



THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
INSTITUTE FOR AREA STUDIES

UNBOXING THE GOSHIWON LIVING: REFLECTIONS IN THE KOREAN MEDIA

MASTER'S THESIS

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Master's Thesis

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ETHICS STATEMENT

I hereby declare that I have collected all the written and audio-visual material presented in this thesis in accordance with academic rules and ethical principles; that I have fully cited and referenced all material that is not original to this work in compliance with scientific norms; and that this thesis is the product of my own original work except where indicated by referencing.



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ABSTRACT

A goshiwon, derived from two words in Korean meaning “examination” and “place,” is a box-like non-housing unit that first appeared in the 1970s when people from all over Korea gathered mostly in Seoul to get affordable shelter and isolated space to study for national exams with its owners or hired managers also staying in one of the rooms and taking care of the floors or building. In the 1990s, goshiwons became an option not only for students or young adults preparing for exams but also for single-person households who were unemployed, engaged in temporary or daily jobs, and unable to meet their housing needs. Despite lasting government policies on mass housing, the demand for passive income and the continuously increasing housing prices have made goshiwons a matter of non-housing options in the real estate market. Consequently, low-income and unemployed young adults have increasingly opted for goshiwons for longer durations. Officially recognized in the 2010s as a “semi-housing”, goshiwons are still associated with inadequate living conditions and dietary habits in contemporary Korean society. This thesis aimed to examine how the experience of goshiwon living was reflected in the Korean media. Online news articles, documentaries, and fictional resources (TV series) were used as data sources; while the Ethnographic Content Analysis and discourse analysis techniques were employed as methodology. The results demonstrated that in Korean media, goshiwon living was reflected as a way for social advancement, a last-chance shelter for the urban poor, and a blind spot for crime and safety.

Keywords: goshiwon; housing policies; one-person households; media research; South Korea.

ÖZET

Geleneksel anlamda goşivon, Güney Kore’de “sınav” ve “yer” anlmlına gelen iki kelimeden oluşan, ve 1970’lerden itibaren Seul’e akın eden binlerce genç yetişkinin önemli ulusal sınavlara hazırlanmak, sınav hazırlık kurslarına katılmak ve izole olmak amaçlarıyla sınırlı süreler içinde barınma ihtiyaçlarını karşıladıkları, kutu şeklinde ve dar zemin alanına sahip pansiyon benzeri bir konaklama işletmesidir. İşletme sahibi, yahut bir yöneticinin de günlük ihtiyaçları karşılamak, giriş-çıkışı kontrol etmek ve güvenliği sağlamak üzere odalardan birini paylaştığı goşivonlar özellikle 1990’lardan itibaren sadece öğrencilere ya da sınav hazırlığındaki genç yetişkinlere değil, işsiz, geçici ya da günlük işlerle geçimi sağlayan, barınma ihtiyacını karşılayamayan tek kişilik hanehalkının da tercih ettiği bir seçenek haline gelmiştir. Değişen hükümetlerin benzer toplu konut politikalarına karşın emlak piyasasında bir prestij meselesi haline gelen pasif gelir talebi ve sürekli artan konut fiyatlarına karşın düşük gelirli ve geliri olmayan genç yetişkinler daha uzun süreler için goşivonları tercih etmeye başlamışlardır. 2010’lu yıllarda resmi olarak “yarı-konut” olarak tanınan goşivonlar günümüz Kore toplumunda hala yetersiz yaşam koşulları ve beslenme alışkanlıklarıyla ilişkilendirilmektedir. Bu tez, goşivonda yaşama deneyiminin Kore medyasında nasıl temsil edildiği sorusunu sormuştur. Bu soruyu cevaplayabilmek için çevrimiçi gazete makaleleri, belgeseller, ve kurgusal kaynaklar (dizi) veri kaynağı olarak kullanılmış olup; method olarak etnografik içerik ve söylem analizi teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar goşivon yaşamının Kore medyasında sosyal anlamda bir yükselme basamağı, kentsel yoksulların son çare barınma alanı ve suç ve güvenlik konularında ise bir kör nokta olarak yansıtıldığını ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Goşivon; konut politikaları; tek kişilik hanehalkı; medya araştırması; Güney Kore

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECA:	Ethnographic Content Analysis
ICA:	International Cooperation Administration
JRP:	Joint Redevelopment Program
JRTI:	Judicial Research and Training Institute
KDB:	Korean Developmental Bank
KHB:	Korea Housing Bank
KOSIS:	Korea Statistical Information Service
NHC:	Korean National Housing Corporation
NHF:	National Housing Fund
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPRH:	Permanent Public Rental Housing
QCA:	Qualitative Content Analysis
URH:	Urban Residential Housing
US:	United States

GLOSSARY

Bojeungbuwolsse: A lease contract in which a portion of the jeonse for a real estate object is converted into monthly rent according to a certain ratio.

Daldongnae: Slum, shantytown. **Sandongnae:** Slum on the skirt of a mountain.

Gongshisaeng: A title given to those studying for the civil service exam.

Goshichon: Neighborhoods that contain facilities, academies, and goshiwons designed for examination preparation students.

Goshinangin: Individuals who are trapped in the examination preparatory loop for years without any progress.

Goshisaeng: Examination preparatory student.

Goshiwon: 1- An enterprise with divided rooms prepared for students. 2- A semi-housing option with shared facilities.

Goshiyeolpung: Examination- fever. It was called after the rapid increase in the number of people who applied for national examinations flooding towards goshichons.

Hagwon: 1- Examination preparatory institutions. 2- Cram school.

Hasukjib: 1- An alternative type of shared accommodation that includes 3 meals a day into the monthly pay. 2- Boarding House.

Ilse: Daily lease.

Jaebol: a blood-related business organization mainly composed of executives with large capital and members of the same clan as family members and relatives.

Jeonse: Lease with key money of 40-80 percent of the property value paid in advance.

Jiokgo: 1- Lease with bad conditions referring to semi-basement (**ji**), rooftop (**ok**), and goshiwons (**go**). 2- **jiok:** hell, **go:** goshiwon.

Jjokbang: Small, divided room with an average floor area of 3.3 square meters.

Min-dalpaeng-i: Slug; **dalpaeng-i:** Snail

Officetel: A non-housing unit that first emerged in the mid-1980s, with a workspace, a small bathroom, one or two bedrooms, and a kitchenette.

One-room: A studio apartment in Korea.

Panjiha: Semi-basement room.

Panjajib: The housing units made of wooden planks mostly occur in shantytowns.

Pyeong: Unit of measurement used in Korea (One-pyeong equals to 3.3 meter square).

Saenghwal: Living, being active in a certain environment.

Sakwolsae: Lease with a one-time deposit, the time residents stayed at the house would be cut from the deposit, and the interest is taken from the landlord.

Seomin: 1- Commoner. 2- A common person without high status. 3- A person who is not financially well-off and is below the middle class.

Suheomsaeng: A comprehensive term for those taking a certain exam.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Goshiwons*¹, originating in South Korea (hereafter, Korea), are traditionally non-residential accommodations that emerged from the need for affordable shelter for individuals to spend a limited time studying until they pass an examination, mostly based in Seoul. Goshiwons stemmed from the need for decent housing and the influx of single young adults who fled to Seoul from rural areas, which revealed a serious accommodation issue in the 1970s when the national bar examination, civil servant examination, and university entrance examination preparation institutions in Seoul pulled thousands of young adults to Seoul for the prospect of a better future. A goshiwon was characterized by modest one or two-story dwellings in shanty towns in Seoul where inhabitants coexisted in the same location, the rooms of these dwellings were rented to young adults who came from rural areas so that they could go to universities or prepare for national examinations (Yoo et al., 2019). Within goshiwons, landlords typically would furnish essential amenities like food, heating, and cleaning services, and rent is usually charged monthly, without the necessity for a deposit or a formal contractual agreement.

Conceptionally, goshiwon finds its roots in the word “goshi,” denoting “the examination” referring to numerous national examinations Koreans have to pass in order to secure a place in the most prestigious universities and private or governmental offices; is paired with the word “won” signifying “a place”. Together, they bring the meaning of a place designed -to study- for examination. The term *goshisaeng* is used to describe a student who is preparing for the examination. Goshisaengs had to spend a long period of time studying for competitive examinations, sometimes for years, and attending educational institutions without distractions, a social life, and other responsibilities. For instance, the national bar examination (*Sa-bob-shi-heom*), is known for bringing prestige and high social status to those who finally succeeded in passing three steps of the process: a multiple-choice test, an essay examination, and an interview, until its abolishment in 2009. Thereafter, the prospering students would be able to

¹ In this thesis, the Romanization of Korean words was made according to the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR) system except for the word “goshi” is written instead of “gosi”.

attend two years of training at the Judicial Research and Training Institute (JRTI), which is mandatory for officially becoming a lawyer, judge, or practitioner in Korea (C. R. Kim, 2006).

Moreover, to get this training which leads to becoming a lawyer, the previous majors and grades of the students did not matter, thus making the bar examination a distinguishing step towards a successful and prestigious life. The participants did not have any limits for the trial of the examination, and the idea of such a life-changing step available for every student of any major, background, and success in university attracted many young adults to return to the charge for years. In contrast to its importance, the success rate of the national bar examination was only 5 percent; and “*goshi-nang-in*” is the term for some of those students who waste their time on the bar examination for years, and never be able to succeed (Kwon, 2021). This conception demonstrates that many people in a *goshi-nangin* status were usually unemployed, and financially unable to provide themselves with basic needs on their own, and typically the regular residents of a *goshiwon*.

1.1 Transformation of Goshiwons

Starting from the 1980s, *goshiwons* naturally began to proliferate in different neighborhoods and the profile of its residents became diversified which formed the word “*goshichon*” that characterizes the “villages or neighborhoods that witness a proliferation of *goshiwons*”. The inception of the first *goshichons* encircled the Seoul National University Campus and neighborhoods that had many private education institutes for entrance examinations such as Donjjak-gu, Sillim-dong, Noryangjin, etc (Yoo et al., 2019). However, over the years, finding affordable accommodation in Seoul turned out to be one of the most challenging things for single individuals who came to settle in the city. For those whose dwellings were abolished due to urbanization, the demand for affordable housing for one-person households turned *goshiwons* into a new type of dwelling for the poor. Although *goshiwons* were going through a transformative process by means of resident characteristics and utilization purposes, the facilities were yet to be advanced or regulated, thus the proliferation of *goshiwons* emerged uncontrollably. As Seoul started to develop industrially and economically through the 1970s and the 1980s, the city enlarged in the lead of many housing and urbanization policies, and shanty towns started to vanish through gentrification, transforming into neighborhoods with high-rise buildings to serve middle to upper-middle

income households (Koo, 2019). However, most of the displaced people who were once living in those towns were unable to be lifted from poverty due to the lack of inclusive policies (Son, 1997).

It should be noted that the first site of apartments in Seoul was built in 1964 and the first social rental system was launched in 1989, thus the transformation was rather at a slow pace, letting people come up with alternative accommodation solutions. By the 1990s, a key-money deposit rental system called “*jeonse*” was introduced to relieve the accommodation crisis and provide housing for those multi-household families who could not afford to buy or get loans to own a property. In exchange for 2 to 10 years of residence, the residents had to pay a significant amount of deposit and on some occasions, in the range of none to a proper amount of rent. Having a *jeonse* contract was the optimum way of saving money while paying a relatively low rent to a well-maintained apartment unit with a healthier environment and facilities. However, the amount of deposit or key money ranging between 5 to 75 million Won required savings or enough credit to take out a loan which was impossible for those who did not have the savings or a good credit score. Subsequently, the Financial Crisis² of 1997 further contributed to the financial challenges faced by individuals who had gone through bankruptcy, exacerbating poverty and intensifying housing shortages. The ratio of one-person households steadily increased during this time due to the economic and social changes in Korean society. This situation prompted more people to urgently seek solutions to their housing needs. This need led many housing accommodation types to emerge and spread like one-rooms, guest houses, *jjokbbangs*, office-tels, one-room-tels, and so on. Goshiwons did not require anything in advance if people were just looking for a roof above them.

As the new millennium unfolded, goshiwons emerged as a favored housing option, particularly catering to the needs of college students and individuals earning minimum wage. The confluence of various factors, including the spread of online lectures, the repercussions of the Financial Crisis causing financial strains for numerous individuals, and the steady rise in deposits and rent rates, contributed to the widening appeal of goshiwons, and a decreasing number of student residents (Koo, 2019). This resulted in an expansion of the demographic spectrum of goshiwon residents, with a growing preference among people spanning a broader age range for the convenience and affordability offered by these compact living spaces. The

² In most of the resources I have cited that were written in Korean, the financial crisis that happened in 1997, known as the Asian Financial Crisis, is referred to as the IMF Crisis. In this thesis, I use the two terms interchangeably.

growing demand for affordable housing gave rise to goshi-villages (goshi-cheon), each designed to serve a specific purpose. For instance, in Noryangjin, goshi-villages were tailored to accommodate students or graduates preparing for entrance or national examinations. The surrounding neighborhood featured numerous *hagwons* (private education institutions) and budget-friendly food stores, catering to the demands of these financially constrained students. Conversely, in the Gangnam area, goshiwons were predominantly favored by construction workers and white-collar employees who desired to be close to work and avoid traffic. This preference stemmed from the practicality of living near workplaces, as extensive work hours and financial constraints made distant housing rentals less feasible.

While apartment complexes proliferated on the outskirts of Seoul, goshiwons remained concentrated in the city center, strategically located around universities, educational institutions, and workplaces. In recent times, the COVID-19 Pandemic has worsened the situation for economically disadvantaged individuals. Goshiwons, which typically provide shared bathrooms, were closed down, leaving only more expensive options with private bathroom-toilet cabins inside the rooms available. Universities, prioritizing student safety, shifted to mandatory online lectures, resulting in goshiwons hosting fewer traditional students who isolate themselves in box-type rooms for focused studying. Instead, more young adults on the brink of financial hardship, relying on part-time or daily jobs, became the predominant occupants, striving to sustain their daily lives (Chi, 2021).

1.2. Literature Review

The evolving body of literature dedicated to goshiwons predominantly highlights pivotal issues and challenges reflective of contemporary South Korean society. The emergence of goshiwons as a widely recognized housing alternative for students as well as workers and unemployed individuals occurred in the absence of established legal frameworks or standards governing the operations of multiple-household accommodation enterprises (Yoo et al., 2023). Thus, defining goshiwons is one of the main challenges emphasized in the literature. Stemming from the legal gap, goshiwons are not officially categorized as a form of housing, despite the fact that rooms are rented through contractual agreements. The classification of goshiwons poses a complex dilemma, primarily because residents are perceived as occupying these rooms for a temporary duration, regardless of the actual length of their stay. Furthermore, due to the

absence of individual external doors and the prohibition of cooking facilities within the rooms, goshiwons are often labeled as falling within the realms of “non-housing”, “quasi-housing”, “multiple living facilities” or “semi-housing” classification. This challenge in categorization is highlighted in the literature as a distinctive and intricate character of goshiwons within the realm of housing (Jeong, 2021; Jin, 2020; Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2014; C.-H. Lee & Lee, 2021; S.-H. Lee & Lee, 2014; Yoo & Yang, 2019). The scholars agree that one of the primary factors contributing to the preference for goshiwons as living spaces, beyond their educational utility, lies in the housing policies established by the Korean government. A study conducted in 2020 demonstrated that the challenge of saving for a jeonse or high deposit forced households to tolerate the burden of higher monthly rent with low deposits although, in the long term, there is a “high tenant default risk” (S. S. Park & Pyun, 2020). In the research, goshiwons take place as fully rental no deposit housing solutions when residents cannot provide the deposit amount for a one-room or studio flat. Adding to the burdening deposit and rent ratios, the housing policies in Korea predominantly cater to multi-person households and families, resulting in apartment projects that primarily consist of multi-room flats also unsuitable for those living alone (Lee & Kim, 2020). On the other hand, (Jeong, 2021) suggests that besides the governmental policies, the poverty of landlords is also a determining factor for the reproduction of inadequate non-housing rental products and assets. Consequently, the housing supply fails to adequately address the needs of the growing population of one-person households lacking sufficient financial resources, compelling them to seek alternative non-residential accommodations (J.-H. Lee & Kim, 2017).

The residents’ identity is also one of the main focuses in the literature. It is agreed that goshiwon residents are young adults approximately aged between 19 to 39, who are deeply impoverished and depend on the financial support of parents, part-time or daily jobs, thus taking their place financially at the most vulnerable strata of Korean society (Ho, 2015; Jung, 2017; J. Kim & Yoo, 2021; E. Lee, 2021; H.-J. Lee, 2013; W. Lee et al., 2020; B. Seo & Joo, 2018; B.-K. Seo & Park, 2021; (Yoo & Yang, 2019). Asset inequality and the demand for passive income are pointed out to be one of the main causes of the proliferation of such inadequate living spaces, affecting young individuals who are just at the beginning of their adulthood. According to Hong, within a broad framework, these individuals belong to the “vulnerable class of housing” by residing in substandard environments, including goshiwons. These individuals maintain a consistent living space but lack the means to address housing issues independently, rendering their living conditions unsuitable. Alongside limited income and a lack of assets, they

encounter challenges in attaining secure housing (Hong, 2021). Hong also asserts that individuals experiencing vulnerability in housing occupy a lower social class compared to those living in adequately spaced and habitable conditions despite having a basic income.

Studies in the literature examined the meaning and concept of “home” for young residents of goshiwon while highlighting the inequalities led by the economic system and financial tendencies (Jong & Lee, 2011; J.-H. Kim, 2013). They suggest that the young generation is going through social anxiety because the prospect of living in an “ordinary home” seems to be impossible in Seoul's near future due to economic inequalities, thus jeopardizing their feelings of belonging, extending goshiwons a meaning of “un/doing home”(Jong & Lee, 2011; Jung, 2017). Lee and Kim (2020) reveal that “*jiokgo*” is a term used by the young generation for goshiwons meaning “the pain of hell” referring to the poor environments in goshiwons placed on the rooftops and underground. Hence, it is demonstrated in the literature that, for the unprivileged young generation, goshiwons stand for a place they reside because they do not have any better options. Another study revealed that goshiwons were also a shelter option for young runaways who escape from family homes or initial places and end up in the streets (W.-S. Kim & Bae, 2019).

Through the period leading up to the 2010s, goshiwon owners enjoyed considerable autonomy in shaping the interior construction of these establishments. This regulatory gap resulted in a significant number of existing goshiwons, particularly those spanning multiple floors within apartment complexes, lacking essential fire safety measures, such as incombustible materials and sprinkler systems, and an excessive number of rooms on each floor, endangering residents in an occasion of fire when they need to evacuate the building. As a consequence of this legal gap, the discourse within the literature on goshiwons places substantial emphasis on the importance of fire safety (D. C. Choi, 2018; H.-J. Kim & Lee, 2014; J.-H. Kim, 2008; J.-H. Kim et al., 2014; C. Lee et al., 2016; N.-K. Park, 2021). The heightened research of goshiwons regarding fire safety stems from a notable increase in the frequency of fires that endanger lives. Despite their growing popularity each year, goshiwons, categorized as narrow dwelling spaces, have faced numerous incidents leading to a pressing need for comprehensive fire safety assessment. A narrow dwelling space is defined as “*a multiple-use facility utilized by an unspecified number of individuals, characterized by either having no windows or by partitioned rooms within the space (Non-windowed: a floor where the total area of openings is less than 1/30th of the floor area)*” (Lee et. al, 2016). The scope of a narrow dwelling space refers to a non-apartment building with small rooms ranging between a

minimum of 3 to 33 square meters, habituated by one or more individuals utilized for living, studying, working, and equivalent purposes, and that is not under legal building regulations (ibid). These narrow and compact spaces can be vulnerable to fires due to combustible indoor materials that can generate toxic gases combined with inadequate ventilation, thus highlighting the importance of fire safety regulations at goshiwons. An analysis made on the deadly fire that happened in G Goshiwon in 2022 demonstrated that there are still many goshiwons vulnerable to fire breaks because the reporting and control system is not working properly (Y. Choi & Lee, 2023). On the other hand, it was stated that among the accommodation options, goshiwons are vulnerable by means of crime and safety (Hwang et al., 2013; E.-S. Lee, 2022; J.-R. Lee & Kim, 2020).

