Introduction of the Research Center on the Commons and Sustainable Society, Social Science Korea, Jeju National University

1. Four Starting Points of Launching the Research Center

1) The reality and debate of Jeju—island of commons
The commons research center of Jeju National University (JNU) is located in the largest island of Korea, Jeju island. The historical and cultural heritage of Jeju which formed in relation to the mainland and natural geographic conditions of the island were direct factors for launching the commons research center. Unlike the mainland of Korea, Jeju has various forms of commons such as communal meadows, fisheries, Yongcheonsu(spring water), Gotjawal forest, and groundwater. Since the 2000s, however, Jeju has been under pressure to privatize and commodify the commons, including natural resources, in accordance with the Free International City plan. On the other hand, the opinion that the natural resources including ground water should be protected and publicly managed as common resources of all of the people of Jeju was raised. The JNU commons research center was born from the Jeju society’s discussion of public management for natural resources. Furthermore, the translation of Governing the Commons by Elinor Ostrom acted as an intellectual stimulus which became available in 2010.

2) The complex crisis of modern society
The modern world has entered an era of "complex crisis" in which the neoliberal market order is strengthening and the resistance against it is aggravating, anxiety and fear are spreading due to the diffusing terrorism and war on terror, environmental crises including climate change are universal, and the conflict and struggle over resources and their depletion are increasing. As the economic crisis continues to exacerbate, natural resources are exploited and destroyed with the rich striving to accumulate more wealth and the poor fighting to survive. In addition to the economic growth policies of developed countries, the global environmental crisis is exacerbated as industrialization policies are promoted in developed countries to catch up with developed countries. On the other hand, the fight for resources and hegemonic competition prevent the formation of intergovernmental governance to overcome crises. These crises polarize the countries and classes even further, and this polarization only adds to the class struggle and generation conflict in domestic politics. This complexity of crisis has spread the perception that the solution of environmental crisis should be combined with politics and movement for the transformation of the system.

3) The shock of March 11 and the advent of risk society
The Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011 and Fukushima Nuclear Accident which occurred in the midst of the complex crisis clearly showed that the problems of persistence of developmentalism without consideration for the sustainability of nature, blind faith in science and technologies, information control by state apparatus, and bureaucratic expertism. The March 11
earthquake had a great impact on the Korean society and boosted discussions on sustainability and “risk society.” Furthermore, the government’s inability and capitalism’s greed became evident through the prevalent “yellow dust and fine dust” phenomenon, the epidemic of SARS and MERS, and the Sewol Ferry Disaster. These events turned into opportunities to raise awareness of the risk society and increased demands for a sustainable society.

4) The growth engine of neoliberalism: accumulation by dispossession the commons
The dominant response to these complex crisis and arrival of the risk society is based on neoliberal ideologies. Neoliberal globalization has tried to redistribute wealth to a minority of ruling classes on a global scale and endeavored to create a new growth engine by commodifying and capitalizing the resources of the commons that have not been incorporated into the market. However, one of the main reasons these crises and risks are increasing is due to the despoilment and destruction of commons by capitalism and power. The propensity to “accumulate through despoliation” is the ruling principle of neoliberalism which has been raging on for the past 30 years. Here, the key “despoilment” is the commons. Neoliberalism has privatized the commons—a foundation for the general public’s lives—as well as public resources to maximize the profits of capital, while commercializing natural resources to utilize them as a new growth engine. Yet, this only resulted in exacerbating the social and economic inequality.

With this backdrop, the National Research Foundation of Korea(NRF) proposed “the advent of the risk society and sustainability” as an agenda in 2011 as part of the Social Science Korea(SSK) project. Our research center applied for this project and started the research on the “public management of nature and sustainable way of life” since September 2011.

