers are employed as permanent workers after several years of working, while the others remain temporary workers or even become unemployed.<sup>106</sup>

In Korean society, under the principle of "growth first, distribution later," workers have been asked to sacrifice and take their low-paid hard work for granted in the process of economic development during the last century. Also, the myth of "trickle-down economics," a wish for the flow of wealth to reach the poor and working class someday while contributing to the success of conglomerates, has been dominant among the people. However, this myth is known to be a false and fictitious ideology, given experiences with

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<sup>106</sup> There are regulations to protect non-regular employment, but they are only nominal. For example, although term-contract workers should be transferred automatically to unlimited-term contract workers after two years of employment, most of them are laid off at the time of transfer and then renew the term for another two years as term-contract workers.

numerous economic crises (H.J. Chang, 2010; Dabla-Norris, E., Kochhar, K., Ricka, F., Suphaphiphat, N., & Tsounta E., 2015). While the internal reserve fund of *chaebol* and large conglomerates has tended to increase continuously since the economic crisis of 1997, the employment rate or wage increase rate have not. It is “growth without employment and distribution.” Rather, in a short period of time the precariat, non-regular and non-typical workers, has dramatically increased, and that has brought about the persistence of labor bipolarization. After the financial crisis, the middle class shrank and income distribution was increased both at the upper and the lower sides. According to the economist Ha-Seong Chang (2014), such social polarization has become more acute, to the extent that “middle income class decreased by 5.8 percentage points from 2000 to 2010.” As a result, “the middle class decreased by 11 percent” and “62% of those who dropped out from the middle income class fell down to the low-income class” (p. 27).

The cause of such aggravation of bipolarization is income inequality. The wage level of non-regular employment in Korea is only half of that of regular employment. Even when computing the hourly wage in consideration of working hours, the wage level of non-regular employment is slightly over half of that of regular employed workers. (Y.S. Kim, 2014). Since 1997, there have been continuous efforts to empower the social safety net, such as unemployment benefits or national pensions. However, such programs were designed to assist regular workers of *chaebol* companies rather than protecting non-regular workers in flexible employment status. Non-regular workers are excluded from most public social benefits. Nak Nyeon Kim and Jongil Kim (2014), who uploaded the

Korean database into the World Top Income Database by Thomas Piketty<sup>107</sup>, confirm that income concentration has increased within the last 15 years (since the late 1990s), utilizing income tax statistics instead of the household survey: “the average wage of the top 0.1% wage earners in 2010 was 21.6 times greater than the average wage of all wage earners whereas it was just 12.7 times greater in 1995” (p. 19). Gini’s coefficient<sup>108</sup> shows that the degree of inequality has been aggravated: it was not too serious in 1996 when the coefficient was 0.259, while it increased dramatically to 0.352 by 2004 (Shin, 2013, pp. 67-8). Expansion of the non-regular working population is ultimately based on the exploitation and mobilization of cheap labor forces. The value of labor or the quality of workers’ lives has become so low in Korea that it is said that the (low-paid) labor forces are ground into the work process.

As such, many working subjects in Korea have gradually fallen into the “new class of danger,” the precariat. Most youths entering the labor market cannot help falling into the precariat, “those who are working but not workers enough, those who belong to the class but at the same time are already ‘half’ fallen out” (J.K. Lee, 2011, p. 335). The *ing-yeo*, 88 Man-won Generation, or Sampo Generation is the younger generation version of the precariat. The number of NEET, those who are not in the schooling system but are not interested in employment or employment training, was about 34.8% of all college graduates in 2011 (Nam, 2011). The number of NEET who are not even looking

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<sup>107</sup> Based on this database, Piketty points out the aggravation of global inequality in income and wealth in his works, including the world bestseller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

<sup>108</sup> It generally indicates the degree of inequality of distribution and especially used to measure the degree of inequality in income distribution. It has a value between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the higher the degree of inequality. When the value is bigger than 0.4, the society is in a state of quite unequal income distribution.

for jobs is beyond one million (Nam and Kim, 2013). The impoverishment of the elderly and the trend of non-regular employment are no less serious than the problem of youth employment. In this aging era in which the number of elderly is gradually increasing, their impoverishment and giving up on their lives are huge social problems. In fact, these issues of the youth and the elderly are not separated but intertwined: the bigger population of the elderly becomes, the smaller the population of the younger generation becomes. Therefore, the children's generation, which is responsible for taking care of the parents' generation, is being decreased. Furthermore, the economic ability of the children's generation is lowered compared to the parents' generation. As a result, unless economic stability and a secure life are given to the children's generation by socio-economic investment in the current and future younger generations, the core of economics, consumption and (re-) production, will be depressed. Given that, it is only logical that such economic deflation will jeopardize the whole social system. In that sense, rather than fostering generational tension and discord between the youth and the elderly, it is necessary to prepare countermeasures for the precarious present and future that both generations, as a group bound together by a common destiny, are urgently facing. The issue of the precariat goes beyond the problem of generation—it may include many other social problems, such as changes in population structure, generation tension, class inequality, and so on.

The reason for discussing the precariat here is not to simply explain the precarious labor of this era as a change in employment format, but to reflect on the changes of working conditions and to consider the possibility of overcoming them. We need to see

that the precariat are not simply the workers who are trapped in low-wage and precarious employment forms, but that they represent epochal changes at large, that is, the increase of the workers' precarity and the insecurity of the whole society. Therefore, as Standing (2011) suggested, the precariat should be defined in terms of process, meaning "the way in which people are 'precariatized.'" For Standing, "to be precariatized is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle" (p. 16). Subjectivity formed through flexible labor and life cannot help but remain precarious. Toby Miller (2010), asking us to pay attention to cultural workers in a neoliberal post-industrial society that is characterized by casual labor, states that:

We inhabit a world where flexibility is the mega-sign of affluence, and precariousness, its flipside: one person's calculated risk is another's burden of labor, inequality is represented as the outcome of a moral test, and the young are supposed to regard insecurity as an opportunity rather than a constraint. . . .

Contingent labor becomes a way of life. (p. 97)

The precariat, living a contingent way of life, cannot become a "class-for-itself" yet. Still, or perhaps forever, they may not escape their identity of a "class-in-the-making" or a "class-which-is-no-class." The contingency and precariousness of their work and life prevent them from having their own identity—their class identity. They also cannot have their own authentic technologies and are "unable to control the technological forces they face" (Standing, p. 18). The precarious subjects are unable to control their own technologies due to their precariousness, and as a result, they become the subjects that are

incapable of sustainable (re-)production. As their work cannot evolve into career-building or continuous personal progress under this “short-termism,” their identities—their minds, cognition, and practices—also become flexible, disconnected, and fragmented. The identity of the precariat is temporal, unstable, and precarious, as their form of labor defines them. However, what creates the class or group of precarious subjects is something more than their precarious way of labor and employment. The precariat’s whole lives—whether in work, leisure, or entertainment—are deconstructed under the rule of flexibility and then reconstructed in a new capitalistic way. In this way, their identity is hard to form. Eventually, they become the subjects that are no subjects, the ing-yeo.

#### **4.3. Digital Proletariat and Cognitive Surplus**

From the reflection on the precariat (the economic ing-yeo subject), we learned that the ing-yeo subjects experience difficulty in biological and material (re-)producibility. The ing-yeo encounter the crisis in their subjectivity due to precarious economic conditions, aggregated inequality, social exclusion, exploitation and appropriation of all human activities by huge capital, and loss of their own technologies and means of production. They simply continue to reproduce such situations in which they are incapable of reproducing and become precarious. The neoliberal system does not feel any responsibility for their incapability to reproduce. It is not because it tries to avoid its responsibility for creating such situations, but that such incapability to reproduce is the foundational driving force for operating the system.

However, global digital media technologies play a major role in turning the life and labor of the *ing-yeo* subjects who seemed incompetent in reproduction back to the realm of production. If the precariat are the laboring subjects in terms of their fragmented working hours, they are the “cognitariat”<sup>109</sup> when it comes to their fragmented cognitive abilities in knowledge and cultural labor (Berardi, 2005; Moulier-Boutang, 2011). The cognitariat are the workers (proletariats) engaged in “immaterial labor,”<sup>110</sup> the dominant labor type in the post-industrial society of capitalism (Lazzarato, 1996). Immaterial labor refers to labor in the fields of communication, information, and knowledge in a narrow sense, and labor based on emotions and overall psychological activities in a broad sense.<sup>111</sup> Even though the cognitariat are not the working class who do not possess the means of production according to Marxian criteria, they appear to be social *ing-yeo* subjects as producer-consumers and precarious workers in the digital-information culture.

To cognitariats, there is no fixed space such as a factory. Wherever there is a computer and access to the network and wherever their service is available, becomes their workplace—hence the concept of “social factory” or “factory without wall.” For this new type of worker, it is unnecessary to have a fixed factory for industrial manufacture. Instead, their daily spaces outside of those meant for waged labor, spaces for leisure and rest, and spaces for reflection and imagination—that is, the places originally not meant to

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<sup>109</sup> This term is a neologism combining “cognitive” and “proletariat.” It is found frequently in the works by Italian Autonomists, including Antonio Negri.

<sup>110</sup> For Lazzarato, the term “immaterial labor” designates the change in the labor process that includes skills in digital information technologies invested and a variety of social and cultural activities, which were excluded from the criteria of labor (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 133).

<sup>111</sup> The later is also called “emotional labor” (Hochschild, 2003; Illouz, 2007) or “affective labor” (Hardt, 1999).

be spaces for production—are transformed into the spaces for production. Not only places, but time is also changed into time for production or for working. Even the time for resting and recharging for the next labor time is turned into time needed for production. Part-time workers who have fragmented, shortened working hours cannot take their free time between each working period as their own. Human relationships, expression of feelings, and hobbies or creative stimulation, traditionally not regarded as being part of production, become necessary for waged labor. In the era of social networks, social activities and social relationships via one's private network also become labor. As Mark Andrejevic (2011) asserts, "if digital technology makes it possible to work outside the office, recent innovations enable the workplace to exploit the productivity of our social lives outside the workplace" (p. 83). Through fragmented immaterial labor at the "factories without walls," cognitariats produce something that might be called the "content." This content is mostly digitized information, which can be accessed, shared, transported, and consumed wherever and whenever through media technology. Due to the content, the cycle of capital can be fast and flexible.

The cognitariat is closely related to post-industrial or post-Fordist political-economic conditions and the introduction of the technological environment of new media we are currently experiencing. In that sense, they might be called the "digital proletariat," the proletariat in a digitized, networked information society, or the "cybertariat" (Huws, 2003) or "cyber-proletariat" (Dyer-Witheford, 2015). Their labor is often called digital labor, immaterial labor, creative labor, cognitive labor, or affective labor. Our current society is understood to be entering the stage where such labor plays a more and more

important role in explaining the mechanisms of this society. Various names are used to indicate this societal system, such as the New Economy, knowledge-based economy, digital capitalism (Schiller, 1999), information society (Toffler, 1980), network society (Castells, 2000), and cognitive capitalism (Fumagalli, 2011; Moulier-Boutang, 2011; Pasquinelli, 2009; Vercellone, 2005, 2007). Such issues of the new production paradigm of current capitalism, new ICTs and their social and economic effects, and the power-dominating system in the global dimension are what Marxist critiques of political economy are especially interested in.

