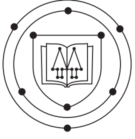


INSTITUTE
FOR THE
COOPERATIVE
DIGITAL
ECONOMY

PLATFORM WORKER ORGANIZING:

A Report by

ICDE Research Fellow
Minsun Ji

About the Institute for Digital Cooperative Economy (ICDE)

The Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy is dedicated to studying the cooperative digital economy.

Where, when, and how work is done is changing. Advances in artificial intelligence, automation, and data processing continue to shift responsibilities from workers to digital systems. These disruptions are often unpredictable and still unfolding.

To navigate these challenges, we need research that imagines, builds, and explores new visions of a fairer future of work. One starting point is the platform co-op model, which carries the cooperative principles into the digital economy. Platform cooperativism addresses the root causes of systemic inequality and presents a near-term solution for the problems plaguing our economy and democracy.

The cooperative digital economy is an under-researched area in the fields of anthropology, political science, sociology, history, and economics. This emerging field is closely linked with labor studies and cooperative studies. In business schools, this field of study is situated in the areas of finance, entrepreneurship, and organizational studies. In law schools, the pertinent areas are governance and corporate structure.

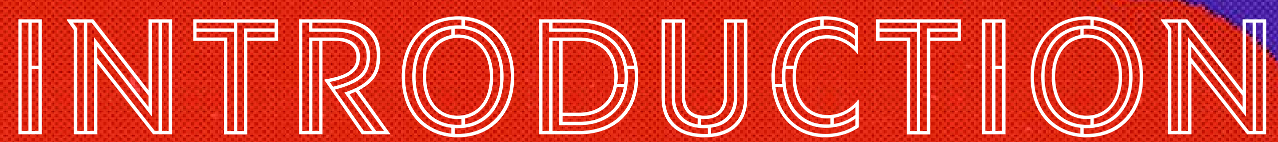
Acknowledging these research gaps, it is the purpose of the Institute to provide prospective and existing platform co-ops with applied and theoretical knowledge, education, and policy analysis. We are committed to realizing new visions for a fairer future of work grounded in relevant research, driven by imaginative proposals. Initial research questions focus on distributed governance, scaling, marketing, and start-up funding. The ICDE makes this knowledge accessible to diverse audiences in innovative formats.

Through this research, the Institute builds a body of knowledge that advances platform ownership and democratic governance for workers and Internet users alike.

Learn more at: https://platform.coop/who-we-are/icde/

This report was cooperatively designed by Keir M-Barnett and Co-operative News

INTRODUCTION



Platform Worker Organizing: Labor Unions and Platform Cooperative Innovations in Korea's Gig Economy

In 2018, the seven largest global companies creating new value were based on the platform economy, such as Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook, Tencent, Alibaba. Seventy percent of all new emerging companies that have a total value of at least $1 billion are platform companies (S.-K. Kim 2018). Although the scale of global platform companies in Korea is much smaller than those in western countries or China, Korea is catching up. Samsung, which is the largest platform company in Korea, is the world's eighth-largest platform company, while Naver (a Korean search engine akin to Google) is the 10th largest and Kakao (an instant chat service) is 11th (S.-K. Kim 2018).

The growth of the platform economy has resulted in a new form of work and new kinds of workers. According to the Korean Employment Information Service, platform workers meet the following characteristics: "[1] work as middlemen between customers and digital platforms, ([2]) earn a designated amount of income per project that comes at irregular intervals, ([3]) and work without signing an employment contract" (H.M. Kang, 2019). In the past, there was no such thing as alternate drivers or designated drivers who drive on behalf of a customer to his/her house using a customer's car, or people delivering food using their own motorcycles, allowing for food delivery 24 hours a day. In these ways, "the emerging platform economy is creating a kaleidoscopic set of new forms of employment and value creation opportunities" (Kenney and Zysman 2018, [4]).

However, these platform workers have limited legal protections and are subject to exploitation due to their legal status as "independent contractors" or irregular workers. Already, Korea has a higher portion of informal and irregular workers than most advanced nations, as OECD (2019) data reports that "21% of all workers are temporary workers, and self-employment accounts for more than 20% of the total workforce" (OECD 2019, 1). Over the coming years, this percentage is expected to grow as the number of platform workers is expected to grow rapidly.

This paper addresses the new reality of the platform economy and explores some new organizing strategies among platform workers in South Korea by examining two cases of platform cooperatives for alternate drivers and domestic workers. Through these case studies, this paper examines the growing collaboration between labor unions and cooperatives in South Korea in jointly organizing platform workers. Although these two labor organizations have been ridden with conflicts in the past due to ideological differences in viewing capital-labor relations, they have recently come together more closely in organizing platform workers. Thus, this paper argues that the rise of the platform economy and platform workers has opened new opportunities among labor organizations to build a stronger labor movement to protect vulnerable workers.

