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*Movement against the Construction of the Tong River (Yongwol Dam) in Korea*

### **1. Introduction**

President Kim Dae Jung reportedly commented that he personally did not want to construct a dam on Tonggang on August 6, 1999. Citizens and public opinion generally welcomed President Kim's statement. Korean Federation for Environmental Movement, which led the anti-damming campaign, released welcome statement. We count this statement was a firm signal of success in fight against damming the Tonggang. Environmental NGO's and citizens shifted their strategy to preserving the river from contamination. I believe this campaign is an important landmark in the history of Korean environmental movement in terms of its extensive participation, winning public attention and supports, preventive action, and above all, ecological issue-making, etc. Internet was found to be a powerful weapon of mass population to lead public opinion. Experts involved in the campaign contributed a lot in a formation of a public opinion. But their commitments were countered by anti-movement professionals. Counter-movement professionals nakedly displayed their parochial interests in constructing dams. However, small sector of the proponents were surrounded by extensive public and social forces. I think a careful examination should be made to get lessons from our campaign against construction of the dam.

### **2. Campaign Process**

#### ***(1) Beginning***

Donggang is located in the central Kangwon Province, east of Seoul, and it is a branch of South Han River. Han River is the source of water supply for metropolitan population (approximately 20 million), and for industrial and agricultural use. There are already seven dams on Han River, six on North Han River, one on South Han River. The planned dam over Donggang is the eighth one. Han River is also a threat of flood to downstream population. Han River is fairly well controlled from flooding. Heavy and intensive rainfalls cannot be completely controlled. Attempt to construct a dam on Tonggang was even made during the Japanese colonial period. But it is reported that Japanese authority gave up due to possible problem of safety. Formation of limestone, and volcanic chains were found in the area. Korea Electric Power Corporation was originally interested in the area as early as 1957 to find a possible source of hydraulic power. Feasibility studies were made in 1974 after the 'oil shock', again in 1985 and 1988. After the flood of 1990 in the metropolitan area, now Korea Water Resource Corporation (KOWACO) began to be interested to construct a dam over Donggang to prevent from flooding. From 1996 to 1997, the Ministry of Construction and Transportation (MCT) began to design a dam on Donggang. Total reservoir capacity of the dam is designed to contain approximately 700 million tons. Its maximum height is 98.0m, and it submerges land of approximately 21.9 $\text{km}^2$  in the reservoir. This dam is also designed to generate electricity (19.6 MW). On October 20, 1977, MCT officially announced a plan to construct a dam on Donggang. MCT made a law to support the submerged area and carried out an environmental impact assessment for construction. In the end of 1977, environmental and civil organization beginning with the KFEM opposed the construction of a dam on Donggang. On the other hand, Ministry of Environment (ME) turned down the result of EIA, and asked the developer to meet necessary conditions. Since environmental NGO's fiercely protested the EIA process, ME still does not finalize the examination of the revised EIA report. On March 10, citizens from Youngwol who will be submerged in case of dam construction came to Seoul to protest. Research Institute for Earthquake of the Hanyang

University argued that the dam site is prone to earthquake on March 30. Debates between NGO's and government were made on televisions and newspapers. President Kim aired that the dam should be made to prevent from flooding. On the other hand, Governor of Kangwon Province declared that the dam should not be built. The Catholic community released a joint declaration to demand government to give up the dam construction. International environmental NGOs sent messages for opposition to Korean government. City council of Pyongchang County, Provincial Councils of Kangwon and Choongchung passed resolutions to oppose the dam (April 26). While MCT pushed forward to construction of the dam, the Ministry of Environment opposed it. Korean Institute of Engineering and Technology (KIET) also reported that the prediction of water shortage was exaggerated, and dam construction was not economically profitable.

### ***(2) Controversies: Water shortage, Flooding, Safety***

Major controversies over dam construction were water shortage, danger of flooding, safety of dam site. KOWACO insisted that the dam should be built to meet the demand for water supply which will be extremely difficult in early 2000s, and to prevent from flooding. On the other hand, environmental NGOs and many independent professionals insisted that the estimate of water shortage by KOWACO was intentionally fabricated, and the water conservation will be enough to meet the increased demands. In addition, there are innumerable leakages on the water supply pipes, and NGOs insists, water leakage in such a way would amount to the volume that may be supplied by such dams. NGOs and independent professionals admit that flooding is unpredictable. But to prevent flooding, it may be sufficient to construct single-purpose small dams, and to seek possibility of building 'forest dam'. In terms of safety problems, NGO insisted that the site is prone to earthquake and the formation of limestone is dangerous for damming. The intensive debate could not terminate controversies. KOWACO and NGOs stick to their original position. Scholars and professionals also did not change their position. The scientific knowledge could justify what anyone believes. It does not seem to change any attitudes of their opponents.

