

Labor Identity of Migrant Workers in South Korea

By
Cheonghee Yu

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

Supervisors: Professor Don Kalb and Professor Jakob Rigi

Budapest, Hungary

2011

Abstract

This thesis explores the migrant workers' movement in South Korea. I focus on the important collective actions in the 1990s and the early 2000s in which migrant workers gathered to fight against the abusive working conditions and the government's attempt to deport undocumented migrant workers. Also, the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) which was established as a result of the sit-in struggle in 2003-2004 is under scrutiny. By analyzing the interviews with sit-in participants and migrant activists of the MTU, the thesis points at two kinds of dynamics: dynamics of the solidarity between sit-in participants and Korean alliance groups, and the oppressive interactions between them and the Korean government. And, how such dynamics influenced migrant workers to build the labor identity will be discussed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Don Kalb and Jakob Rigi for their support, advices and inspirations. Thanks to Elisabeth Schober, who helped me start an adventurous academic life at CEU. Especially, I appreciate my friends from the MTU, Michel, Youngsup, and Masum whom I admire for their endless enthusiasm on the migrant workers' movement. Without their support, this thesis would not be possible. I also thank other migrant activists for their interviews.

Special thanks to my family, my parents, who let me study here in Budapest far away from home and have been supporting me every moment while I was studying.

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List of Abbreviations

AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations

AHM: Alliance for the Human Rights of Migrant Workers

APMM: Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (Hong Kong)

CCEJ: Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice

DGB: German Trade Union Federation

EPS: Employment Permit System

ETU-MB: Equality Trade Union-Migrants Branch

FKTU: Federation of Korean Trade Unions

IMA: International Migrants Alliance

IMWU: Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (in Hong Kong)

ITS: Industrial Trainee System

JCMK: Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea

KCTU: Korean Confederation of Trade Union

KFSB: Korean Federation of Small and Medium Businesses

LPS: Labor Permit System

MOL: Ministry of Labor

MTU: Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union

MWTV: Migrant World TV

SGB: Swiss Trade Union Confederation

UNITE: Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (in the United States)

Introduction

In 2003, the Korean government started sweeping deportations of undocumented migrant workers, justifying them with the upcoming Employment Permit System (EPS) that they were planning to enforce; a system which despite other promises still offered very limited rights to the migrant workers it had as target¹. The government's extensive deportations of migrant workers who lived in Korea longer than four years eventually pushed four migrant workers into suicide from July to November 2003 amidst rising fears of economic difficulties and crack downs. In opposition to the actions of this government, around 200 migrant workers and 150 civil society group members and students ended up gathering at the Myungdong Cathedral in Seoul on November 15th 2003 to stage a sit-in strike, and the number of sit-in participants reached around 1,000 nationwide. Myungdong Cathedral was a place where protesters fighting for democracy in Korea gathered in the 1980s and since then it became a symbolic place of democracy for Koreans. Migrant workers and supporters chose this place as a firm determination to achieve their demands: 'to stop the deportations and to legalize undocumented migrant workers'.

The sit-in participants criticized the government-led deportations of migrant workers by addressing their contribution to the Korean society through the labor. The sit-in which began through the strong networks between migrants from the same nationalities, extended to different nationalities through the networks of the NGOs lasted for 13 months from November 2003 to December 2004. It was possible because migrant workers recognized their right to work and they were determined to achieve their goals and they also started receiving more support from the labor organizations and trade unions. The labor education and the nightly

¹ Since migrant workers arrived in the 1980s, the Korean government has not presented a pertinent policy, but finally implemented the Employment Permit System (EPS), allowing migrant workers to stay in Korea for 3 years. For this reason, the government declared that undocumented migrant workers who stayed more than 3 years should leave the country and would otherwise face deportation.

protests raised their workers consciousness and the legitimacy of the sit-in struggle. The motivation came from the fear that they might not be able to continue working in Korea to support their families. When they heard the news about migrant workers who committed suicides because of the fear of deportation, however, they became more determined. This strike finally led to the establishment of the Migrant Trade Union (MTU) in April 2005, which was a huge stepping stone in the 15 years history of the migrant workers' movement in Korea (People's Solidarity for Social Progress. 2005)².

This paper examines the process in which migrant workers built the 'labor identity' through collective actions and trade union activities by using social movement theories. I explore important collective actions in 1994, 1995, 2002 and 2003-2004 and I investigate the process through which individuals developed their identities. The identity construction process of migrant workers has shifted. First, when they experienced abusive treatment at their workplaces, they defined their situations as unjust, defined as "injustice frame" (Gamson, 1992: 68, 73; McAdam, 1999 [1982]: 51 in Tarrow, 2011 [1998]). When the government started the massive deportations in 2003, migrant workers claimed that they deserve to live and work in Korea. In that stage, they framed the government's policy as oppression and clearly built a politicized identity (Tarrow, 2011[1988]: 153) by fighting against it. During the sit-ins, the interactions between migrant workers with Korean activists and unionists reinforced their labor identity.

After the sit-in strike in 2003-2004, migrant workers changed their tactic and established their own trade union, Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) for the long-term struggle. However, most leaders of the MTU have been deported by targeted crackdowns of the government, and recently the government even cancelled the visa of the

² However, its application is still pending in court because of the appeal by the Ministry of Labor on the basis that illegal migrant workers do not have the same rights to be protected under the Korean law as legal migrant workers despite a Supreme Court ruling in 2007 that every worker, regardless of their legal status, should be guaranteed basic rights, including the rights to organize (Korea Times. 2008)

MTU leader who was a documented migrant worker because of his political activity. The fact that their status has never been stable and the government never allows migrant workers' political engagement simply shows the government's attempt to leave migrant workers in the precarious situations. In this situation, migrant workers' involvement in political activism without citizenship is never easy. Therefore, the citizenship discussion is urgent. As Walzer argues, "migrant workers who are enmeshed in the local economy and the legal system should have political rights" too and be "potential citizens" of the host society (1993[1983]: 60).

The topic on the migration and migrant workers has been highly researched. Migrant workers have long been characterized by "powerlessness" seen as an outcome of globalization (Sassen, 1988: 37). Even though there have been researches on attempts to unionize migrant workers, they take migrant workers as objects to be unionized. Moreover these studies have investigated the unionizing strategies in the perspective of trade unions in the host societies (Milkman, 2000; Penninx and Roosblad). My thesis can help people who are willing to research on migrant workers' self-organizing experience. Furthermore, this research can help people learn the way migrant workers from different origins can build the same identity through political actions. As Thompson says, the class consciousness is a process and can be built among people who experience unconnected events (1980[1963]). They built certain class consciousness not because they are situated in the lowest level of the society, but because they realized and confronted it. Moreover, after migrant workers established the Migrants' Trade Union, they clearly addressed that they would build a strong solidarity with Koreans and consider Korean workers as same working class.

This thesis attempts to give knowledge about migrant workers' self-organizing case. In order to know the structure in which migrant workers are situated, Chapter 1 provides the background knowledge on South Korea's industrialization and labor movements as well as the industrial structure; Chapter 2 reviews literature on collective identity and working class

consciousness; Chapter 3 analyzes migrant workers' struggle and the identity building process. By presenting the migrant workers' movement in Korea, I hope to contribute to the marginalized workers' movement and researchers in the field.

Chapter 1. Background

1.1 South Korea, a state of dramatic industrialization

In South Korea, known for the dramatic industrialization during a short period, the economic development took place with the intensive labor of Korean workers from the 1960s until the 1980s. The oppressive industrial system has exploited Korean workers like it does to migrant workers today. In this part, I will present the industrial conditions which were oppressive towards workers and the struggle of Korean workers to escape from such conditions. Since the dictator Park Chunghee took the presidency in Korea, he completely changed the industrial structure in the 1960s and 1970s. Korea's economic system, taking up the Fordist capitalism, led a lot of labor force in Korea to move from 'farm to factory' to fill the manufacturing jobs in the cities (Koo, 1990). Korea's economic system, however, showed the peripheral Fordism which had 'the high-productivity with low wage' under the exploitative conditions on workers (Kim, 1990 in Bae et.al., 2008: 25-26).

Korean Workers

While Korea's economy was growing dramatically with workers' intensive labor, capital kept workers in such poor conditions as low wages, extremely long working hours, hardly giving holidays and a lot of labor violations. Decades of exploitations on factory workers by the government, by justifying the economic development, led Korean workers to a lot of labor disputes in the 1980s.

It was 1987 when there was a huge wave of labor unrests that erupted over the Korean peninsula. There were 3,749 labor disputes in 1987 while there were just 276 in the previous year in Korea and the number of unions increased twice than 1986 (Koo, 2001: 158). This wave of labor disputes, called 'the Great Worker Struggle' carried on with the emergence of democracy movements. There were work stoppages, wildcat strikes, or demonstrations by

workers nationwide. This was the beginning of the militant labor movements that had a strong base in the heavy industries such as automobile companies and shipbuilding. After 1987, Korean economy turned into the Fordism with mass production, mass exports and mass consumption since the labor disputes pressured capital and the government to provide workers better wages and working conditions. This is when the influx of migrant workers started into Korea from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet countries and China. Since the wages of Korean workers increased, some companies moved their factories to other Asian countries searching for cheaper labor costs. Small and medium sized companies, which could not afford the high wages of Korean workers, employed migrant workers since the late 1980s.

The militant labor movements and the Korean trade unions

As a result of the militant labor movements in the 1980s, a democratic trade union, the Korean Confederation of Trade Union, was established in 1995 which included 420,000 members. There was already another conservative trade union, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions established in 1965. Currently, the KCTU has 752,000 members (in 2006) while the FKTU has 872,000 members (Bae et al.: 78). The rate of unionization of Korean workers was 10.3% in 2006 which was 19.8% in 1989 and has decreased since then (Bae et al., 2008: 44). The rate of unionization is quite low, having known for the militancy of Korea's labor movements. Bae et al. suggest that the reasons are first, the state-led compressive industrialization and the absence of the progressive political parties (established lately), second, the high rate of the small businesses³ and they stress the second reason. According to the source of the Ministry of Labor, the rate of unionization of businesses with 30-99 workers is 8.96% while 37.54% in businesses with more than 500 employees (Bae et al., 2008). This is an important factor that makes it hard to unionize migrant workers who are mostly employed in the small businesses. Also, there is a significant point that compared to 1960s and 1970s

³ The rate of small businesses less than 50 employees is 68.5% in Korea, 43.4% in the US, and 52.7% in Japan. The rate of large businesses more than 300 employees is 11.8% in Korea, 27.1% in the US, and 13.1% in Japan. (source: the National Statistical Office; Bae et al.(2008)).

when Korean factory workers were generally exploited; today the labor market segmentation is has been spread in Korea. According to Reich et al. (1973), the labor market segmentation by capitalism has divided the labor market between race and sex (1973: 360). They suggest that historically capitalists who tried to meet the treat of capitalist class, employers actively and consciously fostered labor market segmentation in order to “divide and conquer” the labor force (361). Today, the segmented labor market is filled with female contract workers who are working in the ‘flexible labor market’ and migrant workers who fill in the 3D jobs- dirty, difficult and dangerous.

Korean unions and migrant workers

Korean unions had long been representing the male regular workers working for the large businesses. However, since the labor market has been diverse with irregular labor, such as temporary and special jobs that have occupied the labor market in Korea especially after the Asian economic crisis in 1997 and 1998, the trade unions only representing the male regular workers have been considered as a group only existing for the vested rights groups (Park, 2004; Park, 2004 in Lee, 2004: 65).