One of the most basic arguments of this theoretical approach is that any surplus value produced through immaterial or cognitive labor under the current information-communicative capitalism will be appropriated by capital. Basically, this argument is based on the traditional Marxist labor theory of value. According to this theory, a certain value and wealth is produced through activities that are only tangentially considered “labor,” such as the cognitive, knowledge, creative, and immaterial labor of the cognitariat. At the same time, this wealth and value are segmented, synthesized, and recombined in various ways to be accumulated in the form of capital. There are many analyses of these not-labor-enough activities that have been exploited or appropriated through the cycle of value production, analyses that ask what the source of creating surplus value is. According to the labor theory of value, the value of a product can be measured by the amount of labor time invested into production. However, the problem lies in that today, such labor or activities that contribute to creating surplus value cannot be fully recognized as labor, or paid as labor. This point continues in Marx’s theory of

surplus value: since one cannot be paid according to his invested labor time, the surplus value being produced from that time is something that is exploited by capital. In this context, Christian Fuchs (2014) explores how digital labor in the age of the Internet and social media creates value; he verifies that Marx's theory is still valid for understanding labor and value in digital age.

However, in a developed capitalist society, the increased productivity of automated machines replaces human labor. Therefore, human labor is not directly exploited, but the operation of machines harmonized with human knowledge produces value. The contradiction of capital caused by an automated machinery system, which Marx assumed in the "Fragment on Machine" (in *Grundrisse*), refers to how "it [capital] presses to reduce labor time to a minimum, while it posits labor time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth" (p. 706). Machine work itself decreases the labor time of humans that creates the surplus value so that surplus labor, i.e., the accumulated value to be exploited, decreases, which will bring crisis to capitalism itself. However, beyond this point, Marx sees this automated machinery system as more than an increase in productivity. He considers it to be followed by the accumulation or combination of social and abstract knowledge. He calls it "general intellect," which seems to anticipate the sort of social production of the post-industrial or post-Fordist society (then, information society) where knowledge or intellectual activity becomes the mainspring of the production of wealth.

The concept of general intellect seems to indicate that the traditional meaning of the law of labor—that is, as Marx states, that labor time invested into the process of

production determines the value of the product—is no longer central in the modern capitalistic production system.<sup>112</sup> Marx thought general intellect to be a kind of fixed capital, such as machinery systems or infrastructure in which human knowledge is technologically externalized and objectified. Although the automated machinery, performing as fixed capital, increases productivity, proportionally the amount of human labor contributes less to the production of value. As a result, such disproportion, shown in the process of production, seemed likely to lead to an internal crisis in capitalism.

However, what Marx missed was that general intellect works as living labor in the dimension of today's labor process (Virno, 2004, 2007). According to those who advocate cognitive capitalism, general intellect would be the core source of value production in the current information capitalistic society, not as fixed capital but as living labor. Labor (or labor time) in the traditional meaning may not be the sole measurement of value evaluation. However, it seems evident that intellectual activities in the form of knowledge and cognition with social and collective characteristics contribute significantly to the formation of value or wealth. Nevertheless, current capitalism still tries to extract living labor as much as it can by making workers perform their maximum working hours, even though labor is not limited to physical work. General intellect is something more than a mere sum of knowledge of individual workers. It would rather be

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<sup>112</sup> The extreme interpretations of this phenomenon are “the end of work” (Rifkin, 2004) or “farewell to working class” (Gorz, 1982). These arguments are based on the fact that the revolutionary development of science and technologies brought about the reduction of power of skilled laborers. However, what they are missing is that the reduction of power of laborers does not mean their liberation. Rather, the social crisis caused by technological development results in the degeneration of all laborers to the industrial reserve army. In that all workers become the flexible, unstable, and precarious workers—the potential unemployed, in essence—they are thoroughly proletarianized rather than liberated.

better understood as everything that is defined as the “common” by Hardt and Negri (2009): not only the “common wealth,” such as the air, the earth, and the water, to be shared together, but also the results of “social production,” such as language, codes, affects, and other forms of knowledge (p. viii). It is no one’s possession but everyone’s. The surplus value that information capitalism produces is the common formed by the assemblage of various types of communication, knowledge, and cognitive-sensory activities. General intellect as the common functions as the initial raw materials and the final products, as well as the process of production itself. Not all benefit equally from this common, and that is where the problem arises.

There have been numerous conflicts surrounding the issue of development of post-industrial capitalism and the characteristics of labor value and social production relations that have changed throughout that process. Theories suggesting that immaterial, cognitive, and affective labor are the defining characteristics of current capitalism have faced criticism that they ignore the reality in which most productions are made through physical labor. Also, these theories cannot present appropriate answers to the question of the method of valorization, even though immaterial or cognitive labor has become the core source for creating surplus value. That is, the issue lies in how to define and measure the value created by cognitive labor in terms of socially necessary labor time. For example, how can we measure the value of activities such as pressing a “like” button or updating a personal status on Facebook, if these are considered labor?

In fact, such valorization is quite natural in the current financial capitalism where the investment value of various corporations is measured and calculated with the

assistance of supercomputers and complex mathematical functions. In Google's AdSense, the price of one click on the advertisement is already set based on the number of visitors to the website. In the Third World click farm, the price of one thousand "likes" on Facebook is set as well.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the issue of valorization of knowledge and cognitive labor is not particularly significant, in that it has neither opened a whole new chapter for value creation nor brought about a new way of existence for workers. It actually would be an extreme exaggeration to state that a completely new type of capitalism, which succeeded in subsuming such knowledge and cognitive labor into the process of value accumulation, has appeared. Rather, it would be proper to see that new tools and technologies—the means that can not only measure value but extract, accumulate, filter, analyze, and recombine value—have enabled such activities to be measured in the form of value.

However, what if those knowledge and cognitive activities were not appropriated as labor producing surplus value? Would it not be wonderfully positive if the various cognitive activities of those who are not bound to labor relations can contribute to others out of goodwill? It would be even better if it were a surplus of cognitive ability. Social media theorist Shirky (2011) calls free time given to people outside of production and labor "surplus time," and calls cognitive activity within that given surplus time "cognitive surplus."<sup>114</sup> He examines why and how cognitive surplus, the total sum of cognitive

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<sup>113</sup> According to Arthur's (2013) *Guardian* article on this issue, click farmers in the Third World "could have to generate 1,000 likes or follow 1,000 people on Twitter to earn a single US dollar."

<sup>114</sup> I mentioned in Introduction that the term "cognitive surplus" (Shirky, 2011) indirectly inspired the idea of this dissertation in the early stage. Though referring to a different social phenomenon,

ability that all citizens all over the world can collect from their free time, should be considered significant in the current post-industrial society where productivity is excessively increased and social media is greatly developed. Shirky sees that multitudes can contribute to the interests or benefits of the whole community through the collective and collaborative process of mental (cognitive) labor. For example, according to Shirky, “Americans watch roughly two hundred *billion* hours of TV every year. That represents about two thousand Wikipedias’ projects’ worth of free time annually” (p. 10). If at least some of this surplus time wasted in watching TV can be assembled and used for meaningful projects for the public, it would contribute to the common good of all society.

How valuable it is that cognitive surplus (whether surplus time, creativity, or intellects) other than wage labor can contribute to the common good of all society, compared to wasting away that surplus watching TV! According to Shirky, social technology, such as social networks or social media, is a tool that effectively controls and leads surplus time and ability to the reasonable direction of social participation.

However, the necessary condition for cognitive surplus is that free time outside of economic activity (waged labor) must first be ensured. What matters is how to effectively and meaningfully use surplus time and activities after productive labor. However, can the time even of the precarious ing-yeo subjects contribute to the common good of the whole society collectively? And should it? Nonetheless, since the precarious subjects as digital proletariats are excluded from the time of production and labor, their ing-yeo time is not free time from waged labor but rather abandoned and discarded by the society. What

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I thought that cognitive surplus in the digital age has something in common with the ing-yeo (surplus) subjects in Korean society.

matters is that their ing-yeo time and labor is captured in the form of information commodities generated by their activities on proprietary online services and platforms regardless of their will.

Stiegler (2010a), a French techno-deconstructionist philosopher with a standing similar to Italian Autonomists, sees the problem of a collective mobilization of cognition from a different perspective. He argues that proletariats in the digital era (the ing-yeo, from our viewpoint) contribute to the creation of value in the field of digital production and consumption but are consequently alienated from this labor through the “loss of knowledge” that occurs during this process. If Shirky sees the transition of consumer to producer from an optimistic point of view, Stiegler regards the transition as a degeneration of producer (worker) to consumer from a pessimistic point of view. In other words, while Shirky thinks that accumulation of cognitive surplus and rearrangement of users’ participation would lead to something productive and creative, Stiegler points out that the productive worker would lose *savoir-faire* (the knowledge of how to make or do) and then the mass *savoir-vivre* (the knowledge of how to live) by being proletarianized in the technological environment of new media.

Stiegler diagnoses the current global economic crisis philosophically with concepts drawn from Plato’s *Phaedrus* and Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy.” According to Stiegler, an increase in productivity by automation and digitization and the following problem of unemployment brought about the end of work in its traditional meaning. However, he sees how the digital network technology forces bring new types of labor (non-regular employment, temporary employment, etc.) and proletarianize workers by

externalizing their memory and knowledge.<sup>115</sup> This process is proletarianization because they are no longer the workers who subjectively think and work using their own bodies; they face the loss of memory and knowledge (the tool necessary for production) by delivering knowledge to machines. Thus, workers come to depend upon machines that embody the human intellect. That is why Stiegler calls media technologies such as today's social networking services "hypomnesia." In the process of externalization of the intellect, the mass consumers' labor force of nervous system is proletarianized to an unprecedented degree. Losing their knowledge completely, the proletariat of nervous system become a purely cognitive labor force. "Cognitive capitalism" refers to the new form of capitalistic system where such a cognitariat labor force becomes the object of value production and accumulation.<sup>116</sup> Social change through the creative and voluntary collaboration of cognitive surplus, which Shirky celebrates, is only a single aspect of the cognitive capitalism that exploits the cognitive labor force, that is, the surplus cognition from Stiegler's viewpoint.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> To externalize memory and knowledge means to be dependent upon the exterior technique or equipment of memory, for example, writing, photograph, film, computer, mobile phone, etc. It is in this sense that Stiegler uses Plato's terms such as "hypomnesia" or "mnemotechnics."

<sup>116</sup> According to Bernard Paulré (2009), the term "cognitive" in cognitive capitalism does not refer to that in cognitive science or cognitivism but simply to knowledge (*connaissance*). For him, cognitive capitalism designates "a status of capitalism in which the accumulation of knowledge occupies a central place and not especially a capitalism in which the cognitivism is developed" [my translation]. Moulier Boutang (2011) defines cognitive capitalism as "a mode of accumulation in which the object of accumulation consists mainly of knowledge, which becomes the basic source of values, as well as the principal location of the process of valorization" (p. 57).