A central theme explored in the literature on goshiwons revolves around architectural analyses, with a particular emphasis on the examination of structural design, convenience, and safety considerations in floor plans (M. Byun et al., 2019; D.-J. Kim et al., 2020; Koo, 2019; C.-H. Lee & Lee, 2021; S.-H. Lee & Lee, 2014; (Yoo & Yang, 2019). Scholars delve into these aspects in order to assess resident satisfaction and the impact on the health and well-being of individuals dwelling in goshiwon accommodations. These architectural studies not only acknowledge the convenience and potential advantages offered by goshiwons but also serve as foundational components within the literature, paving the way for subsequent recommendations on how to enhance the habitability of goshiwons. Moreover, these studies contribute valuable insights that can inform suggestions aimed at making goshiwons a more appealing and health-conscious option, particularly in response to the evolving needs of the growing single-household population in Korea. For instance, Yoo et al. (2019) suggest that goshiwons in Seoul can be categorized into 3 districts: goshiwons in the Gangnam/Seocho-Gyeong-gu area are primarily occupied by high-income workers, resulting in elevated rental fees and providing better living facilities and environments. In contrast, those in the Dongjak-gu/Gwanak-gu area tend to accommodate predominantly 20-30-year-old students actively preparing for exams, often financially supported by their parents. These goshiwons are well-maintained and strategically located in proximity to study centers and hagwons, catering to the specific needs of students. Conversely, goshiwons in the Dongdaemun/Seodaemun-gu area are commonly inhabited by low-income individuals and daily workers. Positioned as the more affordable option, these rooms offer lower rental fees but are associated with poorer living conditions and environments. Consequently, they suggest that the construction and interior design of goshiwons in the future should be planned according to the residents' characteristics in these

specific areas. Additionally, they recommend incorporating more communal facilities to facilitate socialization, leisure activities, and sports within the goshiwon environment.

Finally, in a conference paper, Kim et al. (2022) revealed research on the perceptions of Korean society regarding goshiwons, as studied through online media resources such as news articles, movies, TV series, documentaries, and webtoons. They concluded that media perceptions of goshiwons were predominantly negative due to incidents of crime and fire vulnerability. They extracted three categories from their data: crime, accidents, and the actual conditions—the reality of goshiwons. They demonstrated that noise, economic and emotional deprivation were the primary reasons for conflicts arising from the poor residential environments. They noted that the number of goshiwons began to decrease starting in 2018, due to fire and murder incidents that had a significant impact on the negative perceptions of goshiwons. They also added that with the COVID-19 outbreak, living conditions worsened and the image of goshiwons further deteriorated.

1.3. Research Question

In the age of social media, the nearest thing to grasping a society's footprints is to examine its media archives. Something as personal as a living space that hosts such specific strata of Korean society would have a remarkable footprint to demonstrate an invaluable insight into many aspects. In this thesis, I primarily inquire how “goshiwon living”, the experience of living in a goshiwon, and being a resident of a goshiwon rather than goshiwon itself is reflected and represented in Korean media resources. This question will help figure out many aspects of goshiwons: the way goshiwon residents see themselves and the rooms they are living in; the image and discourse of goshiwons and its residents are represented; the societal and traditional means of goshiwon living; and the fictional image of goshiwons will be seen through.

1.4. Methodology

This research aims to reveal, to “un-box” what the literature in English lacks to demonstrate, the unique transformation of goshiwons from being isolation centers for students to a non-traditional housing option for the poor. As a unique phenomenon taking place in Korea, this

study aims to reveal the concepts and image of goshiwon living revealing the social experience and consciousness. The term goshiwon living (*goshiwon seanghwal*) was used to reveal both the cultural and spatial means of living in a goshiwon that was reflected via cumulative data of events in the news articles revealing clustered concepts and the content from documentaries and TV series. To be able to process the data gathered from these media resources, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) was employed to construct an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. According to Altheide (1987), the ECA uses purposive sampling on narrative data and includes the researcher's interpretation and comments on textual analysis. Rather than conducting data gathered from the field, it uses the existing data in narratives and texts to interpret and reveal unvisited aspects of a cultural phenomenon (Vickovic et al., 2013).

Unlike Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) which uses predefined categorizations and random or stratified sampling, ECA has a fluid mechanism that creates new conceptions according to the data and produces descriptive information using purposive and theoretical sampling (ibid). For instance, although news articles about goshiwons that are used for examination preparation have less representation in the number of news articles that were gathered, it was the most frequent topic between 1993 and 1999 and periodically appeared as pivotal moments reflecting the transformation of goshiwon living. Thus, the ECA enables the researcher to interpret and explain what might be overlooked in the data processing, involving the researcher in every phase of the study. On the other hand, Wang and Liu (2021) agree that while using media resources, “textual analysis can provide thick descriptions and deep, localized knowledge of social processes”. Thus, discourse analysis is also used in this research to analyze textual data gathered from the articles and video resources.

The data collected for this thesis primarily relied on the systematic review and purposive sampling of the online news archive of the Chosun News on the coverage of goshiwon published between 1993 and 2021. Each news article that contained the word “goshiwon” between 1993 and 2021 was evaluated by the researcher to eliminate the ones that did not serve the research question and topic. Consequently, 483 (sample size) out of 3267 (population) articles were selected to be coded and clustered. Out of these articles, most of the coding process demonstrated overlapping concepts and keywords, which required the researcher's interpretation. Additionally, narratives and interviews in documentaries and TV series were examined to support the conceptions that were shaped after the conceptions were set according to the news articles. Finally, the four most frequent and culturally meaningful conceptions were made to represent the “goshiwon living” in this thesis.

Firstly, the dominating keyword for goshiwon articles was “accommodation” with 100 cases. Articles that were coded with accommodation included discussions and criticism about goshiwons being unregulated non-housing options that caused distress to society hindering the extent of unemployment, poverty, and safety issues; while some of them were entitled as an opportunity for entrepreneurs who are looking for a steady income that will come from managing a goshiwon business. In Chapter 2, this transformation was demonstrated by presenting the socioeconomic background that revealed goshiwons as accommodation choices for one-person households with low income.

The second most frequent keyword was “poverty” with 90 articles; including youth and elderly poverty, which was supported by many stories. For the poverty that was reflected through stories in goshiwon, the main discourse was the life of Korean people who were entitled the “*common people (seo-min)*” who previously resided in shantytowns before the urban redevelopment policies, started living in goshiwons because they could not survive the economic recession, lost their families and property, or were just born to a poor family. The spatial consciousness of these individual stories reflected how one-pyeong rooms, which equals 3.3 square meters were the standard floor area of goshiwon rooms that emerged before spatial regulations, embodied many of these stories. Thus, their stories were represented in the 3rd Chapter as “*One-Pyeong Life of the Commoners*” to reflect the spatial and socioeconomic presence of the goshiwon and its residents that refuge in these cramped rooms for living. The Korean drama “*Came to Me and Became a Star* (2013), the documentaries “*Residential Refugees: A Single Room in the World* (2015)”, “*Betrayal of Study - Qualification for Dreams* (2016), and the musical documentary “*Seoul's Moonlight Night* (2010)” was employed to contribute to the conception.

The third most frequent keyword “crime”, was demonstrated in 81 articles, including major crimes like arson, murder, and sexual crimes. Without the intention of creating a stigma about the individuals residing in goshiwons as criminals, the stories demonstrated goshiwons as blind spots for safety where the identities of residents are rarely considered when handing them keys. That created an insecure image for goshiwons where one could not guess who was living next door. Accordingly, the safety issues and criminal patterns in goshiwons were discussed and represented in the 3rd Chapter titled “*Crime in the Next Door: Hell is Other People*” as a reference to the Korean drama “*Strangers from Hell* (2018)” which demonstrates how an isolated goshiwon in a redevelopment area can be a blind spot for serial murder crimes and the frustrations of people living in.

Lastly, the keyword “*goshiwonforgoshi*” was used to gather the articles about the examination preparatory students that denominated the term *goshiwon* with 35 articles. *Goshiwon* originally stemmed from the structure of the examination system that attracted many individuals to flood into *goshi*-villages for the prospect of a better future. The well-known examination preparatory academies and *goshiwons* were famous for producing winners were highly visible in the media, supported with documentaries about the examination students’ life in the *goshi*-villages. It was revealed that taking the national examination historically turned into a trend that pushed thousands of people to try their chances of being a governmental official at any age, ending up spending years while living in *goshiwons*. Narratives of “holding on, cheering up, and never giving up” demonstrated the fighting spirit of students that filled *goshiwon* rooms for years. In the 3rd Chapter, this phenomenon was represented as “*Seek for Advancement: The “Fighting!” Generation*”. This section tells the stories of *goshi*-saengs, *gong-shi*-saengs, *su-heom*-saengs, *goshi*-nang-ins, *gong-shi*-tribes (see *Glossary*), and many more that gave away a part of their lives living in *goshiwons*, and struggling to find a place in society. The Korean drama *Drinking Solo* (2016), and documentaries “*Noryangjin Goshi-Village: Despite All* (2011)”, and “*Exclusive World* (2019)” were exposed to explore the concept further.

The remaining articles were both overlapped or independent cases from the articles about fire safety and arson cases (44); the classification and regulations of *goshiwons* (39), business-related articles about *goshiwons* (28), stories of homeless people (21), suicide incidents (16), stories of celebrities that once lived in *goshiwons* (8), etc. was also mentioned throughout the 3rd Chapter.

Limitations

In this research, I worked on the term “*goshiwon living*” as a form of both spatial and social phenomenon, and demonstrated how it was reflected in the Korean media channels. I used the online archive of Chosun News as my main source because it had reachable data starting from 1993 revealing a meaningful transformation. Thus, it may reveal a one-sided image compared to the many other media channels that are present. One of the concerns I had while doing the systematic review was sorting out many irrelevant articles from thousands of inputs, and clustering them according to the categorizations I formed concurrently. The conceptions were created and my interpretation put the stories together as the researcher, thus, it may create a misconception about what *goshiwon living* means for Korean society, or *goshiwon* residents themselves. As I stated earlier about the “*Crime in the Next Door: Hell is Other People*” section,

rather than trying to create personas constituted by some data set, I aimed at revealing related cases in harmony to tell the story of thousands of people living in goshiwons that had similar experiences somewhere.



CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF GOSHIWONS

Unboxing the so-called goshiwon living, and its transformation story requires to be supported by the socio-economic context that reveals goshiwons as a contemporary subject to be studied. The transformation of goshiwons as substandard housing solutions is subject to housing policies, demographic changes, and lingering poverty in contemporary Korea.

Considering the housing policies, government regulations that aimed at providing housing for low-income households were implemented as part of a welfare policy initiative by providing loans and projects for mass supply. Private enterprises and conglomerates were incentivized to invest in the construction sector to meet the increasing demand for suitable housing. The private housing market expanded due to tax incentives and the release of land by the government to stimulate development. Nevertheless, the prices in the private housing market remained unaffordable for low-income households residing in impoverished neighborhoods or those who had recently relocated to the capital city. Instead, the private housing market began to cater to the demands of middle to upper-middle-income households, operating as a free market influenced by individual builders and companies. Consequently, every government that came into power in Korea persisted in implementing “public housing” policies specifically tailored for targeted low-income households.

However, according to statistics for 2022, 5.6 % of the housing stock in Korea still consists of non-housing, or quasi-housing units reaching 7.9 % in Seoul (KOSIS, 2024a). These units are known as more affordable and unconventional housing solutions that evolved as a reaction to inadequate housing policies, especially for the increasing one-person household population in Korea densely populated in commercial areas. Among these emerging single-households, goshiwon residents constitute one of the youngest and most impoverished strata, thus the housing vulnerable class mostly residing in the capital city. As highlighted in the first chapter, goshiwons emerged as educational isolation cabins for young adults who were studying immensely eager to pass national examinations so that they could reach their prospective future as being accepted and secure adults by having respected and life-long guaranteed careers although only a low percentage of individuals were able to do so.

As a result of prevailing housing and demographic dynamics, goshiwons underwent a shift, transitioning from primarily hosting students to accommodating a growing number of individuals from lower-income brackets and those grappling with homelessness. This transformation was spurred by persistent economic crises and high levels of unemployment, reflecting the evolving social landscape within these living spaces. Another reason for the transition of goshiwons as quasi-housing units gradually took place as a result of the challenge of being part of the traditional housing ladder that emerged in Korea in the mid-1960s. The mass housing supply of each government policy lagged in providing adequate housing for the urban poor. One explanation for this phenomenon is attributed to the prioritization of growth-first policies. These policies were intended to improve overall living standards for the entire population naturally (Son, 1997). Nevertheless, the results indicated that adopting this perspective led to a society marked by greater disparity between the extremely impoverished and the wealthier.

In this section, public housing policies will be thoroughly examined, to uncover the complexities surrounding the continuous struggle to provide adequate housing for the housing vulnerable class. Additionally, the transformation of goshiwons as a practical accommodation solution amidst these ongoing challenges will be explored. Furthermore, the changes in housing structures following the rise of the one-person household population, youth, and elderly poverty will be demonstrated.

2.1. Background of Housing Policies for Low-Income Households

In the mid-1950s, Korea found itself in a state of profound devastation, marked by extensive displacement and homelessness affecting thousands of individuals. This dire situation stemmed from the culmination of 35 years of Japanese occupation followed by the destructive consequences of the Korean War, which brought about significant demographic shifts and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. The displaced families and individuals fled to the countryside during the war, and went back to the urban areas, especially to the capital city. While a portion of the Korean populace, compelled by various factors, resettled in regions such as Japan, Manchuria, and beyond during and after the war, a concurrent influx of returnees and refugees from North Korea streamed back into their homeland. Despite the prevailing devastation, Seoul, the nation's capital, experienced a notable demographic surge, witnessing a

population increase of over twenty percent within five years. Additionally, the rapid economic developments mostly revolved around the capital city. However, the pace of urbanization lagged behind this rapid population growth, exacerbating the emergent housing crisis that drew the attention of governmental authorities. The persistent influx of people into urban centers further strained already inadequate housing capacities, highlighting the pressing need for comprehensive measures to address the escalating housing shortage.

As the populace flood to Seoul grew gradually every year, the housing shortage became an urgent issue in the remaking of the city. Despite the government's developmental policies, numerous low-income basic labor and service industry workers relocated from rural areas to Seoul. The city lacked the capacity to accommodate this influx, leading to the emergence of substandard housing solutions. This emerging group of people, whose salary is less than minimum wage, and who do not own a property or have savings, created a class vulnerable to finding shelter and caused squatting around the city center.

In the 1960s, thirty percent of the population was living in squatter neighborhoods in Seoul (Kim, 2014). The population of Seoul peaked in 1969 and the year after because the drought in the south-west pulled thousands of families to the developing Seoul which contributed to the lack of affordable housing choices, and further contributed to the forming of *daldongnaes* and *sandongnaes* (Ha, 2002). *Daldongnae* simply stands for a moon village and *sandongnae* points out to the villages constructed on the hills of Seoul, and both of these neighborhoods were illegally constructed shanty towns. The housing units in these towns were mainly called *panjajib* made of wooden planks (Ha, 1994). The Korean government's first attempts regarding housing policies included wiping off these types of settlements (Shin, 2021).

In 1957, South Korea embarked on its first concerted effort to develop a structured housing plan, facilitated by the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), a body supported by US aid (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012). This initiative was a 6-year project, aimed to cater specifically to the housing needs of low- to middle-income households in the country by constructing small and middle-size housing units up to 66 square meters. The ICA, operating under the oversight of the Office of the Economic Coordinator tasked with managing US aid, played a key role in orchestrating this housing endeavor. In order to become a house owner, one had to own or purchase private land and be able to cover the expenses of repayment. The process of securing ICA assistance proved to be slow and bureaucratic, resulting in delays in the implementation of housing projects. Additionally, the repayment terms associated with the ICA aid posed significant challenges for the targeted households, making it nearly

impossible for them to meet the repayment requirements within the designated timeframe. The shortage of construction companies hindered progress in meeting supply targets, prolonging the duration of the deficit. Furthermore, demanding that loan-seekers offer land as collateral for ICA aid created a major barrier, particularly for low-income households. Bureaucratic procedures extended the process of obtaining financing, placing an additional burden on those in need. As a result, repayment of loans was slowed down by these systemic inefficiencies, exacerbating the housing crisis. The combination of bureaucratic obstacles and challenging repayment terms highlighted the significant difficulties faced in tackling the housing shortage through externally funded programs during that period.

Additional sources of funding for housing initiatives included the Korean Developmental Bank (KDB), municipal governments in Seoul, and various financial institutions, all subject to governmental regulation. Housing units constructed under these programs were commonly referred to as “public housing”. These dwellings typically consisted of detached two-story row houses intended to accommodate four households, with floor areas ranging between 50 to 132 square meters. The lack of affordability of the housing project resulted in delayed payments, thereby impeding the project's progress and leading some individuals to resort to illegal resale of their houses. In response, the government imposed stricter eligibility criteria for housing loans. It was required that those “who are able to do the monthly payments with twenty percent of their income” were eligible to get a loan (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012). While governmental housing initiatives initially aimed to provide sufficient housing for low-income households, the imposition of these restrictions rendered them ineligible for public housing loans. Consequently, the size of the projects and floor areas were downsized, and privately funded housing projects regulated by the government began to overshadow public housing projects in quantity. Over the years, although private housing construction outpaced government efforts in terms of quantity, the government-built constructions were of higher quality and with more floor area. While half of the housing supply was the government in the 1950s, the ratio of public housing to private initiatives dropped to 10 percent in the 1960s (Ha, 1994).

The first attempt to generate a system for adequate housing supply was the establishment of the Korean National Housing Corporation (hereafter, NHC) in 1962. Before its establishment, the Korean Housing Authority was the head of the decision-making process without owning any funds. The NHC extended the legal authority and funding to plan and supply construction and land development projects on its own. With the changes in the

government, housing policies started to focus on massive supply and started the Public Housing Act in 1963. The NHC was responsible for constructing housing units for middle-income households and apartments called type 1 public housing, and the housing projects for low-income households were executed by local governments. It is stated to resemble the times of the Japanese invasion, when the local governments supplied housing for the poor, and Japanese construction corporations were working for the middle class (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012). The NHC's first remarkable project was the Mapo Apartment Complex between 1962 and 1964, with 40,000 units. With the emergence of apartment buildings starting from the Mapo Apartments in 1964, a new type of housing that was more efficient than detached housing was considered, and the construction of those multi-floor types of housing decreased as apartment buildings proliferated in Korea. Apartment settlements enabled a variety of housing policies for the urban poor.

From the mid-60s onwards, the government shifted its attention towards rental projects to assist those unable to buy housing units. These projects offered one-year rental periods, with an average annual supply of around six thousand rental housing units. However, the rental fees were burdensome for low-income households, rendering the system inefficient (ibid). By the 1970s, the authoritarian government of Park Chung-Hee (1963-1979) pursued economic developments more concentrated on initiatives of conglomerates, so-called *jaebols* concentrated on heavy industry, and public housing policies were inadequate to address the shelter needs of the urban poor. The public policies prioritized boosting the GDP and overall income across the population instead of implementing targeted strategies aimed at offering significant projects for low-income households or housing vulnerable groups (Ronald & Lee, 2012). Ha (2002) asserts that the relative relief in housing poverty between 1962 and 1977 was due to economic development, rather than intentional social welfare policy.

The primary method of accommodation in the newly constructed public housing involved purchasing a housing unit. However, for low-income households, five to eight thousand units were allocated annually for leasing at low prices for only one year, until the units were made available for sale on the real estate market (Ronald & Lee, 2012). The rental system emerged as a dual market, public housing and private housing markets were disconnected in structure and value towards the end of the 1960s (S. Kim, 2014). The government aimed to achieve a target of 2.5 million housing units within a decade, with 1.8 million of them funded by the government. To accomplish this, the Housing Construction Promotion Act was enacted in 1972, granting the government the authority to oversee both public and private land and housing

initiatives. Before this act, only the NHC and local governments were authorized to plan, construct, and manage housing projects. However, after its implementation, private conglomerates and suppliers became eligible to undertake housing projects. To attract major private companies, all taxes related to construction and land payments in selected districts were eliminated. In 1977, the government introduced a registration system for home constructors to prevent poorly constructed buildings and immoral practices in advertising. Registered entities were eligible for support in land expropriation and tax exemptions. To attain legal status as a construction company, factors such as budget, skilled labor, and annual construction capacity were taken into consideration (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012).