Migrant labor could be a threat to the native workers’ trade unions since it has a potential to cause competition between two groups. Korean unions originally opposed to the government’s plan to import migrant labor forces which was declared in 1991 (Seol, 1992a:134). The reasons presented were ‘migrant workers would weaken the Korean workers’ position and worsen the collective bargaining power (Seol, 1992b: 284), showing the principle of ‘protecting native workers’ of Korean unions (Kwon, 2010: 60). Nevertheless, Korean trade unions had to realize that the labor market in Korea became diverse, and they had to deal with precarious laborers such as irregular workers and migrant workers and the KCTU finally established the department for the precarious labor (Kwon, 2010: 65) and started the project for migrant labor. Even though the unions and the leaders made the project

department, it took quite a long time for Korean workers to accept and to have sense of solidarity.

Although the Korean trade unions officially opposed to the migrant labor, in the beginning they actually connived since migrant workers started occupying the secondary job sectors where Korean workers especially union members did not work. While the Korean trade unions kept silent about migrant workers and their exploitative conditions, a lot of NGOs and social movements group already started the supporting projects since 1992 (Seol, 1992a: 134). As Kwon points out, there were already over 150 NGOs supporting migrant workers as of 2003, but there are just 5 unions which have unionized migrant worker members until 2010 (Kwon, 2010: 60). After a long time of silence, the KCTU got pressure to support migrant workers by the civil society groups and migrant workers' collective actions due to the industrial injuries and the unfair treatment towards them pressured the KCTU to support migrant workers' movement. The actual solidarity action started since the early 2000s after the Equality Trade Union-Migrants Branch was established by Korean organizers and migrant workers in 2002, and the 2003-2004 sit-in at Myungdong Cathedral.

After setting up the department of the precarious workers inside the KCTU and the establishment of the MTU, the KCTU have been more active in solidarity actions with migrant workers and the MTU. Obviously, the MTU exists as one of the chapters in eastern groups of the Seoul branch of the KCTU. Currently, the organizers of the precarious labor at the KCTU consider migrant workers as same workers as Korean and they are educating Korean workers to have the same awareness. The solidarity between the KCTU and the MTU will be investigated more in chapter 3.

1.2 Methodology

Research subjects

I got interested in migrant workers' lives in Korea since 2003 when I was volunteering at the Ansan immigrant center (previously Ansan migrant workers' center). It was 2007 when I heard from my friend that three leaders of the Migrants' Trade Union got deported by the government. Since then, I got involved in migrants' movements by participating in their protests for achieving their labor rights, or writing and translating articles about migrant workers' movement with my friends. After my participations in the MTU, I met a lot of migrant activists and what they showed was their enthusiasm to empower migrant workers.

I chose my subjects according to their experiences of struggle. I knew about the biggest and most significant struggles of migrant workers in 1994, 1995, 2003-2004 and 2010 and I learned about one more sit-in struggle that was organized in 2002. My subjects experienced the struggles in 1994, 2002, 2003-2004 and 2010. Most subjects were undocumented workers when they were (are) in Korea except for one subject⁴ who came to Korea through the Employment Permit System. People who are in Korea now are activists at the MTU or Migrant World TV (MWTV, previously Migrant Worker TV). Two informants are in their home country; one of them is involved in the movement and connected with the MTU and KCTU, and the other one is taking a rest after getting back home. The period of stay in Korea was diverse from 5 years to 16 years.

Deepa (Nepalese) came to Korea in 1993 at the age of 16. After losing her 3 fingers at work she joined a sit-in with other migrant workers in 1994. She went back to Nepal and started working for a Nepalese trade union, GeFont. She said the experience of sit-in changed her life. Now, she is studying NGO studies while working in the MTU.

Gurung (Nepalese) worked in Korea for 10 years from 1995 until 2005 as an undocumented worker. He got involved in the migrants' union movement in 2002-2004 during the Equality Trade Union-Migrants Branch and participated in the sit-in in 2002 for the objection to the

⁴ However, Ronald's visa recently got cancelled because of the oppression of union activities by the Korean government.

EPS and demanding the legalization of undocumented migrant workers. Now he is working in the KCTU, the radical trade union in Korea, as an organizer of migrant workers.

Ronald (Filipino), an activist at the MTU, was an EPS worker from 2006 until the beginning of 2011, but his visa got cancelled due to the oppression of the government on the union activists. He did not have any experience of social movements back in the Philippines, but he said that the inequality experienced by migrant workers led him to be an activist.

Maung (Burmese) started working in Korea in 1995 and he has been working for the MWTU. While involving in the migrant workers' movement, he made a migrant workers' music band, 'Stop Crackdown' with Nepalese, Indonesian, another Burmese and a Korean musicians. He applied for the refugee status because of the political situation in Burma. It took extraordinarily long, because he was known for the political activism that often criticized the Korean government.

Habib (Bangladeshi) recently went back to Bangladesh after 10 years of stay in Korea. He was undocumented while in Korea. He got involved in the MTU and migrant workers' movement since he solved the unpaid wage problem through the MTU and even became the branch leader in Anyang.

Alam (Bangladeshi) got deported by the Korean Immigration officers in 2007 after staying in Korea for 11 years and involving in activism for 5 years. I interviewed him through skype since his return to Bangladesh. He often got angry when he talked about the Korean government's policy and the discriminations on migrant workers.

Hyungroh Kyi, the head of precarious labor department, has worked for the KCTU more than 10 years, but has recently become the department head of precarious labor. He realized that working with and organizing migrant workers are totally different from organizing Koreans and said he would learn a lot. He is working closely with Gurung as coworkers and the MTU as a person in charge of migrant workers.

Research methods

My actual research with my subjects started in 2008 by supporting the acting leader of the MTU. Since then I participated in the protests and the meetings of the MTU and went to some events of the MWTV. My intensive field research was held from the end of January until the beginning of April in 2011. In February 2011, the Immigration Service under the Ministry of Justice cancelled the MTU chairperson's visa for the reason of 'fake employment' and ordered him to leave by March 31st. The MTU refuted the Immigration Service's decision by condemning their action as an oppression of the MTU and migrant workers' political actions. For 2 months, I was volunteering at the MTU and most time I was translating for the chairperson of the MTU at the protests, press conferences, and solidarity group meetings in order to make plans or denounce the government's policy on the MTU. Therefore, my voluntary work automatically became my field research in the form of participant observation. At the same time, I was participating in the MTU's activities such as the branch meetings, the General Assembly in February, their street campaigns with labor counseling and daily labor counseling activities.

I conducted semi-structured interviews. As I got to learn the topics that I did not expect and I spontaneously changed the direction or the topic itself. For the interviews, I spoke Korean with most subjects except for Ronald whom I talked with in English. In case of Deepa, we began with Korean, then switched into English and then into Korean. As for Alam, even though he left Korea 4 years ago, he could still speak Korean well, so we talked in Korean. In addition, two interviews with Habib and Alam were done online because both of them are in Bangladesh. The interviews with my subjects were done in March and April in 2011 during my field research period. Since I had already talked about my research to my subjects, they volunteered to support me by accepting my interviews. In order to keep the anonymity of them, I will use fake names, but I will disclose some of names which are

already publicly known such as the chairperson of the MTU.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Collective Identity and Workers Consciousness

An individual's participation in a collective action and her becoming a member of the action request us a clear explanation of what it means individually and collectively. In this review, I will discuss the process in which collective action participants (migrant workers) build the shared identity through the collective actions and social movements by taking Melucci's concept, 'collective identity' (1989, 1996). Also, I will investigate the 'process of making workers' consciousness', that is made through history as a result of experiences argued by Thompson's work (1980 [1963]). Both of them see their concepts as a process rather than static 'thing'. It may be too early to say that migrant workers in Korea have formed a certain class yet, but they became a collective by expressing the shared demands together. By synthesizing Melucci's and Thompson's concepts I will attempt to prove that they are in the state of class forming.

Collective identity is "an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place" (Melucci, 1989: 34, 1996: 70). By cautioning the structuralist view on collective action, Melucci points out that neither the macro-structuralist models or those based on the individual's motivation can explain the heterogeneity of collective action and how its various aspects are combined and sustained (1989: 30). Either the structuralist view or motivation might explain the beginning of a collective action but not the whole process, therefore collective identity is presented as an intermediate level.

Since collective identity is actor-oriented rather than the structure-oriented, the relations, networks between actors and others are emphasized. For example, collective actors

can construct their identity by recognition which can be denial or opposition. This recognition becomes a tool to differentiate themselves from others. However, even though collective actors differentiate themselves from others such as authorities, they still express their belonging to the society (1996: 73-73). This can be seen from migrant workers' collective actions. The sit-in participants expressed their demands by gathering at the Myungdong Cathedral several times. It was a kind of expression that they were unauthorized workers who were different from Korean citizens and at the same time collective actors differentiated themselves from other undocumented migrant workers who did not participate in. Even though participants criticized the Korean government during the sit-ins, they still demanded the legalization of themselves to stay in Korea and they claimed that they were same workers as Koreans contributing to Korean society.

In terms of the relationship between individuals and a collective, the concept, identity work process by Snow and McAdam is worth mentioning. The identity work process means a group accomplishment that people do individually or collectively (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996: 115 in Snow and McAdam, 2000: 46). According to Snow and McAdam, identity work process is the process through which personal and collective identities are aligned, such that individuals regard engagement in movement activity as being consistent with their self-conception and interests (2000: 49). In order to explain the relationship between individuals and a collective, Melucci says that motivation is an important factor for individuals, and it is constructed and developed through interaction. In order to maintain the collective action, the group needs incentives which are always interactive for the actors (1989: 30). Besides the incentives, the collective action needs to maintain networks and resources for the actors to keep participating in the collective action. These interactions, networks between participants and allies, and resources such as access to information can help me to explain how the sit-in of migrant workers in 2003-2004 lasted for 13 months. Eventually, it will help

explain whether the sit-in participants have constructed a certain collective identity as a collective.

It is hard to say that migrant workers in Korea have working class consciousness yet. Even though they are situated in a similar position in Korean society socio-economically and politically, it is not clear if they consider themselves as a class. Gray (2004) designated migrant workers in Korea as ‘underclass’ which cannot be included in the existing working class and is socially excluded. However, migrant workers especially the participants of collective actions and the activists of the Migrants’ Trade Union (MTU) have built worker consciousness, so they are not simply situated in the underclass. In order to explain the development of the consciousness, I take E.P. Thompson’s work on the working class formation.

Class is not something fixed or structured according to Thompson. He understands class as “a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness and as something which in fact happens in human relationships” (1980: 8). Even though migrant workers have different backgrounds before becoming migrant workers, due to similar working conditions, exploitation, discrimination and they finally resisted as other migrant workers did. By sharing common experiences, people articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other people whose interests are different from theirs (8).

Since Thompson emphasizes the experiences and the processes, he argues that class struggles comes prior to class and are not separable from class. By criticizing the structuralist Marxists who regard class independent of historical relationship and struggles, he says that through such struggles resulted from exploitations they discover their class consciousness (1978: 149). What we should take into account is the history of class formation, that is, the process in which people make class through time and experiences (Kim, 2003: 27).