<sup>117</sup> At first glance, Stiegler's concept of "cognition" looks similar to nervous system or perception rather than knowledge. While Stiegler thinks that the mass workers come to have only cognitive ability, losing their knowledge and technologies, Autonomists insist that the general intellect, i.e., generalized knowledge of the mass workers, is appropriated and exploited by capital in cognitive capitalism. Although the two seem different diagnoses of knowledge or cognition, they are in the same line in arguing that knowledge and cognition become the source of surplus value as well as

#### **4.4. People Deprived of Attention**

Nicholas Carr (2010), who writes on technology and culture, often refers to neurological science to discuss how the dominant media network, the Internet, distracts people and shapes new habits of mind. Carr asserts that the online environment promotes “cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning” (p. 116) and that people’s pattern of thinking (the way people’s brains and minds work) deteriorates by multitasking via the Internet. Excessive stimulus from the Internet threatens and shuts down people’s thoughts while the ability to think deeply and creatively degenerates. Therefore, he argues that multitasking in the networked environment seems to be quite effective, but consequently our brain’s capacity to remember and perform over the short-term becomes overloaded. We pay attention to the screen but our brain accepts it in a scattered way. Carr describes this paradoxical situation as follows:

the Net seizes our attention only to scatter it. We focus intensively on the medium itself, on the flickering screen, but we’re distracted by the medium’s rapid-fire delivery of competing messages and stimuli. Whenever and wherever we log on, the Net presents us with an incredibly seductive blur. (p. 118)

The activities of web surfing and immersion in the Internet stand opposite to each other but we still cannot distinguish one from the other. We get text messages at every moment and the newsfeeds from Facebook friends grab our attention. We leave our knowledge in the customized information that Google provides. In this situation, how can we say that we are concentrating on something? The problem lies not in that our concentration

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the object of exploitation.

decreases simply by using the Internet; what is important is that we are gradually losing the ability to concentrate. In that sense, Carr's argument has something in common with Stiegler's: we are losing our subjective abilities (such as concentration, creativity, imagination, etc.) by depending on external machines like the Internet.

Does paying attention to something or concentrating on something also mean being distracted by it? Do we become indifferent to reality when we immerse ourselves in the network? Does being distracted by something mean that we are freed from its control? Does indifference to reality lead us to freedom from society's interference? Shirky (2010) explains the reason why the consumption of gin, a cheap and hard liquor, explosively increased among London workers in the early eighteenth century in the beginning of *Cognitive Surplus*. It was because a sip of gin helped workers to forget the pain and agony of labor and to sleep well. It was a social problem that could not be solved through the government's prohibition of alcohol.<sup>118</sup>

In the twentieth century, entertainment through new technology became a popular method for relieving workers' pain by helping them spend free time at ease. Drinking did not decrease or disappear, but the ways to use free time were replaced with watching movies or TV. Things that fill the boring surplus time of workers and that comfort their weariness have gradually grown into a huge industry. Cheap popular culture as an industry goes beyond satisfying the surplus and free time of laborers. It reaches the point

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<sup>118</sup> In the article "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics," Buck-Morss (1992) pays attention to the historical fact that the development of anaesthetics, i.e., technique of insensibility, in the nineteenth century was coincidental with the misuse and abuse of many drugs, including alcohol, to pacify the modern people's nerves that were devastated and fragmented from the shock of wars and factory labor.

where it dominates the consciousness and unconsciousness of the public and numbs their will to go against the system. That is why Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) criticize the culture industry. According to them, the culture industry deprives the workers and public of their attention. It disrupts the public's clear recognition of reality.<sup>119</sup> The public turns everything over to the fancy, smooth, sweet, and superficial comfort of entertainment. In such a situation, Guy Debord (1994) illuminates how visual spectacle and commercialized images grab public attention in modern society, how they bring about the separation (alienation) of workers and products, and therefore how they result in the proletarianization of the world. Modern spectacle makes the human being an existence being consumed by the illusion of images. The surplus value of people is captured by the ideology of capital under the influence of spectacle. The power of spectacle might lie in its ability to attract the attention of people to distract them from reality.

Ing-yeo subjects are those who are deprived of their attention—their time of attention cannot be kept for themselves. Most network idealists take a positive stance regarding the situation where people's attention becomes appropriated or mobilized for a specific purpose. They praise it as sharing surplus intellects or cognitive surplus through free and voluntary participation. However, they tend to remain silent regarding the fact that the creation of new business models and the driving force for (post-)industrial development can only be enabled by the appropriation and mobilization of such cognitive surplus. Such captivated attention is equivalent to labor, but without any knowledge or skill. It would be the essence of “cognitive labor power,” which Stiegler (2010a)

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<sup>119</sup> Benjamin (2008) would have quite a different opinion concerning the public's recognition of reality through popular culture.

mentions. On the other hand, captivated attention is identical to Smythe's (2001) process of "audience labor," as well as the process of the "cinematic mode of production," which is at core of the "attention economy" as Jonathan Beller (2006) states. "Cinema and its succeeding (if still simultaneous) formations, particularly television, video, computers, and the Internet, are deterritorialized factories in which spectators work, that is, in which we perform value-productive labor" (p. 1). In other words, current ing-yeo subjects are working to produce certain surplus value in the "deterritorialized factories"<sup>120</sup> of the computer and the Internet. No matter what media it is, surplus subjects are working productively through the process of enjoying the media or the process of paying attention to it. How does spending free time on the Internet become labor that produces value? Why do we call the relaxation of watching a movie labor, and the consumption of information on the Internet production?

Simply speaking, it is as follows. Media service companies such as Facebook and Google have billions of users globally, and the number of users keeps growing. The values of those companies depend on the number of users and the amount of information users exchange via these services. For instance, as users endlessly search information, send emails, upload photos or videos, and chat with friends, the value of Facebook in 2004 was over USD 200 billion and Google USD 400 billion. Their brands have grown beyond our imagination. Just as electronic email did before, functions on Google and Facebook have extended working hours into our free time, and daily life itself has

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<sup>120</sup> Like the ubiquitous environment and the "social factory" that the Autonomists suggest, it means that the production can take place in any place outside the workplace and factory. The problem is whether those non-factory laborers, such as white-collar workers, farmers, students, and housewives, could be included in the working class.

become a sort of work. While users only use the platforms and services, the surplus profit (basically profits from advertisement and exposure) occurs in those companies through mechanisms that are opaque to users.

Nonetheless, the users do not seem to care much about it. Google and Facebook as social media connect people all over the world, and they have even triggered and supported civil revolutions in the Middle East. However, we tend to easily forget how immediately these revolutionary tools can be transformed into oppressive ones. We tend to overlook how its effective operation system is linked to the surveillance and control system. Furthermore, when celebrating “immersion” in the new media, we forget its negative side effect of “deficiency of concentration.” In some sense, these two effects (immersion and deficiency of concentration) have a single purpose in the era of Web 2.0 and new media: the production of surplus value by making people surplus (as ing-yeo subjects) through the new production system.

From the perspective of the new media industry and capital (attention economy), the most significant matter is how to attract users’ attention to and immersion in the media itself. Furthermore, their core interests lie in how to make the users create, share, and consume new information and relationships continuously in that process of attention and immersion. Collective intelligence, open sources, free labor, and participatory culture provide these media companies with the ing-yeo users’ intellectual and cultural foundation to ensure the possibility of a wide-open new market where intellectual, emotional, and cognitive (immaterial) labor can be freely supplied. For example, the ethics of sharing through social networking services would be the most useful

motivational force in political-economic value production performing on such a cultural platform. Further, the human-computer interface would be the most popular culture-economy interface because it enables the appropriation of users' knowledge and their activity information by smoothly inducing users' immersion or interactions.

However, we can see the most typical example of appropriating users' attention and immersion in online games or video games. According to Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter (2009), today's computer games have become "the staple in the media diet of young people," and they say that "digital play is a vast industrial enterprise" (p. xv). The global game industry already has passed Hollywood in terms of profit. Just like the movie industry, the global game industry in developed countries has been trying to build markets and discover massive game players in every corners of the world. Since Korea has the strongest gaming culture in the world and China is growing fast in the gaming market based on its massive population of gamers and developers, the global media and game industry pays attention to countries in East Asia. The size of Korea's game market keeps growing and, proportionally, the ratio of people spending free time on computer games has outnumbered that of people watching TV.<sup>121</sup> Nothing seems more appropriate for playing computer games than ing-yeo subjects' surplus time. The consumption of cognitive surplus as well as ing-yeo time through online games even contributes to

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<sup>121</sup> According to *White Paper on Korean Games*, published by the Korea Creative Content Agency (2010), the size of the Korean game market reached 6.58 trillion won in 2009. As of 2010, the percentage of those who spend their free time playing computer games (28.3 percent) is higher than those watching TV (22.1 percent). Game players spent 74.9 minutes a day playing games, a 10.7-minute increase compared with the previous year. As of 2009, there were more than 43,000 employees in the Korean game industry, and the number continues to grow.

another production (in the gaming industry), and ultimately, within the game culture, it becomes hard to distinguish consumption from production, leisure from labor.<sup>122</sup>

These days it is not natural for all family members to gather around to watch TV in the living room. For the youth, it is more common that each holds an individual device for playing games or chatting with his or her friends online.<sup>123</sup> They spend more time on the Internet than watching TV. Many regulations have been enacted to control excessive immersion of youth (especially teenage students) into Internet games. An expression such as “game addicts” is no longer an exaggeration. Online games that require gamers’ emotional, sensational, and physical immersion and attention paradoxically weaken the ability of deep concentration. As Stiegler (2010b) argues, “psycho technologies’ general spread provokes effects of attention destruction in a variety of ways, which are then combined and reinforced to create a collective pathology with many diverse, harmful consequences” (p. 94). He criticizes the attention economy because it takes individual attention as its resource for growth and brings about the phenomenon of the deficiency of “deep attention” of younger generations through psychotechnologies, such as social media, that are activated by the programming industry. Cultural technologies via new media now focus more on “attention” than “information” itself. Individual attention is a limited resource and the industrial obsession to capture it is desperate. Whether old media or new media, in order to capture individual attention more frequently and for longer

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<sup>122</sup> Real Money Trading (RTD) and gold farming are direct examples that show how playing games (as the representative consumption of ing-yeo time) can produce economic (surplus) values. Concerning active exchanges between the cyber (virtual) economy and real economy, see Castronova (2005, 2008) and Dibbell (2006).

<sup>123</sup> On the birth of PC bang (cyber cafés), online games, and ing-yeo subjects, refer to the second chapter.

periods of time, it must be able to dangle new bait before media users' attention is dispersed in different directions. The degree of stimulus must be stronger and faster. Above all, such stimuli should be repetitive and obsessive. The logic of all media theories concerning the media economy is reassembled around the capture of users' attention or immersion.