2.2. Urban Redevelopment Policies and Displacement of Urban Poor

In 1973, the Temporary Act on the Promotion of Housing Improvement was enacted to combat substandard housing settlements, especially in the Seoul city center. The uncontrollable mushrooming of shanty settlements was rapidly destructed by renewal projects in central Seoul and rapidly replaced with mostly construction by private companies. The need for a massive supply of housing for low-income households was tried to be fulfilled by the mass construction of New Towns with high-density buildings on the outskirts of the city. The creation of New Towns on the outskirts of Seoul was also a part of greenbelt strategies aimed at managing the rapid population growth, which posed security concerns due to their proximity, just 40 kilometers from the North Korean border (C. G. Choi et al., 2019). This establishment resulted in higher land and property prices in central Seoul and lengthened the commuting hours for those moving to New Towns, also increasing the transportation expenditures (ibid). On the other hand, the central government extended municipal governments the right to own the lands in the renewal areas, so the shantytowns placed at the city center would be determined and cleared rapidly (Shin, 2021). If the settlement was illegal, they had the right to crash a neighborhood without paying anything to residents in return. This authority only had the power to make poverty invisible in the city center carrying it to the skirts of Seoul, which also provided cheap labor to conglomerates or the so-called *jaebols* (ibid). The urban renewal and gentrification projects displaced many people out of the designated areas, the low to middle-income households who were able to move to the newly established public housing units out of the central city enjoyed housing with better facilities and conditions *ceteris paribus* (S. Y. Lee, 2018).

Subsequently, below the low-income households, the dislocated urban poor below the average income was not considered during the making of these redevelopment policies (Son, 1997), thus they came up with three main housing solutions: *Vinyl-house*, *beoljib*, and *jjokbang* (Ha, 2002). Three of these options were inadequate and with impoverished environment. Vinyl houses were made with wooden planks covered with vinyl; a *beoljib* resembled a bee hive where numerous small housing units are tied closely to each other; and *jjokbangs* a word referring to a “small, divided room” with an average floor area of 3.3 square meters, started to take place as daily rentals for the poor and homeless. The daily rent was 3-5 dollars and 100-120 dollars for a month in 1999, mostly placed in the inner-city areas (ibid). The criteria for non-housing was vague and based on physical quality and legality. In the 1990s, the Ministry of Construction established criteria for substandard housing, defining it as a dwelling with less than 23.1 square meters of space, built unlawfully on public land, constructed with inferior materials such as vinyl or straw for makeshift barracks, and lacking essential amenities like water and electricity (Ha, 1994).

Despite urban renewal projects transforming the city's appearance, individuals displaced from shantytowns still faced challenges in owning or renting housing units in their original locations. Consequently, as Seoul's image evolved into a more developed and affluent city, the displaced urban poor found themselves compelled to inhabit inadequate, unhealthy, and small non-registered housing units scattered across the city. Following the initiation of rental systems in Korea, subsequent illegal rental developments were predominantly situated in high-density areas and often suffered from overcrowding, substandard environments, and insufficient facilities. Hot water facilities were a rarity, leading to frozen pipes during the winter season, and impeding tap water access to housing units. Ha (2002) states that after the Joint Redevelopment Program (JRP) and gentrification projects between 1985 and 1988, only 10 percent of former residents had the chance to reside in renewed areas. The following financial crisis in 1997 diminished this relative relief and with rising unemployment housing kept being a lingering and worsening issue.

2.3. Rental Policies for Low to Middle-Income Households (1970-2010)

The inception of Korea's public housing rental system followed the introduction of the first apartment complexes in the late 1960s. This system operated on a key money-deposit-first

basis, eventually enabling tenants to purchase their initial rental housing unit. Initially, rental units were only leased for one year, aiming to address the rapid expansion of buildings and offer affordable housing for low and middle-income households until they could save up to obtain a loan for purchasing their own home. The eligibility for residency in these short-term lease units was determined through a credit system overseen by the Korea Housing Bank (KHB) (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012). It managed the regulations of borrowing and lending to those who require funds from the National Housing Fund (NHF). The NHF was comprised of three key elements: State Housing Pre-emption Subscription Deposits, National Housing Bonds, and the Housing lottery (ibid). Subscription deposits were aimed at households without existing property ownership who intended to purchase or rent a housing unit. This allowed them to save for deposits and down payments through monthly contributions over a specified period. To qualify for purchasing or renting a public housing unit built by the National Housing Corporation (NHC) or local governments, participation in the NHF deposit system was mandatory. Hence, those who could not make payments to the monthly subscription of deposit funds would simply be disabled from purchasing or renting a public housing unit. Finally, more and more middle-income subscribers became prospective property owners rather than those of low income which the funding system was made for. On the other hand, private developers had access to funding through national housing bonds if they wished to build housing units smaller than 60 square meters (Ha, 1994).

After the release of rental housing units in multi-floor buildings, private rental systems started to evolve more autonomously than public rental releases, supplying middle-income households. Of the private rental systems, the *jeonse* rental system was highly preferred till its peak in the mid-1990s, was a rental system where tenants paid a key-money deposit worth 40 to 70 percent of the total market price of the housing unit, legally for at least 2 years without paying a monthly rent. The deposit would be used as an investment for the landlord to gain from its interest rates accumulating in their bank accounts, and fully returned after the rental period (Ronald & Jin, 2015). The monthly rental systems were considered a waste by the middle-income residents, and having a *jeonse* contract enabled them to have the chance to keep saving in addition to the deposit they would be returned while moving out, while landlords benefited from the high deposits as an interest-free loan (ibid). It was stated to be a step of housing ladder for low-to-middle income households before purchasing their first property: To be able to purchase a housing unit, a newlywed couple first had to live in a rented room or live with their extended family until they saved enough to afford a deposit, then they would move

to a jeonse continuously saving to purchase their first housing unit which usually with a smaller floor area (H. J. Lee, 2017; Ronald & Jin, 2015).

Some jeonse residents were also homeowners who rented their property to live closer to work- schools preferring to stay at a jeonse (Kim & Jeon, 2012). This behavior of residents pointed out to be caused by two main reasons: financially unable to buy a second property near the workplace, and the burden of long commuting hours, residents are also stated to be more likely to have children of school age. In 1990, due to changing economic conditions and low interest rates, jeonse rentals became less of a profitable choice for homeowners. As the 1997 Economic Crisis hit the markets decreasing the interest rates, many jeonse landlords turned their houses into monthly rent housing units with deposits to prevent fiscal loss. This phenomenon was called *jeonse crisis* (B. Seo & Joo, 2018). To combat the increasing shortage of jeonse units, the government also supported and induced multiple property owners to lease their housing units to the jeonse market for more than five years by tax releases of up to 50 percent from 2005 to supply for the low-income households (Ronald & Jin, 2015). After the emergence of the jeonse rental system where a significant amount of deposit is given to the landlord, for them to invest and count the interest percentage as rent, other types of rental systems also emerged. *Bojeungbuwolse* system required less deposit- refundable combined with rent. *Sakwolse* system required a one-time deposit, the amount of time residents stayed at the house would be cut from the deposit, and the interest is taken from the landlord. *Wolse* is the basic rental system that is common worldwide, with monthly rent paid from the tenants. Lastly, *ilse* stands for a daily rental system where residents can rent either a room, a bed, etc., for a day or for hours which mostly took place in jjokbangs and goshiwons.

Meanwhile, in the late 1980s, despite efforts to address the housing needs of low-income households, the demand still outpaced the available supply, especially considering the growing urban poor population in Seoul. Rental deposit and sale prices had surged by more than fifty percent compared to previous rates, a trend attributed to the hosting of the Asian Games (1986), Olympics (1988), and social unrest (*see* June Uprising in 1987) (Son, 1997). Moreover, the public rental projects, which were primarily designed for a limited duration of one to five years, tended to cater more to the middle-class demographic. When the rental period was over, the housing unit had to be sold, thus all the occupied rentals were rented only once. The political environment was also at a significant turning point. The authoritarian government was replaced with the first democratically elected president, Roh Tae-Woo in 1988 and the democratization in Korea brought more social housing initiatives.

In 1989, Korea initiated its first attempt at permanent rental social housing under the leadership of President Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993). The introduction of the 2 Million Housing Construction initiative and the establishment of Permanent Public Rental Housing (PPRH) which can be called social housing, aimed to provide housing for approximately a quarter million urban poor in five years (Lee, 2017). Poor families, the elderly, veterans, and handicapped households were given priority in obtaining a permanent rental unit. To provide funds for the program, the government used its budget and public finance while the Korea Housing Bank started to provide funds for middle-income residents and the NHF provided for low-income households (Ha, 1994). Nevertheless, the project encountered considerable financial obstacles. The affordable social housing units were far from the employment areas, and commuting to work had high costs. Thus while the project supplied for those in need of affordable housing, commuting expenses and hours were not favourable.

Afterward, the Permanent Rental Housing system was substituted with the Long-term Public Rental Housing program during President Kim Young-sam's tenure between 1993 and 1998 (ibid). The difference between permanent and long-term rental units was that permanent units were rented for 50 years, while long-term rentals were released for 30 years, and with less quantity. The implementation of globalization policies and expenditures during President Kim Young Sam's administration led to a decline in long-term rental public housing policies. This resulted in the domination of the private housing construction market that favored short-term rental options (Seo & Joo, 2018). Thus, the most prevalent type of rental housing was of 5-year lease units eighty percent built by private companies; these companies would secure loans from the NHF to construct housing units, which would then be purchased and rented out by other companies to their employees (Ha, 2008). Residents would utilize the money saved in subscribe saving funds to rent one of those housing units. The government also joined a short-term housing release market called *Maeip housing* referring to private housing that was purchased, resold, or rented out as public housing.

The year 1997 stands out as a pivotal moment in the evolution of the Korean economy and political landscape. Despite the upheaval caused by the Asian Financial Crisis, which led to a surge in deposit and rental rates within real estate markets, the inauguration of the Kim Dae-Jung administration in 1998 marked a significant shift. The current government, the first liberal administration since 1961, has adopted a proactive strategy to tackle the severe housing shortage. This marked a shift in policy direction, moving away from a primary emphasis on economic growth to a greater focus on social policies and welfare aimed at expanding the reach

and effectiveness of existing initiatives (Ronald & Lee, 2012). Through large-scale housing projects, including the One-million Rental Housing Plan designed to meet escalating housing demands, and the allocation of two hundred thousand social housing units for the disadvantaged, Kim Dae-Jung's administration effectively tackled the pressing housing needs of the population (ibid). The upcoming left-wing administrations continued this policy shift, In 2003, Roh-moo Hyun had a 1 million public housing supply in 10 years to be leased for 30 years.

By the year 2004, despite the concerted efforts directed towards providing housing for low-income households over the preceding years, the output of public housing initiatives remained limited, comprising less than one-tenth of the overall housing market. Consequently, a substantial gap persisted in living conditions between different income strata (Ha, 2008). A growing number of individuals began favoring smaller housing units with reduced upfront deposits and monthly rents. Consequently, some homeowners encountered challenges in refunding deposits upon the expiration of the contract period (Ronald & Jin, 2015). The imbalance and privatization within the real estate market, coupled with socio-economic disparities, overshadowed public housing initiatives. The spectrum of housing options expanded from the most luxurious settlements to the least satisfactory units, with regulations proving inadequate. By the year 2010, approximately 10% of the population continued to inhabit substandard housing (*Policy for Affordable Housing in Korea*, 2012). Concurrently, the number of housing supply finally reached the number of total households; however, another demographic aspect came into account rendering the housing supply inadequate: emerging one-person households.

2.4. The Emergence of One-Person Households and Increasing Poverty

The emergence of one-person households as a dominant demographic in Korea can be traced back to the late 1990s. Previously, Korean society was predominantly characterized as traditional and family-oriented, and the typical household types would consist of four people: a couple with at least two kids. This is evidenced by statistics from 1980 when one-person households comprised less than five percent, while four-person households had the dominating part of the population. Initially, the rise in one-person households was viewed as a temporary phenomenon attributed to rural-to-urban migration (H. Park & Choi, 2015). Nevertheless, in

the 2000 household census, the percentage of one-person households surged threefold to around 15.5%, and by 2010, nearly a quarter (23.88%) of the entire population comprised individuals living alone (KOSIS, 2010). Based on household projections, by 2050, nearly half of all households in Korea are expected to be one-person households, totaling 9,053,860 households. This demographic shift is poised to surpass other household types, such as couples (5,334,979) and couples with unmarried children (3,905,770), respectively (KOSIS, 2022a).

Youth Poverty

The exploration of the underlying factors contributing to this unconventional demographic trend remains a focal point of research in contemporary Korea, with particular emphasis on youth poverty as a noteworthy component warranting thorough investigation (An et al., 2022; H. M. Byun & Yun, 2021; Ho, 2015; J. Kim & Yoo, 2021; H.-J. Lee, 2013; H. Park & Choi, 2015). When examining unemployment rates, the data between two decades, 1999 to 2020, reveals comparable percentages for the age group of 20 to 39, standing at 16.1% and 14.2%, respectively. Additionally, within the age range of 20-29, there was a consistent prevalence of unemployment at 10.3 %, a percentage that remained unchanged in both years (KOSIS, 2024b). Although these rates tend to decrease considerably in some of the years in between, the unemployment rate in young generations seems to be prevalently vulnerable to socio-economic changes.

The rapid migration of young adults to the capital city from rural areas in search of better education and employment encountered the severe effects of the 1997 Financial Crisis, decreasing disemployment and unemployment after graduation, leaving numerous young adults back in their agendas (Jung, 2017). The “IMF Generation” was used to describe this unfortunate generation of young adults who had to go through the severe effects of the crisis in their 20s and 30s. The post-financial crisis period in urban Korea was associated with career insecurity, urban inequality, and housing inadequacy: the young and “very poor” proportion of the urban population had to find shelter to pursue education and create a career path for their prospective future (B. Seo & Joo, 2018). The lifelong career path of the developmental era left its place for temporary jobs and daily employment for those who are yet to qualify for the limited amount of employment seats in big conglomerates that promise better living conditions. Although the governmental push for supplying housing for low-income households kept being a priority in politicians’ discourses, the capacity of demand for affordable housing for young adults was still financially unable to cover the expenses of either burdening high deposit or monthly rental housing units. The very poor young adult population started accommodating in substandard

places like oktapbang (rooftop room), banjiha (semi-basement room), and goshiwons. Then, especially more goshiwon rooms proliferated to be used by the “IMF homeless”, and financially unstable one-person households (Jung, 2017).

Another abbreviation for youth poverty emerged aftermath of the 2008 Economic Crisis, when it gradually caused a decrease in full-time and stable jobs in the job market. Companies started to favor contract-based temporary workers, and the competitive job market became more unreachable to those who just graduated from university. These temporary workers after the 2008 Economic Crisis were called “880.000 won generation” (88-man-won-se-dae, 650 dollars then) to reflect the difficulties young temporary workers had to face. After the 2008 Crisis, more and more young adults who suffered from poverty and hardships of getting full-time employment were desperate to keep up with society’s expectations and pressure to succeed in having a decent life and a full-time job. *Sam-po-se-dae* has emerged from the desperation of these young adults meaning “the generation who gave up on three things; dating, marriage, and children (Ho, 2015). This abbreviation has evolved: *O-po-se-dae* meant “the generation who gave up on five things” included giving up on their social life and also the idea of owning a house, adding to the three things earlier. These abbreviations on young adults giving up on many things in life eventually formulated to be recently cited as the so-called “N-Po generation” which demonstrated that the young generation gives up on so many things an unknown “N” as the limitless things until one gives up on life to survive in contemporary Korea. The last form of the “giving up generation” discourse took place during the COVID-19 pandemic which deteriorated many existing temporary jobs with low insurance and common residence facilities were shut down due to the pandemic restrictions.

Elderly Poverty

Korea started the millennial with the concerns of demographic challenges: the low birth rates that decrease yearly and the aging society. As of 2020, 15.7% of Korea's population comprised individuals aged over 65, a figure projected to surge to 47.7% by 2070 (KOSIS, 2023). These statistics certainly indicate Korea's trajectory towards becoming a rapidly aging society. However, according to an OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) report, almost half of the population over the age of 65 in Korea lived in relative poverty which is a number that outpaces most of the OECD countries (Jones & Urasawa, 2014). As the aging society became one of the important welfare issues in Korea, classifications such as old, old-old, and advanced-old were used to define studies about the elderly.

Another OECD report published in 2023 also revealed that Korea ranked first in terms of poverty rates among the population aged over 65. The report disclosed that over 40% of elderly individuals in Korea live in poverty (*Pensions at a Glance 2023*, n.d.)³. According to the statistics in 2020, 20.2% of individuals over 65 did not own their home; 9.8% resided in jeonse leases; 7.6% in monthly rentals, and 2.8% in free leases (KOSIS, 2022b). Out of the elderly population, approximately 19.8% are living in one-person households (ibid). According to Park et al. (2021), elderly individuals living in one-person households often experience severe depression due to poverty and isolation. They also noted that half of the elderly struggled to adjust to living in one-person households.

Along with the changes in socioeconomic structures, the traditional pattern of elderly care given by relatives diminished as the population kept aging and the dependency rate of the elderly reached 21.8% in 2020. After the IMF Crisis in 1997 besides many young adults being left unemployed, elderly people who went through economic difficulties and bankruptcy became one of the main branches of social support policies. After raising their children and investing a lifetime source in their well-being and education, working parents faced difficulties in taking care of their own parents, and on the other side, young adults in poverty found it challenging to support their parents due to unemployment and low wages considering the housing and livelihood expenses (Chae & Heshmati, 2023; S. Lee, 2014; J. H. Park et al., 2021). With the rise in welfare and economic prosperity in Korea, life expectancy has seen an increase, while birth rates have declined. However, low pension rates and high rates of elderly poverty have made it challenging for those who do not own their homes to afford suitable housing, resulting in difficulties in finding healthy living environments for the elderly, thus many of them ended up living in jjokbangs, banjihas and goshiwons.

2.5. Social Housing and Non-housing Solutions for Low-Income Households

By 2010, it was noticed that the housing supply finally exceeded the number of total families demographically, however, increasing one-person households were not taken into account (S. Kim, 2014). The mass of built housing units and apartments were mostly designed for at least a typical four-person household, at higher prices than most of the one-person households of the

³ According to the OECD report, elderly poverty was calculated according to the “income lower than 50% of median equivalised household disposable income”.

youngest and the elderly living in the poverty threshold could afford. Even young adults with low income did not have much of a choice to live in Seoul after two major economic crises. 2010 was also a turning point for affordable housing initiatives because for the first time in governmental policies the concept of “social housing” was used apart from public housing. Public housing in Korea has corresponded to social housing until the 2010s.

The difference between public and social housing is usually interchangeable according to the owner. Public housing is mostly funded and controlled through central and local government loans and initiatives while social economy actors and non-profit organizations mostly initiate social housing in three ways: borrowing land from the municipal governments to build and lease the units; renovating buildings that previously were non-housing residents like dormitories, or renovate abandoned buildings (Chung et al., 2020). The demographic focus of social groups primarily encompassed specific segments of society, including various income brackets such as young adults, the elderly, families with limited financial means, and recently married couples, all of whom adhere to a budget (ibid). Between 2010 and 2013, the national government supported social housing initiatives with various projects named “Hope Housing” and “Happy House” releasing small studio apartments for less than market prices. These initiatives specifically targeted working young adults, college students, and newlyweds, rather than focusing on specific income levels (B. Seo & Joo, 2018). Due to these accommodating issues of young adults, different types of housing and non-housing solutions emerged. Specifically in Seoul, the number of non-housing facilities rose from 2.2 % in 2006 to 3.9 % in 2014, and the current percentage is almost double this figure hitting 7.9 % in 2022 (KOSIS, 2022c).