Thompson suggests several important groups who developed the working class formation in Britain. Artisans, who were not considered as working class, but already had political and cultural tradition actually led the labor movement, derived ideas, organization, and leadership in 19th century (1980:211) are evaluated by Thompson as a different collective from the mob in 18th century (1980: 463). Luddism which was remembered as a group of artisans destroying the machines is reevaluated by Thompson. He says that Luddites demanded a legal minimum wage, the control of the ‘sweating’ of women or juveniles, the right to open trade union combination and so on (603), which already showed a form of working class. Since these artisans already had this resistant culture against the economic exploitation and political oppression, they developed themselves into a working class. This actor-oriented theory together with the importance of experience and history can demonstrate that migrant workers have built a certain worker consciousness by experiencing same exploitations, participating in the struggles and the union activities even though they have not called themselves the working class yet.

Politicizing of migrant workers

Migrant workers in host societies are considered as a “challenge” to native workers since they can cause job competition and weaken workers’ bargaining power against capital. At the same time, it is a task for union organizers to organize migrant workers. Therefore, a lot of union organizers have realized that the unions cannot sustain without organizing migrant workers especially in the decline of labor movements in. Castles and Kosack argue that “it is essential to organize them – not only in their own interest, but also in the interest of the rest of the workers.” Furthermore, Castles and Kosack argues, “trade unions cannot prevent immigration and their attempts to do so only serve to alienate the new workers from them.” Moreover, it will result in “the weakening of the unions and the deepening of the split

in the working class” (Castles and Kosak, 1973: 128 in Agtas et al., 2007: 17).

Before discussing the details of organizing migrant workers and migrant workers’ movement, I would like to present the overall trend of trade unions’ attempts to organize migrant workers in North America and Europe. In case of Canada, recently the labor market has been flexible and the precarious job sectors such as contract works or season jobs have been filled with migrant workers and women (Cranford and Ladd, 2003: 47). Canadian trade unions have built community unions such as Immigrant Workers Centre/Centre des Travailleurs et Travailleuses Immigrant (IWC/CTI) which offers the services to migrant workers that community centers do. Also, they facilitate links between immigrant communities and unions that seek to unionize new workers (Cranford and Ladd, 2003: 49). Moreover, in the United States, since the labor movement has declined, the trade unions such as the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) have aggressively organized migrant workers. In the United States, Migrant workers are employed in the most precarious job sectors such as garment industry and building cleaning (Milkman, 2000). On the other hand, in Europe, the decrease of membership of domestic workers was a clear sign of the decline of labor movement, and, organizing migrant workers has been crucial. In Germany, the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) has been organizing migrant workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. In 1973, 500,000 out of 2,500,000 migrant workers joined the trade union and in 2000 the number reached 700,000 (Kuhne, 2000:55). The role of migrant workers is regarded essential in Germany for the success of the union. In Switzerland, after a long time of reluctance towards migrant workers, the trade union has changed their attitude since the 1970s. In 2000, migrant workers represented 30 per cent of the membership in the Swiss Trade Union Confederation (SGB), the largest and most important trade union in Switzerland (Heisler, 2000: 22). As stated above, organizing migrant workers has been an essential work for the domestic trade unions in these

countries. Even though the importance of migrant workers is emphasized, migrant workers have been considered as the objects to be unionized rather than the subjects.

Even though there are restrictions on migrant workers in terms of their legal status, there have been cases which have shown the successes in organizing migrant workers such as ‘Justice for Janitors’ in the United States and the ‘Migrants’ Trade Union (MTU)’ in South Korea, the main subject of this thesis. After the struggle of Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles, migrant workers formed a “high level of class consciousness,” as well as a “willingness to take the risks involved in organizing that was palpably shaped by experiences back home” (Waldinger et al., 1998: 117 in Milkman, 2000: 9). The various literatures on migrant workers’ movement show different approaches on the organization of migrant workers: regarding migrant workers as objects for organizing or political subjects. Some of them demonstrate only organizers’ strategies and whether the organizing is successful or not, while the others show the movement by migrant activists.

In the United States, migrant workers who are employed in the garment industry were completely prevented from unionizing by the structure. Due to the flexible, global system of production in which factories could simply move to another part of the globe, it has been difficult for union organizers to organize migrant workers (Bonacich, 2000: 131). Furthermore, the contract system of the apparel industry in which workers contract with their employers who contract with manufacturers. In case workers go on a strike, the contractor together with workers has no job the next day (Bonacich, 2000: 142). Bonacich, in her article, demonstrates the alternative approaches by UNITE (the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) in Los Angeles: the Jobbers’ Agreements and the Worker-Centered Organizing (2000: 142). In this case, it is not an issue of the will of migrant workers’ whether or not to join the unions, but it is rather their condition that can simply prevent them to be unionized. Therefore, the union tries to change the employment structure in which migrant

workers situated in the ‘Jobber’s Agreement’ as well as to empower immigrant workers by educating them through the grass roots way, ‘Worker-Centered’ as different organizing tactics.

When looking into the organizing process of migrant workers, it often lacks the agency of migrant workers themselves. In this sense, Pero’s article (2008) brings a critical point to politicization of Latin American migrant workers in the United Kingdom. By explaining two political groups of Latin Americans in the UK, his article emphasizes the importance of treating of migrants as subjects of politics acting on their disadvantageous condition, but not as objects of policies (Pero, 2008: 73). Two groups of Latin Americans are presented: ‘The Latin Front’, a political group, but not a political party, which works for recognition of Latin Americans and tries to regularize unregistered people by lobbying to British politicians. The other group is ‘The Latin American Workers Association’, a trade union which is a part of the Transport and General Workers Union, focuses on workers’ rights. This article gives an alternative approach of migrant workers’ politics in a way that Latin American migrant workers show their attempts to integrate into the British society through their own agency through a political initiative or a trade union by demanding their rights (Pero, 2008: 82).

Turning into the Korean literature on migrant workers’ movement, I would like to present the critical literature here. Korean scholarship has worked a lot on the migrant workers’ movement in terms of an advocacy movement, since the movement itself has had this character for the most of its history (Lim, 2003; Park, 2005; Seol, 2004; Seol, 2005). However, since the migrant workers’ collective actions and union movement emerged, there have been numerous researches on them.

First, Lee (2005) published her thesis on the migrant workers’ sit-in against the deportation of workers and the implementation of the Employment Permit System. She focuses on the emergence of migrant workers’ movement and the character changes of the movement, especially before and after the biggest and longest collective action in 2003-2004.

By taking labor education during the sit-in, migrant workers developed a worker consciousness, but they had to realize that becoming as equals with Korean workers cannot happen overnight. Regardless of this, she argues that, migrant workers wanted to build their own movement which would not be overwhelmed by Korean activists and they decided to build their own trade union (127-128).

Jeong (2006) and Kwon (2010) have researched on migrant activists of the Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) and the process in which migrant activists established their political subjectivity. Firstly, Jeong argues that migrant activists of the MTU have identities as 'workers' and their movement is the labor movement in which they practice as working class (77-78). Besides that, he argues that migrant activists of the MTU also have potential of 'anti-racist' political subjectivity which came from their experiences of being targets of racism in Korea (84). The third one is 'trans-national' political subjectivity. He argues that migrant activists are already political subjects in Korea, although they are not given any rights to do so. Therefore, he says that migrant activists have confronted the state by their engagement in political actions, such as defending rights of disabled people, homosexuals, evictees, irregular workers, and protesting against sending troops to Iraq, besides their own struggle.

Similarly, Kwon's thesis (2010) focuses on the political subjectification of migrant workers who are members of different kinds of trade unions. The three trade unions which have migrant worker members: Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union, Seongseo Community Union and Samwoo enterprise union. She argues that while the members of two unions are subjects of the activism, the members of the third one are simply objects to be unionized by Korean union organizers. She finds the reason through the path dependency; the political subjectification of migrant workers (activists) resulted from the motivation through which migrant workers join the unions as well as the openness of two unions to migrant

workers from any kind of industry (2010: 140). Furthermore, migrant workers experience ‘disidentification’ in which migrant activists become free from their previous identities such as religion, nationality by identifying themselves ‘workers’ just same as any other workers (130).

The literature here is based on migrant workers’ movement in three countries and they show different approaches to migrant workers’ movement. Firstly, in the garment industry in Los Angeles where unionizing has not been successful, Bonacich argues that migrant workers are organizable by new approaches. Secondly, Pero’s article and the rest Korean literature show that migrant workers’ movements have progressed by the actor-oriented approaches. Especially, the three Korean literatures have focused on the changes or developments of migrant activists through collective actions or union activities.

Chapter 3. Process to build the labor identity of migrant workers

In this chapter I am exploring the process in which the migrant workers become aware of their common grievances by making alliances with the Korean NGOs and trade unions, and struggling against discriminative conditions. To do so, I will use social movement theories. In order to explain the perception, actions and outcomes of each sit-in, I use ‘framing alignment’ theory (Snow et al. 1986, 1988). Within the emergence of the collective actions, I explore the ‘identity construction’ process (Tarrow, 2011[1998]) in order to see how a variety of identities such as different nationalities developed into one ‘labor identity’.

The movement of migrant workers in Korea has shown different forms and different allies: the mutual aid form between same nationalities, asking for help to local NGOs where services are offered such as labor counseling, language and medical services, and joining a trade union such as Equality Trade Union-Migrants’ Branch (later the Migrants’ Trade Union). But, for most migrant workers joining the trade union is not easy because of their legal restrictions. This chapter focuses on the participants of sit-ins where migrant workers demanded their rights, interact with Korean activists against authorities or employers. Each collective action can be framed differently: basic human rights based demands and labor rights based claims. After the sit-ins, the establishment of the Migrants’ Trade Union showed the workers’ claim as a new tactic. Finally I explore the discussion on citizenship of migrant workers since migrant workers’ status has never been stable due to the non-citizen title.

3.1 Who are migrant workers?

There was a series of journal articles in a Korean news magazine, <Hankyoreh 21> about the working poor in Korea and one of the topic was about the conditions of undocumented migrant workers in 2009. One journalist got employed in a furniture factory in

Maseok in Namyangju, the outskirts of Seoul. During his one-month work with undocumented migrant workers, he observed them and their working and living conditions.

The doors of the factories at the furniture factory complex were closed and even locked, so people from outside could enter only when people inside checked them through a small hole on the door. It was because most employees in that factory complex are undocumented migrant workers and the factory owners had to prevent them from sudden crack downs by the Immigration Service Officers. When the journalist entered the factory, he saw the factory full of sawdust, and heard the noisy sounds from the machines which kept annoying his ears. Inside there were Korean workers working with four undocumented migrant workers without whom the factory could not function. As the new worker starts working and learns the skills, he gets to know that they have extra works until 9:30 in the evening for 4 days per week. One of the migrant workers injured his back, and he had to pay a lot of money without the medical insurance because he is ‘illegal’. Other migrant workers have continuous pain on their chests and hands as well. “Think about it, we can’t go to the hospital in the daytime. We’re ‘illegal people’, you know. I can’t even go to the downtown to buy some clothes.” But, what is scariest for them is a sudden crackdown more than anything else, the journalist wrote⁵. This is a common case of undocumented migrant workers who are filling the 3D job sectors which are located in the lowest level in the capitalist hierarchy where most Koreans avoid working today.

