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Aspects of Yangbanization

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Japanese anthropologists who study traditional aspects of Korean society and culture basically agree with Akiba Takashi's dual model of Confucianism and shamanism [Itō and Sugiyama 1986; Kawamura 1986]. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in how this traditional culture has been transformed, or even recreated, in modern South Korean society [Shima 1992].

Knowledge about the *yangban*, who adopted Confucianism as the basic principle for organizing their lives, is indispensable for understanding not only traditional culture but also contemporary society in South Korea. The reason is that *yangban* culture is still strongly influential, and understanding it gives important insights into the dynamic process of transformation and recreation of traditional culture [Asakura 1992].¹⁾ Recently, many Korean-Japanese cross-cultural studies have compared the Korean *yangban* to Japan's samurai warriors, and theories have been developed comparing "literary cultivation" (*mun* in Korean, *bun* in Japanese) and "military force" (*mu* in Korean, *bu* in Japanese) [Kim Yong-un 1981, 1992; Chi 1988; Han 1989]. These comparisons have also been applied to theories concerning industrial technologies [Moritani 1980].

But the term *yangban* has a multitude of meanings [Yun 1993; Suenari 1987]. Besides designating the upper class individuals who had status and political prestige based on hereditary position, specifically the ruling classes of the Koryō Period and the Chosŏn Dynasty, the word also contains the meanings of 'elegant people with dignity,' 'a title of respect toward men,' and the absolutely opposite meaning of 'a scatterbrain or a careless person.' In addition, even when just referring to social status, the meaning of the word has changed during the course of time.²⁾

Keeping these points in mind, let us consider what *yangban* actually entails. There are various approaches to this task,³⁾ but this paper will take an anthropological viewpoint, regarding *yangban* with respect to contemporary social phenomena.

In a symposium held in 1986 under the title "The Psycho-Cultural Dynamics of the Confucian Family: Past and Present," Lee Kwang-kyu noted that even though *yangban* no longer exists as a formal institution or status, there is a discernible tendency to try to assimilate one's lifestyle with that of *yangban*. He also introduced the concept of *yangbanization*:

Confucianism was monopolized by the upper class *yangban* in the past even though it was the state doctrine of the Yi Dynasty. But in modern Korean

society, it has become the ethic of all people. In this sense, Korean society is undergoing a “*yangbanization*” process. Whether it was low or high in the past, every lineage tries to achieve a higher status. And if every lineage attains the status of *yangban* in the future, Confucian Puritanism will become the popular philosophy of all Koreans [Lee 1986:18].

This is a very useful concept. In this paper, we will analyze concrete aspects of *yangbanization* in order to explain what *yangban* designates, as well as to speculate why *yangban* as a status symbol remains deeply rooted in modern society.

Various Aspects of Yangbanization

In this section, we will discuss the phenomenon of *yangbanization* with respect to descent groups, the diffusion of *yangban* culture, and modern social integration.

Descent Groups and Yangbanization

Throughout Korea there are agnatic lineage organizations called *munjung*. For the individual, affiliation in a lineage clarifies and solidifies one's status in society. Let us examine the relationship between lineage and *yangbanization*.

1) First, one must note the existence of distinguished lineages, whose members have been unquestionably recognized as *yangban* since the Chosŏn Dynasty. As delineated in various monographs, these distinguished lineages firmly exist in modern society, maintaining *yangban* lifestyles. Their very existence has important implications in that they provide models of *yangban* in modern society.

A P'ungsan Yu lineage, descended from Yu Sŏng-nyong (1542–1607), is one of the most prestigious lineages in South Korea. Yu Yŏng-ha is the *chongson* (primogeniture descendant) of the lineage at the 27th generation. Formerly a high-school teacher in Seoul, he resigned after his father's death and returned home to succeed his father as the *chongson*. Offering ancestral services and receiving guests as the *chongson* of the lineage comprise the major part of his daily activities. To be the *chongson* is his profession [Adachi 1985].

