Background
“A Documentary of the Undocumented” addresses the human rights issue of undocumented migrant workers in South Korean. Often referred to as The Miracle on the Han River, South Korea, within the past half century, has transformed itself from a poor agricultural country to the 11th largest economy in the world. This rise to a new position in the global economic hierarchy turned South Korea from an exporter of migrant labor to an importer. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, South Korea’s economy was growing rapidly along with living standards which meant stable, secure, and higher paying jobs for many South Koreans. However, this increase in economic prosperity also created a labor shortage in the construction, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors. These shortages, coupled with wage increases, hit South Korea’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs) particularly hard. In order to maintain profit margins, companies started to hire migrant laborers who would work more for relatively less. Thus began a transformation in the labor market in South Korea. The transition to migrant laborers created the need for a legal and institutional framework which employers could use. The result was a systematically racist legal framework of migrant employment called the Employment Permit System (EPS).

Under the EPS, migrant workers work low-skilled, hazardous, dirty, and demeaning jobs -work commonly referred to as "3D" professions- in South Korea. Furthermore, because workers are only permitted to legally stay for three years, with an option to extend determined solely by the employer’s willingness to re-hire them, the EPS system effectively forces those who want to stay to do so illegally. Consequently, the system unintentionally creates more undocumented illegal workers by putting migrant workers in precarious situations. And according to Amnesty International, immigration officers have on multiple occasions “used unnecessary or excessive force and subjected irregular migrant workers to ill treatment.” The situation of undocumented migrant workers, unknown to many, is full of violence, trauma, and stress. Everyday undocumented migrant workers worry about having their homes raided, getting arrested, and being deported from the country.

Goal and Objectives
The objective of this project is to promote peace by bringing awareness to the injustice occurring in South Korea. I plan to do this by filming a documentary of the lives of undocumented migrant workers. The goal is to create a documentary that will implement solutions journalism. Solutions journalism's key characteristics include: identifying the root cause of a social problem, prominently highlighting a response to that problem, and presenting an insight that helps people better understand how complex systems work, and how they can be improved. To the Korean public, most of whom do not know of the plight of migrant workers in South Korea, the hope is that this documentary will enlighten Korean viewers on the systemic discrimination faced by migrant workers and offer a solution which the viewers can partake in, if they feel compelled, to better the situation. The documentary itself will follow the stories of undocumented migrant laborers and will attempt to capture the human details as well as the struggles in the daily lives of undocumented migrant workers that usually go unseen by employers and South Korean natives.

The Migrants’ Trade Union (MTU) in South Korea was formed in the wake of a 381 daylong sit-in protest against the government’s crackdown on undocumented migrant workers. The MTU fights for equal labor rights, an end to the crackdown, and the legalization of all undocumented migrant workers. Another objective of this project is to empower the grassroots organization of migrant workers already existing in South Korea by revealing the discrimination and struggles of migrant workers through film. With the understanding that the problems of migrant workers are deep and extensive, the goal of this project is to shed light onto the plight of migrant workers to spread awareness of this crisis in South Korea in order to gain support for this cause.
Implementation / Method

Upon traveling to South Korea at the beginning of summer, I will go meet the Chief Vice President, Sek Al Mamun, of the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) located in Seoul. I have been in contact with Sek Al Mamoon who is also a self-made film director. After listening to the thoughts of the union members and what they want to be presented in the film, I, along with Sek Al Mamun will decide what the film's focus will be. I will make sure to receive permission and confirm consent from the undocumented migrant workers who will be filmed for the documentary. In addition, in order to protect the identity of the undocumented workers, I will make sure to be extremely careful with the editing of the film. The face will be blurred so that the workers are unidentifiable and their voices will be filtered to be unrecognizable. In scenes in which Sek Al Mamun and I think that face and voice should be put in to make the scene or the story more powerful and/or accurate, actors will be used to represent the protagonist. I will follow these undocumented migrant workers around on days of their choosing and will not film in spaces in which my actions may put the workers in danger. Moreover, the workers filmed will be given authority over the project. They will be allowed to voice their opinions on how the documentary is filmed, what is filmed, and how their lives are presented.

All of the video and audio editing will be done at Yonsei University. I have received permission to access their software as a previous study abroad student. In terms of hardware, Sek Al Mamun has offered to lend his equipment he used in his previous films. The film will be no longer than an hour and will be made available for free on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Both English and Korean subtitles will be put in to reach a wider audience. And since one of the missions of film is to initiate change in South Korea, the film will be submitted to several independent short film festivals in Korea such as the Busan International Short Film Festival, the Daegu Independent Short Film Festival, the Gwangju International Film Festival, the Seoul Human Rights Film Festival, the Seoul Independent Documentary Film & Video Festival, and the Seoul Independent Film Festival.

Assessment / Outcome

The expected outcome of the project is a few thousand views within half a year upon the release of the film. But I hope and expect that the film will receive praise from human rights activists and many ordinary South Korean citizens. The film may also attract a modest number of international viewers. In regards to the outcome of social impact that the project will have in South Korea, I hope that by revealing the lives of migrant workers to the public, South Koreans will see migrant workers as humans who deserve the same basic rights as any South Korea citizen. The outcome of the project will be measured by the reaction to the film on social media platforms. The number of views will measure the outreach of the film. Comments about the films along with the number of likes and unlikes received on social media platforms will measure whether the reception of the film was mostly negative, positive, or neutral.

Sustainability

If this project has a positive and substantial social impact which benefits migrant workers in South Korea, the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) can use their resources as an official union to create content and post about the issues migrant workers face on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. The Chief Vice President of the MTU, Sek Al Mamun, who has already been advocating for the rights of migrant workers through the medium of film can lead the charge in helping others in the MTU learn how to create and upload content to reach a broader audience. Sustaining this grassroots movement online is highly possible with the resources the MTU has already.