CONCENTRATED
CAPITAL AND
THE RISE
OF THE
PLATFORM
ECONOMY IN
SOUTH KOREA

Concentrated Capital and the Rise of the Platform Economy in South Korea

Bloomberg ranked South Korea as "1st on the Bloomberg Global Innovation Index 2019" for six years in a row, with the country also ranked second in R& D spending, second in manufacturing value-added, and the fourth in high-tech density (Invest Korea 2019). Although Korea was one of the world's poorest counties in the 1950s, Korea grew quickly, emerging to become the 12th largest economy in the world with a nominal GDP of $1.62 trillion in 2019 (Silver 2019). Much of this growth was driven by large conglomerates (chaebols). With state support for these conglomerates, the ratio difference in company profits between a conglomerate (for instance, Samsung), and a typical small or medium-sized company became substantially more significant over time.

While the ratio difference in profits between Samsung and the average Korean company was about 40 to one in the mid-1960s, this ratio difference has "risen to about 100,000 to one- approximately a 2,500-fold hike" (Park and Doucette 2016, 548). By 2012, this ratio difference had become 9,600 to one- an 80-fold increase (548). Samsung's dramatic growth rate is a good example of this dynamic. The growth level for the Samsung group between 1966-2012 was 18.6% per annum (548), and by 2009 the company had become " the largest smartphone maker globally measured by volume" (Mandel 2019), with a market share of 27%, and producing 893 million devices (Mourdoukoutas 2018). To date, only a few large companies such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundae have crowded out the R&D space, as large conglomerates accounted for "74% of private R&D investments, while SMEs and venture firms accounted for only 13% and 11%, respectively." Also, the Korean government has announced its intention to invest the US $2 billion by 2020 to become "a global top four by 2022," which makes it even more difficult for smaller and start-up platform companies to enter markets (Peng 2018).

With the rapid growth of Samsung's android smartphone, app-based employment has dramatically expanded in Korea. Although Korea's economy is smaller than that of the U.S., its app use intensity is much higher (and also higher than in Germany, Japan, or the United Kingdom) (Mandel 2019). Similarly, in measuring downloads of company products in 2017, "eight of the top 10 companies, ranked by downloads were Korean, led by Kakao and Naver," while just two companies in the top ten were based in the U.S. ([5]), which makes Korea "one of the most powerful domestic markets for apps" ([5]).

The rapid expansion of app application usage is attributed to the growth of a new business model, Online-to-offline commerce, or O2O, which is "a business strategy/

model that finds consumers online and brings them into the real world to make purchases in physical stores" (Tyagi 2019; also see BusinessWire, September 27, 2019). In this new business model, on-line and off-line sales are complementary in growing sales of a business or service. Korea is fertile ground for this business model. In 2018, Korea ranked third worldwide for retail e-commerce penetration (Nuguyen 2019; see BusinessWire, September 27, 2019) and fifth in terms of retail e-commerce sales revenue, followed by China, U.S., U.K., and Japan (Nguyen 2019). Furthermore, about 2/3 of retail e-commerce in South Korea happens on mobile (Nuguyen 2019).

However, all of this active on-line shopping did not happen overnight. Initially, the concept of e-commerce was introduced by Korea Trade Information Communication in 1992, when the idea of automatic trade business through the internet was promoted. With the introduction of commercialized internet service in 1994, various internet shopping malls, accompanied by the passage of various laws regulating e-commerce, were established in 1996. The very first internet shopping mall, InterPark, was established in 1996, and internet shopping rapidly expanded thereafter (Yonsei Research 2018). In particular, the initial adoption of the O2O (Online to Offline) strategy in the market started in 2007, accompanied by the rapid growth of Apple phones. Currently, the market size of the O2O economy has grown from $2.1 billion in 2016 to $8.7 billion in 2020 (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 28).

Most developments of the O2O strategy happened in service sectors--such as alternate driving, domestic work, and delivery sectors such as quick service, mail/packet delivery, and food delivery (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 28). According to S.-H. Kim (2018), this market has grown rapidly, rising from $334. 7 million in 2013, to $3 billion in 2018 (S.-H. Kim 2018). As an example, food delivery app users grew to 1.3 million people in 2019, meaning that "one out of five people have used food delivery app" (Jungang Sunday Newspaper, 2019.05.11). The number of food delivery workers has also increased to 37,000 delivery workers (H.-J. Cho 2019; also see D.-M. Park, 2019). Already only a few companies such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundae have crowded out the R&D space, as large conglomerates accounted for "74% of private R&D investments, while SMEs and venture firms accounted for only 13% and 11%, respectively." Also, the Korean government announced to "invest US 2 billion by 2020 to become "a global top four by 2022," which makes it even more difficult for smaller and start-up platform companies to enter markets (Peng, 2018). Thus, this trend is also shown in Korea as only a few large conglomerates such as Samsung, and LG have benefited from the rise of the platform economy and their success is also exacerbated by government support.

However, many of Korea's food delivery app companies are mostly owned by foreign investors (S.-H. Kim 2018; Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 46). For instance, the largest delivery app, "Bae-dal-min-jok," is largely owned by Hill Souse BDMG holdings, which is a part of the Chinese capital venture company Hill House Capital Group (S.-K. Kim 2018).

The second and the third largest delivery app companies, "Yogiyo" and " Baedaltong," are owned by Delivery Heroes in Germany, whose sales in Korea have grown by 117% in the last several years and stood at EUR 1.46 billion in 2019 (Bloomberg October 31, 2019).