Migrant workers started entering Korea in the late 1980s and the number of them reached around 650,000 now. The origins of migrant workers are diverse: China, Southeast Asian countries (Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and so on), Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), and even from Africa (Ethiopia). The kinds of industries include manufacturing industry, construction industry, farming and fishing. Although the

⁵ One month I spent with migrant workers at the Maseok furniture factory complex: crackdowns, the scariest thing. http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/cover/cover_general/26107.html This is one of series of articles on a progressive media, Hankyoreh 21 that include journalists’ actual experiences of the lowest working class in Korea.

Korean economy has developed, still there are industrial sectors, the subcontractors of bigger businesses, which cannot afford paying for Korean workers. The fact that workers of these small businesses are not unionized raises doubts that the conditions will be better since Korean workers would rather leave the company than try to improve the condition, creating empty places to be filled by migrant workers.

According to a survey (Seongseo Community union, 2010) regarding the working conditions of migrant workers, 141 migrant workers out of 322 (43.8%) were employed in the companies with employees between 5 and 20, and 77 workers (23.9%) were employed in the factories employing between 20 and 50 workers. The companies with less than 5 workers were 48 (14.9%) (2010: 10), and it is noteworthy because these companies do not take responsibility of the payment of extra working time and severance fee.

The survey investigated the working time and the wages of Korean workers and migrant workers. Korean workers at the manufacturing industry work for 189 hours per month while migrant workers work for 297 hours and the salary of Koreans is 2,162,857 won (around 1,403 euros) while migrant workers are paid 1,270,913 won (around 824 euros) (p.11). This survey shows that 47.5% of migrant workers have 4 days of holidays per month and 32.4% showed even 0~3 days of holidays (p.12). Migrant workers are generally employed in the factories with the poorest working conditions and they endure the time to support their families. In short, migrant workers work much longer than Korean workers, hardly having holidays, but get paid a bit higher than the half of Korean workers' salary.

The difficulties do not just come from the long working hours, but from the discriminations with Koreans' racist treatment, verbal and physical violence on them.

My coworkers do not consider me as a same workers as them. I'm quite old, but they call me 'hey hey'. (Excerpts from an interview with a Nepalese worker, in Kown, 2010: 39)

In Korean society people traditionally have seen factory workers as 'mean and contemptible'

(Koo 2001, 12-13 in Gray, 2004: 99) and migrant workers from poorer countries are considered as outsiders who could threaten the racial homogeneity of Korea (2004: 100). Such abusive conditions and racial discrimination of the migrant workers keep them at the lowest level of society.

3.2 Regulation systems on migrant workers

The influx of unskilled migrant workers started in 1987 in accordance with the capital's demand for cheap labor and migrants' desire for earning money in Korea. These migrant workers from Southeast Asia, China, the former Soviet states, Central Asia, and Africa entered Korea with the tourist visa and overstayed to work for the economic support of their families. The Korean government, having no policy on migrant workers until 1991, declared the implementation of a system, called the Overseas Investor Company Industrial Training System which allowed Korean companies overseas to train and hire migrant workers in Korea. However, this system ended up failing because such overseas companies were large and the companies which actually needed migrant workers were the Small and Medium size ones (Moon, 2000: 148-149 in Gray, 2007: 301). In 1994, the government introduced the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) which gave two years of training and one year of working in order to fill the labor shortages of the small and medium sized enterprise sectors (Lee, 2005: 41; Gray, 2007: 301). Since trainees' legal status was students not workers, the employers could evade the responsibility of offering the medical insurance and the industrial accident insurance. Moreover, the system did not allow trainees to have 3 labor rights, the right to organize, right of collective bargaining, and the right of collective action, while these trainees did not even get trainings. That is, the system was designed to utilize migrant labor whilst denying their *workerness*, or, in other words, their legal status as workers (Gray, 2007: 301). Furthermore, their salaries were considerably below the minimum wage and trainees were not

allowed to change the workplaces was banned. For such reasons, the trainees rather took the risk of having undocumented status than being tied to the system which was often called ‘the modern form of slavery’.

Furthermore, what is very strange for the ITS was that the agent group of this system was the Korean Federation of Small and Medium Businesses (KFSB) not the Korean government, which resulted in charging extortionate fees through brokers to the KFSB. The official fee for a trainee is \$340–1,300, but in reality, 68.5% of trainees pay between \$1,500 and \$10,000 (JCMK in Gray, 2007: 302). Therefore, it was common for them to be in debt to people in their home countries to enter Korea, and they have to endure working in exploitative working conditions to pay back. Also, it is not surprising that the KFSB exceedingly opposed the introduction of the Employment Permit System which was to be controlled by the government.

There was another group of migrants, ‘illegal migrant workers’ who had stayed in Korea longer than the legally accepted period. The number of undocumented migrant workers was 48,231 out of 81,824 (58.9%) in 1994 and reached 289,239 out of 362,597 (79.8%) in 2002 (Yoo, 2004: 5). Undocumented migrant workers were vulnerable to exploitations since it was hard to resist their employers in cases of unpaid wages, human rights abuses or labor violations due to the fact that they were exposed to deportations. Besides the unpaid wages, Korean employers often confiscated their passports and even threatened to report them to the Immigration Office. However, in terms of making money, undocumented workers held a better position since the minimum wage was applied to undocumented ones while it was not to trainees and the longer period of stay offered them better wages too. However, after the announcement of the Employment Permit System, the oppression of undocumented migrant workers extremely worsened.

The Industrial Trainee System (ITS) has been constantly criticized by advocacy

movement groups. Claiming to introduce a new system, a migrant workers' advocacy group, the Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea proposed the Employment Permit System which recognized migrant workers' legal status as workers for the first time. Even though the government did not adopt every part of the proposal, this was evaluated as the result of the long history of struggle. The minimum wage law⁶, four insurances (employment, medical, industrial injury insurances and the pension) and three labor rights were applied according to the new system. However, in reality these rights were impossible to practice. Migrant workers can work for three years in Korea with annual renewal of visa⁷, change the jobs three times in three years, and 2 months are given for them to find the new jobs. They can change their workplaces only with the employers' permission, and they cannot change the type of industry. Therefore the chances to change the workplace are given only when the employer dismisses the worker, the company gets bankrupt, or there is a serious violence proved within the workplace.

As of 2011 after 7 years of the EPS, a third of 2,583 workers whose visas expired in 2010 stayed in Korea as undocumented sojourners (LaborToday, 2011). Although the EPS started as a short-term rotation policy on migrant workers, a lot of them chose to stay with unstable status. It is proved that the system could not prevent the desire of migrant workers to stay, especially when Korean employers prefer those who have stayed longer. The EPS does not provide full bargaining power to the workers against employers, so documented workers usually remain weak. At the same time, the government has justified the crackdowns and deportations of undocumented workers by asserting the legitimacy of the system. Today, the government's policy of the EPS or deportations on migrant workers has proved that neither of

⁶ In 2002, the minimum wage was 514,150 won (333 euro) while the wage of trainees was twice lower than the minimum wage.

⁷ Later on, the system offered 3 more years only if the employer extends the contract with the migrant worker in the third year. However, they had to go back to their countries after 3 years and come back to Korea. This was meant to prevent migrant workers from applying for the citizenship and the permanent settlement. Currently, migrant workers are given 4 years and 10 months without a short departure.

them can stop migrant workers to overstay.

3.3 Emergence of migrant workers' movement

The first experiences of most migrant workers after arriving in Korea and getting to work were seeing Korean employers and coworkers shouting at them and even beating them up without giving the reason. The second is experiencing the unpaid wages from the factories. When migrant workers experience abusive treatments, they try to solve the problems through their friends who entered the country earlier.

When I was working in a textile factory, my coworker from Peru got an industrial injury, but the employer just disappeared not paying the medical fee and even his wage. I was just with him. We hardly communicated; he spoke Spanish and I spoke English so we communicated with some sign languages. I introduced him to a church where people spoke Spanish and then we collected some money to help him. Later on, we built a kind of community so that we could help each other when experiencing any injuries or something. (With the Bangladeshis?) Yes, at first. Then we started helping together with Filipinos and Thai friends". (Excerpts from my interview with Alam, a participant in the sit-in in 2003-2004)

Alam's experience is an initial form of mutual aid that connects people who have little resource. Migrant workers at first get help from their friends who entered Korea earlier and then join their nation-based community. These communities usually cooperate with the NGOs, but sometimes with trade unions because they cannot autonomously solve their problems.

Networking through nation-based communities

The nation-based communities provide important information to migrant workers such as finding jobs or solving problems related to living in Korea. The direction of the community can be diverse depending on their religions and their political background from their country of origins (Hyunjin Byun, 2004: 13). Nation-based communities have cooperated with the NGOs and migrants' trade unions. These communities have the organizational power and strong ties to each other since they gather regularly for such events as national holidays. This section will demonstrate some active nation-based communities.

A lot of nation-based communities have a strong basis on the religion, but it is rare to see communities which develop into political groups. In case of a Filipino community KASAMMAKO, members of this group share the same religion (Catholic) as well as political activities. KASAMMAKO has close ties with the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU). They participated in a protest denouncing the Filipino embassy since the embassy had cancelled the passports of some Filipinos (Byun, 2006: 18) and still get engaged in the activities to improve the conditions of migrant workers in Korea not just Filipinos.

The communities can be influential groups for the advocacy movements and migrants' movements. As Seonok Lee points out, the Nepalese community that organized the biggest number of participants in the sit-in struggle in 2003-2004 together with the advocacy groups shows that the strong ties between the community members can lead the successful organizational actions (Lee, 2005: 50). Samar Thapa, the former president of the ETU-MB was the one who organized a number of Nepalese migrant workers for the sit-in in 2003-2004. Their participation in the sit-in struggle in 2003-2004 has developed their activities into the inter-national group, the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU).

The communities usually develop into political groups, though the experience of a political action served as a momentum for building the community activities. Burma Action Korea was established in 2004 after the sit-in protest at the Myungdong Cathedral and the Anglican Church in Seoul. My informant Maung and other Burmese sit-in participants were encouraged to build a community after participating in the collective action in 2003-2004. Starting from denouncing the Burmese embassy which levied too high taxes to Burmese in Korea, they have been working hard for the democracy of Burma as well as improvement of human rights and labor rights of the whole migrant workers in Korea (BMK website, 2011).

Migrant workers' advocacy movement

When migrant workers experienced human and labor rights violations at their

workplaces, the first place most of them go to get help was either a religious organization or an NGO, where services for migrant workers are offered. While trade unions perceived migrant workers as potential competitors for jobs, NGOs reacted quickly and started programs for migrant workers. So NGOs and religious organizations have been the most influential group in the history of migrant workers' movement in Korea.

The first supporting activity started at a Catholic church of the Seoul Diocese in 1992 and in the same year one group, called 'Group for Foreign Workers' Human Rights' started a counseling program for fighting for the unpaid salaries, industrial injuries and then expanded the daily services into Korean language education, medical services, translation and offering shelters for migrant workers (Seol, 1992a: 134). Currently, there are around 200 groups such as migrant workers' centers or immigrant centers. In case of religious centers, some of the priests have worked on the human rights issues since the 1980s and turned advocacy activities for migrant workers. Their daily services include Korean language classes, labor counseling and preparing events for migrant workers. Such NGOs have seen the inhumane treatment and unjust systems of migrant workers, getting to know migrant workers' situation better than any group. Therefore, it was NGOs that supported migrant workers' collective actions especially the sit-in struggle in 1994 and 1995 in order to change the system.