For instance, an *officetel* was a non-housing unit that first emerged in the mid-1980s, to ensure both accommodation and office space to then entrepreneurs and investors in commercial areas, which also started to take place as urban housing for one-person households after the Financial Crisis in 1997 (Gohaud & Baek, 2017). Officetels had a workspace, a small bathroom, one or two bedrooms, and a kitchenette. The transition of officetels to accommodation units is stated to be a reaction to the necessity of the estate market (ibid). These types of housing units also were regulated in the early 2010s. On the other hand, *sharehouses* emerged in Japan by the 2000s and became a trend in Korea in the 2010s supported by both public and private business initiatives to meet the demand for affordable housing for one-person household young adults who are in the beginning of their career and also college students who seek an alternative accommodation to dormitories (J.-H. Lee & Kim, 2017; S. Lee, 2021). Sharehouse types of

enterprises can be considered as long-term hotels also resembling goshiwons, with more private and shared areas, shared and private rooms available for a wide range of monthly prices, and living communities like cafes and terrace spaces designed for sharehouse residents. Another accommodation option for urban young adults is called *hasukjib*, which is translated as “boarding house”, and is similar to a goshiwon, however, the managers or owners of the *hasukjib* usually offer three home-cooked meals a day, and services like cleaning and management of facilities included in the monthly rent price, and bathroom and kitchen facilities are common places⁴. Its evolving forms can appear as a goshiwon-like *hasukjib* and one-room-like *hasukjib* where both of the original forms additionally have free meals included in the monthly payment.

Lastly, *One-Room (won-reum)* type of housing also emerged to supply one or two- or two-person households, retrieved from small-housing units available in the estate market with interchangeable prices between deposit and rent. In some cases deposit is relatively high, residents can enjoy affordable rent prices and get their deposit back when the rent contract is over. One-rooms can be considered studio apartment units highly preferred by newlywed, and single young adults.

In contemporary Korea, many accommodation options for one-person households were initially emerged from ever-increasing estate market prices and lack of recognition of the subjective urban poverty, especially for young adults who do not own a property or not supported by other family members. Policy direction for legalizing these non-housing options is aimed at setting standards for the inadequate facilities that danger residents’ health, and regulating property owners’ unjust enrichment due to overcrowding in the enterprises and practices. Goshiwon, the main subject of this thesis, transformed into a housing option in these circumstances.

2.6. Goshiwon as Quasi-Housing

Quasi-housing, or semi-housing in Korea was identified to fill the gap of affordable accommodation needs especially in urban Seoul. The lack of definition and policy towards non-housing enterprises resulted in the proliferation of inadequate and poor living standards, as

⁴ Hasukjib (boarding house) is not a frequently studied topic, and mostly mentioned in the news articles.

landlords and managers of goshiwons did not observe the existing policy regulations enacted by parts in ambiguous categories that do not directly point out goshiwons. In 1999, a goshiwon was described in a court as: “a place that test takers use for temporary study and sleeping to prepare for exams and does not fall into the category of independent residential housing” (“gosiwon-eun yeogwan”, 1999).

Although there were no regulations directly about goshiwon as a housing type, it was classified as a quasi-housing facility since the Housing Act was enforced in 2009 and 2010 (Sin, 2011). This Act was enforced to benefit from the existing non-housing units that already have resided as accommodation units, and also to be able to regulate and establish a standard for many substandard environments caused by these non-housing units. The existing non-housing types that occasionally caused imbalances and inadequate forms of housing sourcing from the lack of legal backgrounds included officetels, dormitories, and senior welfare housing. These four types of semi-housing units were called “Urban Residential Housing (hereafter, URH)” (Gohaud & Baek, 2017). In 2010, by the time goshiwons were identified as quasi-housing, the number of registered goshiwons in Seoul had reached 4,085, experiencing an annual 8 percent growth since 2004 (Sin, 2011). Considering an average of 40.4 rooms per goshiwon, the total number of units was estimated to be around 165,034 (ibid). According to the Seoul Metropolitan Government (2023), in 2020, the total number of registered goshiwons reached the number of 5,663 in Seoul. On the other hand, according to the “Minimum Housing Standards” enforced in 2011, the minimum floor area of 14 square meters, rendered the goshiwon enterprises ineligible to be referred to as adequate housing.

Among the housing type of one-person households in Seoul, goshiwons usually host young adults from their early 20s to late 30s and recently appeal to a wide range of populace belonging to a variety of income levels. Although it is associated with poor facilities and an unhealthy environment, with regulations and renovations, updated versions of goshiwons are increasing with the demand for smaller and more affordable housing units. Goshiwon residents favor affordable rents, free facilities like Internet access, hot water, basic meals, and preferable locations. Most goshiwons are placed in the vibrant city center, around university campuses, near subway stations, and wealthy neighborhoods where lease deposits and monthly rental prices are considerably high (Sin, 2011)⁵. Price-wise, goshiwons constitute the cheapest rent

⁵ “According to data from the special fire inspection of goshiwons conducted by the Seoul Metropolitan Fire & Disaster Headquarters in 2008, 23.3% of the 3,200 goshiwon residents were students (25,215 people), 19.5% were job seekers (21,135 people), 24.1% were office workers (26,086 people), 12.7% were unskilled laborers (13,755 people), and 20.5% were unemployed (22,237 people)” (Sin, 2011).

among other quasi-housing and small housing units, however, comparing the floor area, goshiwons are the most expensive option in rent ratio per square meter among them (ibid).

In contemporary Korea, goshiwons as a quasi-housing type differs from its initial form of educational isolation box. The new kinds of goshiwons are called: goshi-tel, one-room-tel, living-tel, etc. The reason behind this is to make goshiwons sound like a hotel where people are accommodated for a limited time and to supply the need for affordable shelter for one-person households. The structural types of goshiwons are differentiated according to their use: *“multiple houses, illegal multi-household houses, one-room houses, and ordinary houses”* (Yoo et al., 2019). Goshiwon enterprises operating as multiple houses typically include bathroom and toilet cabins within the rooms. However, the kitchen is designed as a separate common space area. Some illegal goshiwons adopt a multi-household setup by placing cooking utensils within the units, resulting in their illegality. Despite this, certain operators install small cooking facilities in rooms to attract more tenants at higher rates. Additionally, goshiwons serve as one-room studio accommodations, often referred to as one-room-tels, with unauthorized cooking facilities. Property owners of such one-room-tels find registering their assets as goshiwon enterprises profitable. This is because goshiwon properties, unlike one-room studio apartments categorized as housing units, are not required to provide parking spaces (a legal obligation for studio apartments- one-room enterprises), making them a more profitable choice for landlords. Moreover, there is an issue of goshiwon rooms being illegally converted from ordinary housing units.

Beoljib-hyeong goshiwon is a bee hive-type goshiwon where the main floor is shaped as a rectangle and there are so many rooms stuck to each other around and in the middle of the area like leaving a narrow space for the rotation-type corridor (J.-W. Seo & Lee, 2020). Bee-hive goshiwons are considered the most vulnerable type in case of fire because of the density of rooms and rooms placed at the inner circle of the floor difficult to reach from outside and to evacuate rapidly. The isolation type of goshiwons is placed on the rooftops of buildings, associated with poor conditions and illegal construction. Goshiwons with a middle corridor and room only on two sides mostly consisting of rooms with windows facing outside, demonstrate less density and a safer environment for its residents. A goshiwon enterprise can be placed on several floors of a commercial building some floors belonging to a restaurant, café shop, etc., while it may cover a whole building.

The 2010s witnessed structural regulations of goshiwons evolving over the years in response to various technical and safety concerns that have arisen since their inception. Notably,

the initial regulatory measures were implemented relatively late, with the first significant regulation occurring in 2009, focusing on fire safety. This regulation mandated using incombustible materials for the inner structure and made it compulsory to install a simple sprinkler system in areas of multiple use. However, the existing buildings were not obliged to use sprinkle systems or incombustible materials at the time of construction, thus unless these did not go through remodeling, they kept the poor facilities that caused danger. Concurrently, a law was enacted to prohibit the coexistence of certain facilities, such as elderly or child care centers, within the same buildings as goshiwons, aiming to mitigate the risk of fire breaks. In the subsequent year, 2010, the Enforcement Decree of Building Law was introduced, establishing standards for ventilation, lighting, and boundary walls between rooms. Further enhancements in regulation occurred in 2011 and 2012, where fines for illegal construction or renovation of “the second neighborhood living facilities” namely quasi-housing units were increased (Koo, 2019).

These legal measures sought to control the proliferation of households more than capacity of the building and a restriction was placed on the total floor area, capped at a maximum of 500 square meters. By 2015, the regulatory framework became more specific, directly addressing goshiwons as multi-living facilities by setting guidelines for the length and width of corridors and rooms. Even the thickness of concrete was stipulated, underscoring a comprehensive approach to ensure the safety, comfort, and compliance of goshiwons with established standards. Additionally, it was forbidden to place rooms in the basement floor. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport announced preparing ‘Crime Prevention Building Standards’ for apartments with more than 500 households including goshiwons are subject to mandatory application of the requirement to install a security room or access control system at the entrance and install CCTV. Consequently, goshiwons were considered as disaster, safety, and welfare blind spots, caused by lack of regulation and recognition from the government.

2.7. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it can be deduced that in Korea, housing policies and demographic structures have changed dramatically from the 1970s when goshiwons first emerged near universities and preparatory schools to two decades from the Millennial. For those who were just about to start their adult lives apart from home, the promise of a prospective future with insurance of a safe and stable living was jeopardized initially by the unaffordability of renting a housing unit. The miracle economy of Korea let a considerable percentage of people who could not chase the systematic ladders of owning a house or having an accepted career partly because they were not given a prosperous family with wealth and assets or a high intellectual level to climb the ladder from zero to top. Economic crises in 1997, 2004, and 2008, and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis demonstrated an increase in the one-person household population while poverty seems more visible in society's discourses and policy directions.

Although considerably late, the government seems to accept this poverty rate and regulate existing illegal non-housing solutions to supply for young adults who fall into the vulnerable class of housing. In this context, goshiwons can be considered forced housing for those who cannot afford to give away a deposit for living facilities with better conditions. Given that goshiwons have a more expensive rent value per square meter which results in giving away a considerable amount of temporary or daily jobs' salary, it compressed young adults into a poverty loop, unable to save funds or improve their conditions. While the regulation level of goshiwons as quasi-housing enterprises is considered as weak and inadequate, the wealth gap forces the most vulnerable individuals to live in goshiwons with the worst conditions that existed in Korea.

In the next chapter, the image of the goshiwon living that is demonstrated in the Korean media resources will be examined.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. Seek for Advancement: The “Fighting!” Generation

*“The sky in Seoul is so clear, my sweatpants are scratchy.
Why did I leave my hometown, to eat cold rice balls?
I draw a window on the white wall, it feels like the seagulls are calling me.
I hear my mother's voice.
This one pyeong place, is my dream, my universe.
Cheer up Noryangjin Park, ain't you still young?
Cheer up Noryangjin Park, never, never give up.”*⁶

“How come you wear and eat better than I do?” Gong-Myung asks in fascination to his friend Kim Ki-Bom who lives in a goshiwon of Noryangjin and has been preparing for the national examination for three years. The drama “Drinking Solo (2016)”, tells the story of the students and teachers of Noryangjin, the so-called “Mecca of public examinations”, and reveals many aspects of goshiwon living. As a response to Gong-Myung’s question, Kim Ki-Bom answers in reproval: “Do you think all of us students here eat cold rice balls and wear old sportswear? It is all the image that the media creates!”, admitting that he uses his mother’s credit card to buy food and clothes. The two friends spend the day together, eating limitless food from a 4 dollar buffet, playing games at a center, and drinking till night, Gong-Myung says astonishedly, “I thought Noryangjin would be so depressing, but it turned out to be a city of dreams where you can spend your mother’s money without hearing her complain! Should I start studying (for the national examination) too?” (Drinking Solo, 2016, Episode 1).

Goshiwons, situated in goshi-villages like Noryangjin and Sillim-dong, served as vital hubs for students striving for socioeconomic advancement by succeeding in national examinations

⁶ A song from indie singer Sai’s first album.

It is also the ending song used in the documentary “Noryangjin Goshi Village – Despite All (2011), and it is also a song that contains the joys and sorrows of goshi-saengs while picturing life in a cramped goshiwon room without windows.

for many years. Initially established to offer shelter to those undertaking intensive preparatory courses for exams, these compact living spaces became synonymous with the dedication and determination of students pursuing their aspirations in Korea. To secure positions in public office or become licensed attorneys, students faced the daunting task of passing highly competitive multi-layered examinations characterized by incredibly low acceptance rates. These exams represented not only a pathway to prestigious careers but also a means of attaining societal recognition and acceptance. In the aftermath of the 1997 Financial Crisis, when the pursuit of a career through succeeding in the examinations became increasingly competitive due to the downsizing in the private sector, goshiwons emerged as sanctuaries where students could fully immerse themselves in their studies, shielded from distractions.

As the demand for academic success grew, goshiwons expanded to accommodate scores of students from all corners of the country seeking refuge in Seoul's educational hubs. The students, commonly referred to as *goshi-saengs* or *gong-shi-saengs*, infused the goshi-villages with energy, transforming the neighboring areas and igniting fresh social movements that frequently caught the media's attention. Despite changes in the goshi-village landscape over time, with an increasing number of workers, unemployed individuals, and the homeless seeking shelter in goshiwons, students remained central. Their relentless pursuit of academic excellence and unwavering commitment to their studies continued to define the essence of goshiwons well into the mid-2010s. Their influence went beyond merely reshaping the physical landscape of these neighborhoods; it also deeply enriched the cultural tapestry of Korean society.

The image of goshiwons in the goshi-villages differed from being cheap accommodations to the ones that gave the best services to the students so that they could succeed. In 1993, Geumtop Goshiwon located at the entrance of the goshi-village in Sillim-dong, Seoul, became a hot topic by producing 39 people, or 14% of the 288 people who passed the second round of the bar exam that year, ranking first among the 200 nearby goshiwons in passing rate (“hangosiwonseo”, 1993). Geumtap Goshiwon kept first place in 1995, 51 people passed the second round of the bar exam under its roof. The manager of the goshiwon stated that the success is sourced from his attitude towards the residents because he thinks of them as his children (“hanjibung 51myeong”, 1995). The standing of goshi-saengs in the goshiwons was at first seen as children who were separated from their families and needed special treatment to become future government officers, attorneys, and respected people of Korean society. At this point, the image of goshi-saengs living in goshiwons was embraced with compassion, high value, and care.

Around the same time, women's presence in the goshi-villages was one of the topics that the media was aware of. The increasing number of women who spent more than 15 hours a day for years studying in goshiwons was recognized as a sacrifice to become esteemed members of society such as patent attorneys, certified public or tax accountants, and governmental officers (“gihoeui ttang”, 1994). This presence was evaluated as women seeking equal opportunities by taking time off their lives to participate in the socioeconomic sphere.

As the popularity of goshiwons like Geumtap Goshiwon and successful preparatory academies increased in Seoul widening the goshi-villages, the term “*goshi-fever (goshi-yeolpung)*” became a way to explain the standing of goshiwons in the Korean society. The commonness of goshi-saengs was highlighted with the slang “386” meaning someone aged in his/her 30s, graduated in the 80s, born in the 60s is either an activist or a student preparing for the civil service exam. This demonstrates that 386, a resistance group against the military dictatorship in the 1980s, also has the image of being a leading figure in driving the goshi fever that leads people living in goshiwons (Choi, 1999). The stereotypical image of goshiwon residents striving to achieve their employment goals often portrayed them residing in goshiwons wearing simple sportswear- sweatpants and heavy coats as they hurried between study academies. Rather than spending holidays leisurely with their families over rice cake soup, they opted for a simpler lunch of toast and cold rice balls purchased from street vendors (Jang, 2009).

The issue of unemployment became a prominent concern associated with goshiwon living after the 1997 Financial Crisis. A prevailing trend emerged wherein students opted to take a gap year from their college studies to focus on preparing for employment examinations and obtaining certificates from employment or language academies in advance. By 2009, this trend had become so prevalent that college students began referring to themselves as “those scheduled to be unemployed”, exacerbating concerns surrounding unemployment. Consequently, an increasing number of students relocated to goshi-villages, residing in goshiwons to accumulate various certificates in hopes of supporting their employment prospects. Moreover, some young individuals who abandoned their pursuit of jobs in the private sector redirected their efforts toward preparing for the civil service exam. This shift in focus led them to move from one goshiwon to another in pursuit of their career goals (“geugsimhan chwieobnan-e”, 2009).

Behavioral patterns of goshi-saengs were significant indicators of the goshiwon living that became a part of their ways of advancement. Although almost half of the graduate students were from rural universities, goshi-villages also were popular among goshi-saengs who lived with their parents in Seoul. A student stated that although his family lives in Seoul, he resides

in a goshiwon in Noryangjin to prepare for the civil servant exam. Because the longer the preparation period, the weaker his will seemed, so he visited Noryangjin to give himself a change of environment where people around him would have the same spirit (Kim, 2007).

In the late 1990s, a notable trend emerged: graduates from rural universities began relocating to goshiwons in Seoul to attend prestigious national examination preparatory academies started to switch their goshiwons frequently. A goshiwon manager in Sillim-dong remarked, “goshiwon students typically switch accommodations every 3 to 6 months, giving them the nickname “*grasshoppers*” due to their frequent moves” (“Munhwapung-gyeong”, 1999). Young adults with their intensive study schedules often exceeding 10 hours a day, sought new environments regularly as a survival strategy, demonstrating the frustrating side of staying in a cramped goshiwon room.

Another survival strategy of a goshi-saeng was demonstrated in the documentary Noryangjin Goshi Village- Despite All (2011), a goshi-saeng living in goshiwon, Choi In-Hee (24, employment examination) showed her wall covered with notes saying: *“I keep changing the place of the furniture because it is too frustrating to live here. My bed was actually facing another direction, so whenever I could not sleep, I sat up to read the notes I put on the wall”*. Changing the place of furniture, and putting pictures of loved ones on the wall, goshi-saengs also tended to put on their motivational quotes, and mottos, or write down the reasons why they want to pass a specific exam, and the reasons they moved to a goshiwon in the first place. Once students decided to take an examination and got in a goshiwon room, they prepared themselves not going back until they succeeded.

The success stories of goshi-saengs kept stoking the goshi fever in the 2000s. In 2002, Ms. Park Chun-Hee became the oldest person to pass the national examination at 48 years old. She was a divorced woman with two kids, a graduate of a rural university’s textiles department, and became a snack bar owner in Seoul in her mid-30s, and finally decided to prepare for the national examinations to become a public officer to prove herself and make her children proud. Leaving her family behind, she studied at a goshiwon for 10 years, failed the examination nine times, and succeeded on her tenth trial. She said:

If I had known it would take that long at first, I wouldn't have tried it at all. I spent all the money I earned on the snack bar and then got help from my older sisters and younger brothers. I had a part-time job managing and counseling students at a high school in

Sillim-dong during the day, and I also studied at night. (...) Of course, you don't always succeed just because you do your best, but I think the period in which people do their best is a bit short. Will your dreams come true if you stay up all night for a few days or work hard for a few months? (...) life is also about achieving greater success by accumulating failures despite trying your best. (Jeon, 2017)

She was later elected as the mayor of Songpa-gu, Seoul at the age of 56 and re-elected in 2014. Her story of triumph demonstrates the resonance between success and failure, as well as her decade-long stay in a goshiwon, during which she sacrificed her savings and eventually received financial support from her family. On certain occasions, the pressure to receive financial support from families served as a motivating factor for goshi-saengs to intensify their studies. Choi Seon-Ae (26) reflects on her father's sacrifices and stated:

I saw my dad while working once, he was working as a moving-out delivery worker, and he was in the car moving heavy things. It was so dangerous, but he was doing it to make money so that he could make his children study so that I could study in Noryangjin. I think I am strong because he shows me how hard he works for us. Even when I pay the goshiwon fee, my hands shake, and I think of my dad who works for me that way, and that I should do my best. (Noryangjin Goshi-Village: Despite All, 2011)

In addition to the success stories, the media has also shed light on the narratives of failure, serving as a cautionary tale about the transformation of “goshi fever” into a paralyzing “goshi disease” (Choi, et. al., 1999). This phenomenon tantalizes individuals with hope but ultimately crushes them with its obsessive grip. A goshi-saeng in his 40s was found dead in a goshiwon room in 2009, he had been studying for the civil service examination for 25 years, he passed the first round of the bar exam three times and failed the second round each time (“25nyeongan sabeobgosi”, 2009). Another striking story appears in the TV program “*Exclusive World (Teuk-jong Se-sang)*, (2019)” which portrays the life of 74-year-old Mr. Kim within the confines of a goshiwon. Despite graduating in 1970 from one of Korea's top universities, Seoul National University, and marrying before completion, Mr. Kim's journey took a different trajectory. Although he successfully navigated the first stage of the national bar examination, he never conquered the second phase, persistently attempting but never succeeding. Over the years, he

made numerous attempts at administrative and foreign service examinations, only to find himself divorced after his tenth failure and confined to the walls of a goshiwon. Haunted by the spook of failure, Mr. Kim spent 50 years studying for the examination, all the while seeking to maintain contact with his former wife, who firmly refused reconciliation. His goshiwon room appeared cluttered, filled with trash and foreign newspapers that he perused daily. Two photographs of himself and his former wife stood prominently amidst the chaos. Clothes and books lay haphazardly strewn about the room, with a sheet and pillow carelessly tossed on the floor. He lives on ramen and the money he saves from donations and support programs, and sometimes from the toothbrush sets he tries to sell in the subway. Unlike Mr. Park who spent a lifetime studying although failing each time, a goshi-saeng for 5 years, Mr. J (30) ended his life in his goshiwon room by hanging himself to his pants strap on the day of the National Bar Examination in 2011. According to the news, the police remarked that although there was no suicide note, the goshi-saeng probably could not overcome the disappointment of the bar exam for which he had prepared for a long time (Kim, 2011).