Social Science Korea
In 2010, the National Research Foundation of Korea(NRF) launched Social Science Korea(SSK) to vitalize collective research in the field of social sciences. SSK follows a phased growth model in which they first provide three years of research support to small-scale research teams. After evaluation, medium-scale research clusters are selected for research support. These clusters are evaluated again after three years and research support is provided to large-scale research centers. Jeju National University(JNU) was selected as a small-scale research team in 2011, as a medium-scale research cluster in 2014, and as a large-scale research center in 2017. In order to enter the large-scale research, we established “Research Center on the Commons and Sustainable Society” in June 2017.
2. Ostrom’s Theory of the Commons as a Theoretical Reference Point

1) Ecological Transition
We believe that we need to pursue an “ecological transition” in politics, economy, culture, law, institutions and other social areas to move away from the “complex crisis and risk society” modern Korean society is facing. This “ecological transition” signifies a systematic reform and transformation in the methods mankind uses nature to create and distribute wealth, the lifestyles that consume wealth and dispose of waste, and the popular ways of thinking and practices regarding the issues of modern society. The fact that people have already discussed the “limitation of growth” since the 1970s and “sustainable development” was presented as an alternative over 30 years ago suggests that “ecological transition” is a task which cannot be postponed any further. The United Nations (UN) and international community have proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which combine the alternative goals for the “complex crisis and risk society” of the modern society. These goals can be summarized as “constructing a just and sustainable eco-welfare society.” We believe that the task of restoring, expanding, and restructuring the commons in planning this alternative system will be the key process.

2) The results and implications of Elinor Ostrom’s commons theory
To cope with the “complex crisis and risks” of modern society, we need to stray away from nationalistic control and command and forsake the blind faith in capitalistic market order. The experience from the last five decades clearly demonstrate that the traditional dichotomy of the state and market is the cause of the problems, not the solution.
The person who developed the idea that an alternative other than the state and market is feasible in the most exquisite manner was the eminent American scholar, Elinor Ostrom. Her research, studies, and theoretical work on commons presented the possibility of “sustainable resource management by the resource users.” Before Ostrom, Garrett Hardin, who asserted the tragedy of the commons, rejected the possibility of people cooperating voluntarily. However, through her case studies and theorizing, Ostrom demonstrated that it is possible for a certain group of people to use and manage resources sustainably in the process of using natural resources by institutionalizing their own rules and norms. Ostrom was recognized for her work and received the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009. We determined that Ostrom’s argument is an important reference point for securing sustainability of human society by publicly managing nature. In our research which began in 2011 on a small scale and then in 2014 on a medium scale, we focused on verifying and applying the concept, theory, and methodology of Ostrom’s common-pool resources (CPRs) according to the situations of Korea and Jeju Island.

3. Vision and Strategy of JNU Commons Research Center

1) Results from the small- and medium-scale research

① Vision and results of the small-scale research
Since 2011, the research team has conducted research on the “public management of nature and
sustainable way of life” under the agenda of “the advent of risk society and sustainability.” The initial phase of research that lasted three years was a process of verifying the basic concept and theory for the public management of natural resources and applying them to the reality of Jeju after transforming them creatively within the vision of “rudimentary and critical approach to commons.” During this process, we combined Ostrom’s concept of CPRs with the concept of socio-economic fairness and applied it to the study of land, water, and wind in Jeju.

**CPRs defined from the sociological aspect**

In the process of participating in the debate of classifying goods in economics, Ostrom identified commons as CPRs with non-excludability and rivalry. In economics, the problem of non-excludability that occurs in the supplying goods is generally understood as issues of the nature of the resource, technical conditions, and economic costs. We focus more on the motivation and process of non-excludability that should ensure the livelihood and survival of the public and the public usage right to nature, and stress the social nature of resource use, rather than the problem of how to manage the outcome of the non-excludability of certain resources.

② Vision and results of medium-scale research

The middle-phase research which started in 2014 expanded the scope of commons research to the East Asian regions under the vision of “multi-layered and integrated research on commons,” and strived to be an integrated research through joint research and writings by researchers of various branches. Through the medium-scale research, the research group confirmed the different methods and conditions of commons management in diverse East Asian societies such as Korea, Japan, China and Taiwan. The research demonstrates that the terrain of public-common-private (公共私) that surrounds the commons consist differently in each society. Hence, each society must develop separate strategies to conserve and expand commons and restructure publicness. In addition, a more in-depth research was conducted on the commons of Jeju during the middle-phase research, and a sustainable social model was constructed at the local level through this process. These achievements not only maintain the existing institutional framework that manage commons in the process of commons formation and reformation, but also emphasize the importance of human awareness and practice regarding the commons of nature and surrounding environment.