The manner by which these foreign-owned companies controlled their business operations is different than traditional companies as these platform companies are not into "so much direct ownership as control…because of the way that a platform's data and algorithms structure the rules and parameters of action" that is available to participants on the platform" (Rahman and Thelen 2019, 179; also see Kenney and Zysman 2016). As these oligopolistic global platform companies also "shape the terms on which participants interact with one another" they economic lives of those who interact with them (Rahman and Thelen 2019, 184; see also Kenney and Zysman 2018; Kotkin 2019).

According to Korean Labor Department data, the number of the platform economy workers is between 470,000 and 540,000, which is equivalent to 1.7-2% of all employed people in October 2018 (Junyoung 019; Bizwire, June 3 219). In particular, the number of platform economy sectors in food delivery, alternate drivers, and quick service has rapidly grown (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 8).

However, these platform workers are vulnerable to exploitation since platform companies typically use the rationale of defending the interests of consumers first before workers, and of course, always care about profits most of all. Rahman and Thelen (2019, 185) argue that the platform economy has developed "a model of powerful investors, deputizing managers to extract returns primarily through an attack on wages, benefits and labor costs" (183). As a result, companies are able to "deliver lower prices and more seamless consumer experiences that generate market share and revenue, which in turn yield investor returns" (Rahman and Thelen 2019, 185).

Also, platform workers are generally not protected by law, and the "ambiguous employment status of digital platform workers" has become one of the most contested issues in the platform economy (Vandaele 2018, 8). As platform workers are typically hired as special hired workers or independent contractors (ostensibly to maximize their flexibility and autonomy), they typically work in isolation from each other, and beyond the reach of labor laws developed for standard, full-time workers. Although the Constitution of South Korea has various articles such as Article 32(1) 101 and 33 (1) 102 that guarantee the right to work, the right to associate in unions, and the right of collective bargaining and collective action, platform workers are exempted from all of these laws. Similarly, although Article 32(4) of the Constitution emphasizes that "special protection be accorded to working women against unjust discrimination in terms of employment, wages and working condition," domestic workers are excluded from the 1953 Labor Standards Act, the Minimum Wage Act, the Employment Security Act, the Wage Claim Guarantee Acts, or any kinds of laws meant to safeguard against employment-

based discrimination and provide welfare benefits to workers (Gu 2013; A. Kim 2010; Chun 2013). Domestic workers are also excluded from the Act on Equal Employment and Support for Work-Family Reconciliation, which emphasizes gender equality in employment and equal opportunity for both men and women (A. Kim2010, 45).

As a result, platform economy workers suffer from low wages. According to Park Chan Im, platform workers' average hourly wage was just 8790 won (less than USD $8 an hour), and 12% of workers received less than Korea's minimum wage (cited in H.-Y. Kim 2018, 10-19). For such reasons, Vandaele (2018) argues that "digital labor platforms are not neutral" (35), as these platforms simply "pander to companies' enduring search for cheaper and more compliant labour" (Vandaele 2018, 35). For instance, many alternate drivers utilize at least 2-3 different app programs that will allow them to locate customers, and they must pay fees to each of these app program companies separately from paying fees to intermediary companies and covering all other costs to run their own business. Thus, the reality of platform workers in the era of the platform economy is gloomy and dark, and Rahman and Thelen (2019) argue that the rise of the platform economy is resulting in growing inequality and the "eroding social contract" (Rhaman and Thelen 2019, 198).

LABOR ORGANIZING STRATEGIES: EMERGENCE OF PLATFORM COOPERATIVES

Labor organizing Strategies: Emergence of Platform Cooperatives

Platform worker organizing, in general, is seen as difficult because the "disruptive capacity" of isolated platform workers is very minimal. One challenge for worker organizing is that "the platforms can hire workers to perform a specific digital task irrespective of their location" (Vandaele 2018,13) However, there are many types of platform work that are time-and-place-dependent such as food delivery, child care, home cleaning, and alternate driving, which are all performed locally (13). Such time -and-location-dependent, on-demand gig workers can be organized a bit easier than other cloud-based workers who work virtually, in isolated locations from anywhere in the globe (Kaine and Josserand 2019, 480).

One organizing strategy is for workers to join together in a worker cooperative, though the concept of platform cooperatives is relatively new in South Korea. A platform can be defined as an online product or service that plays "a core role in providing value to customers" (Oh and Hong 2018), while a cooperative can be understood as "an enterprise where there is mutual ownership and control of the enterprise by either those employed by it or using its services" (Lampinen et al. 2018, 2). Scholz describes ten important principles in creating platform cooperatives: ownership, decent pay and income security, transparency and data portability, appreciation and acknowledgment, co-determined work, a protective legal framework, portable worker protections and benefits, protection against arbitrary behavior, rejection of excessive workplace surveillance, and the right to log off (Scholz 2017, 180-183). Through these principles, a platform cooperative offers an economic strategy "that puts workers, owners communities and cities- in a kind of solidarity that leads to political power" (Katie 2015), and is an alternative to the "system abuse of investor-owned platforms" (Schneider 2018, 323).