Literature and media scholar N. Katherine Hayles (2007), to whom Stiegler refers, asserts that ADD or ADHD, from which the recent younger generations suffer, should be defined as a disorder of "search for stimulation" (p. 190). That the youth have come to desire faster and bigger stimulation means that they have been excessively exposed to the milieu of new media. She argues that repetition of this short but strong media stimulation leads the synaptogenesis of the human brain (especially in children and youth) to be totally different from that of the previous generation. However, Hayles thinks that further discussion is needed on whether the "deep attention" that is required when reading a book is better than the "hyper attention" through media screens. For example, media experiences via online gaming might enhance the ability to adapt quickly to the fast-changing information environment. Furthermore, in the current situation where "hyper attention" is already included in daily lives and the curriculum of higher education, it may be meaningless to keep a negative perspective on hyper attention and the media-saturated environment. Hayles, as an educator, sees it as educators' responsibility to create harmony and interaction between the two opposite attentions (deep attention and hyper attention) through various experiments and developments that do not exclude new media.

Hyper immersion and surplus attention via new media bring us new cognitive and sensory abilities. However, cognitive capitalism or the attention economy ultimately destructs the individuation process in which one unique subject is established by externalizing and segmentalizing<sup>124</sup> our attention, cognitive ability, knowledge, and language through media technology. Therefore, “Dare to know! (*Sapere aude*) Have the courage to use your own understanding,” the motto of enlightenment that Kant (2001) claimed, may be expired in the new media era. Within the cycle of the global new media industry, the existence of the self or subject has become too ambiguous to trust one’s power of reason and to pursue knowledge—hence surplus cognition and the glut of information. New media technologies and cognitive capitalism based on them have become a huge program excluding or capturing the ing-yeo subjects. The subject as the owner of knowledge is ready to vanish. Subjects are becoming workers of cognitive surplus or consumers of surplus information.

#### **4.5. Capture of Ing-yeo in the Circuit of Drive**

Ing-yeo subjects degraded to the proletariat in the digital age consist of various identities. As seen in the candlelight gathering in Korea in 2008 against the import of American beef, the participating individuals were scattered without a unified center and gathered without a single class interest. For that reason, they used to be called the “multitude” (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Female high school students, netizens from heterogeneous online communities (baseball, fashion, animation, etc.), reserved army forces, and so on: they had not a single identity, hobby, or political orientation in

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<sup>124</sup> Stiegler, who refers to Derrida, calls it “grammatization.”

common. Those subjects without commonality and various groups of ing-yeo formed a loose association as a candlelight gathering. We have witnessed how these surplus beings without any commonality could accomplish socially meaningful events, from Seoul City Hall Square filled with candlelight in 2008 to the so-called Arab Uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 to the Occupy Wall Street movement in the U.S. What creates individualized subjects as an immense flow of resistance? What makes heterogeneous people participate in those movements? Many advocates for new media and information technology argues that ICTs, such as social network services, play crucial roles in this explosive participation and resistance.

However, the revolutionary capacity of this global network and digital media, which mediates (collects and disseminates) the thoughts and information of individuals, does not function in one direction. The very tool that brings about a revolution by assembling individual ing-yeo subjects can be at the same time the tool for control and surveillance that expels these subjects to the periphery of the society. Furthermore, it is a magical technology that can mobilize the creativity and productivity of ing-yeo subjects by transforming consumers into producers.

The ing-yeo seem to neither work nor produce. They rather take it as pleasure to consume and use their surplus time outside of the production cycle. They prove by themselves that they can enjoy non-labor or no labor despite their exclusion. These ing-yeo subjects are useless from the perspective of politics and economy. Their ing-yeo activities neither harm the system nor produce any help for reproducing or sustaining it. However, for the system of politics, economy, and culture to sustain itself, it should turn

these surplus existences and their activities into something meaningful. In order to capture the time and behaviors of surplus beings that are spent meaninglessly, scattered and individualized, a new kind of tool (for communication, production, consumption, and distribution), such as new media or Web 2.0, is necessary.<sup>125</sup>

Web 2.0 is a new online platform that provides individualized subjects with the network as a tool for connection; makes them share their thoughts, labors, activities, and emotions in a new way while communicating and collaborating; and captures and absorbs surplus consumers' content and participation in the process of production.<sup>126</sup> However, such a process is meaningful only when it can draw a massive number of participants through the network. The power social networks and social media, as well as advertising, effect through data mining techniques and the collection of personal information can be meaningful only when millions or billions of people produce information, share data, and spread relationships. Further, in order for this process to continue, participants (ing-yeo subjects) must not be aware of the fact they are captured in this production process. Or else, even if they were aware, they would not give up participating because of the benefits that the services provide. The ing-yeo beings should feel as if they enjoy much freedom within this situation or that they are only using its benefits, independent from the system. The ideology of new media, such as more freedom, smoother mobility, faster and cheaper technology, and ubiquity, should cover all doubts. Platform design and

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<sup>125</sup> About a dichotomous structure of Web 2.0, from which the exploitation of users' free labor can be hidden, see Gehl (2010).

<sup>126</sup> The content produced by consumers' (or users') participation is called and categorized as User Generated Content (UGC), and UGCs are circulated, consumed, and re-created by other users and consumers.

algorithms of state-of-the-art media technologies such as Google and Facebook should be invisible (even insensible) in users' daily experiences. Alexander Galloway (2012) finds the invisibility of interface to be a characteristic of the current media era: "The catoptrics of the society of the spectacle is now the dioptrics of the society of control. Reflective surfaces have been overthrown by transparent thresholds" (p. 25). Users themselves get into the smooth logic without feeling the friction of reality.

Beyond such transparent thresholds, how or why do the subjects of cognitive surplus of this age hand over their cognition, knowledge, or intelligence to capital without any resistance in their daily lives? How is surplus appropriated through new media and digital communication? Why is this new kind of labor performed voluntarily or unknowingly? Moulier-Boutang (2011) suggests three "motivations to work": wealth (material interest), power (desire to dominate), and *libido sciendi* (passion for learning). While the first two are traditional motivations, *libido sciendi* is an emerging paradigm in cognitive capitalism. It produces a new mechanism that motivates collaboration (networked brains) of people and captures the creative human activities created by such collaboration (p. 76). However, what motivates such a desire to know (passion for learning)? I would say it is based on a certain fantasy injected into the subject, though of course, here fantasy does not refer to any deception or illusion.

First of all, it is based on a fantasy that one participates in a community and interacts with others or that one contributes socially by sharing and collaborating—this is the part on which most theorists of cognitive capitalism agree. To apply Moulier-Boutang's expression, however, the fantasy of learning and knowing is a foundation for

the desire to know, along with such fantasy factors. What motivates digital ing-yeo subjects to participate in the activities of information communication may be an impulse stimulated by the fantasy of participating, collaborating, and knowing (or learning knowledge and information) rather than their willingness to cooperate and participate actively. Similarly, radical media scholar Jodi Dean (2009) introduced three fantasies that operate in the system called “communicative capitalism” in order to understand such system:

Communicative capitalism relies on the fantasy of abundance accompanying the reformatting of messages as contributions and the fantasy of participation accompanying technology fetishism. These fantasies give people the sense that our actions online are politically significant, that they make a difference. A fantasy of wholeness further animates networked communications. This fantasy furthers our sense that our contributions to circulating content matter by locating them in the most significant of possible spaces—the global. (p. 42)

In addition to Dean’s three fantasies, the fantasy of knowing can be another approach to understanding communicative capitalism. Beyond the desire to know, the fantasy of knowing refers to the fantasy in which being passively positioned—or virtually experiencing the computer-brain simulation process—within the information flow would automatically lead knowledge or information to be delivered, shared, and recognized in subjects. It may not become true, but those who are accustomed to computer-mediated communication tend to believe that simply experiencing the information glut

automatically leads to one's own knowledge. That is similar to the function of "simulation" that we discussed in previous chapters.

There have been various discussions on the society of information, communication, or cognitive capitalism. Here, I will examine "impulsive" characteristics of digital activities (and labors) by focusing on ing-yeo activities (or ing-yeo-jit), the ing-yeo's behavior in the use, consumption, and exchange of information through digital communications.<sup>127</sup> The most noticeable characteristic of the ing-yeo's communication method is the combination of short sentence and image. For example, in long blogs or forum postings, it is common to insert a three-sentence summary with an image of "*jjalbang*."<sup>128</sup> The ing-yeo consumers do not have enough time to concentrate on the whole content of the postings. Of course, the ing-yeo subjects waste much of their time in vain (or looking at vain) activities compared to common people. Since the postings are created and read in short, segmented amounts of time, they will fail if they cannot grab the reader's eye in one glance. When they cannot be easily understood in one skimming, the postings will lose readers' attention. Therefore, the prioritized goal for postings is to attract attention in a short amount of time. Utility and efficiency matter, rather than content. That is, the methods of communication are transformed and solidified in a unique way due to the limitation of fragmented or segmented surplus time. Although *jjalbang* images had been simply used for the purpose of immediate attention, they have become the source of endless Internet memes and buzz, as shown in the second chapter.

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<sup>127</sup> For ing-yeo activities in terms of "cultural ing-yeo," see the section 2 and 3 of the third chapter.

<sup>128</sup> In the second chapter, we dealt with the origin of *jjalbang*.

Blind obsession with being noticed by others and pressure to participate in the viral excitement have strengthened the power of *jjalbang* even more.

What captures the attention of online users most effectively and quickly is “clickbait,” the web content which attracts users’ click for online advertising revenue usually with sensational headlines. Among others, the top players in online clickbait are BuzzFeed, Upworthy, and Huffpost, though clickbait functions in a slightly different ecosystem in Korea. Surfing around portal sites, online news, and various communities in their surplus time, people want something that is not work. They want to get away from working, so they tend to click easily on celebrity news or gossips. By allowing themselves a slight freedom, the surfers online submit themselves to the flow of useless information. Clickbait becomes vital at such a point. People consume their time (do surplus activities) by surfing the web and visiting portal sites, humor sites, communities, etc. in order to let themselves be exposed to the informational flow rather than find useful information. For instance, if some Internet users obsessively or habitually browse online shopping sites even though they do not need any items, they just need to create a situation where those items become necessary or a situation in which they feel it is desirable to get those items. In other words, they push themselves to a certain situation in which a desire naturally occurs.

Sometimes an event becomes a hot issue that especially attracts people’s attention online. Everybody wants to talk about it, and society boils up around it. To use jargon from Korean youth, this is called “paste-bait is thrown” and those users who show interest in it “bit the paste-bait.” This bait is an extremely significant factor in continuing

online ing-yeo activities. The paste-bait plays important role in making the online users' lives more fun. If one does not know the issue or trend related to this paste-bait, one can be alienated from conversations with others. Ing-yeo subjects feel obsessed with online communities and social networking sites for a continuous supply of paste-baits—building identity and relationships is secondary. Obsession with the continuous flow of information (paste-baits) shows a tendency toward fetishism in online activities. If this obsession goes further, one can reach a quasi-psychopathological status, the so-called Internet addiction.

