1. Introduction:

In 1991 the Korean government launched the beginning of what has been claimed to be the largest reclamation project in the world, aimed at converting over 41 thousand hectares of tidal flats in Chollabok Do, west Republic of Korea into arable land for agricultural use. A 33km sea wall intended to close off the area surrounding the mouths of the Mankyung and Tongjin Rivers, will then connect via a road the two provinces that straddle the current tidal area. The government’s claims that this reclamation will expand the national area, help in the supply of agriculture and industrial water, lead to better drainage of adjacent land, and allow development of an international harbor are remarkably similar to other reclamation projects such as Shiwa lake/Teibu Do in Incheon. Having been in the works over ten years already, the project (to have been completed in 2004) is now projected to be extended due to environmental and budgetary restrictions.

Currently the creation of farmland from the reclaimed land has taken a back seat to the newer addition of a plan to include an industrial complex intended to draw such interest to the area. Also, and more recently proposed, is the inclusion of what would become the worlds largest golf course (540 holes) to increase tourist revenues in the area. The provincial North Cholla government has forwarded its proposal to the central government, confident in its ability to increase revenues during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. This new proposal has birthed its own concerns around the chemical usage of the golf course removing any possibility of the reclaimed land being productive for agricultural purposes.
organizations, a lower court ruled to halt the project. But, in the following January, the Seoul High Court repealed this ruling and allowed the project to continue.

Now the completion of the dike wall is set for 2006, with the completion of the entire project set for 2011 at a proposed cost of 3.5 trillion won. Many critics though set their estimates at closer to 6 trillion won. Concerns of the local people over the degradation of their environment and their livelihood has sparked the organization of grassroots movements, which though sponsored and trained by outside influences, remain active at the local level. The central Korean government and the local provincial government of North Cholla maintain their position on the reclamation project despite the pressure of contrary environmental surveys and lasting examples of the damage done by previous, similar projects from which the consequences still demand remedy.

2. Other Issues:

Other factors also play a role in the continuation or cancellation of the Saemangum Reclamation project. One is the existence of the nearly completed wall. Should the project be halted by environmental and local protest, the government will have done nothing justifying the expenditure of so much financial resource, not to mention the possible cost of returning the tidal flats to their original state via the removal of the already in place damming wall. This would in a way add insult to injury with the added financial burden making it very attractive for the central government to press the issue to completion.

Also on the table is the issue of subsidized agriculture. Under a World Trade Organization rule that calls for the reduction of state subsidies for agriculture, the government will be forced to phase out the
state purchase of rice by gradually lowering the purchase prices. While this area provides a major harvesting ground for the Asian hard clam, in turn providing the local townspeople with a means of sustainable income, the conversion of this land to agricultural use faces a larger problem. Korean farmers are facing a local crisis at home with the reduction of state purchased rice, lowering their incomes, and so their motivation to utilize newly reclaimed land (which will be unsuitable for use for many years after completion anyway) will be low.

And finally, environmental pressure is high from outside organizations. Local concerns aside, the loss of habitat for many endangered shore-birds have many environmental groups clamoring to appeal this reclamation project. While environmentalists fiercely protest the plan, saying it will destroy one of the world’s most valuable mud flats and bring irreversible environmental damage, supporters are of the view that the reclaimed land is necessary to revitalize the region’s economy. According to the Korean Times (07-17-2003), Puan County in the province said it will withdraw its offer to house a nuclear waste storage site if the Saemangum project is suspended, while sports representatives said they will boycott a national athlete meet scheduled to be held in North Cholla Province in October. Agriculture-Forestry Minister Kim Young-jin also tendered his resignation in protest.