In the first episode of “Drinking Solo” (2016), one of the supporting characters is Dong-Young, who comes from a poor family, wears old sportswear, and lives on the leftover food and instant ramen that is free at the goshiwon. After finding out that he failed the exam, Gong Myeong and Ki-Bom take him out for drinks, and he gets drunk, so they take him back to his goshiwon room. His towels and blankets are free giveaways from events. They start to argue about how cheap Dong-Young is, while he defends himself, saying he is desperate to earn his own money too. But he failed the ticket to employment, the examination. While they speak, another man from the next room shouts at them to be quiet. Kim Ki-Bom criticizes him, saying, *“How sensitive! Like he is the only one who studies. If you want it quiet, go live in a one-room studio apartment. Why did you settle in a goshi-tel anyway?”* From the other room, another voice is heard: *“Auntie, did you hear the news? I passed the exam!”* Dong-Young starts to cry out of envy and disappointment. To ease his pain, Kim Ki-Bom and Gong-Myeong start shouting at the second voice to be quiet because this is a goshi-tel, a shared space, where he should be sensitive. The argument lasts. The scene also demonstrates the frustrations caused by poor structures that convey noises between rooms which cause disturbance to the residents maintaining daily lives in these rooms.

The significant period spent in goshiwons symbolizes a time tunnel that carries goshi-saengs to a prospective future that erases their past life’s struggles. This metaphor gives us an outlook of the transformational motivation of the period spent in goshiwon rooms for those who look

for a prominent change in their lives through examinations. A goshi-saeng who lives at a goshiwon stated he noticed he had empty hands at the end of his twenties and decided to take the examination: *"I believe Noryangjin is the place where I can achieve this goal. I came here because I want to live a life different from the one I have. To people who think this is a reckless trial, I can say that I am still young"* (Noryangjin Goshi-Village: Despite All, 2011). His optimistic determination encouraged him to move into a goshiwon in Noryangjin and transform the rest of his youth into a success story.

The goshiwon walls witness the never-ending efforts that were mentioned to bring people success; however, as the years spent in the tiny goshiwon rooms increase, goshi-saengs' become more isolated and fall apart from their families and friends. The stigma of being a goshi-saeng who does not have a job and keeps living on external financial support kept them from socializing and even seeing their families. The goshi-saeng added: *"Here, when I see a familiar face I recognize if they are a test-preparatory student, however to the people I know and who are close to me, it is so difficult to say "I am a test-preparatory student (suheom-saeng)"* (ibid). Living within the goshi community as a goshi-saeng and carrying that identity into other communities presents a significant challenge. The more time spent in goshiwons, the more isolated and alienated individuals become. The feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, stemming from the fear of being stigmatized and unaccepted, drove many people to stay within the boundaries of goshi-villages where they feel more familiar. In 2010, the *"Chuseok syndrome"* was mentioned to explain this phenomenon, it highlighted the urge to stay at their goshiwon rooms rather than go back to their hometowns for holidays to avoid facing the questions family members and relatives may ask about goshi-saeng's life. A goshi-saeng (30, female) stated that she had been preparing for the bar examination for four years and was asked a bombardment of questions like when she would be a judge. She said: *"The holidays are really hell for me because I haven't gotten married yet and have repeatedly failed exams. I plan to study alone at a goshiwon this Chuseok"* ("deodo malgo hangawiman", 2010).

On the 6th episode of the drama Drinking Solo (2016), Kim Ki-Bom visits his hometown to attend his grandmother's birthday party. Standing at the entrance, he witnesses a dialogue between his mother and grandmother. His mother says: *"I hope he does not come to the party, I am so ashamed of him! Other kids all got into the good universities in Seoul, and some even started their careers..Look at how Kim-Bom is...He wanted to come and give you a gift today, but I barely managed to stop him. Passing the examination would be the best gift he can give you"*. Kim Ki-Bom returns to his goshiwon room after watching the party from afar,

disappointed, and starts to study harder despite all the distractions of spending time with his friends, seeing his family, and having a romance.

No matter how many goshi-saengs flood the goshi-villages to prepare for a variety of examinations, the acceptance rate for most of the examinations was as small as 3.5 percent by 2009. Most of the goshi-saengs who could not show progress in the examination kept the pattern of trying for years living in a goshiwon and attending academies, they were called “*goshi-nang-in*”, which the media images as students who start studying with great enthusiasm and ending up being just poor people. A goshi-nang-in living in goshiwon remarked in an interview: “*I’m too old to get a job anyway, and all I have done so far is study for the civil service examination, so I can not find another job. Songworms only eat pine needles, so this is the result of digging only one well for several years*” (Park and Heo, 2009). This phenomenon was criticized by Kim Jae-Cheol, the President of the International Trade Association in a column comparing goshi-villages to China’s Silicon Valley, *Zhongguancun*. He indicated that *Zhongguancun* in China has formed around the universities to be a leading technology center launching satellites, while what forms around universities in Korea is more goshiwons turning towns into a Mecca for examination preparatory students, which only get students to memorize law codes and raise more public officers. It was stated to become a dynamite to the natural sciences in Korea (Kim, 2002). While many goshi-saengs get stuck in their goshiwon living for years, in the end, most of them become 9th-level public officers who are responsible for public affairs and uncritical positions. Especially after the Law school system was introduced in 2009, and the abolishment of the national bar examination in 2017, goshi-villages were filled with people who sought the lowest positions in public offices.

The constant demand for putting an intense effort into an examination that the acceptance rate is so low, although most of the gong-shi-saengs that fill goshiwon rooms fail at the exam, they keep being a gong-shi-saeng even if they give up on trying to pass. These people are called the “*gongshi tribe*”. One of the reasons they keep trying is that there is no age limit for the public civil servant examinations. The difficulties of getting a job in the private sector push more people to try to pass the public officer examinations at their very best or give up on employment altogether. That is why the gong-shi tribe is told to burden the economy. It was stated that many people have given up on preparing for employment and spend more time in PC rooms, playing games. A goshiwon general secretary indicated that “*out of the 30 people living in his goshiwon, about 5 wake up around 10 o’clock, go to the PC room, and come back after it is dark. It’s like taking the civil service exam without even studying*”. It was stated that

the gongshi tribe is not participating in economic activities, the economic loss due to the gongshi tribe fever amounts to 17.1429 trillion won every year (Choi, 2017). Unemployed, and grown apart from family because they hide their failure, the gong-shi tribe consists of people who are apart from society, alienated, and unmarried filling goshiwon rooms in goshi-villages.

In a scene of *Drinking Solo* (2016), Kim Ki-Bom and Gong-Myeong stand while looking towards the goshi-village and Kim Ki-Bom says: *“I think whoever invented the goshiwon did it to torture us. There is a thin wall separating hell and heaven. The sound of happiness and sadness are all heard at the same time”*, confessing he read that line from a webtoon. Gong-Myung admits saying *“You bastards’ life is just as difficult as I saw on the TV. This is not the image that media creates right?”*. Kim Ki-Bom smiles while slightly nodding. Consequently, the image of goshiwon living that is reflected in the media contains goshi-saengs and their struggles while trying to achieve their utmost goals of advancement with a “fighting!” spirit. From success to failure and strategies for survival, they constitute the main foundation of why goshiwons were prominent in Korean society.

In the closure of the documentary *Despite All* (2011), goshi-saeng Park Myeong-Jin (29 years old, 7th level civil servant examination) stands on the rooftop of a building, looking towards the goshiwon and hagwon buildings:

It looks quiet, but not because there is no one out there, probably because all are studying hard in silence. In the far future, when I look from this view, I will remember it as the best day of my life, because I have never lived so fiercely and boldly. If I fail, of course, it would be hurtful, but even if that happens I can say I have no regrets.

The interviewer says she will not be able to recognize him in a suit other than the sportswear he wears. He says he has never thought of it adding *“I think I would be so proud”*. The camera focuses on his bare feet in the classic purple-white slippers. As the media reflected, by 2019 goshi-villages were not dominantly contained by goshi-saengs anymore. Most of the academies that gave lectures for the bar examinations were closed down and some of the students that came to goshi-villages for the academies opted for the online lectures. In the goshiwon rooms left empty by goshi-saengs, a variety of people started to rush in.

3.2. One Pyeong Life of the Commoners⁷

“People who have been separated from their families live here

They live to forget their families

They live because they cannot forget their families

They live to be separated from their families forever/ (...)/

My windowless room,

Except for the bones, as cozy as a coffin...”

(Part of Cha Chang-Ryong’s poem ‘At Goshiwon’)⁸

A carp bread (bung-eo-bbang) without the carp (bung-eo)⁹: goshiwons without goshi-saengs in it was called this in the 2000s (Yoon, 2002). In time, the name of goshiwon changed a little while its standing in Korea started to mean so many other things simultaneously. It is called a goshi-tel, living-tel, oneroom-tel, or even a sharehouse although it was formerly a goshiwon. The goshiwon industry was stated to be the utmost investment thrust for 50-60-year-old people who are looking for a safe way to maintain income after retirement (“Silbeo chang-eob”, 2002). It was even one of the most prosperous sectors after the economic crisis in the 1990s, making the most of floor area by leasing every pyeong. While the goshi-saengs who used the goshi rooms decreased over the years, they were filled by various people: day laborers, runaway teenagers, unemployed people, bar workers, foreign workers, homeless people, etc (Joo, 2006). People ranging from teenagers to the elderly filled in goshiwons because they didn't have money to pay a deposit but needed to find a shelter to sleep in. The IMF Crisis in 1997 became a starting point for clusters of failures that caused individual bankruptcy that led people to fall into poverty, the Credit Crisis in 2004, and the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 further challenged the already bankrupt people. These people found the substandard accommodations like jjokbangs, banjihas (semi-basement rooms), and goshiwons to at least have a shelter of

⁷ One-pyeong: 3.3 m²

⁸https://munjang.or.kr/board.es?mid=a40702000000&bid=0034&list_no=5745&act=view&ord=B&nPage=1&c_type=A&c_page=

⁹ “붕어빵에 붕어가 없듯 아예 고시생 없는 고시원”

their own¹⁰. As goshi-saengs emptied goshiwon rooms and more people started a goshiwon business to profit at the best they could, goshiwons spread to other neighborhoods.

In 1998, goshiwons that were placed around the illegal entertainment facilities and bars where sex workers and hostesses work was called “*pervverted goshiwons*”. This was reflected as a social problem because, after the economic crisis, many female college students and married women in their 30s and 40s were said to be a part of this labor branch, and found shelter in goshiwons that “encouraged the corruption of sexual morality” (“10dae jeobdaebu geubjeung”, 1998).

Considering the cheap price and convenience of moving in, the free food given to residents, and also the total monthly rent without deposit enabled people to save from paying extra expenses like electricity, hot water, and internet, goshiwons became the best option for those in need of accommodation. The expression “difficult lives of the common people” was used to describe a range of people who are the most vulnerable and face financial struggles affected by economic recession. Goshiwons were stated to be one of the most frequent places to host the common people, who had no choice but to refuge in the confined and dark rooms (Kim and Na, 2005). These common people were mainly low-income individuals and families, who could never break the chain of poverty in their lives. The welfare and basic livelihood support policies were directed through the common people of Korea, and those who lived in goshiwons also fell into this categorization.

In 2008, goshiwons had a spotlight by reaching 250.000 residents in total, the media started to reflect the stories of 70 percent of goshiwon residents who were not goshi-saengs, especially the stories of the 3 million “working poor” population who were unable to reach adequate living standards no matter how much they work (Yeom, et. al., 2009). That indicates one out of every 200 people living in Korea in 2008, resided in a goshiwon. To save a little more money, they chose goshiwons which had the worst facilities and windowless goshiwon rooms of one-pyeong (3.3 m²) floor area were symbolic for the common people. These rooms were also called “meok-bang” where the “sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow through” (Lee, 2009). The beoljib type of goshiwons which had the most number of rooms stuck to each other resembling a beehive was one of the representatives of the accommodation for the working poor and unemployed. In an interview, a cook working at a restaurant stated:

¹⁰ See the photographer Sim Kyu Dong’s project called “gositel” via <http://analography.co.kr/gositel/>. He portrays his neighbors living in the same goshiwon, demonstrating the reality of residents’ daily lives.

I live in a goshiwon because I haven't gotten married yet. If you look at the people living here, most of them don't have a job. I have also seen people who came into goshiwons after sleeping on the streets to make a comeback but ended up sleeping on the streets again because they had no work to do. The monthly goshiwon fee is about 200,000 won, but many people move to goshiwons with worse facilities to save just 20,000 won. (Kim and Na, 2005)

Other features of the cheap goshiwons can be identified with thin walls, inadequate fire prevention systems, goshiwons that are placed on the hills of a mountain in redevelopment areas, or goshiwons placed in the same building with restaurants and bars. An owner (55) of a goshiwon that shared the same building with a chicken restaurant stated:

Among the people living here, only one in ten has a proper job. I've been in the business for over 10 years and have hosted everyone from college students to grandfathers, but I've rarely seen anyone leave after laying a foundation and getting married or getting a job. (Byun, 2009)

Family break-up and bankruptcy stories due to the IMF Crisis also demonstrate one of the main concerns of goshiwon living. For example, Mr. Yoon had a divorce and left his home after failing his business and getting trapped by debt due to the IMF crisis in 1997. He booked a goshiwon room with misery, he attempted suicide many times but ended up in failure. He said:

After the divorce, I tried to die alone. I jumped from the roof of the 4th floor of a goshiwon, but I fell on top of a car that saved my life. I took herbicide pills wrapped in kimchi, but that also failed because it blocked my airway and I vomited. Living was difficult, but so dying was. (Park, 2005)

One day he ended up in front of his ex-wife's door and asked her if he could just lay there for ten minutes, and that was the time they got back together. Mr. Yoon may have had a cat's luck, however family break-ups and the bankruptcy of family heads were not accepted in peace in all cases. Mentioned as "the fathers on edge" in the media, family heads in their 40s and 50s who face financial burdens and bankruptcy are said to be ignored and refused at home by their wives and children, forced to divorce, and kicked out of their homes to live in goshiwons (Han, 2012). Some of them were also called "elite poor" in the 2010s to explain unemployed heads of families that were formerly known for great educational and career backgrounds (Cha, 2015).

The documentary "Residential Refugees: A Single Room in the World (2015)" demonstrates a 60-year-old construction day laborer as he indicates has been living in the goshiwon room for 10 years. The room is as small as the length of his arms, when he opens his arms wide, he can touch both of the walls. There is nothing to do but lie down and watch TV. His business also failed after the IMF crisis with a debt of more than 100 million won. He says he was ashamed that he had to run away from the debt collectors who kept calling and finding him at his home. Although his children are now at marriage age he can't contact them after all. "All left to him is his depleted stamina and this goshiwon room, which has become his last refuge" as he earns 800,000 a month, pays 250,000 per month for the goshiwon fee, and, lives on the kimchi and rice that is free at the goshiwon. Losing everything they had, one-pyeong goshiwon rooms became the last refuge of the common people in Korea.

As the elderly population living in goshiwons increased, several issues came to light such as the struggles of dementia patients, poverty, and lonely deaths. In 2017, a complaint was made at a goshiwon in Seoul saying some old man was walking around naked. The 83-year-old man was reported to be frequently taking off his clothes and urinating anywhere. He fell on the street after drinking and was taken to the emergency room (Hong and Choi, 2018). Being a dementia patient, at his stage he could not remember to take his medication or ask for help. As a recipient of basic livelihood security, he received 500,000 to 600,000 won per month from the government, but he was unable to use it. Ms. Kim (80), who lived in a 1.5 pyeong semi-basement room in a goshiwon in Mia-dong, Seoul, had no boiler or electric blanket, so she used portable butane gas to warm her body during the cold winter. She said that if she used it sparingly, she would use one and a half cans a day (Jo, 2016). On the other hand, the lonely deaths that were also seen in Japan were evaluated as a trait of non-developed countries because their solitude was not due to prosperity or choice.

The Korean government accepted goshiwons as one of the “welfare blind spots” where residents mostly reside unrecorded as goshiwons were not official housing options until recently (Choi, 2011). Even after that, goshiwons were seen as temporary accommodations, residents were not added to the general unemployment and poverty statistics which caused constant criticism in the media. Afterward the government’s recognition, those in need but had been neglected were partly discovered and supported so that they could afford to make a comeback in society. Since 2008, the Seoul Metropolitan Government supported homeless people by giving away 6 months of goshiwon fees for the homeless to enable them to have shelter on the coldest days of the year (Lee and Koo, 2018). Mr. Yumo (pseudonym, 74), who lived alone in a goshiwon in Seoul, was receiving basic livelihood security benefits. Since it was not enough to meet other expenses, he peddled bicycles and sold used electronics. However, his business slowed down and he had almost no income. He said, *“If things keep going like this, I’m going to be kicked out on the street because I can’t pay the goshiwon fee”* (Son et. al., 2016).

On the other hand, the homeless people who usually lived in the streets near Seoul Station were encouraged to leave the station and move into goshiwon rooms. An attempt for homeless people to resettlement in life can be examined by the effect of the Big Issue Magazine. Big Issue Group in the UK started this initiative as a social enterprise in 1991 to raise awareness and solutions for poverty and homelessness, which later became a light of hope for homeless people even in Korea. The magazine was aimed at giving homeless people a source of income by giving them sales rights for the magazine, enabling them to shake off the deprivation. Mr. Lee (43), a formerly homeless man managed to find shelter in a goshiwon and then started to study as he got into the Korean Open University Department of Tourism taking online classes from his one-pyeong goshiwon room thanks to being a salesman of the Big Issue Magazine (Kim, 2013). He told the reporters that he later aimed to save money for a lease deposit. Mr. Lim has been working as a Big Issue magazine salesman too, who is known for his optimism and smiling face towards the people around him. He said that he’d been living in a goshiwon and succeeded in saving enough money to pay for a lease deposit now, and he was expected to move out from the goshiwon (Yoo, 2015).

“A room of one’s own”, and the image of the “gorgeous single” who does not wish to share the living space with others, were increasing at the end of the 1990s as the one-person households steadily increased in Korea (Heo, et.al, 2005). People who are living in narrow goshiwons, and moldy semi-basement flats turn these places into more livable places to call home. The household goods store, Daiso, was stated to be famous among goshiwon residents with affordable prices and various options. A college student (22) demonstrated how she turned

her goshiwon room into a 2-pyeong café which she decorated through things she bought not exceeding 5 dollars each. She stated:

When I came home late at night after finishing my part-time job at a convenience store, I felt depressed and didn't want to do anything. I wanted to shake off the gloomy mood and live brightly, so I started decorating my room. (Pyo, 2017)

However, for some of the common people who made a living out of several part-time jobs, and are barely able to pass the day and meet the expenses of their accommodation, being single and alone would mean more of a misery. Ongoing unemployment that breeds poverty resulted in the alienation of those who take shelter in goshiwons. As a typical accommodation for the poor, goshiwons are known to have a high density of population lined side to side. Although residents may hear the morning alarms of each other due to thin walls, it is rare to see people exchanging personal information or recognizing each other. Mr. Lee (56), the owner of a goshiwon said, *“People living in the goshiwon share a kitchen, but they never eat together”* (Seok and Noh, 2011). A resident Mr. Choi living in the same goshiwon stated, *“There was a time when I came into my room alone and was so overcome with loneliness that I thought about committing suicide”* (ibid). Daily struggles to save the day and live at the minimum all the time pushed individuals into depression combined with the feelings of isolation felt strongly in goshiwons.