After undertaking several collective actions, Korean NGOs decided to build a networking group over migrant workers' issue and the result was establishing the Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK). The JCMK led the migrant workers' movement by contributing to the improvement of migrant workers' conditions by campaigning and pressuring the government. However, inside the group, people were aware that JCMK was run by Korean activists and migrant workers were objects rather than subjects of the movement (Park, 1999: 72-81 in Lee, 2005: 57). Accordingly, in 2000 a group of activists withdrew the JCMK and established a group called 'Struggle center for the complete

achievement of migrant workers' labor rights and the freedom of migrants' employment' in order to make the migrant workers' own trade union. Later on, another NGO alliance group left the JCMK and established the Alliance for the Human Rights of Migrant Workers (AHM) in 2003-2004. The breakup of the JCMK showed that various types of movements appeared, and migrant workers wanted to have a movement in which they could be the subjects not the objects.

Currently the JCMK and the AHM are the two most active associations in the migrant workers' movement together with the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU). The JCMK and AHM approach the issue of migrant workers' movement offering social welfare programs rather than building a movement in its conventional sense. In contrast, the MTU approaches the migrants' issue in terms of class and labor movements (Park, 2005). The following table shows the most important and distinctive characteristics of each group, their attitude towards migrant workers' issues and the sit-in in 2003-2004.

<Table 1> Distinctive characteristics of migrant workers' groups.

	Name	Form	Characteristics	Position on the EPS	Sit-in place In 2003
'87-'92			Individual discontent & Individual resistance		
'92-present	Nation-based Communities	Spontaneous group	Mutual aid		
'95-present	JCMK	Advocacy group	Human rights	Amendment, improvement	Seoul Anglican Church
'01-present	ETU-MB (MTU)	Trade Union	Labor rights	Labor permit system	Myungdong Cathedral
'04-present	AHM	Advocacy group	Citizenship & Accepting Labor rights	Amendment, improvement	Ansan migrant center

< Translated source from Seonok Lee, 2005: 63>

While cooperating with each other, the JCMK and ETU-MB showed a clear difference on the Employment Permit System and the voluntary departure in 2002. The JCMK valued

the EPS as an outcome of the movement while the EUT-MB regarded it as a challenge to overcome. Especially, when the government announced the one year of legal stay while encouraging the voluntary departure after one year, the ETU-MB fiercely criticized the government and encouraged migrant workers not to accept it while insisting on the complete legalization. It was different for the JCMK that said undocumented migrant workers should autonomously decide.

As a result of the strong advocacy movement, migrant workers have been paid attention to by the society. However, the advocacy movement showed the limits such as victimizing of migrant workers. As a result, the criticism on the NGOs' movement led to different movements such as union movement, and now migrant workers' movement has been more diverse.

3.4 From 'underclass'⁸ to workers: Experiences of struggle of migrant workers

In a movement against oppression, the focus is an "injustice frame" that people collectively define their situations as unjust" (Gamson, 1992: 68, 73; McAdam, 1999 [1982]: 51 in Tarrow, 2011 [1998]: 145). Participation in a collective action can be explained by 'collective action frames' which serve as "accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable" (Snow and Benford, 1992: 137).

Among migrant workers' collective actions, four significant sit-in strikes are discussed here: the sit-ins in 1994 and 1995 demanding the compensations for industrial injuries of undocumented migrant workers and claiming to stop mistreatment and physical violence inside their workplaces. Two sit-ins were conducted by having resources (supports of NGOs)

⁸ 'Underclass' means 'a class beneath a class' which designates migrant workers in Korea as those who cannot be included in the existing working class and socially excluded (Gray, 2004).

and the sit-ins resulted in compensation for industrial injuries even to undocumented migrant workers and guaranteeing the labor standard laws. However, two sit-in strikes in 2002 and 2003-2004 in which migrant workers demanded the legalization of undocumented migrant workers and objected the implement of the Employment Permit System which were supported by the trade unions and NGOs did not achieve the initial goal that they demanded. In addition, while the direct adversaries of sit-in participants in the 1990s were their employers, for two sit-ins in the 2000s it was the government.

Migrant workers' bargaining power against capital is very weak since they are considered as "substitutable or expendable" workers (Tilly, 1988: 455). In most cases, migrant workers' labor rights have not been guaranteed. Therefore, migrant workers, especially undocumented ones, have to take the risk of deportation when they dare to take part in a collective action. Nevertheless, migrant workers in Korea have conducted significant collective actions to be recognized as human beings and workers. Collective actions are constituted by individuals, therefore the collective identities of the sit-in participants that they built through the collective actions will be discussed.

The sit-in against the abusive working conditions in 1994 and 1995

In 1994 when Koreans were not even thinking about the human rights of migrant workers, this sit-in of that year (from Jan. 09 to Feb. 07) was conducted by 13 undocumented migrant workers with the support of an NGO, 'Pinancheo for migrant workers', which means the refuge for migrant workers at the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ). My informant Deepa was one of the 13 people. She had undocumented status when she lost three fingers at her workplace, a leather factory. Her employer had not paid her salary for six months when she got the injury and refused to compensate for the accident. There was no law to protect undocumented migrant workers when they were mistreated.

I came to Korea to make money and I worked for a leather factory. What my boss did to me was unjust. Not just him, I'm a human being too. My friend from Nepal

proposed to join the sit-in and I met people like me from the Philippines, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Ethiopia at the Pinancheo. (Wasn't it scary? You could have been deported.) It was scary. I also thought that I might regret later, but I could do it because people were helping us. We fought there, even sleeping outside in the cold days in January and February (Excerpts from my interview with Deepa, a participant at the sit-in in 1994).

In the early 1990s, migrant workers were considered simply as machines which employers could use as long as they wanted and their human rights were often neglected. Having the undocumented status, she was scared to participate in the sit-in, but she thought that it was unjust not to get the proper compensation just because of her status. She joined the sit-in by a suggestion of her Nepalese friend who also got an industrial injury. An NGO (Pinancheo) organized the injured workers and another NGO (CCEJ) provided a place. The participants in the sit-in used their limited resources such as the network through a nation-based community and the support of the NGOs.

We could not communicate with each other very well. We were all different in color, culture and language, but one is common that we were fighting for the migrant's right. (Excerpts from my interview with Deepa, a sit-in participant in 1994)

Koreans didn't even know about migrant workers and the migrants' issue was never in the media at first. But after the sit-in, the government changed the law and the migrants' issue was reported through media after our sit-in. You know, migrant workers are same as Koreans. We need to get compensated for the injuries (Excerpts from my interview with Deepa)

The demands of the sit-in participants were accepted rapidly. The Ministry of Labor said that undocumented migrant workers would get the compensation for the industrial injuries for three years retroactive (Seol, 2003: 254).

Since the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) started, there were constant labor violation cases. 13 Nepalese trainees staged a sit-in protest at Myungdong Cathedral against the non-transfer of wages, violence, verbal abuse and confiscated passports that had become rife under the system (Gray, 2007: 306). They decided to escape their workplace after ceaseless work for 14 hours with violence and finally went to the Myungdong Cathedral which was the symbol

of democracy in the 1980s. At the sit-in, they chained themselves while shouting “Please do not beat us up”, “Give our wages directly to us”, “We are not slaves” and “Give our passports back to us” (Seol, 2003: 259). The background is that when trainees came to Korea, most of them took loans of 2,000 USD which was three years of wages to pay the broker fee. The brokers said that trainees would receive 500 USD per month, but what they actually received was less than 210, but the brokers did not ever send the money to trainees’ families, which they promised to do. Working as trainees was even worse than working as undocumented migrant workers in terms of wage and changing workplaces and sometimes even entire wages were being appropriated by the brokers. After this sit-in, the government declared that trainees would be guaranteed with the Labor Standard Law that includes prohibiting the forced labor, violence, and observance of the working time. Also, trainees could get their wages directly from the employers.

The sit-in for obtaining of the working visa in 2002

Whereas the two sit-ins in 1994 and 1995 were framed in terms of basic human rights issues, other issues such as the working visa and legalization of undocumented migrants have been raised since the 2000s. After the JCMK was divided into three groups, one of the groups, ‘Struggle center for the complete achievement of migrant workers’ labor rights and the freedom of migrants’ employment’ joined the Equality Trade Union under the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), a radical trade union group. In the late 1990s and 2000s, the government was preparing the implementation of a new system, the Employment Permit System. Before its implementation, the government announced that they would accept the voluntary registration of undocumented migrant workers and guarantee their residency for one year if workers promise the departure after one year. It was in 2002 and 255,978 undocumented workers registered. ETU-MB objected the idea of voluntary registration, criticized the government’s plan, and organized its members and staged a sit-in from April to

June in 2002.

I was a member of the ETU-MB and participated in the sit-in in 2002 at the Myungdong Cathedral. (What did you demand?) We shouted out ‘Stop crackdown and deportation of undocumented migrant workers’ and ‘Objection to the EPS’ because we knew what the EPS was about. We tried to say that what we wanted was the Labor Permit System not the EPS. (Excerpts from my interview with Gurung, a sit-in participant in 2002)

The ETU-MB which objected the introduction of the EPS concluded that the voluntary registration would extend just one more year, but it could not resolve the fundamental problem of legalization of undocumented migrants (Power of Working Class, 2003).

The difference of the sit-ins in 2002 and 2003-2004 was whether the government already declared the introduction of the EPS or not. I think the introduction of the EPS could have been different if the sit-in in 2002 had been more successful (in terms of prevention of the system). (Excerpts from my interview with Gurung)

What the government did in 2002 was allowing one year stay for undocumented migrant workers. The fact that the demands of the sit-in participants were not so different from those in 2003-2004 just proved that this sit-in did not prevent or affect the introduction of the EPS at all. The sit-in was conducted by the ETU-MB itself without many allies and could not influence the government’s decision regarding the EPS and the legalization of undocumented migrants. The sit-in was conducted solely by the ETU-MB because the NGOs which was still influential in the migrants’ advocacy movement did not agree on the ETU-MB’s claim to oppose the voluntary registration. The NGOs argued that the decision of voluntary registration and departure should be made by migrant workers themselves. Because of the lack of agreement and the solidarity between groups, the sit-in was not known among migrant workers and to the public. Eventually, migrant workers and the NGOs had to face the massive deportations one year later.

The biggest collective action of migrant workers in Korea in 2003-2004 against the massive deportations: focusing on the sit-in at Myungdong Cathedral⁹

⁹ This part is written based on Seonok Lee’s thesis (2005, Sungkonghoe University) and the news articles from

When migrant workers decided to participate in the sit-ins, they had similar goals to achieve such as legalization, the rate of success would differ for everyone. Also, for sit-in participants, their desire to stay and work in Korea does not necessarily mean that their identity as workers is built. According to Tarrow, most individuals negotiate among a variety of identities, so the politicized identity a movement claims may need to be constantly reinforced (2011[1998]: 153). For example, making them agree on ‘who we are’ is crucial. For some people, the suicides of other migrant workers encouraged them to join and then they developed the collective identity through labor education during the sit-ins.

