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著者(英)	Mutsuhiko Shima, Roger L. Janelli
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## Introduction

SHIMA Mutsuhiko  
Roger L. JANELLI

More than a quarter century ago, Maurice Freedman stated that the comparative study of East Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, lay immediately ahead. He observed that since sociological knowledge of Korea and Vietnam was still limited, "the first benefit to be derived from comparative East Asian studies will be the light cast on them from China" [1970:ix]. He also observed, however, that "our understanding of China itself will stand to gain from a close examination of the variants of 'Chinese' institutions and cultural expressions as we find them in the larger world" [1970: ix-x].

The anthropological study of Korea was just beginning to gain momentum when Freedman made these observations. Though folkloristic research in Korea had been conducted by Korean and Japanese scholars since the 1920s, an interest in the social anthropology of Korea was only beginning in earnest during the 1970s. One indication of this growing interest was the elevation of anthropology to departmental status during the reorganization of Seoul National University, the nation's preeminent institution of higher education. Until that time, anthropology at Seoul National University had been part of a combined department of anthropology and archeology. In the English-speaking world, Vincent Brandt's *A Korean Village: Between Farm and Sea* [1971] was the first book-length anthropological treatment of Korea to appear since the publication of Cornelius Osgood's *The Koreans and their Culture* [1951] twenty years earlier. But the 1970s witnessed a rapidly rising number of American graduate students conducting dissertation research in South Korea. In Japan, anthropological interest in Korea began anew when active scholarly exchange between Japan and South Korea resumed toward the end of the 1960s. *Family and Ritual in Rural Korea*, edited by Nakane Chie [1973], was one of the earliest results of the joint efforts of Korean and Japanese anthropologists.

Since the early 1970s, Korea has attracted many anthropologists who have pursued a variety of topics. In view of the accumulation of research that has been carried out in the past two decades, a symposium was organized in 1993 to examine the current status of anthropological research in Korea.

One purpose of the symposium was to give participants an opportunity to present and discuss the latest anthropological research on Korea. The other was to examine the relationship of this research to that of other East Asian societies. Comparison of the principal topics of investigation was expected to highlight both

differences and some of the major similarities and interrelations among these societies. Comparison of the issues and approaches attempted in Korean studies with those in Chinese and Japanese studies was expected to suggest some intellectual stimuli received from the research on these neighboring societies and other potential topics for fruitful inquiry. The papers presented at the symposium dealt with a wide variety of topics, ranging from shamanistic rituals for the dead to human relationships in a modern conglomerate, and from community leadership under Japanese colonial rule to the re-creation of Confucian culture. Of course, no single conference can cover all potential research topics nor even all the research that is currently being conducted on Korea. It is especially unfortunate that anthropological studies of North Korea could not be included.

Of the major themes that appear in several of the papers, perhaps paramount is the relationship between Confucian ideology and Korean social systems. When the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) adopted Confucianism as its official creed, it became Korea's hegemonic ideology and was espoused by the elite *yangban*, who dominated national and local politics. Under the impetus of Confucian ideas, the family and kinship system of this privileged stratum underwent major transformations in the first half of the Chosŏn era, and the newly developed forms eventually became ideals for nearly the entire Korean population.

From the vantage of Chosŏn dynasty legal codes and court cases, Hesung Chun Koh's paper examines the process whereby Confucian ideas imported from China encountered older, indigenous Korean family practices. She notes particularly how the position of women in Korea did not mesh well with much of the new ideology, producing strains in personal relationships that later became evident in legal proceedings.

Shima Mutsuhiko considers the development of patrilineal descent groups, which comprised another component of the Korean response to the spread of Confucian ideas. Noting that the genealogies of these descent groups were repeatedly recompiled, Shima compares editions compiled over several centuries to determine what additions, deletions, or other changes occurred. His comparisons reveal how these genealogies recorded the activities of the kin who chose to join in each revision. Noting that these documents provided kin with a potential means of retrieving their past, he points to the active agency of the kin themselves in forming the descent system that still prevails in South Korea today.

Kim Kwang-ok's paper examines the political dimension of Confucianism in contemporary South Korea by looking to how it is exploited and manipulated as a political resource in local politics. His paper shows how the local elite of the southeastern region of Korea continue to use this ideology to guard their privileged status, appealing to the past while simultaneously adapting Confucian ideas to rapidly changing social and economic conditions. He demonstrates that Confucianism is not simply handed down from one generation to the next but is actively reproduced in the midst of South Korea's social and cultural transformations.

Ch'oe Kil-sŏng's paper focuses on a set of religious ideas that have often been associated with non-*yangban* commoners and regarded as the major alternative to Confucianism. Examining rituals for the dead, Ch'oe observes that whereas Confucianism emphasizes agnation and tends to disregard the socially disadvantaged, shamanism, with its beliefs in afflicting spirits, provides a means of caring for those dead who are ignored in Confucian rites. Instead of treating Confucianism and shamanism as constituting different traditions associated with different genders or social strata, therefore, Ch'oe proposes that Confucian ancestor worship and shamanistic rituals for the dead constitute a single complementary set of rituals for dead family and kin.