In 1985, the wife of the *chongson* of another P'ungsan Yu lineage published a book entitled *The Inner Discipline of a Reputable Family*, in which she described proper women's behavior by referring to her own experiences. This book was a best seller and was followed by several other books dealing with inner discipline.⁴⁾ The publication and success of these books reflect the general public's strong interest in the lifestyles of the *yangban*.

Yun Hak-chun, a descendant of the P'ap'yŏng Yun clan who now resides in Japan, may serve as another example. One summer, he returned to Korea and traveled through his native Yech'ŏn county in North Kyŏngsang Province. Later he published a book entitled *History-Obsessed Korea* in which he discussed Korean history and introduced people and scenes he had encountered during the trip. The book is full of episodes of tenacious conflicts over rights to use geomantically auspicious sites (*myŏngdang*) for tombs or houses, and over the titles and ranking

of the famous Confucianists to be commemorated in the private academies for Confucian education (*sōwōn*) (these Confucianists being ancestors of competing lineages). *Yangban* lineages and factions have long fought, and continue to fight, over these matters. What is at stake is greater fame and prestige as *yangban* than other lineages and factions. Thus, Yun depicts “a climate of *yangban*-like thought” that still exists today [Yun 1993].

The members of distinguished lineages behave according to their own ideas of *yangban*. But it is also important to note that society, too, expects them to behave in *yangban*-like ways.

2) Next, we refer to lineage activities in the so-called “stronghold of *yangban*,” namely North Kyōngsang Province, where each lineage endeavors to be recognized as *yangban* in the local society.

Chōn Kyōng-su describes a formerly non-*yangban* Ch’ōn lineage of the hamlet of Mail in Andong City that aspires to be recognized as *yangban*. In order to be acknowledged as *yangban*, the lineage abides by the economic requirements of owning some common estates and the graves of ancestors, works hard to educate its sons, establishes an ancestral hall (*sadang*) and an academy (*sōwōn*), and compiles a genealogy. In addition to these conditions, the lineage must be admitted to the *yangban* intermarrying circle known as *honban*⁵⁾ before being fully acknowledged as *yangban* [Chōn 1984].

Suenari defines *yangbanization* as a phenomenon in which a lineage, by shaping the behavior of its members according to the ideal pattern of *yangban*, consolidates its status and aspires to climb still higher on the ladder of social rank. Suenari analyzes cases of small and medium-sized *yangban* lineages and clarifies the mechanism of social class fluidity and the method of internal ranking. In contrast to Lee Kwang-kyu [1986], who discussed *yangbanization* as a phenomenon at the level of society as a whole, Suenari explains the phenomenon at the lineage level. The ranking of each lineage depends on the following factors: how many of its ancestors held civil examination degrees or high ranking offices during the Chosōn Dynasty, or were famous Confucian scholars; how much literary tradition it has; how meticulous it is in ancestral rituals and hospitality to guests; how many monuments and other structures it has commemorating the ancestors; and which other lineages it maintains sociable relations with, especially through intermarriage. The aspiration to rise in rank also dictates proper child rearing, etiquette, and appropriate family conduct [Suenari 1987].

These descriptions convey the requirements for becoming a modern *yangban*. While distinguished *yangban* lineages continue their efforts to maintain their recognized status, small and medium-sized ones strive to elevate their position. Particularly in areas where there is a strong awareness of social class, extreme importance and prestige are attached to becoming *yangban*.

3) With respect to geography, the *yangbanization* of lineages differs between regions where class consciousness is strong and areas where it is weak. For example, the formation of marital networks among *yangban* lineages—called

honban—can only be found in North Kyöngsang Province. “In areas where class consciousness has traditionally been strong, people are classified as being either *yangban*, commoners, or the low born, and all try to rise in social class. In contrast, in areas where class consciousness is weaker, there is little interest in *yangban* in daily life” [Itō 1980a:315]. Recently, however, the movement toward *yangban* ideals can be seen even in regions of weaker class stratification.

For example, most island societies far offshore have weak class stratification. However, in recent years Kōmun-do Island has witnessed a movement to reevaluate Confucianists born on the island [Maruyama 1987]. An increase in tourism and the attendant closer contact with mainlanders may have stimulated this movement on the island, but *yangbanization* is also in evidence even on isolated islands with very little tourism.