We learned the work, the language and the Korean culture for a long time in Korea. We knew about Korea and the skills, so we could teach such things to others and help them adapt to Korea. They (the government) simply threw us away, like throwing us to a trash bin. They were saying that ‘We gave what you deserved to get, so just go away’. They just deported us. They never considered me as a worker. (Excerpts from my interview with Alam, a participant of the sit-in in 2003-2004)

I was just helping my friends because I spoke Korean quite well, but I didn’t know about my right or labor rights as such things. I just saw my friend who was already involved in the movements and I thought he was so cool. I could never imagine doing that in Burma unless I decide to lay down my life, but in Korea people would do it... One thing that convinced me to join the sit-in was this question: ‘Did we commit any crime? No, we didn’t.’ I knew about my factory well. Koreans would never work for the factory and it would never be run without me and my friends. The government has to make a system in which all people could work together. Is deporting people a right thing to do? (Excerpts from my interview with, Maung, a participant of the sit-in in 2003-2004.)

In 2002, the bill on the Employment Permit System was passed in parliament and the new system was planned to be implemented in July 2004. The government announced the intensive crackdown plan starting on November 17 2003 as well as the legalization of migrant workers depending on the period of stay by 15 November 2003. Migrant workers who had stayed in Korea less than three years were given one or two years so that the total stay would be less than five years; those who had stayed for three or four years were given one more year after returning to their home countries and coming back to Korea, and those who had stayed longer than four years, they had to leave voluntarily. The intensity of the government’s

Ohmynews.com and the Social Movements magazine.

campaign regarding the crackdowns and deportations had never been seen before 2003 and it was powerful enough to threaten undocumented migrants. Some migrant workers hid themselves in their houses hoping the government's crackdown would be over soon. Furthermore, frightened migrant workers threw themselves into the subway rails or died of heart attacks and the number reaching 10 from November 2003 to the beginning of 2004.

You should know that not everyone was an activist. They joined the sit-in because it was about their lives and living, which was so desperate. There were even some people who were so scared of crackdowns and came to the sit-in for a refuge.
(Excerpts from my interview with Maung)

While the fear of deportation made migrant workers timid, others joined the sit-in places claiming some change on the government's policy and the number of sit-in participants reached 1,000 in November 2003. Meanwhile, the news about migrant workers who killed themselves for the fear of deportation motivated them more than ever.

I heard the news about a Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi who committed suicides because they were scared of the crackdown. They killed themselves after hearing 'if we don't get a visa and get caught, how are we going to live?' After I heard the news, I determined to fight. Oh, we should fight this time I said to myself and joined here. (Documentary film, 'What is illegal?' in Seonok Lee, 2005: 96)

Since the government declared the huge crackdowns, migrant workers' movement groups decided to stage a nationwide sit-in at the migrant workers' centers. Some leading groups in Seoul and Gyeonggi province include the ETU-MB and the KCTU, and the advocacy groups. Even though the views on the migrant workers' movement were quite different, they all agreed on the urgency of the situation and the necessity of the sit-in. They decided to conduct the sit-in together. Around 1,000 migrant workers participated in the sit-in and 200 migrant workers joined the Myungdong Cathedral sit-in. Compared to the number of male workers, female migrant workers were four at the Myungdong Cathedral.

During the sit-in, you know the NGOs, especially the religious group said, "What can you migrant workers do? Migrant workers don't have any power. We're powerful, we can meet the minister and the president. We're the people who can work for you, so just do what we tell you to do." They just listed what

migrant workers wanted, needed just as they wanted and started negotiations with the government. We opposed it, why? Migration would never be finished and migrant workers would continuously come to Korea because Korea needs the labor force. We should make the labor conditions without any discrimination or any conflicts between workers. They said migrants couldn't be leaders. What we proposed was making the joint leadership, like one person from migrant workers, one from the KCTU and one from the religious groups or the NGOs. They refused to do it and made another sit-in place in another church with some migrant workers organized by such (religious) groups. (Excerpts from my interview with Alam)

Even though this was not the only reason, the leading groups could not make the complete agreement on conducting the sit-in. Migrant workers tried to make their own voice heard rather than relying on the Korean groups as presented at an interview with Samar Thapa, the representative of the sit-in.

We migrant workers realized that we have to fight and achieve things we need by ourselves, not asking for some help from NGOs or churches. I suggested my comrades that let's make our fight, otherwise we can't make better situation for migrant workers. (Excerpts from an interview with Samar Thapa, the representative of the Myungdong sit-in. *Social Movements* (2003: 3))¹⁰

Since the sit-in was meant to cancel the deportation plan of the government and to demand the complete legalization of undocumented migrant workers, the participants' daily programs focused on the politicization and the protests in front of the Myungdong Cathedral as well as the labor education. Also, in order to let other Koreans know about the situation, they campaigned, giving leaflets to Koreans.

We had protests and gave some speeches during the sit-in. Besides that, we had some educations on the labor rights the trade union from Korean labor activists. In the beginning, we said that 'We're discriminated because we're foreigners. It's not something strange that we didn't get our wages because we came to a foreign country. Maybe it's too much to demand the complete legalization of undocumented migrant workers. We didn't have visa. Do we have a right to be legalized?' We completely changed our minds after the education. The educations by Korean activists just enlightened us; 'You're workers, so you have labor rights.' I realized that 'Right. I just worked here. I didn't do anything wrong here.' After such educations, it just completely changed my perspective like my previous thoughts just disappeared. (Excerpts from my interview with Maung)

¹⁰ Excerpts from an interview with Samar Thapa on *Social Movements*.
<http://www.movements.or.kr/bbs/view.php?board=journal&id=959&page=116>

What I learned here is ‘what is a worker’. Before I joined here, just making money was all for me. You know, a lot of migrant workers have been dying and getting injured. I think that ‘we should fight and take our rights’ (Excerpts from an interview with Suriya, (Lee, 2005: 97))

Such labor education taught the sit-in participants that the daily abuses at the workplaces should not be regarded as normal.

In the early 2004, the sit-in participants and the government were at a stalemate. For the sit-in participants, the government which did not show any will to legalize migrant workers made them frustrated whereas the government could not meet the number of arrests. The government extended the voluntary departure period of undocumented migrant workers by the end of January 2004 and they added that in case of voluntary departure, migrant workers would be guaranteed to reenter Korea with the EPS or the ITS. As Lee (2005: 79) points out, the crackdowns were not enough to decrease the number of undocumented migrant workers. The government was aiming to reduce the number of undocumented migrant workers as many as possible before the implementation of the new system. After the announcement of the government, most sit-ins got dispersed, accepting the suggestion of the government, but the group at Myungdong Cathedral decided not to finish the sit-in. Instead, they decided to gather signatures for the campaign against voluntary departure. They gathered 2,130 signatures and held a press conference.

Furthermore, the leader of the sit-in at Myungdong Cathedral, Samar Thapa got arrested in February 2004 when he went to meet people from a Filipino community for the signature campaign. The grievances of the participants came from the ‘deportability, but the possibility to get arrested was always lurking around them. The arrest of the leader, however, made participants remain strong.

They might have thought that the sit-in would be finished if they kidnap him. Samar Thapa is arrested, but I think every one of us is Samar Thapa. (Excerpts from an interview with Radika on February 24, 2004 from

While the sit-in continued, the number of participants was decreasing after six months. Migrant workers who could not afford it went back to their workplaces. Participants got exhausted because of the long sit-in, the economic difficulties and especially the fact that they could not achieve their goals they originally set. From July they were considering to finish the sit-in, which ended in November 2004. After the sit-in, migrant activists with Korean groups decided to establish a trade union of migrant workers.

I objected to the decision to build the MTU because I insisted that we should not divide migrant workers from Korean workers. I argued that migrant workers should join the Korean unions because I thought that's the way we could become the same workers as Koreans. I was working for a textile factory, so I should join the textile industrial union. I know that a lot of friends criticized me for that, but I thought dividing workers was just what the Korean government wanted. (Excerpts from my interview with Alam)

However, Alam's wish is hard to be realized before Korean unions are to accept migrant workers. Even though there was a debate on joining the Korean industrial unions, they could not join them since the Korean unions were not fully ready to accept migrant workers. Instead, the participants decided to build the migrants' independent union which will include migrant leadership. The sit-in at Myungdong Cathedral was the longest and most aggressive struggle of migrant workers. While the participants could not achieve their original goals, they decided to continue the movement in an independent trade union. The decision was made because first, the sit-in was mobilized by migrant and Korean activists of the ETU-MB, so they believed that forming a trade union is necessary for the longer struggle and second, the sit-in participants learned the importance of the trade union through labor education by Korean activists.

The sit-in in 2003-2004 showed the explosions of the migrant workers' grievances against the government's oppression before introducing the EPS. It is hard to say if it was

¹¹ Excerpts from an article of Ohmynews.com on February 24, 2004.
http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000170864

successful or not, but what is clear is that migrant workers developed their identity as strong human beings and workers who contribute to the Korean society, so they deserve to stay in Korea. Also they showed that they wanted their own movement not the advocacy movement. With this strength, migrant workers could continue their movement in the way of the Migrants' Trade Union. During the sit-in, participants found the solidarity between migrant workers from different nationalities, and between migrants and Korean alliance groups, and they continued to seek for the change for migrant workers themselves through trade union activity.

3.5 Mobilization to movement: Establishment of an independent union of migrant workers, the Migrants' Trade Union

As a result of the 13 months of the sit-in protest in 2003-2004, migrant workers established their own trade union, Seoul-Gyeonggi-Incheon Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) in April 2005. The MTU was the first and the only autonomous trade union whose leaders were migrant workers. Starting with 300 members, the MTU was not strong or widespread enough to represent migrant workers, but it has been symbolically strong enough to show migrant workers' will to be recognized as workers just same as Koreans and not to be exploited by the system. The history of the MTU is the history of the state offensive since most leaders have been arrested and deported due to their political involvement with their 'illegal' migrants. Since the union has been oppressed, there are more reports on the leaders' deportations than the ones on the MTU's activities. Regardless of the oppression, MTU leaders have tried to keep the union by trying different strategies. In this part, the MTU's role and activities as well as the strategic changes will be discussed. In order to explain the MTU's claims, the frame alignment processes are used by Snow et al. (1986). According to Snow et al., frame alignment is "the linkage of individual and SMO (social movement organizations) interpretive orientations". (1986: 464). Its claims are as such: legalization of all of migrant workers,

achievement of the Labor Permit System (LPS)¹² and three labor rights (right to organize, right of collective bargaining). The MTU leaders express such claims to the public at the protests, interviews or press conferences. Since the MTU does not have collective bargaining power, they have different tactics. Also, since they are both workers and migrants, the solidarity groups are diverse.

Leaders of the MTU

According to Tarrow, organizers attempt to relate their goals and programs directly to the existing values and predispositions of their target public and they need “frame resonance” for relationship to existing popular understandings (1992: 189). Therefore, the MTU’s framing is directing to the needs of undocumented migrant workers. However, since documented migrant workers through the Employment Permit System became larger, the MTU needed to organize migrants with the EPS visa as well and it started targeting not just undocumented migrant workers. Here, in Snow et al.’s term, ‘frame extension’ occurred. ‘Frame extension’ refers to “enlarging its adherent pool by portraying its objectives or activities as attending to or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents” (1986, 472). Furthermore, the leader Catuira who was elected in 2009 extended the frame of the MTU and has been targeting to abolishment of the EPS.