### ***(3) Appealing to Ecological Sense and Beauty***

Activitsts of KFEM visited Donggang, and they were overwhelmed by the untouched beauty of the river and the ecological richness of the area. The river was calm and beautiful. In April,1999, Korean Broadcasting System(KBS) reported the ecological features of Donggang. Citizens were excited to watch the beauty and cleanness of Donggang. Tours were organized to raft on Donggang. Donggang became suddenly famous. People rush to Donggang to take a look before it would be submerged. People experiencing the beauty of the river came back with a resolute idea to oppose the construction of the dam. Poets, essayists, and photographers rushed to Donggang to write and take a look. Donggang is not simply a beautiful spot. Many kinds of natural treasures of fish and birds, other animals are found in and around the river. Since this area is formed with limestone, there are many limestone caves with beautiful scene. There are many unknown plants. Donggang used to be a rafting site to transport logs to Seoul, and a Chungsun(name of place nearby) was famous for the origin of Chungsun Arirang(famous Korean folk song) Donggang is full of natural and cultural treasures. I think these complex components of Donggang contributed to attract people and line them up to fight against the dam construction.

### ***(4) Activities of NGOs and citizens***

KFEM was opposed to damming the Donggang from 1997. But it started the campaign again March 1999. It appealed to mass media, and made postcards, t-shirts, posters, and other items to call attention from the public. KFEM held a couple of symposium, and started Water Conservation Campaign. On March 26, it started 33-day sit-in at the KFEM. Many social and political leaders participated in sit-in. Many visited the sit-in to encourage them. Restaurants in the neighborhood even brought in foods. Sit-in sites became a center for public attention.

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KFEM used newspaper and radio commercial advertisements to call public participation in the campaign. General public responded actively. Some sent encouragements, and donations. Musical concert was held to publicize the Donggang problem, and to collect donation. KFEM also mobilized its international NGO network to send letters to the Korean President to appeal revocation of the plan. Cyberworld also actively responded to these anti-damming movement. KFEM and other netizens made homepages for this campaign. Others made homepage for commercializing Donggang. Netizens' poll was taken and 3906 persons responded. 88% of the respondents opposed the dam construction. 82% of them opposed it in order to preserve environment and ecology. Netizens (61%) understood that the purpose of dam construction was to secure jobs for the MCT and KOWACO. The respondents (88%) believed that they could stop building the dam. 79% of them responded that they were willing to participate in activities of preserving nature of the Donggang. At the time of government announcement to postpone its decision by January 2000, and to order a foreign consulting company to examine the feasibility of dam construction, we interpreted those government actions and statement as steps to set back from constructing the dam. KFEM shifted its strategy to preserving the dam, because tourists increased immensely, and destroyed the environments of the Donggang. Many tourist companies and rafting clubs and companies mushroomed to sell and commodify the Donggang. Tourists increased five times. Donggang gets dirty more and more everyday. KFEM set up a summer camp at the Donggang and posted some staffs to campaign the preservation of the river.

### **3. Implication**

The Donggang campaign opened a new chapter in the history of Korean environment movement. First, Korean people begin to understand that ecological destruction is the core issue of the Donggang dam problem. Korean environmental NGO has given more attention to industrial pollution, reclamation of coastal sea, and massive development projects. Purely ecological campaign could not succeed very much, because general public did not show their concern. Second, the Donggang dam was the first case that could be stopped and the environment could be preserved before destruction. Korean NGO's campaign against the Shiwa Reclamation was successful but only after complete destruction of the environment. Thirdly, Korean NGOs could organize extensive citizens' network to line up against the dam construction. All walks of people such as media people, religious groups, local governments, culturalists, teachers, and childrens participated in the movement. Government was virtually besieged by opponents. President Kim's decision to revoke the dam was simply a political action. He gave up simply because majority of population did not want it. Fourthly, environmental professionals were active in shifting social trends. But their contribution could not give a decisive impact, because there were also counteractions from proponent professionals. Fifthly, there is a very difficult task ahead for Korean NGOs to preserve the Donggang. The campaign aroused people's interests on the Donggang as a tourist spot, The Donggang became commercialized, and nature became 'commodified'.