The island of Toch'o-do provides another clear example of *yangbanization* in recent years.⁶⁾ Toch'o-do is one of the numerous islands off the mainland of South Chōlla Province. The Nangju Ch'oe lineage of Toch'o-do built a lineage hall at the enormous cost of 70 million won (approximately US 100,000), and held a ceremony to honor completion of the building on 16 November 1991.

The focal ancestor of the Nangju Ch'oe lineage migrated to Toch'o-do island seven generations ago. The inscription on the fifth-generation ancestor's tombstone cites his official title as *T'ongjōng-taebu* (senior third rank civil official), which hardly makes the lineage distinguished. However, because two recent members have served as township mayors, the lineage is counted among the more respectable descent groups.

Construction of the Nangju Ch'oe lineage hall was first proposed in 1984, and work progressed with meetings concerning the sale of some mountain land and forests owned by the lineage. Some people believed that the proceeds from the sale should go toward establishing scholarships for lineage children. However, since many people had moved off the island and into the cities, the overwhelming majority of both the remaining residents and emigrants felt that a lineage hall would be the greatest source of pride for all members. Faced with lineage members leaving the villages one after another, they wanted a symbolic center where they could retain their lineage identity. Another reason for building the lineage hall, although not stated explicitly, seems to have been rivalry with the Kim lineage who live in the same hamlet. Later, when construction funds fell short, contributions were obtained mostly from lineage members living in mainland cities, especially Seoul. This development spurred the establishment of a lineage association in Seoul.

It is a moot point whether the construction of the lineage hall led to the lineage being acknowledged as *yangban* in the island society, or whether the members of the lineage are conscious of their status as *yangban*. At least this action expresses the effort of the lineage to increase its prestige by following the behavior of accepted *yangban*.

General Diffusion of Yangban Culture

Today more and more South Koreans have adopted *yangban* lifestyles. The awareness of being descendants of *yangban* has permeated throughout the citizenry, and many of the cultural norms that used to apply only to *yangban* are now regarded as appropriate for all. An example can be seen in the spread of genealogy compilation.⁷⁾ Written genealogies (*chokpo*) were first made in the mid-fifteenth century, when they were the exclusive possessions of *yangban*. But today a clan genealogy purports to include all the clan members defined by the common surname and clan seat, and accordingly, many people now consider themselves of *yangban* origin. In the past, not all households possessed copies of their genealogies. Today, with urban migration, families of agnates tend to live apart from each other, and these families, encouraged by economic prosperity, are eager to possess their own copies of genealogies. Publishers of genealogies flourish. *Yangban* culture has come to constitute a part of the core of South Korean identity [Yoshida 1986].

Many lineages set up lineage association offices in the cities to undertake joint tasks, exchange information, and periodically sponsor reunion meetings, called *chongch'inhoe* or *hwahoe*. Referring to the foundation of the Great Association of Chŏnju Yi Clan in 1956, Ch'oe described it as "a practice unknown in other clans" [1975:205-206]. Later, as urban drift increased, small and medium-sized lineages followed suit and formed lineage associations one after another. In so doing, the non-*yangban*, small and medium-sized lineages have imitated the style of the more powerful ones.

Another sign of the diffusion of *yangban* culture is the proliferation of monuments to commemorate filial sons and loyal wives. These monuments are set up only under the sanction of the local associations of Confucianists (*yurim*). In the past, they were erected only sparingly. In recent years, however, many new monuments have been set up and old ones repaired throughout the country. In addition, more and more lineage halls are being built. Grave sites are being ornamented with stone monuments, to the extent that the more luxurious decorations have attracted criticism. An extravagant case is that of a man of non-*yangban* origin who became rich in the transportation business after the Korean War and spent a vast fortune to build a new Confucian academy [Yun 1993:235]. This is a modern version of the corrupt *yangban* that Pak Chi-wŏn caricatured in his novel *Yangbanjŏn* (The Story of a Yangban). These activities are conspicuous expressions of group solidarity and attempts at showing off the *yangban*-ness of the groups concerned.