Besides the family break-up and loneliness being more common themes in the media related to goshiwons, the love story of two goshiwon residents remained a remarkable place. Mr. Noh (31) and Ms. Lee (21) met at a goshiwon with rooms of 1.5 pyeong in 2014. Mr. Noh had left home after graduating from high school and started to make a living on part-time jobs and living in goshiwons, he had a debt of 20 million won because of a business initiative failure selling phone cases. Meanwhile, Ms. Lee had been abused by her father and grandmother and she finally ran away from home to settle in the same goshiwon with Mr. Noh. Anticipating each other's stories, they fell in love and decided to get married. Soon they found out that Mr. Lee was pregnant. Although Mr. Noh started to work on construction sites to save enough money to start a family, the winter season prevented him from working. As the due date of pregnancy was approaching, Mr. Noh felt helpless, *“I was so desperate that I sent the baby and mother to a facility for single mothers and I thought of making money by going on a boat.”* he said (Kim, 2016). Finally, the goshiwon manager conveyed the young couple's story to the Gil-Dong Community Center and the community staff helped them by providing them with

financial support and an eight pyeong (26 m²) semi-basement room covering the 5 million deposit by social welfare foundations, also covering the expanses of birth and mother's health necessities. After this story was published in the media, many supporters sent financial and material help to the couple and the newborn baby.

On the other hand, in the TV special drama "Came to Me and Became a Star (2013)"¹¹ the main characters Mr. Kang-Seok and Ms. Ha-Jin meet at a party and decide to get to know each other, eventually ending up dating. What they did not know is, that the two people were living in the same goshiwon on different floors, and they never came across for a long time. Kang-Seok is a man with debt who suffers financially while trying to cover his mother's hospital fees, while Ha-Jin is an employee at a small company that can not pay her salary for months. The two people end up in the same goshiwon because of financial struggles, however, Kang-Seok does not want Ha-Jin to find out that he is broke, so he lies about his financial situation after he finds out they are living in the same building. When she finds out about the situation, they start to fight. She says:

Sadness may become half when you share it, but poverty? Poverty only doubles. I am getting scared these days. When I thought I would hit rock bottom, I wanted to meet a capable man and go up. I think I loved the Kang-Seok who earns 200 million won annually, not the Kang-Seok who is trapped in a goshiwon because of debt and his mother's hospital bills.

In this drama, the idea and fear of lasting poverty that would stick with Ms. Ha-Jin pushes her away from the men she loves. Although she is also living in the goshiwon same as Mr. Kang, she is pessimistic about the future that can turn out wealthier and happier if she is stuck with him. Discourses in these two examples demonstrate that goshiwon living may be an opportunity to be recognized or seen by someone, someone who might be a friend or a significant other to face struggles together, but also a stigma that can push others away because of its image in the society. Especially for the drama case, the sensation of being socioeconomically trapped in goshiwon is drawn as a hopeless image for the goshiwon residents.

¹¹ "나에게로 와서 별이 되었다".

In the 2010s youth poverty came under investigation with the name of “the era of student poor” or “the Sampo generation” (Kim and Kim, 2011). Young adults who stayed at goshiwons while doing part-time jobs were not added to the unemployment statistics while struggling to get a standing in life and aiming to find jobs and get out of goshiwon rooms. Poor college students and young adults were said to be sleeping deeply in undesirable goshiwons that were no different from jjokbangs which are known to have one of the worst facilities and narrow floor areas (“Jjogbang daleum-eobsneun”, 2012). The motive of sleeping deeply or recession sleep was used to explain people experiencing severe effects from the economic recession, having nothing to do but sleep in cramped rooms. Mr. Park (29), who had been applying for jobs without a positive return stated that he lost confidence and slept half of the day, working part-time at a convenience store to afford to stay at the goshiwon, and when he is on his day off, he often slept the whole day in his goshiwon room (Park and Lee, 2012). Another saying that describes the student poor is called “*min-dal-paeng-i*” which means a slug (Nam, et. al., 2014). The reason they call themselves slugs is to highlight their desperation of not being able to afford decent housing: Even a snail (*dal-paeng-i*) has its own home, however, a slug is a snail without a shell. As harder finding affordable accommodation gets, more college students move into goshiwons making life more difficult. Eventually, they find themselves in a vicious circle, working part-time to save for living expenses and college tuition, giving up credits in school, and losing the scholarships they had. Struggling to cover the expenses of living alone in the metropolitan city without financial support, young adults start their adult lives many steps back from others with less or no financial struggles.

In the documentary “Betrayal of Study - Qualification for Dreams (2016)¹²”, the story of Kim Son-Hye (Sunkyunwan University, Korean Literature) is reflected as an example of the student poor. She works at a ticket-selling cabin part-time to save money and puts only 10 dollars in her wallet each day for her food expenses. She mentions not remembering the last time she ate something nutritious. For three meals a day, she spends 3 dollars each, which leaves her nothing to eat but kimbap (rice and vegetables wrapped with seaweed), rice burger, and instant ramen. Her one-pyeong goshiwon room only has a small single bed and a study desk with a bookshelf above it. She puts her clothes on the bookshelf near her books. She says, “*I struggled the most when I did not have money to afford to socialize with friends and do things that required money*”. She earns 600.000 won from the part-time job she has, which is barely

¹² “공부의 배신 - 꿈의 자격”

enough for her monthly expenses, she buys nothing for herself. In each day of survival, she ends up giving up on things one by one. Buying clothes, meeting friends, eating properly... In the interview she gave, the tone of despair for the future is also felt deeply:

If I see something (I like) to purchase but when can not afford it I feel upset and uneasy.

To be honest, there are lots of things I would like to eat too, but I end up cutting my interest from my surroundings as a way of survival (...) Only if I could have the confidence and belief thinking I will have an increasing curve later in life, it would not be this difficult although I am suffering at the moment in difficulties and poverty. But it does not seem like that right now. If you do not feel the possibility that things will get better later, it gets more difficult to endure.

In the musical documentary “Seoul's Moonlight Night(2010)” A 26-year-old young man, appears to work hard as the youngest cook at a Japanese restaurant. The head chef carefully looks at the meal he prepared, criticizing him for textural mistakes. He does his best to learn from the best chefs, but he keeps getting criticizing side eyes. He appears again as he wipes off the floor nealed down, In the next scene of his interview, at his windowless goshiwon room he says,

The first time I felt like this was the reality was when I first got into the goshiwon. The first thing I remember is the room smelled like alcohol as the neighboring rooms that elderlies used. I kept telling myself ‘Let's hold on for a month’. I didn't even have a blanket then, so I pulled the bed cover and used it as a blanket. The first thing I remember is the smell”. His foot goes under the desk when he lies down. “In the summer, it's really hell, at around mid-August it becomes so hot (in the goshiwon room), that I cannot sleep till 6 am. One day I slept in the subway line (all the way) for two hours (because they have air conditioners) I only gave 900 won for that, and I slept well, then I went to work.

He shows off his drawings of the restaurant he dreams of owning “I really want to succeed and host my family” he tears up while smiling. He lies down while his clothes are hung over

his bed. The one-pyeong life of the common people demonstrates the blind side of being confined in a goshiwon room with its reasons, bright and dark sides altogether. From young adults to the elderly, the media reflects the struggles of the common people with stories of loneliness, poverty, suffering, and hope at the same time.

3.3. Crime in the Next Door: Hell is Other People

*“There are three things that goshiwon does not have. There is no goshi-saeng, no sunlight, and nobody coming after us. As you know, here, there’s just a wall dividing the rooms; you can hear everything, even the slightest whisper from the next room”.*¹³

A small bed lying through a study desk in a tiny goshiwon cabin, surrounded by uncolored thin walls covered with mold, and a window the size of a hand that cannot be opened. When the main character Yoon Jong-Woo comes to Seoul from his hometown in a rural city to do an internship, this goshiwon room is the cheapest option he could find until he can save some money to pay for the deposit of a studio apartment. His goshiwon room costs less than 190 dollars; however, it is placed in a redevelopment neighborhood on the skirts of a hill and will be demolished in six months, also a foreign man who was known to be living in that room committed suicide not long ago. “Strangers from Hell (2018)” is a crime/thriller drama adapted from a webtoon with the same heading, that mainly revolves around the residents of Aden Goshiwon. The residents of Aden Goshiwon are mostly middle-aged men: A gangster-looking man with mean behavior, another man with a wifebeater shirt and threatening looks whom Yoon Jong-Woo caught while cutting pornographic pictures, and mentally retarded male twins that make abrupt appearances, turning the tension of the scenes up. Aden Goshiwon has an unrepaired 4th floor, which used to be separated from women only before a big fire. The manager of the goshiwon tells Yoon Jong-Woo to stay away from the 4th floor so that he would prevent injuries because she could not get a loan to repair the damage. She convinces him to stay at her goshiwon saying, *“You are only here temporarily, you can not find a cheaper place than this room in Seoul, just come in and pass the time”*.

Demonstrating the dark side of goshiwon living, the drama can be considered to have a representative storyline compared to the news in the media based on crimes that took place in

¹³ A line from the drama “Strangers from Hell”.

goshiwons. The fact that there is no way of knowing who you lie next to, gave scenarists many options and ideas of crime to write about. In an interview with the writer of the original webtoon *Strangers from Hell*, Kim Yong-Ki explained how he was inspired by his own goshiwon living experience:

It contains my experience while living in a goshiwon in Eunpyeong-gu, Seoul six years ago. It was a cramped space with no deposit and a monthly rent of 190,000 won. I could hear everyone else's every move. Like the man in room 204 (in the drama), someone secretly stood behind me while I was making ramen and glared at me for a long time because I said something he didn't like, which was almost similar to my real-life experience. There was a time when I realized too late that someone had spit on my back and I got very angry. Human relationships are the greatest pain for humans. Then I realized that I, too, could be hell for someone else. (Jeong, 2018)

Based on media reports, goshiwons have emerged as havens for criminals and frequent crime scenes, including incidents of sexual assault, arson, fraud, theft, and even murder. Being one of the most affordable daily accommodation options, goshiwon managers often overlook background checks and long-term commitments for prospective residents. Consequently, criminal activities occupied a significant portion of media coverage related to goshiwons. Individuals trapped in cycles of poverty and crime often seek refuge in goshiwon rooms. Various patterns of crime occur within goshiwons, with corresponding patterns of criminals who both reside and conceal themselves in these accommodations. For instance, some cases demonstrated a pattern of crime where individuals commit robbery or fraud so that they can afford a goshiwon room of their own. Conversely, goshiwons that host only female individuals seem to be scenes for most of the sexual crimes. Arson and fire breakouts might happen just because of a resident's curiosity, an innocent experiment, or a hateful murder plan. In all, someone in the next door can be the cause of all.

Individuals with criminal records face significant disadvantages when attempting to rebuild their lives after serving their sentences. Goshiwons are one of the first options that come into the minds of those who have just been released from prison. However, the difficulty of making a comeback in society and integrating as a former criminal challenged them to return to what they had known. In 2004, Mr. Jang, a 75-year-old man who spent 31 years in prison for robbery

was caught by the police while pickpocketing again six months after his release. After being released from prison in 2003, he lived in a goshiwon while receiving a welfare subsidy from the district office. Mr. Jang told the police, *“The only thing I learned was stealing, so I ended up like this. It’s easier to go to prison quickly than to be investigated tiringly, so please don’t even check the warrant”* (Kim, 2004). A similar case in 2014 demonstrated the story of a man in his 70s who spent 40 years in prison and was caught pickpocketing 17 days after his release. He was living in a goshiwon with the money he borrowed from a friend. He could not find a job, and because of his age and criminal record, he could not meet the expenses so he committed a crime again (“40nyeon ogsal-I’ 70dae”, 2013).

Conversely, culprits who have not been caught took advantage of goshiwons as hiding places. In 1998, Mr. Hyeon in his 40s was found hiding in a goshiwon room after organizing a suicide scene where he burnt a drunk homeless man to death in his car and even left a suicide note and his identification card so it would look like he committed a suicide. His wife remarked that she held a funeral for him thinking it was her husband (Jeong, 1998). Another case of hideouts was in 2003 when a son of a wealthy family was caught robbing and assaulting young women at a bar. He had lost all of his money gambling in the US, where he went to study, and came back to Korea to live on robbery and hide in a goshiwon (Choi, 2003). For the convenience of hiding their identity or complicating getting caught, serial criminals often changed their goshiwons and phone numbers. In 2010, a serial rapist (29) who had been committing sexual crimes only against teenage women for seven years was caught. The criminal was hiding in a goshiwon in a small room in the Seoul area and traveling back and forth between Jeonju and Seoul (“7nyeongan 27myeong cheongsongyeon”, 2010). In 2012 a man attempted to rape a woman who was living in the same goshiwon but different floor and failed because she ran away. As a result of the investigation, it was revealed that Mr. Kim was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of aggravated rape in 2002 and served in prison until March 2005 (“gosiwonseo miseongnyeonja”, 2013).

Those who had nowhere to go but goshiwons constituted the most wealthless circle in society, thus even keeping their cramped rooms one more month could become reasons for committing an offense or illegal attempts to get some extra cash. In 2011, three teenagers in Seoul were arrested on charges of committing a robbery in which they assaulted women and drunk passengers on their way home in the early morning hours, stole their money, and ran away. It was revealed that after running away from home, they committed the crime to raise money for a room at a goshiwon (“jayangdong ildae 10dae”, 2011). In 2014, a chef in his 40s

was caught in a robbery after returning home late at night after losing his job. A police official said, *“Mr. Park stated that he committed the crime to raise money for goshiwon expenses after being fired from a restaurant at the end of last year”* (“40dae jubangjang silji”, 2014).

On the other hand, in some cases, the reality of the goshiwon living was associated with a weakening impact on the body and mind, which would justify the reasons for crime. Mr. Kim (30), who was indicted on charges of indiscriminately stabbing four people in the middle of Yeouido, Seoul claimed that he committed the crime accidentally while mentally and physically weak at the time. Mr. Kim’s defense team said, *“Before the crime, Mr. Kim was living a poor life in a goshiwon, and even at the time of the crime, he was unable to eat properly, so his body and mind were weak”* (“yeouido kalbulim’ piuija”, 2012).

The inevitable and lasting poverty that pushed many people to live in loneliness in cramped rooms also forced them into addictions, despair, and perpetration. In 2013, it was revealed that some men in their 20s and 30s who live in goshiwons are part of illicit fake marriages with Vietnamese women arranged by a broker and agreed to stay married for more than two years on paper receiving about 3.5 to 4 million won (“wijang-gyeolhon”, 2013). Mr. Kim, who confessed to having married a Vietnamese woman under pretense, lived alone in a goshiwon in Seoul. After graduating from high school, he moved to Seoul and worked as a freelancer, hoping to find a stable job, but when he failed to find a job, he started working part-time at a PC room. *“I could not get a job, but I was tired of earning small amounts of money through part-time work. I wanted to make a little bit of money,”* he said. However, once he got back to his senses, he regretted his decision, he added, *“I was so anxious thinking about the future. I was so blinded by money that I did such a stupid thing”* (ibid).

The poverty loop in some cases has put people through a desperation that led them into a fit of hysteria. In 2013, Mr. Kang (36, unemployed) set fire to the bed in his room with a lighter on the 5th floor of a gosshi-tel. It is known that Mr. Kang called the police immediately after setting the fire and reported himself, saying, *“I set fire to my room”*. A police official said, *“He had been living in one room at a goshiwon for six years and could not get a job, so he set the fire out of anger, and it almost led to a serious accident”* (Lee, 2013). In another nerve attack, Mr. Lee (50) had been drinking and had an argument with the goshiwon owner over being unable to pay back 250,000 won for the fees, and then in a fit of anger, he set fire to his room with a lighter and ran out. A police official said, *“Mr. Lee has been in poor health recently and has been having a hard time financially due to not being able to go to work”* (“25man-won-I mwgogie”, 2014).

Some criminals deliberately choose goshiwons as their target locations for committing crimes. This was also highlighted as a negative feature of goshiwons as being safety blind spots. In 2004, an arrest warrant was applied for Mr. Eom, a 35-year-old man who worked as a telephone repairman also has 8 criminal convictions, on charges of habitually visiting places where women live alone, such as women-only goshiwons or studio apartments, stealing money and valuables, and sexually assaulting young women (“honja saneun yeoseong”, 2004). In 2006, a robber entered a goshiwon and threatened Ms. D (19) with a weapon, and sexually assaulted her, then entered the room of Ms. E (20) on the same floor again and used the same method. He molested them and ran away. Moreover, in the morning of the same day, two female residents living in another goshiwon in the same neighborhood were robbed of money and sexually assaulted by a gunman who appeared to be the same criminal, causing damage to goshiwon residents one after another (“nahollo yeoseong”, 2006). Similar to these cases, in 2010 an office worker, Mr. Park (34) was arrested for stealing money and women’s underwear targeting only goshiwons and empty residential areas (“yeoseongsog-os deung humchin”, 2010). In these cases, women living alone were seen as easy targets as it was convenient to break into goshiwons.

Goshiwon living can be disturbing for a group of reasons, and one of them is thin walls dividing the rooms. Although recently there are laws regulating the concrete thickness of the walls between rooms of goshiwons, the existing goshiwons that have not been remodeled and regulated kept their rooms divided by thin layers that easily convey the slightest sounds to other rooms, which turned out to be reasons for conflicts and attempts of crime. In 2010, Mr. A was accused of entering an empty room at a goshi-tel in Busan around midnight, igniting a bed sheet with a disposable lighter, causing property damage worth 2 million won, and running away. It was revealed that Mr. A committed this act out of revenge after being kicked out by the goshiwon manager four months after he moved in because he was drinking and causing a disturbance (“daehyeong inmyeongsago nalppeon”, 2010). In 2013, Mr. Kim (19) was indicted on charges of stabbing a guest in the next room who warned him for making a loud noise at a goshiwon (“sikkeuleobda hungye”, 2013). Similarly, in 2015, Mr. Jeong was accused of brandishing a weapon at a goshiwon for making a fuss by shouting in his room in the grip of alcohol. When a disturbed resident warned him telling him to be quiet, he got angry and brandished a weapon, saying, “*Why are you telling me to be quiet?*” (“niga mwonde joyonghi”, 2015).

Some incidents that happened in goshiwons created tremendous impacts reflected in the media. In 2006, a case of arson occurred in the basement of a four-story commercial building that spread to the goshiwon upstairs in the 3rd and 4th floors belonging to the Jamsil Goshiwon (Kim, 2006). A firefighter stated that the building lacked emergency exits and the goshiwon rooms were split by wooden walls that conveyed the flames easily (Kim, Kim, and Jo, 2006). Also, the goshiwon had a bee-hive structure with 34 and 36 rooms stuck together in the floors, respectively, and that was also one of the reasons for casualties. Eventually, it was revealed that the owner of the karaoke bar in the basement argued with his former wife, who set the place on fire out of anger resulting in the loss of eight lives.

Two years later, in 2008, a remarkable incident happened at a goshiwon in Gangnam, Seoul. It was mentioned in the media for many years and is still reflected as a warning sign for the blind spots of safety, and socio-economic polarization. A 31-year-old male goshiwon resident Mr. Jeong started a fire with lighter oil and then swung a knife at people escaping the smoke, killing six people and seriously injuring seven others. The criminal was said to shut the victims with a gun first, and then slit their throats with a knife (“gyeongje bulhwang”, 2008). Mr. Jeong was stated to be a social loner with psychological issues doing irregular jobs and living in a small goshiwon room with 170.000 monthly rent. He would talk to a water bottle for hours and spend all his money on claw machines (“beom-in-eun mulbyeong-gwado”, 2008). Although the media sources admitted how horrifying this incident was, they also accepted some of the perspectives that had led Mr. Jeong to be pushed into a thirst for revenge. The fact that he came from a rural area to live in one of the luxurious neighborhoods in Korea with tall buildings and high-end goods stores, but lived in a bee-hive-type goshiwon highlights the contrast in living conditions. This phenomenon was evaluated as an illness of a polarized society.

The drama “Strangers from Hell (2018)” also demonstrates the social frustrations of Yoon Jong-Woo, who came to Seoul to start his adult life away from home, getting a job in a well-known neighborhood, but living in a goshiwon that is placed in a redevelopment area. He was formerly a promising writer in college, however, when he started working for the company of his friend from college who used to be less successful, he started to get disvaluing comments from his friend such as, “*Look how things turned out, you used to be a promising writer at college, now you are working for me as an intern*”. Throughout the drama, the transformation of Yoon Jong-Woo from a nice guy to a furious man thirsty for revenge is demonstrated via his relations with people, his girlfriend, his colleagues, and the people in the Aden Goshiwon.