The first leadership was formed by Anwar, the president (Bangladeshi), Shakil, the

¹² <Table 2> Comparison between the Labor Permit System and the Employment Permit System

	Employment Permit System	Labor Permit System
Content	Working visa issued for a worker based on the employment by an employer	Working permission and visa given to a worker and the worker can choose a job for a certain period
Changing working places	Impossible in principle	Possible
Decision on the wage and working conditions	Decided before entry	Decided after entry
Possibility of collective action	Thin possibility due to no bargaining power	Possible for having bargaining power
Manageability by employers	Manageable	Relatively less manageable

<Source: Lee, 2005: 64>

vice-president (Bangladeshi), and Kajiman, the general secretary (Nepalese), three of whom participated in the sit-in in 2003-2004. The MTU declared its establishment in May 2005 and registered with the Ministry of Labor. However, the Ministry of Labor requested to submit the list of its members to the MOL, because otherwise it would be refused, implying that they would not allow the trade union of 'illegal' migrant workers. The MTU, composed of all undocumented migrant workers, refused to submit it and the MOL denied its registration. The MTU filed a case against the decision of the MOL. In February 2007, the Seoul High Court ordered the MOL to cancel the refusal of the registration of the MTU establishment, but this case is still pending in the court after the appeal from the MOL.

We migrant workers got confident after the sit-in. I think the Korean government got scared of this confidence that's why they arrested and deported the first leader Anwar as soon as we established the MTU. (Excerpts from my interview with Alam)

The MTU leaders have experienced the changes in their lives through the struggles and they tried hard to strengthen the migrant workers' movement through the MTU. The leaders in each leadership had a different perspective on the MTU. The activities and the plans of the MTU will be given and the important issues the MTU was dealing with will be discussed here. In doing so, the problems and the direction of the MTU will be presented.

After the first leader Anwar got arrested, Shakil became the acting president of the MTU. According to Shakil, the MTU was trying to build the nationwide trade union of migrant workers not just working in Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Incheon and was focusing on organizing the regional chapters and branches. One of the important claims at that time was achieving the Labor Permit System not the Employment Permit System. Shakil pointed out that the reason migrant workers experienced the violence at their workplaces was because they were not considered as workers in Korea. In the same vein, he claimed that the inhumane processes undocumented migrant workers were experiencing during the arrests just showed

how low the status of migrant workers was¹³. Having the undocumented status, the most serious obstacle for the leaders was that they were not free to move around. In order for the aggressive movement of migrant workers, he urged the Korean society to express stronger solidarity with the MTU.

The second leadership of Kajiman, Raju and Masum was formed in 2007. This leadership expanded the activities with the MTU and started highly active solidarity actions with Korean movement groups. Kajiman, the president also emphasized the implementation of the Labor Permit System as Shakil did. He claimed that the reason why migrant workers belong to the lowest part of the society and accept the situation comes from the economic structure; they took a lot of debts to come to Korea and then they need to make money in a limited period. He argued that this is why migrant workers belong to the low class and the reason they could not speak out even about the discriminations¹⁴.

Michel Catuira (Filipino) became the president of the MTU in 2009 after a long break of the presidency at the MTU. He is the first leader who had the visa and who was not involved in the sit-in 2003-2004. He realized the precarious situation of migrant workers including both documented and undocumented people through the companies and the controlling system. He argues that even though migrant workers think the EPS makes migrant workers safe and makes them adapt to the situation, actually migrant workers are exposed to 'systematic racism'. The two institutions, the Immigration Service and the Labor Offices which are directly related to migrant labor treat migrant workers as inferior people, and they listen to the Korean employers rather than migrant workers. For migrant workers' awareness, he stresses the importance of education¹⁵. Adding to the general points that he raises, there has

¹³ It was written based on the interview of Shakil with the Newscham on August 20, 2005.

¹⁴ <http://www.newscham.net/news/view.php?board=news&id=33685&page=2&category1=1>

¹⁴ It was written based on an interview of Kajiman with E-saram, human rights magazine in November 2007.

http://www.esaram.org/2008/webbs/view.php?board=esaram_8&id=150

¹⁵ It was written based on an interview of Michel Catuira with the Newscham on July 30, 2010.

<http://www.newscham.net/news/view.php?board=news&nid=57888>

been a critical shift on the management of the MTU among migrant and Korean activists as Catuira points out.

The MTU is trying to minimize the role of Korean staff. The way of Korean movement was trying has not been effective to migrant workers' movement, and furthermore, what worries me is that the Korean way of movement has dominated migrant workers' movement even inside the MTU. We need our distinct way of strategy and struggle. Therefore, in the MTU, we will not have any Korean staff in the near future. Surely we need to share the experiences with Korean activists and we need volunteers and education programs, but the important decisions regarding the movement will be made by us migrant workers.¹⁶ (Excerpts from an interview with Catuira. Hankyoreh. on March 04, 2011)

For 10 years of migrant workers' movement, the government was not the only challenge migrant activists had to overcome, but the Korean movement itself. Although cooperating with Korean groups is important, directing the movement in migrant activists' way is currently the most important thing for the MTU. In terms of the agency-making process, this attempt shows the exact point that migrant workers have been trying to achieve: having their own voice heard. This is a significant challenge for migrant and Korean activists as well.

The role and activities of the MTU

-In order to get the basic labor rights, we will fight to achieve the labor permit system which will guarantee the right of changing workplaces and legalize undocumented migrant workers!

-We will fight to improve the working conditions of the workplaces where the Labor Standard Law is proved a dead letter!

-We will gain the 3 labor rights which are guaranteed by the law and start a struggle so that we could organize migrant workers and keep and strengthen our union to guarantee migrant workers' lives as human beings!

-We will organize 400,000 migrant workers into one union and fight together with Korean workers! (Excerpts from the declaration of the MTU establishment)

Since its establishment, the main activities of the MTU have been the struggle to change the system on migrant workers and to raise the awareness of the Korean society, especially Korean workers. In order to deal with daily abuses and violence on migrant workers, the MTU offers labor consultations regarding the unpaid wages, industrial injuries or violence

¹⁶ Excerpts from an interview with The Hankyoreh on March 04, 2011. <http://hook.hani.co.kr/archives/23156>

inside the workplaces. They have Korean language classes and computer classes run by volunteers, which are quite similar to other NGOs' activities. One of the interesting activities of the MTU is protesting in front of a factory where a problem occurred to a migrant worker.

When I was working for a factory in Anyang, it was 2008, my boss did not pay my salary and he even refused to pay. He threatened me that he's going to report me to the Ministry of Labor. (What did you do then?) I had a consultation with the MTU and we made a protest in front of the factory. The whole amount I did not get was around 5,800,000 won (around 3,800 euro) which was my salary for 4 months. (Did you shout at in front of the factory?) Yes, and we said "You bilked your worker out of 5,800,000 won! Pay his salary!" (Did you receive your salary in the end?) Yes. He paid 1 million won each month divided until he paid the whole amount back. (Excerpts from my interview with Habib, a member of MTU)

Even though he took legal action by filing a case, there is still the possibility that the employer would not pay his salary and especially his *illegal* status could be a tool that makes the employer irresponsible. Their collective action is an attempt to confront the Korean employer and the system which does not provide perfect protection to undocumented migrant workers. MTU, not able to conduct collective bargaining for the members' wages, instead conducts collective actions to meet the members' needs.

When I went to the NGO, it wasn't enough. They usually beg the *sajangnim* (boss, generally used in Korean itself by migrant workers) giving us what we deserve for. But with the union, with MTU, I realized that it's not about begging, knowing what your rights are. That's the biggest difference. I think it's that because the more you learn what your rights are, the more difficult for you to accept the kind of treatment you're getting from your company. (Excerpts from my interview with Ronald, a member of the MTU)

Ronald, a member of the MTU explains why it was the MTU not an NGO which tried to solve his friend's labor problem. It was because he learned that he has a right to demand something that should be given for him through union activities and it was also because the MTU put migrant workers equally with Korean employers.

(Regarding the discriminative situations) This is exactly the reason why they should participate (in the movement). This is the exact reason why you should be working your ass off in fighting for this right and joining this kind of movement because it is most the important thing. Because of this precarious situation that you are in, you should be working more. The more pressure there is, the more you have to fight back. Or the system will eat you up. (Excerpts from my interview

with Ronald)

Not as victims or simple recipients of the services which Korean society provides, the members of the MTU have been learning they could enjoy the labor rights as much as they contribute to the society.

3.6 Changes in the Korean unions after the migrant workers' movement

Since I met and worked together with migrant comrades, I realized that 'Oh, the state is not important at all'. It's not like solidarity between two states or something, but a worker with a worker. Of course Korean workers take much more advantages than migrant workers. But we've emphasized the contradiction of labor and capital. Capital is divided into two: Korean workers and migrant ones. We should not get caught up in the division... I think I realized what 'borderless' means after meeting these migrant activists. Even though I thought class comes first more than the state or the race. But that I thought that way and actually meet and fight together are completely different. (Excerpts from a Korean labor activist from the 'Migrants' supporters group', quoted from Jeong, 2006: 74)

For Korean unionists who have long worked on protecting Korean workers, migrant workers' movement motivated them to break the wall between them and migrants. This is not a personal experience, but something for the Korean labor movement as well. A lot of migrants' groups have urged the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) to take more roles on organizing migrant workers. The KCTU has long worked for male regular workers, but they had to realize that the segmentation of the labor market was already expanding, and therefore they needed to organize irregular workers and migrant workers. The KCTU has supported the migrant workers' movement since 'Struggle center for the complete achievement of migrant workers' labor rights and the freedom of migrants' employment', through the ETU-MB and the MTU in terms of 'solidarity'. Currently, the MTU belongs to the eastern chapter of the KCTU Seoul regional council. The KCTU headquarters has a migrant activist from Nepal and he is working closely with the MTU to unionize migrant workers.

We work with the MTU because the KCTU respects migrant workers' rights and

we believe that ‘All of workers in the world are one’. Our duty is organizing all the workers including irregular workers or migrant workers in Korea. KCTU has worked on the migrants’ issue in terms solidarity until the early 2000s. KCTU founded a department for the precarious labor inside the KCTU in 2000 and we included the project on migrant workers in 2002. So far our project has been more on countermeasures against the government’s oppression on migrant workers... In 2009, we decided to organize migrant workers and support them to make their own voices rather than taking counter-actions. So we contracted the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Nepalese union, GeFont in order to organize migrant workers transnationally in 2010. Starting from the Nepalese, we will develop this project with other sending. Also, we’re closely working with migrants’ advocacy groups in order to change or improve the systems on migrant workers. (Excerpts from my interview with Korean activist, in charge of precarious labor, KCTU)

The KCTU’s project resulted from the intensive struggle of migrant workers from the past, and this project is a huge progress compared to 20 years ago when the KCTU even opposed to the influx of migrant workers. At the same time, it is to challenge the states’ way to regulate workers and connect the workers from two and more countries. The KCTU recently started another project in March 2011; the labor education for migrant workers. This project was planned together with the MTU; organizing Nepalese workers and educating them about basic labor laws and the EPS by a labor expert who is affiliated with the MTU. For the first education, 120 Nepalese migrant workers participated in it and 15 people joined the membership of the MTU. It is necessary to provide the education migrant workers need and it can develop to the organizing of migrant workers. It was not just the KCTU headquarters, but there have been other unions which organized migrant workers in different forms: the Seongseo community union and Samwoo enterprise union to organize migrant workers under both the steel union confederation the KCTU in Daegu. Seongseo community union is in an industrial complex where the majority of companies are small and medium sized entrepreneurs. It was founded in 2002 aiming to bring together precarious workers such as female workers, aged workers, and migrant workers (Kwon, 2010: 81). The Seongseo union has 30 migrant members out of 60 total members. This union was renowned for organizing migrant workers working in the small businesses in which workers are hardly organized.