Hidemura Kenji turns to Christianity, a religious ideology that has spread throughout Korea during the past century and has become increasingly popular in South Korea today. His historical account of Korea's Protestant denominations points to the Great Revival Movement of 1907 as contributing to a spiritualistic tendency that still obtains in many South Korean churches today. Hidemura then turns to two ethnographic case studies that show the diversity of South Korea's Christianity, a conservative church in Seoul and a prayer house that has become famous for its medical healing. He also relates the present popularity of Christianity in South Korea to the various social upheavals that many individuals have experienced. Looking particularly to urbanization as a major cause of the rapid rise of membership in Christian churches, Hidemura shows how women, who are alienated by male-oriented Confucianism, find in Christianity a modern substitute for shamanism and a means of constructing new social networks in an unfamiliar environment. He also shows how Christianity has taken an altogether different course in Japan, due to the different social and economic conditions it encountered there.

Family and kinship have constituted another major anthropological concern in Korean studies. Whereas the essays by Koh and Shima address this topic from a historical perspective, the papers by Yoo Myung-ki and Suenari Michio have a contemporary focus. Yoo points to instances of inheritance and ancestor worship that do not conform to the standard Confucian forms, which emphasize primogeniture. The alternative practices, especially prevalent on South Korea's coastal islands, give greater recognition to equal inheritance or even ultimogeniture. Yoo concludes, therefore, that a single model of kinship cannot provide an adequate account for all of Korea. He advocates the adoption of the dual model of kinship that Myron Cohen [1990] has recently proposed for China.

Suenari Michio's study of Korean kinship urges reconsideration of the concept of kindred, an ego-oriented rather than descent-based category of kin. Observing that such groups can include bilateral relatives or be limited to unilateral kin, he points to their existence among the Vietnamese, in the Chinese five mourning grades, among Kalmuk Mongols, and among Koreans as well. Because action groups may be composed of unilateral kindreds rather than minimal lineage segments, Suenari suggests that the concept of kindred constitutes another analytic

tool for the comparative study of East Asian kinship. He also suggests the utility of this concept for reconstructing the history of descent group systems.

Several of the papers in this volume look to the non-kinship forms of social relationships that are significant in Korean society. In his study of Confucian hegemony, Kim Kwang-ok looks at political relations maintained through regionally based alliances of local elites that extend well beyond village boundaries. Itō Abito examines village leadership in two community development movements, both undertaken under strong governmental control but in very different political milieux. One was undertaken during the Japanese colonial era (1910–1945) and the other under the administration of Park Chung Hee (1961–1979). Utilizing the notion of cultural brokerage, Itō compares the relationships between the government's administrators and the local community at these two historical moments. Finding that traditional institutions were successfully employed in one instance but not in the other, he stresses the importance of giving close attention to the interaction of the government and the local community, and how this interaction is shaped by villagers' conceptions of their situation.

The papers by Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim and by Asakura Toshio look to non-kinship relationships in present-day South Korean society and examine their connections with earlier periods. Janelli and Yim look to strategies whereby male employees in the offices of a modern South Korean company attempt to build and maintain positive relationships with their co-workers. Though their practices look very similar to those reported from Japanese companies, the authors point to multiple origins of these practices, such as Korea's agricultural past, the admonitions of current managers, and business methods in the United States as well as Japan. Adopting Michel Foucault's concept of "genealogy" [Foucault 1984] they suggest that current practices have not simply resulted from mixing these various sources but have been—and continue to be—reproduced or transformed by the white-collar workers in their attempts to defend their own interests.

Asakura examines the extension of elite practices formerly associated with only *yangban* to much of contemporary South Korean society. Terming this extension "*yangbanization*," he considers it an outcome of three historical transformations of Korean society: the long historical process of Confucianization that shaped the thinking of many Koreans during the five centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty; the emergence of a large middle class in the postwar years; and the recent emergence of a nostalgia that has prompted a reevaluation of *yangban* culture and its accordance as Korean "tradition." Asakura compares the process of *yangbanization* with the parallel developments of Japanese *samurai-ization* and Okinawan *munchū-ization*.

Finally, the paper by James L. Watson, a China specialist who kindly served as principal discussant at the conference, provides a fitting conclusion to the volume. Watson takes the major themes of the papers and compares the ways in which they have been manifest in China and Korea, thereby sharpening the focus on the comparisons of these two societies. Moreover the phenomenon of *yangbanization* in Korea prompts Watson to suggest a parallel development of "gentrification" in

southeastern China. In drawing this insightful parallel, Watson gives the first indication that Freedman's second observation about the anthropology of Korea may also turn out to be true. Whereas the papers by the Koreanists amply demonstrate that the understanding of Korean society has benefitted from comparisons with China (and other East Asian nations), Watson's paper suggests that the analysis of Chinese society may in turn profit from the ethnography of Korea.

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