In this new media culture, what role does the paste-bait play? Paste-bait provides people with fun topics to talk about. However, from the users' perspective, paste-bait is discovered rather than provided. And the size of paste-bait proportionally increases relative to the number of users who are attracted to it. That is, the size of paste-bait is not determined in the beginning, but depends on how fast users respond to it and how widely they disperse it. Paste-bait is not actually paste-bait in the beginning. No one forces anyone to eat paste-bait, but the response from those who consume the paste-bait creates the paste-bait itself.

The main beneficiary of such paste-bait is the media or the press that lure the users through fishing. Some Korean journalists (especially for online newspapers) make us wonder if they actually have any ethical mission of social monitoring and criticism. Numerous articles produced, circulated, and consumed online neglect their duties to provide information based on accurate facts. Without feeling ashamed at all, even when copying other articles, these articles use catchy headlines only to attract readers' clicks

(mainly using words such as “shocked,” “wow,” or “naked” in the title) and add suggestive photographs (the same logic as *jjalbang*). They only care about the profit from online advertisements, which are determined by the number of clicks and views, by being exposed longer on Internet search rankings. Relying heavily on clickbait and paste-bait via the Internet, this so-called “abusing” has become a serious problem in Korean journalism. The algorithm of the portal site Naver, which is the leading Korean search platform (even over Google), tends to make such abuse more prevalent. It is easy for a single journalist to use a few key words, repetitive phrases, and sensational titles to be ranked high in Naver’s real-time search ranking. Therefore, every press company competitively copies each other with catchy content, and as a result readers find only similar sensational news on the Web. Such abusing articles can be the most serious kinds of paste-bait and have negative side effects on society.

From the viewpoint of the drive (or impulsion) for voluntary exposure to information via media, paste-bait is not only a lure thrown for fishing by the online media and the press but also a daily feed that Internet users themselves are willing to be hooked up. According to one online advertising and marketing report recently issued, so-called “Me Time” takes up 46% of the whole mobile use among seven unique uses of smart-phones, including Me Time, Social, Shopping, Achievement, Preparation, Discovery, and Self-expression. Me Time refers to an activity of pursuing relaxation or entertainment in order to spend time to focus only on “myself” (BBDO-AOL, 2012). The reason for the higher proportion of Me Time is that activities that fall in another category can also belong to Me Time. For example, purchasing a hot item at an online shopping mall is also

Me Time. Even though this statistic is limited to mobile users, it can also be applied to the whole surplus time for Internet users. As shown above in the mechanism of fishing and paste-bait, Internet users' passive-yet-voluntary activities seem identical to the activities of Me Time. However, can we really call such Me Time relaxed, surplus time for oneself? Would not it be a kind of delusion? Voluntary willingness to be located passively in this flow of data might be explained with "drive" in psychological terms: even though I do not want (desire) to do something, yet I cannot reject doing so.

Information acquisition used to be the most fundamental purpose of Internet use in the early Internet era. However, if we turn the purpose upside down, it is no different from voluntary exposure to information. Even after the particular purpose of information acquisition is fulfilled, one continues self-exposure through the Internet. One immerses oneself in the flow of information with the fantasy of knowing or learning rather than the desire to know. This method of immersion can be called "voluntary passivity."<sup>129</sup> It is a somewhat contradictory way of activities in this new media environment, especially the Web 2.0, where interactivity and participation are emphasized. It shows a pattern of voluntary and active participation since the users willingly bite the bait; but ultimately it is passive in that it results in being caught on the hook. It is not very different from the attitude of passive audiences who commit themselves to the one-way flow of information such as radio and TV. However, if there is any difference from old media audiences, new

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<sup>129</sup> For people's activities of participating in petitions or circulating news content on the Internet and their belief that they create social changes through these activities, Žižek (1997) uses the term "interpassivity"—instead of interactivity. Though this concept is not exactly the same as what I call "voluntary passivity" here, they share a common direction in that to believe that interactivity in the Internet is always active is a mere illusion.

media users (mis-)understand that the use of media technologies is a certain kind of interactivity or voluntary participation.

Surplus time overflowing throughout the Internet can be explained by the concept of drive. According to *Blog Theory* by Jodi Dean (2010), based on the psycho-analytic theory of Lacan and Žižek, “The Real of the internet is the circulatory movement of drive—the repeated making, uploading, sampling, and decomposition occurring as movement on the internet doubles itself, becoming itself *and* its record or trace—effected by symbolic efficiency as loss” (p. 121). This decline of symbolic efficiency through the Internet can be understood in the same context as the decline of the symbolic or transcendental other, as shown in the otaku’s subjectivity above. Simply put, it has become difficult for a subject to discover his identity from Internet activities. The symbolic, which play roles of controlling and managing one’s desire endlessly, cannot have any effect on the subject anymore. Dean asserts that drive is the motive of endless Internet activities in this age and that this drive is not started by a desire (for a certain object) to be satisfied.<sup>130</sup> For her, the drive for circulating itself composes the Internet. Therefore, this circulation is a loop that repeats infinitely. This loop can refer to the completed structure, such as one electrical circuit, or can symbolize a trap or snare, a tool to tie up. According to Dean, all the activities of uploading images, sending messages, blogging, and expressing one’s thoughts and feelings on social networking sites are mere circulatory movements of drive. With the collapse of symbolic efficiency, the fundamental base that enables a subject to function as a subject, the subject repeats online

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<sup>130</sup> For the difference between drive and desire from the Žizekian perspective, see Flisfeder (2012).

activities not to achieve a certain purpose but to enjoy them, accompanied with obsessive drive or with obsession that even the subject cannot understand. The infinite loop of drive involves both the decline of symbolic efficiency and the simultaneous process of dissolution of subject. Therefore, what Dean calls “communicative capitalism” requires the endless persistence of drive (with neither subject nor object) rather than the participation of the subjects.

Therefore, in this context, these subjects and their Internet activities are reasonable enough to be called *ing-yeo*, the subjects who repeat online activities that cannot bear any meaning or utility. As *ing-yeo* subjects, “we enjoy failure” (Dean, 2010, p.121): captured in the loop of repetitive drive, achieving meaningfulness or attaining goals is no longer our purpose. The process of addiction to Facebook app games, such as Farmville, jewel games, etc., which make people click and repeat the clicking endlessly, brings about predestined failure as well as guilt and self-accusation to the *ing-yeo* subjects who cannot but continue the clicking activity. This is an ecstasy of pain or pain of ecstasy that the *ing-yeo* subjects experience daily. As *ing-yeo* subjects, “we are captured in our passivity” (p.122). As I already argued above, no matter how actively the subjects carry out activities via the Internet, all these activities are immediately turned into passive activities. Subjects consider themselves as producing, expressing, sharing, and communicating their thoughts, opinions, creativity, and abilities by replying, blogging, texting, reviewing, re-tweeting, and clicking like buttons. However, all these activities contribute to the circulation of communicative capitalism. In this system, the real users are not us, but communicative capital. Google, Amazon, and Facebook create

and accumulate new values that did not exist before by collecting, analyzing, and utilizing the information from all of our Internet activities. The active participation of ing-yeo subjects is eventually captured by the passivity within the infinite loop of this communicative capitalism.

#### **4.6. Crisis in the Production of Subjectivity**

In many senses, the ing-yeo is a product of the late capitalism in which new media or ICTs are widely spread. At the same time, the new media technological environment that we use daily is the tool for the ing-yeo activities and a certain complex system that the ing-yeo have accomplished. Obviously, the ing-yeo is a product of new media, yet there would never have been new media without the ing-yeo. The ing-yeo is a maniac obsessed with one thing and at the same time an otaku who possesses professional knowledge of love-objects, and furthermore is a passionate consumer of every useless piece of information flowing through the media. The ing-yeo's knowledge is produced, shared, cycled, dispersed, and consumed through information technology and the network. To ing-yeo subjects, new media is something beyond the main communication tool. Without digital media, they would still have remained passive media consumers just killing their free time. New media has defined ing-yeo-hood, based on which the ing-yeo subjects perform their ing-yeo activities in various ways, share their creations, and reconfirm their position before reproducing them. We may call new media a tool for the liberation of the ing-yeo.

However, as confirmed in this chapter so far, the process of identity or subjectification encounters a crisis—hence the crisis of subjectivity too—within the

current neoliberal capitalism where digital communication is dominant. The subjects of the current era became *ing-yeo* in many ways: by desiring the fictitious figures and the imaginary world rather than reality; by losing the reproducibility of their whole life due to economic precarity; and, by losing their cognitive ability and attention with the spread of digital communication technology by falling into the digital proletariat. Lazzarato (2014) diagnoses this crisis occurring in the field of subjectivity as the crisis of production (of wealth) and the production of subjectivity. Of two heterogeneous processes or techniques of production of subjectivity (what he calls “subjectivation”), “social subjection” and “machinic enslavement,” he specifically emphasizes the seriousness of the latter.<sup>131</sup> While social subjection produces the neoliberal individuated subject (i.e., human capital or entrepreneurial self), machinic enslavement, as an entirely different process, occurs through “desubjectivation,” making an individual “a gear, a cog, a component part in the ‘business’ and ‘financial system’ assemblages, in the media assemblage, and the ‘welfare-state’ assemblage and its collective institutions (schools, hospitals, museums, theaters, television, Internet, etc.)” (p. 25). Machinic enslavement operates regardless of the distinction between subject and object, human and machine. Therefore, “Human agents, like non-human agents, function as points of ‘connection, junction, and disjunction’ of flows and as the network making up the corporate, collective assemblage, the communications system, and so on” (p. 27). The crisis in the production

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<sup>131</sup> Lazzarato borrows the division of two processes of subjection from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). In a chapter titled as “7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture,” Deleuze and Guattari discuss how different forms of the State or regimes of power are deeply related to different technologies and apparatuses of value capturing. This is similar to the relationship between productive forces and mode of production from the Marxist perspective of historical materialism.

of subjectivity lies in the enslavement of humans' inherent abilities in language, emotion, intelligence, and consciousness in the current capital relations by being assembled into the production process of the machinic system. The enslavement has only become possible through the fragmentization of the entire existence of an individuated subject.

The issue of being surplus, which we have been discussing, is dealing with the same problem of the crisis of subjectivity. New media and digital technologies, as an apparatus for making ing-yeo human beings, make the subjectification process incomplete or precarious, not only by defining and limiting the subjects but also by transforming the subjects into a part of the mechanical process. We communicate, learn, feel, and recognize each other (or machines) in human-machine systems: we are no longer a worker who produces surplus value but another machine that feeds the machine producing surplus value. The process of being surplus through media and technologies first attracts the ing-yeo to the machine by providing fantasies of participating, learning, and producing. Then the process integrates them into the machine with endless stimuli and drive and proletarianizes them, making them into precarious subjects. The ing-yeo subjects do not possess (understand) the tool (mechanism) of production. They are barely subjectified only when their entire lives are constituted for the production of machinic surplus value.