In particular, platform cooperativism can be useful when the institutional power of digital workers is almost non-existent, and traditional labor unionism faces unique challenges in mobilizing these workers (Schmalz and Doore 2013; Vandaele 2018). The OECD (2019) reports that Korean union density fell from 12.4% in 1985 to 10.5% in 2017, while collective bargaining agreement coverage fell from 14.5% of workplaces in 1985 to 10.5% in 2019 (OECD 2019). In the face of the weakening institutional power of a labor union, cooperatives, on the other hand, have been growing rapidly, and cooperative leaders have been actively engaged in building practices to organize workers through platform cooperatives (Ji 2018, Interview 2019). Although the status of platform workers as independent contractors makes it harder for them to rely upon the "institutional security'

ensured by traditional rights to organize unions and collectively bargain, the new strategy to organize platform workers through platform cooperatives has been viewed as promising (Vandaele 2018, 10; also see Wood et al. 2019).

This positive perspective on platform cooperativism has been influenced by the political context of Korea, in that many Korean leaders have seen the growth of the social economy as a key to economic development. Korean public policy has laid the foundation for cooperative growth through the 2012 Framework Act on Cooperatives (FAC), which opened a new opportunity for "more than five small business owners or independent workers to form a profit-seeking cooperative" without significant barriers (Ji 2018, 12). As this new cooperative law lowered the minimum parties to form a cooperative to only five persons or small businesses for cooperatives, have grown rapidly in number. According to the Korean Social Enterprise Promotion Agency (2019), there are 16,724 cooperatives that were established as of December 2019, since the passage of the FAC in 2012. As these cooperatives have grown organically, so have experiments to organize platform workers through cooperatives, as shown in the following two case studies of platform cooperative worker organizing among designated drivers and domestic workers.

KOREA'S ALTERNATE (DESIGNATED) DRIVERS' PLATFORM COOPERATIVE

Korea's Alternate (Designated) Drivers' Platform Cooperative

In Korea, an alternate (or designated) driver is "one who drives on behalf of an owner of a car, when he/she is not able to drive a car by her/himself" (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 50). The concept of alternate drivers in Korea emerged in the 1980s when policy increased penalties for drunken drivers. Through the 1990s, alternate drivers mostly concentrated in affluent entertainment areas, such as Gangnam in Seoul. However, alternate drivers became more visible and normalized in all sorts of communities when more people started using cellular phones in the 2000s (C.-G. Kim 2016, 56-57).

According to the Korean Transportation Department, the alternate driver market in 2014 posted between 1-3 billion rides a year. At that time, there were ten alternate driving program app companies, 3,851 intermediary companies connecting drivers with customers, and more than 110,000 alternative drivers (C.-G. Kim 2016). By 2018, these numbers had approximately doubled, with the Korean government's planning department (2018) reporting 200,000 alternate drivers, 8,000 intermediary call centers, and 20 alternative driver app companies (134).

Despite the rapid growth of the alternate driving business, working conditions of alternative drivers have been deteriorating. As the business model first emerged, most drivers drove as part-time workers to bring some supplemental income, but by 2015 71.7% of all alternate drivers were estimated to be full-time drivers, working about 9-10 hours a day (C. Lee et al. 2015; also see Lee S.-G 2019). Workers are subject to double payment to an app program company and to agencies (a call center) that connects workers to customers (C. Lee et al. 2015). If a worker uses two app programs, then he or she is required to pay fees for each program and also pays a monthly fee of 20-25% of their income to the labor platform firms (call centers) that connect drivers to customers (C.-G.Kim 2016).

After deducting costs such as insurance fees (about $180), app program fees, and an agency fee, workers earn about $1,500 per month (interview May 28, 2019: also see C.-G. Kim, 2016, 61). Also, these workers are subject to physical or verbal attacks by drunken customers. One study estimates that 85.8% of workers have experienced a verbal or physical attack by customers, and 47.4% of workers were attacked 3-5 times a year, while 15.8% of drivers were subject to more than ten times a year (C. Lee et al. 2015, xxii).

Another difficulty for drivers is associated with the lack of a public transportation system for drivers who are in need of coming back home after dropping off customers in the early morning hours after midnight. As the public transportation is not available around that time, workers have relied on rides from vans that operate illegally during the night or catch a taxi ride or have to walk long hours until they find transportation. On average, alternate drivers walk 6.83 km every night to catch public transportation or otherwise arrive home (C. Lee et al. 2015, xxii).

Another challenge facing alternative drivers is that there is no law protecting the growing number of these workers. For years after the emergence of this business, no law allowed alternative drivers to form a labor union or protected their fundamental rights, such as through minimum wage or reasonable working condition rules. For the first time, these specialized workers were given the right to organize a labor union in November 2018, by the city of Seoul (J.-N. Jae, 2018). Seoul's Mayor, Park Won-soon, argued that "alternative driving workers never received any right to form a union just because they were not categorized as workers. However, the real meaning of the Korean Constitution, Clause 33, lied in giving all kinds of workers the right to form a labor union" (J.-N. Jae, 2018).

Even before public policy declared an official right to organize, workers pursued some limited organizing efforts. The first time that alternate drivers began to organize themselves was through an internet café where many alternate drivers signed up for a chat room in 2010 to communicate with other alternate drivers (Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018, 130). The number of workers connecting in this way through internet cafés grew rapidly, as there was no formal organization or channel for workers to address their concerns regarding safety, low wages, or exploitation by insurance companies and intermediary companies. Vandaele (2018) argues that such "mass self-communication networks" of workers contributed to connecting workers to each other, forging "a shared identity, trust and solidarity" (16). Subsequently, alternate drivers began to meet together in person officially. A formal organization, the Alternate Drivers' Association, emerged in 2012 from these early platform drivers' organizing efforts.