The elaboration of rituals is another conspicuous development related to *yangbanization*. Although in 1973 a law was enacted in order to simplify family rites, weddings and sixtieth-birthday celebrations continue to become highly elaborate. With a rise in the standard of living, the demand for luxurious ceremonies has increased, spurring great growth in the wedding and funeral

industries. Innumerable commercial facilities have been established for use on occasions of rites of passage. People often have luxurious parties, inviting relatives and acquaintances.⁸⁾ One of the important criteria for judging *yangban* is to what extent one follows *Chuja karye* (*The Family Rites of Chu Hsi*) in practice. Although the trend toward extravagance is in no sense what *Chuja karye* dictates, we may view it as the result of efforts to achieve *yangban* status.

In modern society, many South Koreans, no matter what their personal ancestry, behave in a *yangban*-like way in an attempt to be *yangban*. One often hears that everyone is *yangban* now.⁹⁾

Yangban Culture for Modern Social Integration

Besides lineage and individual dimensions, one can also see a strong orientation toward both *yangban* and Confucianism on the level of the nation as a whole. In traditional Korea, Confucian ideology served as the basis for governing the nation and integrating society. In the face of radical social change and confusion concerning values in recent years, this function of Confucianism has won renewed appreciation.

In the context of everyday practice, Confucianism takes the form of etiquette and forms of courtesy in interpersonal relations. Reverence for seniority, filial piety, and segregation of the sexes, among others, have been emphasized as the most important Confucian behavioral norms. People refer to them as "good and praiseworthy customs" (*mip'ung yangsok*). Although the situation is changing, particularly in cities, Confucian ethics are upheld as exemplifying ideal norms of behavior for the citizens of today.

For example, Confucianism's key teaching on filial piety (*hyo*) is used without any pretension even today. Sons and daughters are publicly awarded with *hyo* prizes,¹⁰⁾ and there is a very popular new practice called *hyodo kwan'gwang*, in which children present sightseeing trips to their parents on Parents' Day (a national holiday) or on their sixtieth (*hwangap*) or seventieth birthdays (*kohüi*).

When something is judged to be contrary to "good and praiseworthy customs," many people react as if the whole social order is threatened. For example, clan exogamy is considered among the best of Korea's "good and praiseworthy customs," strictly observed for centuries, and is deemed to embody the Confucian value placed on patrilineal relations. Clan exogamy is also authorized by law. However, there are sporadic cases of intraclan marriages, which cause problems for the legal status of the children. A revision of the law has been proposed several times to solve these tragic cases, but it has not materialized so far. In 1986, for example, representatives of both the government and opposition parties together submitted to the congress an amendment that would have reduced the range of kinsmen among whom marriage is prohibited. The Confucianists opposed it, arguing that "the purpose of clan exogamy is to prohibit incest, to firmly establish morality concerning sexual relations, and to let the nation observe correct ethics. Those who propose to abolish clan exogamy understand the nation's tradition

erroneously" [quoted in *Chosŏn ilbo*, 2 December 1986]. The amendment was rejected. South Korean society may not be as meticulous in observing Confucian ethics as it purports to be, but it is difficult for an argument to gain general support if people suspect that it may provide an excuse, however remote, for immorality.

When social crimes or incidents occur, commentators in the mass media call for "education," "morals," "social leadership," and "healthiness."¹¹ Behind such calls lies a common understanding that Confucian gentlemen (*sŏnbi*) should become leaders in preaching Confucian teachings against injustices. The implication is clear that social order should continue to rest on Confucian norms. Calls for moral principles (*illyun*) may sound hollow in ordinary contexts, but they have the potential to arouse the people.