③ Conditions of theoretical and practical innovation

Through the small- and medium-scale research, it was possible to recognize the limitations of existing mainstream commons research and distinguish the points of theoretical and practical innovation to overcome the limitations. The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework for CPRs developed by Ostrom and other commons researchers has been evaluated as a useful theoretical framework for studying diverse problems in commons management. After the 2000s, the IAD framework evolved into a social-ecological system (SES) due to the criticism of being limited in analyzing the physical conditions of ecosystems and its inability to embrace adaptive change and active conversion. However, the SES model must also move beyond the separation between different branches of studies and divide between science and ecological
knowledge, and that is why the roles of adaptive co-management and ecosystem stewardship are emphasized. In other words, by converting from the past steady-state resource management model to ecosystem stewardship, the integration of the human social system and natural ecosystem is accentuated while enhancing biodiversity, human welfare, and adaptive capacity. This will secure the sustainability of social-ecological system by improving the social-ecological system resilience.

The aforementioned evolution of theory and methodology has a positive aspect in that it goes beyond the limitation of early commons research which demonstrated its limits in analyzing macroscopic fluctuations. However, it is still unclear how the introduction of system theory will be applied to the social commons research rather than the natural ecosystem. Moreover, we have to point out that there is no strategy in which commons management can achieve reform and innovation of the social system within the flow that highlights the change in the natural ecosystem. These limitations originate from the fact that the problems of “change and implementation” have not been resolved actively in the mainstream commons research led by Elinor Ostrom. The existence of commons and communities are fixed preconditions, and the ultimate change is restricted to the institution of management rules. From a theoretical perspective, we need to pay attention to the problem of social configuration and re-configuration of commons and communities. From a practical perspective, we must refer to the discussion of political ecology regarding the crucial role of political-economic system on the sustainability of social-ecological system. Also, for the reform and transformation of modern society, we need to develop a movement of commons—politics of sharing that reorganizes the political-economic power—by expanding the area of commons.

2) Vision and strategy of commons research center

With the above results and theoretical awareness, the commons research center offers the vision of “constructing a foundation of a sustainable society with the strategy of expansion and realization of commons.” The three theoretical and practical strategies to realize this vision are as follows.

① Establishment and dispatch of a Jeju commons model
Through Jeju, Island of Commons (Vols. 1–2) published in 2016, we have stipulated that Jeju is the “island of commons” due to its abundant commons compared to other regions of Korea and discussed the issues of its history, reality, maintenance and management. The books uncovered various examples of sustainable use and management of commons in Jeju. By developing these study results, we will establish a sustainable social model at the local level and provide a future vision for Jeju, based on this model.

② Strategy for expansion and realization of commons
Since the initial-phase research, we have focused on the increasing destruction and despoilment of commons by the violence of the state and market within the neoliberal globalization. Through the middle-phase research, we confirmed the continued destruction of commons and dichotomy of nationalization and privatization have been carried out in the development of East Asia. The
historical experience and reality indicate that the macroscopic structure and institution of the state and market continue to reduce the scope of commons. Therefore, in order to form a sustainable society, the defensive strategy of conserving and protecting commons should be converted into an offensive strategy in which the scope of commons is expanded and conditions are secured for operation in reality. The strategy of “commons expansion” will not only maintain and conserve the existing commons, but also focus on the study and practice of creating new commons. The strategy of “commons realization” does not simply sustain the current commons, but will construct a stable “commons ecosystem” by researching and producing institutional and cultural conditions that enable the creation and maintenance of new commons.

③ Reorganization of publicness through “securing autonomous publicness”

Meanwhile, the discussion on the publicness issue of how to distribute the diverse natural and social resources within the society has been proceeding in the direction of state(-led) reform of publicness mainly based on the theory of state–market–civil society. This discussion on publicness contributed significantly to the democratization of publicness, yet had its limitation of not being able to set a concrete pathway for counter-socialization. Hence, in addition to the existing strategy of democratizing national publicness, we present a two-track strategy called “securing autonomous publicness” which unifies various efforts of social innovation based on autonomy and grassroots democracy and constitutes a political agenda. The existing politics and movements did not include or consider commons in their political agendas. We believe it is necessary to vitalize the “shared politics” and “commons movement” which expand and realize the scope of commons. Through these efforts, we hope to contribute to encouraging experiments in diverse fields that criticize the order centered around the state and market, making connections, and restructuring publicness in a democratic manner.

These three complementary strategies were designed with the macroscopic prospect of building a foundation for a sustainable society, and are based on the judgement that this prospect is possible through the social innovation and implementation founded on the theory of commons.