In some of the scenes, we can witness how thin the walls between the rooms are, and someone in the next room keeps watching Yoon Jong-Woo from a tiny hole he pierced without concern. He feels someone breaks into his room but somehow cannot prove it. His surroundings also push him to become a loner, where people around him criticize him for not acting like everyone else, putting up with the difficulties in life, and enduring life in goshiwon.

In contrast with the socio-economic hardships that pushed individuals to face frustrations in pursuing daily lives and eventually leading them to various crimes, an incident in 2015 demonstrated a reverse case of a formerly wealthy individual. Mr. Kang (47), a man who had a successful background and a family murdered his wife and two daughters after failing at his job and secretly moving into a goshiwon near his home to make it look like he was going to work for a year. Mr. Kang was stated to follow the “elite course” which meant having the ideal course of life in Korea: working as an assistant to a famous professor in graduate school, getting a good job, and even buying an apartment in Gangnam, making his friends envious (Kwak, Nam, and Joo, 2015). A resident who lived on the same floor at goshiwon recalling his memories of Mr. Kang, said, *“Only during lunch, he would go up to the shared kitchen on the 4th floor; boil ramen, and then eat it alone in his room”* (ibid). When Mr. Kang moved out of the goshiwon, he said *“I decided to find an office in Yangjae-dong, Seoul, and do business with people I know,”* but instead, murdered his entire family about a week later.

Rounded bee-hive goshiwons with windowless rooms hosted many people from different backgrounds. Daily workers, job seekers, students, loners, homeless and runaway people, foreigners, losers, and also criminals. Unregulated and unnoticed, goshiwons until the late 2010s were seen as blind spots for safety, and tried to be replaced with other types of accommodation. Meanwhile, patterns of crime related to goshiwons kept being reflected in the media.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I aimed to reveal the unvisited aspects of goshiwon living as a societal insight that is absent in the literature in English. By doing so, the research contributes to Asian Studies and the study of societal transitions according to a spatial phenomenon. It specifically demonstrates goshiwons as an inseparable reaction to the socioeconomic transformation in Korea. To take a wholesome picture of the research subject, I used media resources to reach the fingerprints of what has been reflected about goshiwon living and the individuals it embraces, and reviewed an archive of online news articles between 1993 and 2021, while selecting documentaries and TV series were used to support the emerging stories. Rather than initially assessing a conclusion, it was intended to discover what the media resources lead and demonstrate about goshiwon living in the way it was experienced in the stories of individuals. Thus, I conducted the ethnographic content analysis (ECA) to gather the stories by the researcher's interpretation to construct an insight into the research subject. The fieldwork I conducted living in a goshiwon room is also one of the components that helped shape this research (see *Appendix-1*).

The socioeconomic turn of goshiwons as accommodation solutions was demonstrated in Chapter 2, by revealing the evolution in the housing policies and market for low-income households that revealed goshiwons as an accommodation solution. It was shown that a part of Korean society identified as the housing vulnerable class has always been visible in policies yet not resolved by the efforts. On the contrary, the housing vulnerable class found ways of taking shelter in inadequate forms of housing to keep from ending up in the streets. The redevelopment projects that introduced Seoul to the world as one of the most prosperous and safe cities also concealed inadequate and substandard living spaces, while encapsulating many stories about the unequal development reflected in society. The policies towards low-income households rendered ineffective over the qualification conditions that left them incapable of being one of the residents in the renewed neighborhoods that once were shantytowns. At this point, goshiwons proliferated in the city center, around human resources companies, and in the skirts

of the city where the mass production process took place and daily workers fled to and became a shelter for those with a limited budget to live in the city.

Demographic changes in Korean society were not considered in housing policies until the late 2010s. The emergence of one-person households rendered existing housing units that were formerly designed for a family of four unavailing and overpriced. Thus, confined and practical spaces were created rapidly to serve the needs of individuals. This necessity originated a whole new branch in the estate market generating goshiwons as one of the options that was already present in the goshi-villages. Out of the one-person household population, the ones that were affected the most by the economic recession waves that started in the 1997 IMF Crisis were identified as the young adults and elderly showed unique patterns of goshiwon living in years. Young adults in poverty had few choices to pursue their lives ending up residing in goshiwons, by taking periods of preparing for an examination or employment or doing irregular jobs enough to keep their rooms but not to enhance their conditions. For the elderly, goshiwons became refuges that kept them alive in solitary. The pensions and social support they receive only let them pass the days in the sunless walls of the confined rooms. Although the literature on goshiwons highlighted that statistically goshiwons were resided by young adults between 19-39 age group, the media represented stories of all age groups from runaway teenagers to elderly in their 80s living in goshiwons.

In Chapter 3, three concepts were chosen to represent major aspects of goshiwon living. In the first part, stories were represented of the individuals who chose the examination track that promised them a life different than the one they have, with advanced conditions and respected standing in society, demonstrating a devotion to their lives in goshi-villages. As the age limit was removed in the national recruitment process, not only young adults but individuals of all ages filled goshiwon rooms to dedicate their time to examination preparations. A goshisaeng living in goshiwon was demonstrated as someone wearing old sportswear and slippers, having basic meals outside because of lack of time and money. Although the articles handling goshiwons as a place for examination preparatory are less presented than other conceptions that were mentioned in this research, being the starting point of the spatial standing of goshiwons, it kept lingering in the contents and discourses in the media.

Goshiwons became transformation stations for examination takers where they left their entire lives outside to focus on the notes they put on thin walls. The introduction of the Law School system in 2009 rendered many goshisaengs ineligible for a career in law after the abolishment of the national bar examination leaving them a chance at taking examinations for

being civil servants and 7th and 9th level governmental officers. Previously, individuals from any background could study in goshiwon rooms and attend lectures at the best academies in Seoul to prepare for the bar exam. Between success and failure stories, the fact that the outcome of the time they spend in goshiwons is being one of the civil servants or low-ranked officers was subjected to criticism. For individuals, it was seen as an opportunity in life to advance their conditions with hard work, so they unconditionally spared their lives to be lived in goshi-villages even though they lost contact with family and friends. It further caused social isolation and alienation towards the world outside and pushed goshisaengs to stay at their goshiwon rooms in the holidays with reservations about being judged by their surroundings.

It was demonstrated that thousands of goshi-saengs spent years in goshiwons wasting their time on the examinations with low acceptance rates, and became losers in the discourses of society. This further trapped them in confined rooms, doing part-time jobs to keep their current situations although at some point some of them gave up on the examination. In this sense, the goshiwon living of examination students as reflected in the media demonstrates an insight into how motivational it can be to have a room of one's own although small and stuffy, to spend meaningful time to be remembered as a period in life that is filled with hard work building a prosperous future. Contrarily, it is also seen as a lost time that deteriorates people's mental health and causes wasting one's productive years leading to downward mobility in society.

On the other hand, goshiwon as a refuge or an accommodation solution in Korea was processed as a spatial reality and a mirror to poverty that is overseen in the politicians' discourses and revealed statistics. The neglected and invisible people losing hope and prospects in life, filled goshiwon rooms that goshisaengs has been emptying due to changing examination systems and online lectures. Their stories were reflected in the media starting from the 2000s gave out a balance sheet of what happened in Korea after the IMF Crisis in 1997. Individuals with a poor background or bankruptcy history chose the cheapest goshiwons with the worst facilities, the representative rooms mostly did not have a window and the floor area did not exceed one-pyeong, also the walls dividing the rooms were mostly made of thin layers that easily convey any noises. The discourse of the common people included the stories of cooks, drivers, construction laborers, irregular workers, college students, recyclers, homeless people; young or elderly, and people who dealt with poverty and lived in goshiwons to save the day had many things in common.

It was stated in many interviews that whoever lived in goshiwons was perceived as someone who did not have a standing in life, a decent job, or a family. The deposit or jeonse system in

Korea made it impossible for them to move to a housing of any type, and that made goshiwons convenient options to consider. Continually, if they did not mind the bad conditions and stuffiness of the rooms, they could benefit from free electricity, wifi, and basic food ingredients to save more money. Most importantly, they did not have a better choice. Bankruptcy and family break-up stories, suicidal thoughts due to financial difficulties, and loneliness came in first when inquired about the goshiwon living of the common people in the media. Loneliness was a spatial contradiction because although tens of people lived side by side, hearing each other's daily rumbles, it was rare to initiate any type of relations made from scratch in goshiwons. As in the instance of the Korean drama "Came to Me and Became a Star (2013)" (page 48), the reality of goshiwon living for commoners was seen as a vicious cycle that would keep one in the cycle of poverty. In this respect, youth poverty was reconsidered once again as an unemployed generation got stuck in goshiwon rooms, they ended up postponing or missing the prospect of having a balanced life, nutritious food, and involving in social activities to have a goshiwon living alone, trying to make savings for their future. The young giving up generation had to deal with depression and social isolation while starting their lives many steps back aiming to reach the competitive job market someday and have better conditions.

Goshiwons being a blind spot for safety and crime was reflected based mostly on crime articles. This conception may reveal a stigmatizing discourse assessing goshiwon residents as prospective criminals, which would generate a fallacy. The conception intends to demonstrate how a legally unregulated shared living facility such as goshiwon can cause a threat to society with its poor structures and convenience of hiding one's identity. The fact that living space is narrow and overall density is high caused disturbance among the residents. Using common places like the kitchen and laundry room with other people demonstrated an insecure image rather than being an opportunity to socialize. For instance, a phone call may be heard through the thin walls of a goshiwon and make a teenager or a middle-aged man so angry that they would stab the person in the next door. There are some patterns to the crime-related events that happen in goshiwons. Goshiwons became a shelter for criminals who could not adjust to life outside after serving quite a time in prison, criminals who needed a hide-out not to be caught after committing an illegal act. Switching goshiwons repeatedly became a way to avoid revealing their identity so that they could successfully be forgotten. Some criminals target goshiwons directly to extract money or commit sexual crimes. If a female resident accidentally left her room unlocked, a pervert could easily get to her room to commit a sexual crime. In the media, this was reflected as criminals targetting women who lived alone, which demonstrated

a trend involving goshiwons. On the other side, some people committed crimes just so they could continue living in goshiwons. Goshiwon living was associated with poor conditions, malnourishment, and weak body and mind. Individuals who were unable to break the chains of poverty in goshiwon living tried illegal ways of enhancing their conditions.

Goshiwons' vulnerability to fires has taken many lives of its residents reflected as a major issue in the media. No matter of fire's starting reason, if the materials of the goshiwon are combustible, and the type of goshiwon has many windowless rooms reaching the floor capacity, it is inevitable to meet several casualties. If the incidents that happened in 2006 and 2008 (page 56) were considered, both of the goshiwons were of beehive type where most of the rooms did not have decent ventilation and incombustible materials. Besides, the incident in 2006 was caused by a fit of anger; while in 2008, the well-known arson and murder incident was a perfectly designated plan. The horrifying incident in 2008 was stated to have been planned by a social loner who felt hatred toward the outside world and lost his hopes for a future. Considering he was living in a goshiwon for a cheap price in Gangnam, one of the well-known and elite districts in Korea, the visible inequality and ongoing poverty were highlighted to cause such a reaction slowly in years.

Consequently, this research highlighted the aspects of goshiwon living that have taken a considerable amount of space in the media. Due to the lack of regulation and recognition as housing until the 2010s, goshiwon living was mostly associated with inadequate living conditions, dietary habits, and insecure standing in contemporary Korean society. Evolving according to the needs of goshiwon residents, the image of goshiwons that were reflected in the media consisted of a three-fold conception: a transit instrument for those who were dedicated to studying their ways out of poverty to reach the utmost prosperity; a shelter for those who did not have a place to call home; a hideaway for those trapped in criminal minds. The reason these three concepts were chosen to construct the discourse of the goshiwon living lies in both the frequency of similar cases and the researcher's standing as an interpreter.

Further research in goshiwons reveals many questions that are worthy of inquiry. The transformation of goshiwons after the COVID-19 outbreak has seen more regulated and safer environments for the goshiwons that went remodeling while older goshiwons closed down. Hence, the profile of residents of goshiwons has been changed. There has been a distinction between the goshiwons that are resided by Koreans and the foreigners living in Korea which increases the importance of the study of foreigners residing in goshiwons and their stories. The crime-related issues also can be further investigated to reveal if this connection I revealed

through the media resources is accurate compared to the perception in society. Conducting ethnographic research in the field would also strengthen the recent image and reality of goshiwon living which I initially tried to do earlier. Finally, it would be valuable to inquire into similar phenomena to reveal societal and spatial aspects of housing for one-person households in other regions and societies which would also contribute to advancing the perceptions and knowledge about living spaces.



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APPENDICES

A. Field Research

THIS IS NOT YOUR HOME: said the sticker note on the 3rd floor door of the Star Goshi-tel. I was starving from the long flight, and my way to finding the goshiwon I booked was adequately stressful. I turned to the manager who helped me take my heavy baggage upstairs- there were no elevators- who was complaining about how many he had to carry that day. I asked him what kind of food I could have for it was midnight, and he helped me get my first meal at the goshiwon. He helped me cook some instant noodles and put some kimchi on the side. I felt something between gratitude and anxiety for the idea of using someone else's chopsticks. I thanked him and intended to sit on one of the three bar stools in the kitchen. He stopped me saying I could not have dinner there, that I had to take my dinner upstairs and eat in my room. My room, a 6.6 m² floor with a toilet-bathroom cabin inside, a study desk, a mini fridge, a small wardrobe, and a low bed lying underneath the wardrobe. No windows facing outdoors. I hesitated and asked him again if I could just continue to eat in the kitchen because the spicy ramen would fill the room with its smell. And the ventilation did not seem to work well. He repeated adding the other residents would be bothered and that it is simply the rules here. You could only cook in the kitchen.

It was one of the last days of the summer of 2022 when I decided to do my first fieldwork as an exchange student in Seoul. I booked my goshiwon room through the Internet, with a 100.000 won deposit paid in advance, and the rent was 350.000 won. When I looked at the price range depending on the convenience and facilities, a window facing outdoors costs an extra 50.000 to 100.000 won, an extra floor area of 3 to 6 square meters also costs an extra 50.000-150.000 Won; and if your room had a “nice view”, you could always find someone to be interested in paying more than double of the average room price. The room I chose was the cheapest one and had indoor windows. The indoors were also ventilated through air conditioning. The goshi-tel had 3 floors and around 50 residents, and there were four types of rooms. Room type 1 was the one I chose with no windows and a 6.6m² floor area (2-pyeong), room type 2 was priced at 400.000 Won with windows facing outside, and an 8.3m² floor area. Room type 3 and the so-called “special room” had floor areas ranging between 11 to 13 m², both had windows facing outdoors with a “nice view” as they advertised and cost between

600.000-800.000 won for rent. The special room had enough area to have a washing machine inside, the other residents had to use the other two placed between the floors. One of them always needed repair, leaving only one available machine most of the time. The kitchen was on the 2nd floor, it was the only common area where all the residents cooked and got filtered and hot water, free rice, kimchi, ramen, and sometimes instant coffee. There were people like me, who preferred getting new utensils like bowls, chopsticks, mugs, etc., and bringing them up and down every time they had to cook.

I did not stay at a traditional goshiwon, because around the area, there were no traditional goshiwons, all of the goshiwon-like businesses were titled guest houses or the naming combination of goshiwon and hotel -goshitel and one-room-tel. My gosshi-tel, or oneroom-tel as they call it was close to the Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) which I would be attending daily, and I thought it would be the right place to start observing and getting in touch with my potential interviewees later. The residents were of both genders and shared all the floors, except the first floor was only for female residents. For hygienic reasons, I preferred to have a room with a bathroom cabin instead of the ones with outdoor windows. It was a time when the world, also Korea had just started loosening the COVID-19 restrictions and regulations, so doing the research without endangering my health and safety was important. On top of that, If I were to choose all of the options, I would have to pay way more, which would jeopardize both my finances and the research I was aiming for. I was ready to suffer a bit in my head.

I started my participant observations and writing down reports every day, and since I originally had research involving Korean young adults and their relations outside the goshiwons, it meant for me to contact the Korean students in and around the goshiwon I was staying in. I participated in some student clubs at SKKU and started joining student gatherings, socializing with Korean people, and asking them if they had a goshiwon living experience. Eventually, I had one prospective interviewee who stayed at a goshiwon only for 2 months. The rest of the many students I met at SKKU did not have a goshiwon living experience in their lives. I've had seen a couple of Korean people in my goshiwon, however, the occasion was so rare, that I didn't know how to approach or get in contact with them, so I decided to wait until we got familiar with each other, and they heard me speaking in Korean which I thought would get them more comfortable with me.

The residents of the Star Gosshi-tel were mainly composed of other international exchange students, people from all over the Globe: England, the Philippines, Germany, the USA, and Finland, etc. I would see a Korean guy in his 20s once in a while on the rooftop of the building,

smoking, and all I could do was say hi and have some small talk before I went back to my room. I also saw a Korean couple looking for a room for one of them, and they had a similar personal space that made me think it would not be appropriate to intervene.

After a month of living in my tiny room, I realized all the Korean people were gone. The manager told me that this goshi-tel is usually preferred by foreign students because if Korean people were to stay at a goshiwon, they prefer cheaper ones with more common spaces like toilets and bathrooms. I knew there were goshi-tels with less floor area (3.3m²) and shared toilet-bathroom for 280.000 Won in the neighborhood. Afterward, I thought of moving to another goshi-tel or reaching out to managers of cheaper goshiwons to see if anyone would be interested in participating in my study with a qualitative interview. One of my friends from the jazz students' club was Ms. Shin (pseudonym), doing a master's in sociology, and she told me I could just give flyers about my research to managers of goshiwons, and they could ask the suiting residents if they would like to participate. I thought it was a great idea, I could just talk to the manager of my goshi-tel to see if he knows where to start. However, I could not manage to move my place or reach more interviewees and it was caused because of the illness loop I was unable to get out of, living in my goshi-tel room. A month into my goshiwon living, on the first week of October, I caught a cold on a windy day and I tried to walk past with some flu meds and honey-ginger tea available at every convenience store.

I saw this illness coming on the day it happened, because predicting the weather and choosing what to wear was a huge problem for me as the summer days were about to end, and some days were way colder than others. While living in a goshiwon room with no windows, I would have to look at the weather forecast, get out of my room, walk through the long and narrow hole, and look out of the locked window to see what people were wearing and how it would be transcribed into my wardrobe. The air conditioner was working out of my control, I sometimes woke up to its sound at 2 AM, soaking from the illness, and felt the cold breeze of the air coming from the ceiling. The filters of the conditioner were filled with dust, I could not tell the last time it was cleaned. I cleaned its surface; however, I was not happy with the quality of the air filling my room every day. On top of that, the intense smell coming from the drain pipes was not helping my condition, whenever I cleaned the room, the smell of bleach combined with the one coming from the pipes, the air conditioner, and the dusty old vacuum cleaner made it challenging for me to breath inside the room. I also had to dry my clothes inside the room, hanging them on the horizontal pole close to the ceiling. The room had floor heating and when I didn't have the strength to clean the room- the old vacuum didn't seem to work properly

anyway, I could feel the warmth with the dust rising from the floor. The bed was small and low to the ground. Along with all these conditions, I started having severe dry coughs in the second week of my illness.

I saw a doctor my friends introduced me to, and started getting multiple medications including antibiotics. I had been ill for two weeks when I started to feel unbearable pain in my lungs. I changed my doctor and went to an internal medicine clinic (내과) that had x-ray machines and a doctor who sees clients with lung diseases. After months of treatment, a CT (computerized tomography) was taken as the last decision to figure out what kind of problem I was having with my lungs to cause such pain. It was revealed that my ribs were broken from the dry coughs I had had for weeks long and that I had bronchitis. The doctor indicated that: *living in a room with no access to fresh air directly is probably the reason for such lasting illness and the elaboration of a cold into an infection that caused bronchitis, and also the severe coughs.* I had to take medication on three-fourths of my stay in the tiny room. On one of those days, I wrote on my field notes:

“The hardness of the bed was causing increased sensitivity in my ribs, so I doubled up my puffer black jacket on my back for it to embrace me more softly. This way, lying down, the pain was less intense (...) Even just sitting up required a lot of energy so that I could get up without feeling pain. That's why it took me some time to get up. I changed my clothes; I was completely soaked. I put on the jacket I had been lying on and went to Daiso (...) Back in the room, as I opened the door, the diminishing capacity of my lungs filled with the intense drain odor. I immediately dropped what I had in my hands and slowly took off my sweater. Despite the pain I was feeling, I couldn't stand the smell and stuffiness. Wearing gloves, I poured bleach down the drain and cleaned the components inside”.