New media technologies function as tools that make the ing-yeo subjects surplus in the current phase of cognitive capitalism or information capitalism. This means two things: first, it has become easy for ing-yeo subjects to perform productive and consuming activities, called ing-yeo-jit, by using new media tools. Second, almost all the

ing-yeo activities are accumulated, synthesized, and transported in various ways through new media tools both macroscopically (big data) and microscopically (personal information and privacy), and ultimately become the main resource for profits in new media (venture) capital. In this smooth network society covered with an invisible algorithm and natural interface, ing-yeo subjects may voluntarily provide their unique cognitive surplus only to have it unknowingly appropriated. As their time for living and working has become more unstable, flexible, and fragmented, the ing-yeo subjects have more free time, or dead surplus time—so they become more vulnerable to the capitalist system that utilizes ing-yeo's cognitive surplus. An individual (and his activities) becomes fragmented and the subject (and its working condition) becomes surplus, so that they are captured and utilized in the form of data within the enclosure of information capitalism. Simply speaking, if the ing-yeo subjects are the proletariat of the digital era, new media technologies function as the apparatus of (de-)subjectification and enslavement to synthesize their fragmented surplus time.

Ing-yeo is the term that the surplus youth call themselves, but it is also their answer to the interpellation of new media and communicative capitalism. On the one hand, the ing-yeo is a form of subjectivity under the precarious and incomplete subjectivation process that is directly affected by the complex political-economic reality. On the other hand, it is a cultural phenomenon where the youth are willing to register and enslave themselves to the governing technologies of the capitalist system of value accumulation. However, becoming surplus is not always presented as a crisis of subjectivity and passivity of the subject. Although the ing-yeo subjectivity that emerges

from the interface of new media technologies and neoliberal social reality seems to shatter subjectivity in its traditional sense, such destruction in the field of subjectivity would mean the urgent need for a total resetting of the current social reality. The crisis of subjectivity might be a social symptom that anticipates the possibility of a new subject or that requests an invention of new subjectivity.

## **CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ING-YEO?**

Theories that attempt to grasp in the abstract the productive development of human society may take one of two forms. They may be based on the concept of scarcity, and legitimize the rule of one or other class who must take charge of scarce resources. Or they may be based on the scandal of surplus, on the conviction that the productive classes in society produce more than their immediate needs, and may consider themselves deprived of this surplus. From the point of view of the productive classes, only one of these is a theory, the other an ideology—which is to say, non conducive to the expression of its interests.

(Wark, 2004, §303)

At first, ing-yeo was just a joke made by the disappointed youth. This dissertation has been, however, an attempt to show that it did not simply end there. Ing-yeo became a symptom of the current era that discloses the characteristics of Korean society as both a subject and a cultural phenomenon. Thus with ing-yeo as a keyword, we can understand the current political-economic and cultural landscape created through extreme social competition and economic exclusion based on the transformation of the society through neoliberal capitalism. Overflowing discourses on ing-yeo are the ways in which the ing-yeo subjects recognize themselves, as well as how the Korean youth understand the reality in which they live. Even though ing-yeo discourses were derived from generation

theories, they differ from the official generation theories in tune: ing-yeo functions as sort of an “image of imagined subject” rather than being formed as a collective subjectivity indicated by generation theories. Since ing-yeo is above all an attitude or a way of life, rather than the actual subject, I have concentrated no less on what the ing-yeo do than who the ing-yeo are. Ing-yeo might refer to either the precarious subjects without stable economic activities (the un- or underemployed) or the specific pattern of practices continuously performing what might be needless and worthless to others. In that sense, ing-yeo is the self-fulfillment of cultural desire by the subject whose economic desire is unfulfilled. In this dissertation, through the keyword ing-yeo, I tried to illustrate the youth’s failure of subjectification and reproduction as well as the material and cultural conditions in which the defeatism of the “subject that is no subject” is formed in contemporary Korean society.

### **Becoming Ing-yeo**

How can we discern the ing-yeo from general people? Who are the ing-yeo and what characterizes them? Ing-yeo is the result of self-awareness, and ing-yeo-hood can be identified through ing-yeo activities. Thus the ing-yeo might not be substantive or actually existing people. Though all the young people talk about ing-yeo and their ing-yeo-hood, and though there are enough ing-yeo discourses circulating among them, they hardly appear in front of us as observable people. Yet this does not mean that they are just imaginary. The ing-yeo do not exist explicitly as a this-or-that existence. That is why this dissertation used the method of identifying the ing-yeo indirectly “through” the specific generation, type of people, and subjects, such as 88 Man-won Generation, *otaku*,

or precariat, who are believed to share common characteristics with the ing-yeo. This dissertation does not intent to reduce the ing-yeo to a specific figure or set of characteristics, since there is the risk of creating the subjectivity by attributing unclear images to the subject. Therefore, the main interest of this research lies in the condition in which the youth really become ing-yeo by deprecating themselves as ing-yeo, spreading ing-yeo discourses, and enjoying ing-yeo activities. In other words, this dissertation explores the process of becoming ing-yeo, in which the joke of youth calling themselves ing-yeo has now come to strangle them in reality.

The youth's pursuit of enjoyment through ing-yeo-jit has socio-cultural meanings beyond simply personal play and pastimes. For the ing-yeo youth, the most superfluous thing is their surplus (free) time. Many highly educated Korean youths are in a state of un- and underemployment, which gives them abundant ing-yeo time. This surplus (ing-yeo) time can either be consumed or invested in production. However, whether ing-yeo time is wasted or productive, it is captured in the invisible massive capitalist system of accumulation. Whether their ing-yeo time and ing-yeo power is useful or not, the ing-yeo's peculiar personal life information is appropriated by something else. On the level of everyday use of new media technologies, this makes the youth ing-yeo in the age of precarity when social mobility and reproduction of subjectivity are blocked. Their self-deprecation and cynical humor originate from their anxious and precarious lives. The ing-yeo subjects try to appease their anxiety and precarity by distributing and sharing dull jokes and cynical giggling within the Net. The current society in economic decline forces

the youth to be ing-yeo who are satisfied with the *status quo* and to give up the basic desire and conditions for reproduction of living.

In the previous chapters, we discovered that ing-yeo is not just a cultural play by the youth through the network but a symptom of overall social changes in a broader sense. Along with these socio-cultural changes, there has been a significant transformation in subjectivity, such as the decline of subjectivity within the network and the precariousness of non-regular employment. What we might call the phenomenon of “becoming ing-yeo” is widespread in our daily lives. From the observation of this phenomenon, we learned that ing-yeo is not limited to a national boundary or a specific generation group. It is not even a passing fad among the Korean youth. People are becoming ing-yeo regardless of their will, and sometimes with their active voluntary acceptance of its status. Their labor, the value produced, intellectual practices, play, pastime, emotion, and desire—all of it is subsumed into a certain machinic regime by being mobilized, accumulated, analyzed, processed, and reinvested within the economic cycle. Marx’s concept of “real subsumption” (of labor to capital) seems to be actualized in this information age.

### **Ing-yeo Politics**

The ing-yeo subjects absorbed into new media hardly feel that they are independent subjects, i.e., the owners of themselves, even though they ceaselessly produce, participate, collaborate, and share through the network. How can the fragmented life stand alone as a whole subject? Are the ing-yeo able to establish their stable identities by becoming the cultural producers? If they can have their authentic inner selves, i.e.,

their own narratives, will they be freestanding subjects? It is hard for the ing-yeo to build their own stable subjectivity in circumstances in which even their cultural production and inner creativity are appropriated by the mass industrial system.

Ultimately, the establishment of independent subjects requires their own political acts, their practices in politics. However, the ing-yeo cannot construct their own class, because the political-economic base on which they stand is obscure, the cultural ground (identity) from which they could unite is too diverse, and their power of cohesion in politics is weak. Most of all, their economic reality and cultural codes are too unstable, defeated, and incompetent to form an independent political agency. In a situation in which they have already become the precarious ing-yeo abandoned as the waste of the dominant system, it is almost impossible for them to raise their voices like the subaltern subjects.

One of the methods for overcoming or concealing the ethos of anxiety and precarity is cynical enjoyment, or cynicism as enjoyment. Oftentimes, only when the ethos of insecurity is shared through the network of enjoyment and recognized by others can the graveness of it be distributed and mitigated. Thus, in this precarity-enjoyment network, while the necessary desires for the reproduction of life (relationships, marriage, childbirth, etc.) are suppressed, the desire for communication is growing. Online communities and social networks no longer exist as separate from real (offline) communities and networks. Ing-yeo-jit driven by ing-yeo-ryeok (power) develops a unique style of the youth condensed as a way of life within the boundary of network. This

might be called the identity of the ing-yeo communities, with which the ing-yeo youth have identified themselves.

It was in the early 2000s that the youth's participation in politics through the network began to emerge in Korean society. The online discussions and so-called keyboard battles were remarkably active, especially during the 2002 presidential election and the situation of the impeachment of the president later on, in 2004. It was during the 2008 candlelight demonstration against the import of U.S. beef that the matured online political participation met the real politics on the street. The newly elected President Lee, after his summit with President Bush, had removed a ban on the import of U.S. beef by revising the beef agreement, which was the last hindrance to the conclusion of the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. The Korean people were angry about the undemocratic use of administrative power as well as the fact that the state was not taking care of its people's health and wellbeing. This candlelight gathering was the first offline demonstration in which online communities participated, holding and waving their own flags. In addition, rather than being a violent demonstration by a small group of activists, it was open to all citizens. All kinds of subjects without any common identity, from families pushing strollers to teenage girls to members of online social gatherings, were allowed to participate freely and connect with one another.

The 2008 candlelight gathering was a political event in which so-called ing-yeo culture—various sort of activities such as derision through parody and their reproduction and distribution through the Web—began to germinate. This cultural turn in civil resistance had a decisive effect on the path of civil movements later. In this way,

however, the resistance through centralized organizations came to be impossible, and all civil movements were reduced to cultural resistance. Nonetheless, a couple of cases in which the youth were involved after the early 2010s contributed to the invention of a new way of resistance of their own. The most exemplary case was the Hongdae Duriban struggle,<sup>132</sup> in which many young local indie musicians, artists, and students—mostly those called ing-yeo—occupied the building in protest of the forced demolition. Those indie artists who do not have money and stages to perform found that place perfect for them. Their accumulated experience of gathering, performing, and playing during the long period of struggle was directly connected to the empowerment of participants in the occupation. It is noteworthy in that the young artists who participated in this struggle created their own organizations in the form of unions and cooperative associations, which might enable their sustainable lives as artists. It is a matter of course that the ing-yeo artists actively engaged in social media such as Twitter and Facebook during the struggle. The Duriban occupation was the full blossoming of ing-yeo culture, in which solidarity among the ing-yeo subjects (the evicted or relocated residents, the precarious laborers, students, and artists) was realized.

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<sup>132</sup> Duriban was a small noodle restaurant in the Hongdae area in Seoul. Local artists, including indie musicians and writers sympathetic to the evictee, occupied this building from Christmas of 2009 to the date of agreement in 2011. Those artists held a sit-in while practicing and performing daily concerts with the support of visitors until they won. This struggle served as a momentum for the indie artists to organize their own festival and union. After the demolition of the Duriban building, the producer of a documentary film *Party 51* said in an interview with *Broke in Korea* magazine: “Duriban was a kind of utopian moment in Korea’s capitalist society, and I doubt there will be another situation quite like that again” (Jung, 2014, p. 4).