<Figure 1> Vision and strategy of the commons research center
4. Team Organization and Programs in Commons Research Center

1) Organization
The commons research center operates five research teams to systematically implement the vision and strategies. The Jeju team aims to study the comprehensive local region and build a sustainable community model. The East Asia team was created for research collaboration and comparison with researchers of different East Asian countries. The legal system, history and culture, and alternative society teams were formed with their own unique research agenda. Although the research objectives of the five teams possess a certain degree of individuality, they complement each other. The overall organization and research objectives per team are shown in the following figure and table.

<Figure 2> Commons research center organization

<Table 1> Research objectives for the five commons research center teams
2) Overview of research programs in the commons research center

<Figure 3> Overview of the research programs in the commons research center

3) Team objectives and research programs

① Jeju team
The Jeju team aims to build a sustainable local community model by expanding on the Jeju commons research conducted during the small- and medium-scale research.
To do so, in the large-scale research phase, we have to conclude cooperation agreements (MOUs) with various Jeju villages that were sites of field studies until now and expand the locations to areas that are considered for the sustainable use of village assets such as communal meadows and fisheries, village forests, groundwater and wind. The team will specially focus on theorizing a sustainable Jeju model from the perspective of how the cases that failed and succeeded in sustainable use can be generalized and theorized.
Furthermore, Jeju has provided "International Free City" as its growth model since it became a special self-governing province. However, Jeju is becoming an island of conflict as various issues are raised regarding the development and conservation of villages from coastal areas to mountainous regions. From the commons theory viewpoint, the team will study the dismantling process of commons through the history of Jeju's development and the possibility of restructuring them in a modern manner. The team's objective is to explore a sustainable community model by presenting an original Jeju commons theory as an alternative model for Jeju's vision of future society which is known as International Free City. Jeju team will proceed with the following main
research programs to achieve its objectives.

- Research on Jeju residents’ movement
The residents’ movement which started in 1988 to oppose the reclamation of Tapdong Sea will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2018. The research will analyze the history of Jeju’s development from the commons perspective and confirm the significance of 30 years of Jeju residents’ movement. In addition, academic events will be held together with civil societies of Jeju.

- Research on Jeju’s sunuleum economy
This research will focus on the sunuleum economy (social economy) of Jeju which appeared in the village documents. Sunuleum is a traditional Jeju culture of mutual aid. In particular, the research will analyze the sunuleum system recorded in village documents and examine the original form of traditional Jeju commons that existed in the past. Moreover, it will look into the similarities to the social economy of today which functions as a social safety net of solidarity and cooperation.

- In-depth research of Jeju village commons
The research will go in depth on the topic of Jeju villages. It will start by surveying the joint assets of the villages and move to the process of change in the disassembly and restructuring of commons in the villages. The objective is to accumulate basic data about villagers (community), village assets, culture and customs, and provide a Jeju commons theory based on the collected data.

② East Asia team
The East Asia team is in charge of sharing the achievements of the research center and introducing the flow of international research by utilizing the established overseas researcher network and engaging in continuous academic exchange. Moreover, the team deals with the comparative studies at the East Asian level, transnational environmental threats, and issues of establishing environmental governance by conducting joint research programs with overseas researchers. The East Asia team includes researchers of various nationalities (China, Taiwan, Japan, and the Netherlands) who have different focuses, and there is one network team of Korean researchers that communicate with China and Taiwan and another that works with Japan. Through these networking projects, the East Asia team aims for the commons research center to play the role of network hub for commons researchers in East Asia.

- Enhanced cooperation with global commons research facilities
East Asia team formed a network with various researchers within the International Associations for the Study of the Commons (IASC) in July 2017 by participating in the IASC’s international symposium. The network project will proceed with research centers in Europe, such as the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, through Prof. Bettina Bluemling of the Netherlands.
Enhanced cooperation with East Asian commons research

In case of Taiwan, networking is in process with National DongHwa University and researchers of Taiwanese aborigines through Prof. Hsing-sheng Tai who has participated since the mid-term research phase. Also, there are three researchers participating in the research group of “culture, settlement, commons: sustainable development under environmental change” led by Prof. Lung-bao Tsai of History at National Taipei University. In China, the team expects to begin academic exchange by bringing in Prof. Wen-Jun Li of environmental management at Peking University. In Japan, the team will collaborate with the Japanese commons research society through Prof. Gaku Mitsumata of Hyogo Institute of Environmental Economic Research (HIEER) in University of Hyogo, and continue its cooperation with Prof. Takayoshi Igarashi’s contemporary collective ownership research team.