Following the creation of the Alternate Drivers Association, workers began to explore the idea of creating a worker cooperative of alternate drivers in late 2012. The creation of a drivers' cooperative aligned with Korea's political and social climate at the time, as the Korean government was in the process of enacting a cooperative law to support the expansion of workers' cooperatives across the nation. In that climate, it was natural that workers considered a cooperative a promising solution to protect their rights, especially since organizing a labor union of platform workers was not legally protected at the time (J.-H. Lee, 2013).

The alternate drivers' cooperative became Korea's first registered cooperative on December 2, 2012, after the Framework Act on Cooperatives (FAC) was enacted in 2012

(Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018; Weekly Chosun News, Feb. 25, 2013). As key leaders regularly of the cooperative met at 4 am for discussions regarding their organization, they decided to go to the registration office to register their cooperative immediately after the law went into effect. Twenty-two worker-owners became founders of this cooperative, with 693 associate members in 2012 (Website; also see Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018; J.-H. Lee 2013). After its formation, the drivers' cooperative focused on developing communication with members, and on educating and advocating for the rights of workers. An early accomplishment included lobbying the Seoul city government to open a rest center for platform workers, opening a total of five resting centers in Korea between 2016 and 2018 (Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018).

Also, the cooperative advanced workers' interests in negotiations with the largest alternate driver app company, Kakao, after the company entered the alternate driving market in May 2016. The drivers cooperative negotiated with Kakao to lower their fees and to include an insurance fee within the app program fee to simplify the process. While drivers had to depend on call centers to receive information about customers in the past (and pay a separate fee for this service), the Kakao app was designed as an "O2O" system, which allowed drivers to communicate with customers directly, without going through call centers (Interview, May 27, 2019). In addition, instead of drivers and customers having to guess fees, this app program provided an exact fee based on distances and time consumed (C.G. Kim 2016). Some competing app development and call center companies attempted to prevent workers from using Kakao's app program by increasing fees for any alternative driver who attempted to connect directly with customers directly, but this harassment could not stop workers from using Kakao's program as it was an O2O system which made it convenient for workers' to communicate with customers directly without relying on a call center at all (Interview, May 27, 2019).

Since the creation of the platform cooperative for alternate drivers, there have been additional positive outcomes for drivers. The driver's platform cooperative has become a hub for drivers to gather together for educational activities. The coop has invested in developing and distributing different educational flashcards based on themes and created on-line and offline educational materials for members. The cooperative created more than 600 flashcards regarding such subjects as job safety, workers' rights, physical and mental health care (Interview, Representative, Alternate Driver Coop, May 28, 2019). Also, workers have used a platform app, Kakao Group Chats, to form group chats to help each other throughout the day and night, and also formed a micro-finance system to provide financial support to drivers.

Using existing social media platforms such as Kakao are useful tools for organizing among workers, and platform workers in other countries also shows promising examples of organizing through Whatsapp or Facebook (Grayer and Brophy 2019). In addition, platform workers have shown initiative in developing their web-based apps to facilitate

organizing. In Korea, the alternative drivers' cooperative at this writing is developing an app for educational purposes for alternate drivers (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019; Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018).

Hoping to build strength over time, the drivers' cooperative has a goal to increase its membership to 3,000 members, from 600 members (Interview, Representative, Alternate Driver Coop, May 28, 2019). Already, the creation of a Korea's platform cooperative for alternate drivers has meaningfully improved working conditions for these workers. The cooperative has successfully catalyzed social awareness, and growing concern for conditions facing alternate drivers has reduced the fees these workers must pay to outside companies, and has increased workers' solidarity and knowledge of their rights. While these alternate drivers worked in the shadows of the past, they are increasingly visible and politically engaged in various labor actions, evidencing worker solidarity among themselves and with workers from other industries.

In short, the alternate drivers cooperative is not a platform cooperative in a strict sense as the cooperative did not develop a platform app to connect customers with designated drivers. However, it has used the existing social media platform, Kakao, and internet platform for drivers, to help facilitate the affairs of workers, educating and promoting the rights of workers, and developing a sense of solidarity among alternate drivers. Also, it is the very first organized group among platform workers to organize a cooperative in South Korea.

KOREA'S
DOMESTIC
WORKERS'
PLATFORM
COOPERATIVE

Korea's Domestic Workers' Platform Cooperative

In 2015, there were approximately 164,000 domestic workers in Korea, with about 39,550 working in Seoul (J.-M. Kim 2019). Just as the business size of domestic workers is growing (rising from 2.8 billion in 2006 to 7.5 billion in 2018), so are these workers rapidly growing in Korea (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 41). However, domestic workers are not protected by any law in Korea due to the fact that domestic work is not considered as standard work, since it is performed in a private space such as someone's house. For this reason, domestic workers are invisible in Korea, suffering from low wages, insecure rights, and limited protection of their jobs.