From my field notes on 30 October 2022

The fracture in my ribs limited my movements dramatically and the conditions in the room were endangering my health further, blocking the way for me to get better. After 3 months of living in a cramped room with windows facing indoors- and two months of suffering from illness, I decided to at least change my room to the one that had windows facing outdoors. It was a big challenge for me, to carry everything to the one available room 2 floors below without help. I packed everything in small parts and started to go up and down between floors slowly as the manager came and helped me carry the last couple of the bags. In an hour or two, I settled in my new small but unstuffy room with natural light, and I wrote to my field notes: *“I feel more*

at home, I do not want to stay in an air-conditioned room(with indoor windows) anymore (Field notes, 25 December 2022).

The manager of the goshi-tel and I had friendly relations with each other, from the first day I arrived, he was so kind and pleased that he could communicate with me in Korean. Throughout my illness, he tried to take care of me on his terms. One day, he brought me a mini rice cooker which he brewed coffee in earlier, and told me to use it as an air moisturizer, and then hesitated and decided that it was a dangerous idea. Eventually, he advised me to cook rice with it, although the rice was free in the goshi-tel, he said it was more hygienic to have it all by myself with this rice cooker, rather than the one everyone uses regularly. I secretly tried using the cooker for air moisturizing and I have to admit, it worked. However, I fell asleep during my trial, and it was a dangerous idea as the manager had already warned. He was truly sorry about my misery in the room, he even gave me his TV saying he could just use his phone to watch stuff.

The occasion of seeing other residents was so rare, that when I went to the kitchen to cook something that required more time, maybe fried rice, I would keep seeing the same people all the time. During my stay there, there were four foreign students in my class staying in the rooms close to each other, and they would always cook and eat together, I did not know how they managed to eat together, one would have to sit on the chair and the three would have to sit on the bed plates on their hands, but I envied them for having company in the goshi-tel. The first time we had a conversation, exchanging surprised reactions of not knowing we were residing in the same goshi-tel, we planned to hang out together sometime, but we never did. Other than that, I would only see a couple of people repeatedly, who regularly used the kitchen, and they were all exchange students like me, we usually had a small talk about how the classes went and the places we had been.

I had a social surrounding thanks to my efforts in student clubs, especially the jazz club, my friends would have dinner with me just so I would not feel lonely during my difficult times in the goshi room. One day, Ms. Shin and Lee (pseudonym) from the jazz club showed up with a huge bag filled with home-cooked meal, instant soup, canned tuna, cooked rice, and vitamins giving their best wishes for me to get better soon. It was such a blessing moment as I had been too weak and inappetent to cook and I was living on bread, ramen, and rice, their gesture made me feel like I was not alone. My dear friend BB, my Seoul-mate, whom I met at the Incheon Airport and found out we were going to the same school for one semester, gave me a big gratitude for sharing her precious time with me so I could feel better.

However, on some days, when I felt the heaviness in the air, I did not want to share or whine about it, instead, I wrote on my field notes:

“Here, no matter what time of day it is, when I turn off the lights, I feel suspended in emptiness, with my view limited to the reflection of the red light filtering through the fire alarm. Unaware of the outside world, except for the occasional sound of pedestrian crossing signals and the sounds from the rooms and corridor around me—sounds that I eventually stopped hearing—there is only my television, my bed, and me. I feel the need to write here. When I go to the bathroom, I wish the cabin door would open to the left so I could see the television. Then, I could even recommend this lifestyle to others. But still in all... It creates in me a desire to escape from my responsibilities outside. I imagine a black hole open in the middle of this room at night, and through that, I find myself in a completely different world.”

From my field notes on 4 November 2022

Staying at the Star Goshi-tel for 4 months, 3 months in room type 1 and 1 month in room type 2, I have experienced and portrayed a form of goshiwon living. Some of the aspects that I gathered about goshiwon living are as follows:

1. The cramped space disabled the possibility of staying active and exercising in bad weather, the goshi-tel did not have any facilities or space for anything but studying and sleeping.
2. The space spared for studying did not help the urge to go outside and study somewhere else than the goshiwon room.
3. It is forbidden to bring a friend -both genders- to the goshi-tel and eat in the kitchen, so there were no shared areas that enabled socializing which pushed the residents to stay isolated in their rooms.
4. There was only one kitchen for over 50 residents' use, so no matter what one wishes to cook, one had to choose a recipe to be done in a limited time. The kitchen would get so crowded at some hours of the day that most of the residents chose to order or eat out.
5. The rooms were cleaned by the residents. If a resident did not clean the room before moving out completely, she/he could not get their deposit back. So the parts of the room like the filters of the air-conditioner were not cleaned regularly, causing a serious threat to health.

6. Type 1 rooms were threatening to health in the long-term stays, The doctor confirmed that to have a healthy environment, the room should have access to a healthy way of ventilation- if not directly able to access natural ventilation having an outside windows.
7. The indoor windows disable the sense and ability to reach life and weather outside, isolating residents physically and emotionally. This may affect residents' abilities.
8. The goshiwon living affects residents' habits of cooking and eating, the space reminds its residents every time that this is not a home, so they should find a way to live accordingly. This results in many quick and irregular meals that are innutritious, which is threatening to the health and immune system.
9. Because of the lack of facilities inside the goshiwon, residents tend to spend more time outside exercising, eating, socializing, etc. which would result in spending more than they would if they chose to stay somewhere else with more rent, space, and freedom (autonomy).
10. The insulation in the room with outside windows was not adequate, letting the cold wind inside.
11. The goshiwon was placed in a commercial building, while living in the room with outside windows, the sound of music playing at the Starbucks downstairs could still be heard inside.
12. The silver lining was goshitel's location on a vibrant street close to the university and also to student-friendly restaurants, theatres, and shops, thus being a considerably convenient place to stay. Also, its price was more affordable than the other options which revealed no personal space.

B. Tables for Crime Incidents

Table 1. Theft, fraud, and illegal business crime cases related to goshiwons (2003-2014)

No	Date	Case
1	14.07.1999	Mr. Kang (31, Wolgye-dong, Nowon-gu, Seoul), had been selling pornographic CDs and sex toys through the computer he installed at M Goshiwon in Jongno-gu, Seoul, and was arrested on charges of violating the law on music and video products. He is suspected of having made a total of 45 million won in illegal profits until recently.
2	22.08.2003	A son of a wealthy family who went to study in the U.S. and lost all of his money gambling was caught by the police after robbing women in their 20s and assaulting them. He has been hiding in a goshiwon .
3	7.01.2004	A 75-year-old man who spent 31 years in prison for theft was caught by the police while pickpocketing again six months after his release. After being released from prison in June last year, he had been living in a goshiwon while receiving a welfare subsidy from the district office.
4	05.07.2007	Mr. Hwang, 31, is accused of breaking into a single woman's room at a goshiwon in Seoul, threatening her with a weapon, and stealing 7 million won worth of valuables over the past four months
5	3.03.2009	Mr. A (27) was caught by the police for stealing fruit and kimchi from a communal kitchen at a goshiwon in Buk-gu, Gwangju. It is known that Mr. A, who was unemployed, worked as a day laborer after dropping out of college , but suffered economic difficulties.
6	31.05.2010	31st, the Gwangju Northern Police Station arrested Mr. Park (34, office worker), who targeted only goshiwons and empty residential areas and stole money and women's underwear, on charges of theft and is investigating.
7	25.06.2010	Mr. A (25, female), without detention, is on charges of theft for stealing clothes from a public washing machine at a goshiwon .
8	17.05.2011	ATM thief arrested in Gyeonggi-do. The police said that Mr. Kim committed theft after injuring his hand while working at a special glass manufacturing factory in Gyeonggi-do in November of last year and staying at a goshiwon in Suwon without a fixed job .

9	11.10.2011	Three teenagers in Seoul were arrested, including Mr. Sim (18), on charges of attempted robbery and other charges of committing a so-called 'punching' robbery in which they assaulted women and drunk passengers on their way home in the early morning hours, stole their money, and ran away. It was revealed that after running away from home, they plotted a crime to raise money for a room at a goshiwon.
10	12.03.2013	Lim brothers, Mr. Lim (34,19) who lived in a goshiwon and worked as day laborers, found it difficult to cover living expenses with day labor alone, so they stole money selling fake concert tickets.
11	15.07.2013	Na Kyung-Sul (51), and his accomplice, Choi Young-Gil (61), were arrested on charges of altering a check worth 10 billion won, withdrawing cash, and running away. It was revealed that they evaded police pursuit by switching vehicles and cell phones every two to three days and moving between motels and goshiwons in the metropolitan area.
12	15.10.2013	Mr. A (32) was arrested on charges of fraud, who made millions of won by pretending to sell iPads on an Internet second-hand trading site, receiving deposits in advance, and then cutting off contact. He committed a crime intending to raise money for the goshiwon expenses when he was unable to find a job.
13	8.11.2013	Mr. Song (+70) who spent 40 years in prison was caught pickpocketing 17 days after his release. He was living in a goshiwon with the money he borrowed from a friend. He could not find a job, and because of his age and criminal record, he could not meet the expenses so he committed a crime again.
14	8.01.2014	A banker (41) who embezzled 1 billion won was caught two years after leaving home to live hiding in a goshiwon.
15	13.01.2014	A chef in his 40s was caught in a robbery after returning home late at night after losing his job. A police official said, "Mr. Park stated that he 'committed the crime to raise money for goshiwon expenses after being fired from a restaurant at the end of last year," and added, "We arrested him because he was unmarried and living alone in Seoul, and there were concerns about him running away".
16	12.11.2014	A man in his 40s who had graduated from a masters degree in Seoul hit his father and received a restraining order from the court. Not long after, he visited again and became abusive and was

		caught by the police. The reason for his behavior was that his father, who was well over 70 years old, refused his request for living expenses for goshiwon.
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Table 2. Sexual crimes and intrusion in goshiwon (2004-2013)

No	Date	Case
1	16.09.2004	(Sexual assault on women who live alone) An arrest warrant was applied for Mr. Eom (35, telephone repairman, 8 criminal convictions) on charges of habitually visiting places where women live alone, such as women-only goshiwons or studio apartments, stealing money and valuables, and sexually assaulting young women.
2	11.12.2006	A robber entered a goshiwon in Daejeon, threatened Ms. D (19) with a weapon, and sexually assaulted her, then entered the room of Ms. E (20, female) on the same floor again and used the same method. He molested them and ran away. Moreover, at about 5:40 a.m., about an hour later, two people, including Mr. F (20 years old, female), who was sleeping on the 4th floor of a building in the same neighborhood, were robbed of money and sexually assaulted by a gunman who appeared to be the same criminal, causing damage to goshiwon residents one after another.
3	19.03.2007	A woman in her 20s suffered gang rape due to the delayed police response. Ms. Choi returned home 15 hours after being gang-raped at a goshiwon just 200 meters away from the police station.
4	24.11.2010	A serial rapist (29) who committed sexual crimes only against teenage women for seven years has been caught. Moreover, the criminal committed this crime while hiding in a goshiwon in a small room in the Seoul area and traveling back and forth between Jeonju and Seoul.
5	12.01.2011	Mr. Cho (32) broke into a goshiwon in Seo-gu at around 4:50 a.m. on the 6th and threatened Mr. Kim (22, female), a college student from Gwangju, who opened the front door. He is accused of dragging her to the building's parking lot, where he sexually assaulted her and took her belongings before fleeing.
6	31.01.2012	Mr. Lim (54) was indicted on charges of attempting to sexually assault a teenage female student living in the same goshiwon by threatening her with a weapon (special rape under the

		Special Act on the Punishment of Sexual Violence Crimes, etc.). It was announced on the 31st that he was sentenced to three years in prison.
7	01.04.2013	On December 16th of last year, while Mr. Kim was watching pornography at a goshiwon located in Eunpyeong-gu, Seoul, he decided to rape Ms. Lee, who lived upstairs and moved to her room. Afterward, Mr. Kim knocked on Ms. Lee's door, made her open the door, broke into the room, and attempted to rape her. However, Lee Yang resisted and ran away, so the crime ended up being an attempt. As a result of the investigation, it was revealed that Mr. Kim was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of aggravated rape in 2002 and served in prison until March 2005.
8	01.09.2013	Mr. Lee in his 20s was caught by the police after breaking into a female-only goshiwon and attempting to rape a woman. He was living at a men's goshiwon near the women's goshiwon. Because the door to the women's goshiwon was locked, he broke in by climbing a gas pipe, and when Mr. A resisted strongly, he jumped from the second floor and was injured.
9	10.10.2013	Mr. Yang (24), who was indicted on charges of sexually assaulting a woman in her 20s and stealing money and valuables at a goshiwon is sentenced to five years in prison.

Table 3. Arson, Fire, and Bodily Harm Cases

No	Date	Case
1	20.09.1998	Mr. Hyeon (40, Gyohyeon-dong, Chungju-si, Chungcheongbuk-do) who was suffering from debt due to business failure is arrested on charges of burning a drunk homeless man to death in his car and leaving a suicide note and identification card to make it look like he committed suicide. The police said that Mr. Hyun came to Seoul immediately after committing the crime and lived in a goshiwon in Jayang-dong, Seoul. On August 13, he was caught withdrawing cash with a stolen card at Jamsil Station on Subway Line 2. Mr. Hyun's wife (40) said, "At first, I thought my husband had really committed suicide, so I held a funeral for him."
2	11.06.2000	Police tracked down a man Mr. Yoon (37, unemployed) who lived in a goshiwon that was suspected of murdering an elderly couple's family. The police believe that Mr. Yoon is the culprit, citing the fact that blood stains left on clothes collected from the N Goshiwon near where Mr. Yoon was staying matched those of the deceased Kim Deok-jo (71).

3	24.07.2006	A fire at Jamsil Goshiwon in Seoul, which killed 20 people, was revealed to be arson by the owner of a karaoke bar in the building's basement out of anger. The Songpa Police Station in Seoul received an arrest warrant for Mr. Jeong on the 23rd after receiving a confession of all his crimes from the karaoke bar owner, Jeong (52).
4	20.10.2008	At a goshiwon in Nonhyeon-dong, Seoul, a 31-year-old goshiwon resident started a fire with lighter oil and then swung a knife at people escaping the smoke, killing six people and seriously injuring seven others. The criminal is said to have slit the victims' throats with a knife or cut open their entire bodies. He used to work as a snack bar delivery person and valet parking lot.
5	14.09.2010	Mr. A is accused of entering an empty room at a goshi-tel in Jung-gu, Busan around midnight on the 9th, igniting a bed sheet with a disposable lighter, burning furniture, etc., causing property damage worth 2 million won, and running away. It was revealed that Mr. A committed this act out of revenge after staying at this goshiwon four months ago and being kicked out by the goshiwon manager for drinking and causing a disturbance.
6	31.10.2010	An incident occurred in broad daylight at a goshiwon in Seoul when a man in his 40s(Mr. Choi) went on a rampage brandishing a 40 cm sashimi knife and the police fired live ammunition and arrested him. In the process, one police officer suffered facial injuries and was taken to the hospital. It is known that Mr. Choi got into an argument with the owner because 'they won't turn on the boiler even though it's cold.'
7	04.02.2012	Mr. Lee (37), a game addict living alone in a goshiwon since 2005, divorced and unemployed, stabbed his friend Mr. L (53) 11 times killing him at the crime scene after an argument at a drinking party.
8	24.04.2012	Mr. Woo(31), who lived alone in a goshiwon and was unemployed , is accused of entering a convenience store in Daerim-dong, Seoul while drunk at around 1 pm on the 21st, and when an argument broke out while purchasing alcohol, he stabbed an employee named Park (female, 19) and ran away.
9	25.10.2012	Mr. Kim (30), who was indicted on charges of indiscriminately stabbing four people in the middle of Yeouido, Seoul (violation of the Act on Punishment for Attempted Murder and Violence, etc.), claimed that he committed the crime accidentally while mentally and physically weak at the time. Mr. Kim's defense team said, "Before the crime, Mr. Kim was living a poor life in a goshiwon , and even at the time of the crime, he was unable to eat properly, so his body and mind were weak. "I was exhausted and had trouble sleeping," he said.

10	18.03.2013	Mr. Kang (36, unemployed) set fire to the bed in his room with a lighter on the 5th floor of a goshi-tel. It is known that Mr. Kang called the police immediately after setting the fire and reported himself, saying, “I set fire to my room”. Mr. Kang told the police, “I wanted to kill myself, but when I saw the fire spreading, I got scared and reported it.” A police official said, “He had been living in one room at a goshiwon for six years and could not get a job, so he set the fire out of anger, and it almost led to a serious accident.”
11	29.05.2013	Mr. Kim (19), who was indicted on charges of stabbing a guest in the next room who was admonishing him for “making a loud noise” at a goshiwon, was sentenced to 1 year and 6 months in prison and 3 years of probation in a public participation trial.
12	23.10.2013	The 11th Criminal Division of the Seoul Eastern District Court (Chief Judge Jeong Seon-jae) announced on the 23rd that it sentenced Mr. Kim (66), who was indicted on charges of attempted murder, to three years in prison for brandishing a weapon (attempted murder) at the goshiwon secretary when he was in danger of being kicked out of the goshiwon.
13	31.10.2013	Mr. Park (50) is arrested on charges of setting fire to his goshiwon room while drunk (arson of a building in Hyeonju). According to the police, Mr. Park is suspected of setting fire to the bed in his room on the second floor of a goshiwon in Singil-dong, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul around 10:50 am on the 31st. According to the police investigation, Mr. Park, a construction worker, finished work at around 5:30 am that day, drank alcohol near Singil-dong, entered the goshiwon, sat on the bed, smoked a cigarette, and repeatedly turned the lighter on and off, causing his blanket to catch fire. Mr. Park stated to the police, “I did it out of curiosity.”
14	03.02.2014	The Seoul Central District Prosecutor's Office's Criminal Division 3 (Chief Prosecutor Jang Young-soo) announced that it had arrested and indicted Mr. Sim (21), a student at a prestigious university in Seoul, on charges of causing a fire and causing the death of one person because of lighting a mosquito repellent at the goshiwon where he lived.
13	10.03.2014	Mr. Lee (50) is suspected of running away after setting fire to his room at a goshiwon located in Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul around 9:33 the night before. Mr. Lee had been drinking and had an argument with the goshiwon owner over being unable to pay back 250,000 won for the fees, and then in a fit of anger, he set fire to his room with a lighter and ran out. A police official said, “Mr. Lee has been in poor health recently and has been having a hard time financially due to not being able to go to work”.

14	02.01.2015	A man in his 40s is arrested after stabbing his friend of 20 years because he did not give him 20,000 won (20 dollars). Mr. Hwang had been living on the streets since he ran out of money 3-4 days before the incident and was kicked out of the goshiwon where he had been living. He had known Mr. Yoon for over 20 years while working as a day laborer.
15	08.01.2015	A man in his 40s murdered his wife and daughter after failing his business. He worked in the offices of seniors and juniors for a while, and for the past year, he has been attending a goshiwon 1.5 km away from his home. On the 29th of last month, Mr. Kang moved out of the goshiwon, saying, "I decided to find an office in Yangjae-dong, Seoul and do business with people I know," but murdered his entire family about a week later. Elite poor.
16	03.02.2015	Mr. Jeong is accused of brandishing a weapon at a goshiwon in Chang-dong, Dobong-gu. It was revealed that Mr. Jeong had drunk more than 4 bottles of makgeolli and was making a fuss by shouting in his room. When Mr. Bae told him to "be quiet," he got angry and brandished a weapon, saying, "Why are you telling me to be quiet?"
17	10.11.2018	A fire broke out in a three-story building in Gwansu-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul, killing seven people, including Mr. Kim (56), who was in the goshiwon on the third floor of the building, and 11 people, including Mr. Jo (57), were injured. Daily workers and elderly people in their 30s to 70s lost their lives. There were no sprinklers inside the goshiwon.

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