3. The Site, Firsthand

Our examination of this project consisted of two visits, one to the government promoted Saemangum Exhibition Center and one to the tidal flats accompanied by staff of a local protest organization. While these two visits were not enough to make clear neither the pertinent nature of loss of livelihood nor the political stress which pushes this project forward, it was enough to taste the motivations of both. One could see from a visit to the gap that lay between two ends of the as yet incomplete tidal wall that the tide and the tidal flat deposits it previously regulated had now shifted direction significantly and were no longer fulfilling their preceding purpose.

It was also not difficult to see that the completion of the Saemangum wall would have a devastating effect on both the lives of the people and the ecosystem they make
their living from. It also did not seem to be in the best interest of the Korean government to complete or promote this project, as they have previous examples of how this kind of reclamation has affected land use, and neither the commercial nor promotional clout to make the result a feasible benefit. The propaganda video that we viewed at the Saemangum Reclamation Center was a blatant as it was disturbing, even more so when I realized that there were many people who would not only be swayed by it but perhaps be convinced of its message as well.

Perhaps the most important information I understood from those affected by the proposed completion of the damming wall, was the sense of regret felt by the local people about how they had taken their resources for granted and now felt that it was just as important for them to change their way of thinking as it was to stop completion of the reclamation dike. In the United States and have never heard of this factor as a part of the grassroots platform.
1. Introduction

The Cheonggyecheon River, partially manmade to serve as both freshwater supply and sewage drainage for the city of Seoul, has played an important role in Korean history for the past six hundred years. Developed during the Joseon dynasty, this waterway allowed the dynastic kings to maintain their capital system by delivering ample supplies of water to various parts of the capital city while disposing of the waste, allowing the city to remain clean. Due to its importance in this effect, much of Seoul’s daily life was centered on its location.

During the Japanese occupation of Korea, the former care that was once shown in the maintenance of this waterway was neglected and by the 1950’s, it had become what some referred to as an open sewer running through the heart of the city. Squatter communities and ramshackle housing sprang up along its banks creating a symbol of poverty. When Korea began a major push towards industrialization in the 1970’s the once famous pride of the Joseon kings was slowly buried and covered in an attempt to beautify and sanitize the city. By 1970, the Cheonggyecheon had disappeared, replaced by an expressway.

Today the location of the former stream can be found on a map by looking for the road named “Cheonggyecheonno.” The city of Seoul is currently undertaking a massive restoration project for returning the Cheonggyecheon River to its former

![The current view of the covered-road on Cheonggyecheon; the Gwaggyo(Bridge) area](image1)

![A simulated view of a restored Cheonggyecheon; the Gwaggyo(Bridge) area](image2)
position and historical symbolism. The city hopes to balance the development of
Northern and Southern Seoul, resolve safety issues along the Cheonggyecheon
expressway, and bring into balance the urban and natural environment for the health of
Seoul’s population.

3. Question of Necessity

Our trip to view the restoration of the river consisted of a visit to the Restoration
center and a walk along a section of the downtown construction site. We were provided
with a concise history of the area and the importance of the waterway, along with models
and a plan of the restoration projects timeline. While I question the necessity of the
Cheonggyecheon river restoration project, I do not question its value. Having only my
imagination to rely on when picturing the previous expressway, I am still able to see how
the undertaking of this project is beneficial to the health and future development of Seoul.

While the display models and computer simulations of how the restoration project
will appear upon completion were very utopic and beautiful, I have serious doubts that
the citizens of Seoul will be able to maintain that level of maintenance. Judging from my
impressions of the rest of Seoul, I would wager that upon completion of the project its
pristine beginnings would rapidly deteriorate, possibly leading to the renewal of the same
problem for which it was at one time covered up: an open sewer running through the
heart of the city. My time in Seoul did not impress upon me that the Korean people in
general have an intense interest in maintaining a clean living environment. Their interest
in such a state seems largely based upon a sense of competition with Japan and a longing
to bring themselves up to some foreign standard of utility.

Still the project is a noble one, if even a bit over-optimistic, having little to no
negative aspects that I was made aware of and to my knowledge being for the simple
purpose of making Seoul a better place to live.
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