Culture and History team

The culture and history team is responsible for studying the “historical changes in community-commons relationship” and exploring the “historical conditions and cultural aspects of commons” with the objective of researching the “cultural conditions for a sustainable society.” The team will proceed with comparative research of history and study various forms of commons and commons theories that exist in the past and present. By furthering the understanding of commons, the team will contribute to developing historical and cultural resources that will aid in the modern commons movement and invigorate the theories and practices of commons. The researchers of the culture and history team come from diverse backgrounds such as history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. This diversity in the knowledge of liberal arts is utilized in the monthly workshop of “ideology and theory of commons” which provides opportunity of communication. The mid- and long-term research programs cover four themes.

Islands and commons of East Asia

The “islands and commons of East Asia” program is a long-term research which studies the complex impact on the formation and maintenance of commons by the unique geographical, cultural, and political conditions of an island. During the first year, an academic symposium will be held on the community response and change in accordance with the military base and land expropriation.

Migration and boundaries of commons

The program themed “migration and boundaries of commons” address the issue of how the collective migration of gypsies, Hakka, and Jeju migrants restructure the boundaries of communities and commons.

Commons of indigenous people

This program of “commons of indigenous people” deals with the change in culture, lifestyle and identity as well as the modern configuration and feasibility of postmodern reconfiguration of the aborigines of Taiwan, Australia and Canada.

Culture of water and commons
The “culture of water and commons” program studies the diverse and complex cultures and systems related to water management through the cases that attempted sustainable water management in different areas of East Asia.

4 Legal System team
The legal system team will study the “ecological transition and legal reform.” Through critical research of the Korean development act, the team will uncover how commons were privatized and nationalized in the modernization process, and how this transformation affected the disassembly of existing communities and restructuring of society. Furthermore, the team will work on a legal system that can be presented as a legal principle for commons, and prepare the legal and institutional foundation for the expansion and realization of commons.

- Critical review of the development act of Korea
  The team will review the development laws and systems—Urban Development Act, Electric Power Source Development Promotion Act, Special Act on Enterprise City Development, Compulsory Expropriation System, Public Water Act—from a critical perspective.

- Legal system research to protect and form commons
  The team will examine laws that guaranteed the rights to commons in history and legal references that are functioning or needed, and study cases of disputes related to commons and village property rights.

- Policy study to enact basic laws for village and village joint property restoration
  The team will study policies to enact the basic laws for villages and village joint property restoration that will expand the autonomy of villages and secure the rights for commons.

- Suggestions for ecological transition and legal reform
  The team will not only socially dispatch the academic research of ecological transition and legal reform, but also make suggestions on governmental organization, budget restructuring, and amendments related to development policies.

5 Alternative Society team
The alternative society team will conduct basic research for the transition to a sustainable society based on commons. The specific goal is to explore philosophies, theories, methods, policies and agendas for this transition from a perspective of commons. For this purpose, the team will not only collaborate with other research teams in the research center, but also external researchers and activists and work to link and synthesize alternatives based on commons discovered or explored over time. The alternative society team will have regular team workshops so that joint researchers can connect and collaborate. In addition, the team will pursue a mid-range theory based on the repetitive cross-calibration of field and theory and form a network to establish a strategic link with the field to this end. The team will manage the research schedule in accordance with the four-step problem awareness cycle of [divergence→convergence→deepening→synthesis] from September 2017 to September 2021, a total of four years.
• **Phase 1 (September 2017–September 2019): develop framework to connect and converge problem awareness**

Phase 1 is the phase in which different problem awareness by joint researchers, external researchers and activists are converged. The team will conduct activities to encourage discussion and connection of alternatives between people inside and outside the research center through team workshops. The framework which will become the foundation of the phase 2 research will be formed through the connection and synthesis of the diverse problem awareness accumulated in this process.

• **Phase 2 (September 2019–September 2021): issue a joint report on the transition to a commons-based sustainable society**

Phase 2 will conduct an in-depth research to develop the convergence foundation of phase 1. The team will continue the process of review and repetitive modification through additional research on the basic elements that constitute the framework and exchange with the field. The results will be published as a joint report in September 2021.