## Living as a Bug in Hell-Joseon

However, the ing-yeo youth's participation in politics by communicating and constructing their identity through the network does not always mean that they are critical of the established regime or that they pursue changes in society with a progressive agenda. As we focused on in the second chapter, DC Inside, the largest online community in Korea, is the place where ing-yeo culture has germinated and bloomed. There, while the youth invented and disseminated various ways of having fun with others and spending free time, ing-yeo culture thrived. However, most parts of the content of DC Inside that we regard as ing-yeo culture were full of immoral and anti-social wastes of expressions mixed with humor, which were sometimes regarded as menacing to the established society. Such provocative postings and debates often ranked at the top and were classified as "daily best" in a separate bulletin board (Gallery) because they could get many "recommendations" from massive numbers of users and visitors. Based on these best postings clipped and archived without permission, a separate website was open in the early 2010s named *Ilgan-best Jeojangso* (Daily Best Repository), or "*Ilbe*" for short. *Ilbe* has become infamous for the community's chauvinist and conservative characteristics and users' anti-humanist postings. *Ilbe* is quite similar to the Japanese "Net right" group *Jaitokukai*<sup>133</sup> in that its members indulge in hate speech against specific provinces (and people from there), women, sexual minorities, the disabled, foreigners, and so on, under the pretext of patriotism. For this reason, the active users of this community are called "bugs" (*Ilbe-chung*), and yet they do not reject being called as

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<sup>133</sup> For the "Net right" and *Jaitokukai* in Japanese society, see Yasuda (2013) and Fackler (2010).

such. Rather, they make it their identity, and moreover, they designate everyone as a bug.<sup>134</sup> In that sense, they practice a sort of egalitarianism in their own way.

Among *Ilbe-chung*'s absurd arguments, the most interesting one is that they define themselves as victims or social minorities, calling themselves patriotic conservatives. Even when they reveal their offline identity, they call it "coming out," as if they were social minorities. With the frustration of being deprived of their portion by others<sup>135</sup>, they show signs of "imagined exploitation" (K. Park, 2014), expressing their anger toward the real social others, minorities, and victims. What is worse, in order to attract people's attention, *Ilbe* users despise the victims of the past democratic movements, upload immoral and sensational photos, and routinely denigrate women. They argue—deluding themselves—that their positions are based on "fact," while they are actually distorting history by overturning the common value system, for example portraying democratization as a failure and industrialization as liberation. They are infatuated with their own idealism in which they want to rely on what they believe is a fact: that is, the "ideology of *Ilbe*" (G. Park, 2013).

In the precarious environment of current capitalism after rapid growth in Korea, the *Ilbe* users have set their position in extreme conservatism that expresses nationalistic violence and retrospective idealism. This sort of right-wing and chauvinist tendency of the youths via the network (the Net right) is common in Korea, Japan, and China

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<sup>134</sup> In that they recognize themselves as subordinate subjects who cannot be incorporated into the mainstream society and ridicule themselves as bugs, their identity shares its root with ing-yeo culture. However, *Ilbe*'s culture is a corrupted form of nasty ing-yeo culture, since they try to find the cause of their failure and frustration in minorities, others, and dissenters.

<sup>135</sup> For example, welfare policies funded from their taxes and equal employment opportunity laws that do not count men's obligatory military duty.

(Takahara, 2007). Is this *Ilbe-chung* phenomenon not the other side of what we simply call ing-yeo? Are the precarious ing-yeo youth not overcoming their fear of economic insecurity with the help of new media technologies by enjoying the denigration of their and others' existence as bugs? Like ing-yeo, the *Ilbe* users strive to be recognized by others in highly cynical way ("cold effervescent"), internalizing emotional atmospheres such as political-economic fear and anxiety (H.J. Kim, 2014). How is the reality of Korean society in which they live hopeless and despairing?

According to a recent survey about the future image of Korea, 42 percent of the respondents (age 20 to 34) chose "collapse and new beginning." On the other hand, only 23 percent answered "continuous economic growth" (S.W. Park, 2015). When this result was announced, it created a great shock in Korean society. The fact that nearly half of the youth portray their future not as growth, preservation, and transformation, but as collapse and then new beginning, proves how significantly they are suffering in the current social system and how much the established generations despair of them. The result of the survey is evidence that the youth have been exhaustively becoming ing-yeo, failing in growing in reality and constructing the future and hope.

Nonetheless, the youth cannot change even their own reality. They have to keep working part-time jobs as though they were full-time to pay tuition and rent for a small room or stay in a library to get higher grades than others for better employment opportunities after graduation. Their dissatisfaction and frustration succumb to the pressure of reality. To quote Paik (2013), ing-yeo "try to be included in the [current] regime, but they are just passive outsiders and precarious workers fallen behind in the

competition and then excluded” (pp. 14-5). Although the ing-yeo have the potential to become political subjects, the potential diminishes as the status of precarious ing-yeo persists.

The persistence of such a situation has brought about changes in the discourses of the youth. As pointed out in the Introduction, ing-yeo began to fade from public discourse in the mid-2010s—it stopped being a buzzword. However, instead of it, a new keyword, *hell-joseon*, has spread widely since around 2014.<sup>136</sup> The youth who called themselves ing-yeo now try to embody their anger and frustration through the image of “hell-joseon.” *Hell-joseon* is an Internet neologism that combines “hell” and “Joseon,” the old name of Korea before modernization, meaning that people experience contemporary Korean society as hell and as the Joseon dynasty, in which people were less civilized and subject to the ruling aristocrats. As a similar expression, there is the “flaming hell peninsula.” According to a newspaper article that analyzes Internet postings on *Ilbe* and Twitter, “the ‘hell-joseon’ did not simply mean an ‘agony caused by difficulty in employment.’ It was the manifestation [declaration] that Korea did not function as a society.” *Hell-joseon* includes the youth’s “recognition that just [individual] ‘effort’ cannot settle the hopelessness.” In addition, the words that are used the most frequently with *hell-joseon* are “*migae*” (uncivilized) and “*talchul*” (escape): “in both Twitter and *Ilbe*, evaluated as having quite different ideological orientations, the two sentences ‘hell-joseon is

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<sup>136</sup> The current conservative regime of the Park administration argues that the defeatist tune and left-leaning perspective in the curriculum of modern Korean history brought about the youth’s negative attitude toward the recognition of their reality. As a remedy for the historical defeatism, the government is planning to teach middle and high school students with a state-authored history textbook beginning in 2017.

uncivilized as expected' and 'I must escape hell-joseon' were the most frequently used" (E. Park, 2015).

While uncivilizedness or barbarism is the way in which people look at the status of the current state (government), it was also how the upper classes recognize the general public. For example, it was during the national disasters like the sinking of the ferry *Sewol* in 2014 or the pandemic of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015 when people realized that the state itself is uncivilized, considering the absence of a system and its incapability of handling the crises. Uncivilizedness is not limited to such cases on a macro level, of course. People encounter it routinely in their workplace and school, on the street, and even in their home: the high intensity of labor and long work hours, the speculative property bubble, the low level safety consciousness, the domination of the economy by a few conglomerates, etc. While *ing-yeo* is the individual manifestation of the youth's incompetence and helplessness in this precarious society, *hell-joseon* is the expression of frustration with the social structure or political-economic regime in which individual effort cannot change or improve their precarious status. However, the problem of structure is too strong for the *ing-yeo* to break through. To the younger generations suffering from precarity and becoming *ing-yeo*, the established generation answers that the youth need to put in more effort or that the older generations overcame much harder times. The government reduces welfare and promotes non-regular employment. Within this hell, the youth become bugs or "slaves."

It is now clear that the current Korean society is not a good place for the younger generation to live. The state has lost its meaning as a community that takes care of its

members. There is no alternative, and the retreat is already cut off. Thus the youth hope to “escape” the *hell-joseon* if they can, rather than becoming bugs or slaves. In the novel *Because I Hate Korea* (Chang, 2015), the heroine decides to emigrate to Australia because she thinks that she cannot survive and is really incompetent in Korea. Like her, many young Koreans would like to emigrate to countries in better condition, such as the Scandinavian welfare states or the countries in North America. About 69 percent of Twitter users have thought about emigration, and the major reasons for considering it were to avoid overheated competition and intensified inequality, to give a better educational environment to their kids, to keep away from inferior labor conditions, etc. (S. K. Lee, 2015).

The only way for ing-yeo youth to survive is to leave Korea. Still, this is not easy, since even the opportunity to escape the country is given unequally. Those who were not born with a silver (or gold) spoon in their mouths, but just *heuksujeo* (dirt spoon), take seriously the internalized and hereditary inequality and unfairness in Korean society. Family-controlled *chaebol* (conglomerates) bequeath wealth and opportunities to the founder’s descendants by means fair or foul. The ing-yeo holding *heuksujeo* hardly have the chance to enter middle-class lives without debt. Suffering from a society like hell, they want to leave Korea or lift *jukchang* (a bamboo spear).<sup>137</sup> Even on the front page of a

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<sup>137</sup> Lifting a bamboo spear means a people’s revolution. In the late Joseon dynasty, the bamboo spear appeared in the peasants’ uprisings. Though it is the simplest and crudest weapon, it is the last means of resistance—the most efficient weapon for those who own nothing. In the current society that rushes toward extremes, the ing-yeo have continued their severe self-destructive declaration. However, this bamboo spear symbolizes their unbearable reality.

website called “hell-joseon” (hellkorea.com), a gruesome phrase is written: “in front of juckchang everybody is equal.”

While the younger generation expressed their resignation and renunciation with “ing-yeo,” they seem to suggest their rage against society with “*hell-joseon*.” Thus, is there a possibility that the ing-yeo’s rage is able to lead to social transformation beyond their defeatism and hatred of politics? The ing-yeo have begun to realize that the problem is not themselves but the social structure that makes people surplus, a subject that is no subject, and re-creates them as human capital continuously exploitable, cheap, and always self-manageable. However, since the precarity of people’s lives, producing laboring human beings as surplus, is the driving force of neoliberal capitalism, the ing-yeo have limited potential to stand as active political subjects. Leave the country or live as a bug in *hell-joseon*: the ing-yeo are standing at the crossroad of their lives. We will likely need further research to investigate the ing-yeo’s future and potential beyond this situation. Thus, in this conclusion, let us just examine a clue of the ing-yeo’s politics in the age of digital network before finishing this dissertation.

### **Distribution of Ing-yeo through the Net**

In the globalized world of databases, our perception of the world has been imagined as the “flattened world” (Friedman, 2005), the postmodern “depthlessness” or “superflatness” (Jameson, 1991; Murakami, 2005), and the “decline of narratives” (Azuma, 2009; Otsuka, 2015). In such a reality, what we actually confront is a sort of flat surface, such as screens or user interfaces. Losing access to depth or the inner self leads to the decline of grand narratives of society as well as individual narratives of the self.