There is an enterprise union which organized migrant workers, the Samwoo. Samwoo was the first case in which Korean workers organized their union together with migrant workers and they made a collective agreement to start the union shop. Also, through the intensive collective bargaining, the union successfully organized migrant workers by guaranteeing migrant workers' jobs from the company's decision to lay them off (Kwon, 2010: 87, 89). Today, in Korean industry, unions cannot avoid unionizing migrant workers who are broadly working in the '3D' job sectors-dirty, difficult and dangerous. However, there is still a question if migrant workers could empower themselves within the unions.

3.7 State Offensive on the MTU

The Korean government showed extreme aversion towards migrant workers' politicization and this "allergic reaction to unionization of migrant workers", as a Korean activist of the KCTU puts, has not been changed until now. Although migrant workers have a right to establish the union, the Ministry of Labor disallowed it and the Immigration Service under the Ministry of Justice has deported most leaders of the MTU by conducting the targeted arrests.

Just three weeks after it was established with three leaders elected, the Immigration Service targeted the president Anwar in a subway station and arrested him. Immigration officers were following him and arrested him violently without the required warrant to arrest. The next leadership could not avoid the arrests either. President Kajiman, vice-president Raju, and general secretary Masum were arrested in November 2007 at their workplace and around the houses. When they were imprisoned, a lot of solidarity groups went to the detention center to prevent them from deportation and were standing at the gate of the Cheongju detention center, but the Immigration Service even hiked the mountain behind the detention center and sent them to the airport. Their arrests and deportations were noticed by Korean society and

migrant workers and it led migrant workers to conduct a sit-in to denounce the Korean government and urge the government to provide complete labor rights to migrant workers. Three months after the sit-in, the MTU elected two new leaders, Torner (Nepalese) and Sabur (Bangladeshi). Again, after being elected as leaders, they knew that the Immigration Service was targeting them so they could not even go outside the MTU office without Koreans. Nonetheless, in May 2008 when there was a huge wave of demonstrations by Koreans, the two leaders of the MTU got arrested and deported.

In 2009, the MTU elected a new leader, Michel Catuira who is the first one with the EPS visa. Knowing that all of the leaders got deported, it was a practical decision to elect a documented leader. However, the state oppression on the MTU and the leader never stopped. On February 15, 2011, the MTU got a phone call from their lawyer who said that the Immigration Service cancelled the president's visa and ordered him to leave by March 7th because "the address of the company Michel Catuira was employed by did not exist and it was ascertained that he did not work as a migrant worker". Regarding this argument, the MTU announced that "Catuira president was already investigated by the Ministry of Labor in July 2010, but the MOL, not finding any violation of law, just advised him to change his workplace because the company suspended the business. Furthermore, he got employed in the company which was enlisted in the Ministry of Labor, otherwise he could not get the job". It was clear enough that the MOL and the Immigration Service were intentionally tracing and investigating him due to his political activity as a union leader.

The cancellation of Catuira's visa was striking to the MTU and the supporters, which just showed the government's endeavors to discourage the union activity and extinguish any political attempt of migrant workers. The alliance group and labor/social movements groups issued statements denouncing the Immigration authorities. Starting with the press conference in front of the Immigration Service in Seoul, one man demonstrations were conducted by the

president of the KCTU, the lawyer from the Lawyers' group for the democratic society and politicians from the progressive parties, and so on. Famous journalists' interviews with Catuira continued to raise the awareness of the freedom of political activities of migrant workers. For the trial to suspend the cancellation while the original case is being processed, 1,200 petition letters were collected from a lot of groups including the unions, university students, the migrant centers, the International Amnesty members, the professors' association and even from the writers' association. In addition, the Amnesty International started the on/off-line campaign of sending petition letters to the Ministry of Justice and conducted the mass twitter actions to the Ministry of Justice and the Minister for urging the suspension of the cancellation of Catuira's visa in early March. Also, the migrants groups in Hong Kong such as Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), International Migrants Alliance (IMA) and Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU) conducted the protest in front of the Korean consulate in Hong Kong. These actions were organized by a group called 'Alliance for the abolishment of the discrimination on migrant workers and accomplishment of labor & human rights of migrant workers' which was formed in 2007, after a conflagration in the Yeosu detention center where 9 migrant workers died and 18 injured,. Since then, this alliance group has made the voice for migrant workers' rights and took collective actions denouncing the government. This group includes seven labor movements groups, three political parties, 1 religious group, 11 civil society groups, two legal organizations, three research centers, one medical organization, three migrants groups, and two student organizations. This alliance group ended up becoming the biggest solidarity group of the MTU and they closely work with the JCMK.

While the national and international support groups were making progress, the 12th Seoul Administrative Court issued the injunction against the Immigration Service because it recognized that their execution would hamper a fair trial on March 2nd. By winning the case,

Catuirra could stay in Korea while his case was in progress. In order to continue working, Catuirra needed to extend his period of stay from the Immigration Service according to his working visa that was valid for one more month. The Immigration Service, postponing the acceptance of his visa to be extended, denied his application for the extension and ordered him to leave by March 31st. It surprised people at the MTU for the fact that the Immigration authorities simply violated the decision of the court which is in the Ministry of Justice. On the 22nd, after the decision of the alliance group meeting, Catuirra went to the Immigration Service together with the lawyer to apply for the G-1 visa, the humanitarian visa which is given to special foreigners who are in the middle of a trial or sick. However, the Immigration Service denied the application of the visa as well. As of the day, he lost his visa and officially became undocumented status on the date of March 31st.

When I was experiencing all the assaults, disrespect, the Ministry of Labor wasn't there to help me, and the Immigration wasn't there to help me. Because of this, I learned that it's important to empower ourselves. It's about our rights, and to take back our dignity. Now that I'm empowered, the Ministry of Labor and the Immigration have decided to attack me because of this empowerment. They want us to remain as slaves in Korea! They want all of the workers, not just migrant workers; they want everyone to remain as they are. They want everyone to remain ignorant and everyone to remain weak. The Ministry of Labor does not serve the laborers; they serve the companies, the *sajangnim* (employers). The Immigration is not there to keep the peace, but it's there to keep the slaves. I feel it's important for us to be recognized. I feel it's important for us to have a voice in Korea. Legalize MTU now! Fight! (A speech of the president Catuirra at the press conference in front of the governmental complex, Seoul on March 24, 2011)

This case raised awareness among the migrants' groups for the fact that the empowerment of migrant workers is banned; among the labor/social movements groups for the reason that the MTU as a symbol of the precarious workers is oppressed.

3.8 Discussion on Citizenship

As a result of experiencing collective actions and the union activities, migrant workers have built the labor identity and claimed that they are workers who contribute to Korean

society. However, their legal status as undocumented sojourners restricted their political actions. Catuira's case showed that even a documented migrant worker's status is not stable when their political engagement is exposed. Therefore, the discussion on citizenship is necessary in order to learn the restrictions on their activities and the potential of the freedom of political activism.

Citizenship has historically had different meanings but in contemporary society it is "something given to individuals and it is a relationship between the individual who is endowed of the citizen status and a political community" (Held, 1994: 4). Marshall defines citizenship as "a status that involves access to various rights and powers". He argues that citizenship has three components: civil, political, and social (Lipset in Marshall, 1965: x). The civil aspects involve a set of individual rights such as liberty, freedom of speech, equality before the law, and the right to own property. Political rights refer to the access to the decision-making process such as elections. The last one, he argues, the social rights such as welfare, security, and education have become a major component in the definition of citizenship in the twentieth century. Marshall argues that the most important aspect of the concept of citizenship is its assumption of equality among those who have status. However, for migrant workers who do not have the legal status as citizens, the equality is not endowed.

Regarding the political rights of migrant workers, Walzer's argument is worth using here. Walzer (1983) discusses citizenship of guest workers. Guest workers do socially necessary work, and they are enmeshed in the legal system of the country where they work while living together with citizens of the host country. He argues that participants in economy and law ought to be able to regard themselves as potential or future participants in politics as well. He also argues that they must possess the basic civil liberties whose exercise is so much preparation for voting and office holding (1983: 60). In the same vein, Park points out the fact that migrant workers have been socially excluded while regulated by the law although they

have been participating in the market economy. Therefore, migrant workers have the right to participate in the market economy as well as the right to have fair distribution. Criticizing the Korean government which has excluded migrant workers and regarded them just as labor supplier, he argues that migrant workers should be regarded as social beings that have political, economical, social and cultural rights (1997: 88).

Migrant workers are engaged in the economic and legal systems while their engagement in social and political systems is hardly allowed. They often experience the social exclusion in terms of racism and political involvement is completely banned. Furthermore, the leaders and members of the MTU have been politically aware and exposed to the public and their activism even led the stronger restriction by the state.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate the migrant workers' participations in collective actions through which they built labor identity. Since this thesis explores the individual's participations in a collective, I followed the personal stories in order to map the collective actions.

Through the interviews with sit-in participants I presented the circumstances before the sit-ins and the outcomes of each one. The dynamics between migrant workers their adversaries, and between migrant workers and alliance groups are presented. Each action was framed differently and migrant workers themselves framed the actions in different ways. At the two sit-ins in 1994 and 1995, sit-in participants staged sit-ins for the basic human rights-based demands such as compensations for the industrial injuries; in 2002 and 2003-2004 sit-in participants demanded legalization and labor rights. The sit-ins had three entities: actors (migrant workers), opponents (employers or the government) and the alliances (NGOs and trade union). In the first two sit-ins, the big support came from the NGOs in terms of the initiative and the decision-making process. In the sit-ins in 2002 and 2003-2004, the process was more complicated because migrant workers took the initiative, but they needed the support of the Korean trade unions. They wanted to be autonomous from Korean supporters while trying to connect with the Korean workers as solidarity not as one-way support. These attempts and debates led Korean unions to recognize migrant workers as equal workers not just from texts but from their experiences.

After the Migrants' Trade Union was established, the workers' consciousness became more obvious. Especially the MTU leaders label this union as a marginalized workers' union just like all of the precarious workers in Korea. This attempt to create solidarity between Korean regular and irregular workers can show the class alliance even beyond the different

ethnicities and class alliance. Also, when migrant workers demand their labor rights, they can get out of the forced situations in which they are restricted as short-term guest workers or undocumented migrants. When migrant workers say that “we are workers” it expresses an antagonistic and resistant attitude (Koo, 2001: 151) toward Korean society as Korean workers who were treated as dirty and menial did in the 1980s.

Studies on the labor movements and working classes have been focusing on native workers in the host countries. Since the migration has been a big trend as a result of globalization, capital and the states try to locate migrant workers in the marginal levels in the host societies. Therefore, organizing migrant workers, especially self-organizing of migrant workers for unions is extremely difficult. In this situation, the struggle of migrant workers in Korea and the establishment of the Migrants’ Trade Union represent an enormous symbolical role for empowerment of migrant workers. Since there is not enough research on migrant workers’ own movement as agency, it would be useful to take further this kind of research or to undertake comparative studies if there are any in other part of world.

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