Despite these legal obstacles, organizing efforts among domestic workers go back to the 1950s-1960s, after the Korean War got over in 1953. The international YMCA was the very first organization that provided a foundation for domestic worker organizing, focusing on issues of job education and training for women so that they can obtain at least some jobs in the market (Interview, Executive Director, Woo- Rung- Gak- Si, May 27, 2019). Seeking to raise awareness of the emerging job category, the YMCA in 1966 coined the term "pachulbu" to refer to a woman who works as a part-time domestic worker. The YMCA also worked with the Korean Wives Association to recruit, train, and educate women to perform domestic work (A. Kim 2010,13).

Domestic worker organizing built on an existing foundation of women's worker organizing that grew ever stronger in the post-war years as Korea industrialized. Amid rapid industrial development that occurred in Korea in the 1970s, women workers in the textile industry were critical in launching some of the very first militant labor strikes in Korea (M.K. Kim 2011, Gender, Work and Resistance). After democratization in 1987, the Korean Women Workers' Associations United (KWWAU) formed in 1992 to further develop the women workers' movement and to advocate public policy changes to advance women's interests. When Korea experienced an economic crisis in 1997, the Action Center for Women's Unemployment was formed to respond to the growing employment challenges facing women (N.H. Park 2006, 494). A women-only labor union, the Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU) was formed in 1999 with 5000 members to focus on organizing women to avoid the reality of "male-focused unions" (496). The women-only labor union focused on organizing precarious women workers, while the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) has also organized precarious women working at various shopping malls, launching long months of labor strikes in the 2000s (Ji 2016).

Although all of these labor union organizing efforts among women grew rapidly since the 1970s, domestic worker organizing was still excluded from the labor union

movement due to many political and social taboos associated with domestic work. After the economic crisis in 1997 resulted in rapid increases in unemployment in Korea, labor organizers began to think more creatively about how to organize among a broader range of workers amidst this crisis. Civil society leaders came together to create the National Coalition for the Unemployed soon after the crisis, and some women leaders formed the very first domestic worker organization in 2004. This organization, the “Korean Domestic Worker Business Preparation Association,” developed its branding, Woo- Rung- Gak -Si, to provide employment for women (Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018; Korea Ministry of Labor 2019). In 2012, this Korean Domestic Worker Business Preparation Association transformed itself to a worker cooperative, expanding to nine regions in Korea and developing twelve different social enterprises for domestic workers (Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018). Out of these twelve social enterprises that Woo- Rung- Gak-Si established; eight were transformed into worker cooperatives, two remained as non-profit cooperative-incubating organizations, and two others were formed as a corporation seeking to develop a platform cooperative. This platform cooperative, Woo-Rung-Gak-Si’s Magic Care Cooperative, became the first platform cooperative in the Kyunggi province in Korea. Another platform cooperative soon followed—Dolbom Cooperative, which focused on caregiving for children and the elderly (Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance 2018).

Beyond participating in the worker cooperative movement, the Korean Domestic Worker Association has been active in launching protests in front of Congress and seeking to pass a national law to protect domestic workers. Their advocacy in this regard was influenced by the policy of the International Labor Organization that was adopted on June 16, 2011, demanding countries to recognize domestic work as legitimate work, and demanding national legislation to give at least one paid holiday for domestic workers each year, as well as advocating for the right of domestic workers to form a labor union (So-young 2019, July 16). Despite attempts to pass these laws for many years, there is no Korean law that protects the rights of domestic workers, as of 2019.

Building on this organizing history, efforts to form a platform cooperative for domestic workers started in 2015, as the market shifted to using more “O2O” systems, allowing domestic workers to communicate with possible customers directly through web-based apps. Already, Woo Rung Gak Si had transformed itself into a social cooperative incubator since 2012, helping women to organize cooperatives in the cleaning business, and taking care of the elderly and children. The decision to organize various women-owned worker cooperatives was influenced by the 2012 enactment of the Framework Act on Cooperatives (FAC), and by 2015 Woo- Rung- Gak- Si had established various social enterprises owned by low wage women.

In 2012, this nonprofit organization changed its legal status to the Korean Domestic Workers Cooperative when Korea enacted its first Korea’s Framework Act on

Cooperatives. Influenced by the passage of the FAC, the Korea Domestic Worker Association branded itself more as a social enterprise association dedicated to developing social businesses for domestic workers, adopting a social cooperative franchise model as the main strategy to achieve scale. While this adoption of the social franchise model has been relatively recent, Woo-Rung- Gak- Si developed Korea's first platform cooperative for domestic workers in 2017, to compete with other "O2O" app cleaning companies. Since 2015, cleaning app platform companies have been emerging in Korea, funded by venture capitalists who studied this business model in the U.S. and other foreign countries and came back to Korea to launch various privately owned platform companies. By 2017, there were at least 27 cleaning platform companies competing with each other to connect customers with workers, and a job dispatch center that used to facilitate job placements for domestic workers gradually lost its power.