Computer-mediated communication and the massive accumulation of data about everything have brought about the effect of flatness of the relationship between society and individual, which results in direct and qualitative changes in life. For instance, the users of new media become the products in the process of communication: as Pariser (2011) says, “the user is the content.” As the users of new media interact with the communication tools, they become the media itself, or just a part of it. Although new media seems to be the most advanced technology that promotes the global democratization process, paradoxically it produces people who do not (or cannot) have an interest in politics in the traditional sense. This is of course deeply related to the precarity of the youth subjects brought about by the combination of neoliberal power and financial capitalism.

The widespread instrumentalization of subjectivity, as well as prevalent symptoms of the failure or decline of subjectification found in the *ing-yeo*, mean that the governmentality (i.e., the strategy of the ruling system) of neoliberal capitalism has worked successfully in Korean society. It might seem clear that the *ing-yeo* have failed in constituting the subjectivity that the regime requires, from the perspective of the *ing-yeo*. However, from the perspective of the regime, the failure of subjectification—the *ing-yeo* itself—is the perfect condition for the success of the regime. Thus, paradoxically enough, under this neoliberal regime, the less successful the subject’s identification with the regime is, the more successful the regime’s production of the subject is. Similarly, the less this regime takes care of the subjects, the more the subjects are compliant with the regime.

The ing-yeo and *Ilbe-chung* fail to constitute themselves as normal subjects, yet they have become the most successful figures that this regime requires. This paradox might be related to what is known as neoliberal governmentality, which Foucault tried to investigate in his late period: the model of subject formation that produces the subject of self-management by internalizing the principle of competition through the intervention of policy-making, rather than indoctrinating discipline or norms with individuals (Sato, 2014; Seo, 2009). The ing-yeo subject appears to become stuck in the trap of neoliberal capitalism.

On the other hand, the irreversible relationship that has developed between humans and media technologies enables the imagination of unprecedented methods of representation, communication, signification, and politics. The lives of the subjects that have trouble with economic and biological reproduction in the environment in which new media technologies are highly developed request fundamentally different forms of politics. As was expected in the early years of the Internet, such demand for alternative politics (or political space) often pursued the extreme form of direct democratic participation. For example, Azuma (2014) conceives the concept of “general will 2.0,” the updated version of Rousseau’s “general will” in *The Social Contract*. According to Azuma, it is an ideologically neutral “mathematical entity” in which people’s activities and desires in their everyday lives are automatically accumulated and analyzed in the form of databases (such as through the platforms of Google and Twitter). The “government 2.0” needs simply to perform or implement what is reflected by the “general will 2.0.” Thus, without conscious communication and beyond the intentions of

individuals, people can participate (or be represented) in politics as far as they use the new media platforms. If the “general will 2.0,” as if it were a collective unconscious in the age of new media, can really represent the ing-yeo subjects who are subaltern in the current regime of capitalism, then it seems persuasive, at least in part.

However, because this sort of idealist politics of network is based on the death of politics and the uselessness of politics itself, and because it utilizes quantified individual life information collected through search engines and social media, it actually repeats the current limits of real politics. The political-economic circumstances in which the ing-yeo are continuously produced and exploited as the driving force of the whole system can hardly be overcome through such technological idealism. After all, what matters is that surplus (ing-yeo) is not something to be accumulated but distributed (through the Net). Along with the proliferation of financial capitalism unconnected with the real economy, the younger generation in Korea barely makes a living, while giving up the chance to reproduce a family through romance, marriage, and childbirth. How could the ing-yeo value (or the value of the ing-yeo) be redistributed rather than accumulated? I think that the “basic income”<sup>138</sup> as a form of universal or social welfare would help solve the current problem of ing-yeo. It is particularly worth considering redistributing to all users the profits of mega-corporations of new media, whose growth is based on the appropriation and exploitation of ing-yeo values via the network. Since the conditions of ing-yeo were constructed through economic precariousness, the externalization of

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<sup>138</sup> According to the definition from the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) website, a basic income refers to an “income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.”

cognitive ability through the network, and the success of the neoliberal model of subjectification, the solution for the ing-yeo problem must be the political actualization of social and universal support through compensation from the network. For a basic income for the ing-yeo, the first step would be the empowerment movement of the younger generation themselves. Furthermore, for more powerful political and economic leverage, they will need more unions and cooperative associations.

Media is the nodal point of our desire. The structure of the media represents the stream and break of our desire. A new media opens up the possibility that we can expand ourselves. As a paradoxical entity in the middle, media lets us believe that it is transparent, yet it must show something to us. While media constitutes our culture, which conditions the way we live, we become the existences of precarious ing-yeo mediated by the media. These precarious ing-yeo subjects are the contradictory seeds that bear the possibility of counter-culture as well as the source of the new media culture. On the Korean street, in the Amazonian jungle, in the Middle Eastern and North African desert, at the heart of cities like New York, London, and Paris, the ing-yeo enraged with unfairness around the world try to prove the limit and crisis of the current system and overcome it in person, dreaming of politics via the Net.

## APPENDICES

### Interview Questions

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

#### On Political/Economic/Social Situations

- Can you tell me about your job or school?
- If you are an unemployed or searching for a job, what kind of job are you interested in?
- If you are (have been) a part-time worker, can you explain the type of work?
- Can you tell me your approximate monthly/yearly income and expenses?
- How has the Asian (Korean) economic crisis in 1998 influenced you?
- Are you registered to any political party or have you involved in any civil movements?
- How do you spend your day/week/month?
- Can you tell me about your family and friends and relationships with them?
- In what ways do you think your life could improve?
- What is your dream?
- Are you interested in popular culture and subculture such as (Japanese) manga, anime, or video games? Are you an *Otaku* (subculture enthusiast)?
- Do you see yourself as economically a surplus being?
- Do you think new media technologies including social networking tools will help in solving your personal problems and contribute to overall social progress?

- Is there anything significant that would help me to understand your surplus activities and economic/social situation that I did not ask?

### **On the Ing-yeo Practices and New Media**

- How long have you been using new media (Internet, computer, or smartphone)?
- Amount of your daily computer or Internet use?
- What kind of tools do you usually use when accessing the new media?
- Where do you connect to Internet (home, school, workplace, PC bang, café, other public spaces)?
- What is your main purpose in accessing the Internet?
- Do you remember an occasion when you first encountered new media (computer and Internet)?
- When you have an access to Internet, what is your favorite service or place (Web, Blog, community, social networking, portal, etc.)?
- Can you tell me about your online activities? What is your Blog about and what is the purpose of your participation in online communities?
- What is your favorite software or applications?
- Do you enjoy online games? What kind of games do you play?
- What do you think is the most significant contribution of new media technologies to our society? What significant problems have these technologies created?
- If you spend a lot of your free time in *ing-yeo* (surplus) practices, what would those practices be composed of?
- What does the term “ing-yeo” mean to you? Do you think you are a *ing-yeo ingan* (surplus being)? Why or why not?
- (If applicable) What is it like for you to be a *ing-yeo* (ingan)?
- Who or what has influenced (made) you as a *ing-yeo* (ingan)?
- Have you participated in social activities (movements) via social media or other Internet tools?

## **Informed Consent Form**

### **Research Procedures**

This research is being conducted to investigate the way in which Korean Internet users participate in Internet practices in online communities, blogs, and social networking sites. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to have an interview that will take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time. The interview will be audio-taped under your agreement and will be transcribed later for the subsequent analysis. If needed, a follow-up interview will be scheduled within two weeks of the initial interview.

### **Risks**

There is no foreseeable risk for participating in this research.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. However, the information you provide may benefit other researchers in the field of the humanities and social sciences who are interested in the relationship between personal patterns in using new media technologies and social material conditions such as financial crisis and the national informatization plan.

### **Confidentiality**

The data collected by interview will be kept confidential. Your name will not be included in the collected information and a code will be placed on the transcription of the interview. Only the researcher will have access to the audiotapes and the transcriptions. You will not be named in any publications.

### **Participation**

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for

any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

**Contact**

This research is being conducted by Sangmin Kim, PhD candidate in the Program of Cultural Studies at George Mason University. He may be reached at 1-703-597-9964, sk2@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. This research is being supervised by Professor Hugh Gusterson in Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University and he may be reached at 1-703-993-4084. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 1-703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

**Consent**

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

\*Please let the researcher know whether or not you agree to be audio taped.

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Name

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Date of Signature

## GLOSSARY

- 386 Generation: generation in college in the 1980s, prior to the *Shinsedae*. Sometimes they are called the *Minjuhwa* (democratization) generation.
- 88 Man-won Generation: young people in their twenties whose estimated average monthly wage is approximately 880,000 KRW or 850 USD.
- Baeksu: people (or a person) who do not have regular job or who do not work—not only because it is difficult for them to get any job but also because they hate to work.
- Chaebol: family-owned conglomerate in Korea.
- Costume play: also known as cosplay. In this activity, avid fans wear costumes and play roles of characters in subculture such as animation, movie, video game, and comic.
- Cyworld: Korean social network service founded in 1999. Users are allotted a “minihompy,” a personalized platform and a “miniroom,” a visualized space they can decorate with photos, icons, and music and to which they can even invite friends.
- DC Inside: one of the largest online community sites and was established in 1999 in Korea. The characteristics of DC are quite similar to 4chan.org in the U.S. or 2ch.net in Japan, which are anonymous thread bulletin boards.
- Hell-joseon: Internet neologism that combines “hell” and “Joseon,” the old name of Korea before modernization, meaning that people experience contemporary Korean society as hell and as the Joseon dynasty, in which people were less civilized and subject to the ruling aristocrats.
- Hikikomori: a type of young people in Japan who rejects real social relations. Social withdrawal.
- Ilbe: an extreme conservative online community. It is notorious for hate speech against specific provinces (and people from there), women, sexual minorities, the disabled, foreigners, and so on, under the pretext of patriotism.
- Ing-yeo ingan: surplus human being.
- Ing-yeo-jit: ing-yeo’s useless or worthless activities.
- Ing-yeo: surplus, redundant, or excessive.
- Jjalbang: abbreviation for jjalimbangji. It literally means the prevention of being cut off. It designates an image or photo that would prevent the post from being cut off within DC Inside. Later, *jjalbang* began to refer to digital images in general.
- Otaku: enthusiastic and intellectual Japanese fans (maniacs) of popular or subculture such as animations, movies, comics, games, etc. They invest a lot of time and passion in their favorite things—whether characters and stories. They are called odeok, odeokhu, or deokhu in Korea.

PC bang: Internet café.

PC tongshin: Internet communication via dial-up connection.

Pye-in: a person who stays at home without any social activities, suffering from a chronic illness. In today's context, it means those who suffer from a different illness, i.e., that of being overly enthusiastic about particular objects or practices.

Sampo sedae: the generation that gives up three significant things (love, marriage, and childbirth) in their lives.

Sedae: generation.

Shinsedae: literally a new generation. It refers to the then-young generation who were born in the 1970s and spent their twenties in college.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Sangmin Kim was born and grew up in South Korea where he received an BS in Industrial Design from Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) and MA in Aesthetics from Seoul National University. He contributed to open George Mason University Korea campus in Incheon as Director of Operations and Administrations.