The domestic workers' platform cooperative, The Life Magic Care Cooperative, is the very first platform cooperative in South Korea to compete with other cleaning apps (Ministry of Labor Labor 2019). Life Magic Care's representative, Choi, argues that the "platform economy apps should not only be developed by the rich but we, as common people, can also develop them" (Interview, Representative, Woo-Rung-Gak-Si, May 27, 2019). The worker-owned cooperative invested over $300,000 in developing the app program in 2017 and launched the official Life Magic Care Platform Cooperative app in May 2018 (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 66). Life Magic Care Cooperative is developed as a social franchise platform cooperative, whose model will be further distributed to other Woo-Rung- Gak- Si member organizations in different regions. As of 2019, Woo -Rung- Gak- Si has facilitated eight social cooperatives, two social enterprises, and one cooperative incubating center that is in charge of helping develop and support new social franchise cooperatives (Interview, Representative, Woo-Rung-Gak-Si, May 27, 2019; also see Y. M. Choi, 2019).

The Magic Care Platform Coop app is designed to build the membership base and to support workers. While many cleaning app companies have traditionally used 'algorithmic management' enabled by platform-based rating and reputation systems to control workers through the customer ratings given in the field (Wood et al. 2019, 64), the Magic Care Platform Coop app did not rate workers after their work was performed (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019, 70). In another point of differentiation, Magic Care Platform Coop members must go through 25-60 hours of education to become a member, while other platform cleaning companies provide little education for members. At the same time, the Magic Care Platform Coop members' fee is 10% of their earnings, while other cleaning platform companies have higher fees of between 12% to 25% of earnings (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019). Since the launch of the official app, there were 1683 people who joined the cooperative, and orders for domestic workers through the app increased from 9% to 25% of the market share. However, more than 80% of all workers who get a job through the app have only managed to work part-time as a domestic worker, and very few found steady or full-time house cleaning work getting a

job to clean the house regularly (Korea Ministry of Labor 2019). Thus, the total income source for Korean domestic workers has not shown much increase yet, which is partly because the Magic Care Cooperative must compete with many other cleaning platform companies.

In short, the development of a platform cooperative for domestic workers by a nonprofit civic organization has shown a new way for domestic workers to seek employment through cleaning platforms. However, the development of platform cooperatives requires significant funding, which can be a large challenge for a non-profit organization to take on, and there are also substantial challenges in dealing with competition from existing, privately-owned platform businesses. Despite these obstacles, it is worthwhile to note the real benefits the Woo- Rung- Gak- Si domestic worker organization has pioneered in developing Korea’s first domestic worker platform cooperative, and the promising ways this organization is helping traditionally isolated domestic workers come together to own and shape the future of their own industry.

GROWING LABOR-COOPERATIVE COLLABORATION

Growing Labor- Cooperative Collaboration

Strong labor militancy has been embedded in Korea's history as a response to the authoritarian suppression of organized labor for decades following the Korean War. In the Great Struggle of 1987, worker activism played an important role in transitioning to democracy, leading to a guarantee of the right of workers to organize. As a result of democratization in 1987, a progressive labor union federation, the Korea Confederation of Trade Union (KCTU), was finally legalized in 1995, which gave the KCTU the legitimacy to organize workers freely without government or employment harassment. Since then, KCTU has actively organized both regular and irregular workers. Although there have been schisms between regular and irregular workers that undermine labor power, a recent KCTU (2019) report shows that the number of union members has increased since 2017 due to the success of organizing 200,000 new service and temporary workers (Seol 2019).

However, when it comes to working with the social economy sector, labor unions have been hesitant. Although many leaders of the social economy sectors had experience working as labor activists in the 1980s and 1990s, many traditional labor unionists have been skeptical about these labor leaders moving into a social economy sector (Ji 2018). Many traditional labor unionists were deeply influenced by classical Marxism, which posits contradictions between capital and labor but thought that the social economy blurs the different nature between capital and labor by emphasizing collaboration between the two. But, their relations at the beginning of the labor movement in Korea were not hostile to each other as the origin of the labor movement in Korea included a joint effort between a labor union and a consumer cooperative in the 1920s, and since then there have been several cases of select labor unions such as bus companies forming a unionized worker-owned cooperative (Ji 2016). However, in general, these two labor organizations have departed from each other and rarely collaborate.

This skepticism among labor union leaders about the growing worker cooperative movement stems from the ideological perspective from which unionists often view worker-owners. As many Korean labor union leaders are deeply influenced by a Marxist doctrine that focuses on the importance of militant protest and class conflict between capital and labor in order to effectively organize workers, they see cooperatives as a co-opted kind of a reform that undermines the importance of class-struggle and labor militancy, in favor of profit-seeking business management. As Ozarow and Croucher (2014) argue that many social enterprises have become dis-embedded from notions of "class" (cited in Ji 2016,320), labor unions in Korea have kept their distance from the emergence of the social economy movement in the 2000s. As one cooperative leader

describes, this distance also relates to the fear among labor unions that working with cooperatives will weaken the legacy of Korea’s labor militancy.

Labor unions do not have an interest in worker cooperatives or any emotional or realistic capacity to take an interest in worker cooperatives, because the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) has always been militant because they have been suppressed by the state (Ji 2018,14).

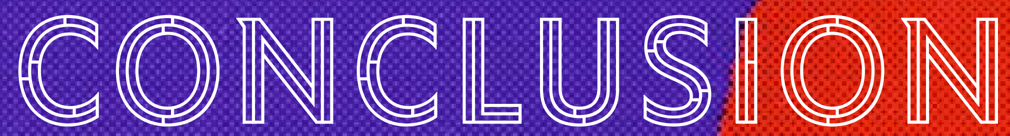
In this regard, working with cooperatives has been viewed by many labor leaders as a co-opted acceptance of the profit-seeking logic of capitalism. Another skepticism regarding cooperatives relates to the scale of work undertaken by cooperatives, as many traditional labor unionists view that the small-scale work of worker cooperatives can’t create systemic change. This sharp ideological contrast between the two labor organizations is well summarized in a statement by a KCTU leader who claims that “worker cooperatives can happen at small workplaces and it is good. But, they can’t change the capitalist system” (Ji 2018, 15).

However, this ideological conflict between labor unions and worker cooperative s ectors has been changing recently with the rise of the platform economy. In particular, KCTU Service Sector labor unions are increasingly open to “generate organizational experimentation and ‘new’ forms of collective representation” (Vandaele 2018, 26). This phenomenon of organizing platform workers through labor unions has increasingly emerged in Europe, such as in Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, where some labor unions have even attempted a direct collective bargaining agreement to represent platform workers (Vandaele 2018, 22). Korean labor leaders are taking note of these innovative strategies elsewhere, and this kind of platform worker organizing through labor unions is also rising in Korea. For example, with KCTU’s support, the very first platform worker labor union was established in 2007 with 52 platform economy express mail Quick Service Workers (Irregular Labor, August 28, 2018). Although the initial labor union leaders within the Quick Service Workers Union did not last for a long time due to the fact that they were forced to seek other jobs to make more earnings, the Quick Service labor union continued to grow, building its membership base and winning some court courses that recognize Quick Service workers as employees, not as independent contractors since 2007. Although the court argued its decision regarding Quick Service workers was limited to those who filed the complaints and that it could not be applied to all Quick Service workers in general, other court victories have given increasing legitimacy to the claims of the Quick Service workers and other platform workers. In April 2019, another branch of the Quick Service labor union in Seoul successfully applied for Labor Department permission to organize Quick Service platform workers, so those union organizing efforts are ongoing (KCTU Service Labor Federation 2019).

Also, the very first alternate driver's labor union was formed in 2012, and four cities in Korea have formed an alternative drivers' union as of 2018 (C.-G. Lee 2018, 95). In the same vein, three labor unions in the Chungju region have begun to form three collective bargaining teams to negotiate directly with platform companies (95). At the same time, Alternate Drivers' unions have been actively working with the Alternate Drivers' Cooperative. They have used a city-run resting center for joint education of alternate drivers and participated in rallies to demand the creation of a law protecting the rights of platform workers (Interview, Representative, Alternate Driver Coop, July 2019). In a related development, a new platform economy union, the Rider's Union for food delivery workers, was formed in May 2019.

The formation of labor unions for platform workers was facilitated by the fact that the Department of Labor has recently permitted labor unions to organize these workers into a union. Although the official position of the Labor Department does not change the definition of independent contracting platform workers to be "workers" who are protected under Korean labor law, the Department has recently permitted labor unions to organize platform workers, giving them the right to collective bargaining and the right to association.

Some of the progress in protecting the rights of platform workers has been facilitated by active protests and rallies that platform workers have done in recent years, increasing their "disruptive capacity" to raise the issues to the public (Vandaele 2018, 14). Their increased destructive capacity strategy was more effectively used for workers in transportation and delivery work because there is actual interaction between producer and customers in these fields (Vandaele 2018). As a result of active rallies and protests for platform workers, platform cooperatives and labor unions (KCTU, Service Sector Unions) formed the " Platform Labor Solidarity" plan in January 2019 to build a "social safety net" for precarious workers, and to strengthen their mutual ties and collaboration (J.-N. Jae 2019; Shim 2019). This plan may open up a more opportunity for both labor organizations to come together to strengthen the power of precarious platform workers, and it is worthwhile to consider to what extent the rise of platform economy itself contributed to the rise of collaboration between labor unions and worker cooperatives, and under what conditions they might continue or break their ties in the future.


CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Spooner and Whelligan (2017) remind us that “in the very beginning, all workers were informal workers. The earliest unions in the world were formed by informal workers, who pioneered the struggles for what we now call ‘ decent work’” (8). The rise of a new form of the economy, the platform economy, and the rise of a new kind of workers (platform workers), is nothing new, from this view--and organizing has always been done by both informal and formal workers through history.

In the case of Korea, the rise of the platform economy and the exploitation of platform workers in service sectors such as alternate drivers, quick service workers, food delivery workers, and domestic workers, has created a new opportunity for labor organizing through the cooperative formation and labor unions. Platform cooperatives, like workers cooperatives everywhere, have proven an effective strategy for once-isolated workers to join together to improve their working conditions, even in the absence of labor unions. For their part, labor unions have also become more creative in reaching out to organize platform economy workers using destructive rallies/protests as strategies to negotiate with platform intermediary companies and opening up their unions to these new kinds of workers. A new alliance between labor unions and cooperatives (specifically platform cooperatives) is a new opportunity that has arisen from the reality of the platform economy in Korea. While Korea’s labor unions and cooperatives were ridden with conflicts in the past, they have emerged as labor partners in building a stronger power and solidarity for platform workers in Korea.

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