Confucianists (*urim*) have two sets of formal organizations. The first of these consists of the Confucian Association (*Yudohoe*), with its headquarters in Seoul, and a hierarchy of branch organizations in each province, county and township. Secondly, they maintain Sŏnggyun-gwan in Seoul as the national ritual center, and keep local Confucian schools (*hyanggyo*) that serve as local ritual centers. There are a total of 223 such local centers in South Korea. In 1991, Confucianists set up the Committee for the Promotion of Confucianism. According to the daily paper *Han'guk ilbo* [6 October 1991], the committee's activities include the Movement toward Creating New Persons (Seasaram undong)—New Persons meaning men restored with moral virtues—establishing Confucian broadcast stations, appealing to the government to declare Confucius's birthday a national holiday, and promoting moral reconstruction at local Confucian schools and branch offices of the Confucian Association. Confucianists are very active in propagating Confucian ethics in contemporary South Korea.

Yanbanization and the Situation in Modern South Korean Society

The trend toward *yangban* can be examined at the individual, lineage, and overall societal levels. The characteristics of each level must be analyzed objectively,¹² and interrelationships between the levels must be delineated,¹³ but my goal is only to look at the overall development of *yangbanization*. In this section, we consider some of the historical circumstances in reference to the phenomenon of *yangbanization*.

Return Towards Traditionalism

As is well known, during the 1970s South Korean society achieved a high level of economic growth, called the miracle of the Han River. Entering the 1980s, the country was ready to step up to the next level of development [Takizawa 1992].

As the country achieved stability and prosperity, people developed a greater interest in the country's past. Instead of examining the past as it actually had been, however, they tended to draw an idealized picture of the past, the paradise lost. As many people flocked to the cities, which were the sites of greatest economic growth,

they sought to reaffirm their origins by looking for their ancestral roots.

Ppuri-chakki, or looking for one's roots, takes such concrete forms as searching for one's ancestors if hitherto unknown, compiling written genealogies, discovering and visiting places closely related to one's remote ancestors, and erecting stone monuments to describe their accomplishments. Not only did people look for their own roots, they also became interested in Korea's cultural roots. In the 1980s, many books were published concerning Korean culture and the meaning of being Korean, and interest in *yangban* flourished.¹⁴⁾

Just as this reexamination of traditions has featured a romanticizing of the past, the same has been true for *yangban*. Ridgid class stratification belongs to the past, and there is no chance of *yangban*-like class stratification reappearing in its original form. But a new class system has come into being with attributes resembling *yangban*. The concrete conditions that gave birth to this new *yangban* took hold during the 1980s, namely the spread of higher education and the great expansion of the middle class.

Achievement in higher education can be seen in the fact that in just eleven years—from 1971 to 1982—the number of students enrolled in four-year universities more than quadrupled. During the 1980s the increase in the number of college graduates was one of the most remarkable phenomena in South Korea [Takizawa 1988:19, 31]. With this widespread popularization of higher education, a larger intellectual social class has formed, and many more people think of themselves as middle class, especially among urban white-collar workers.¹⁵⁾ Just as in the past *yangban* acquired higher status by passing the civil service examinations (*kwagö*) and serving in the bureaucracy, this new breed of Koreans has achieved social status through educational and professional career achievement.

In addition, with the coming of the information age—in particular, television—the lifestyles of *yangban* have been introduced into the living room.¹⁶⁾ These images have served as the model to follow, and *yangban* lifestyles and rituals have been widely adopted. As a result, many people have begun to take better care of their ancestor's graves, establish ancestral halls and Confucian academies, and live up to the conditions of being *yangban*.

The Changing Social Milieu Since Liberation

The social changes that occurred after the liberation from colonial rule make an interesting comparison with the changes typifying the return to traditionalism in the 1980s. It is important to compare the actual changes that have occurred with the social slogans that have urged South Korean society to progress. Let us examine why traditional culture, and *yangban* culture in particular, have been put on such a high pedestal.

1) *Modernization*. Ever since liberation from colonial rule, and especially through the *Saemaul* (New Community) Movement that began in the 1970s, the modernization of daily life has been propagated not only in the cities but also in rural areas. Beginning with food, clothing and shelter, lifestyles have become

Westernized and modernized, and rational philosophies have been held in high esteem. However, since these changes have occurred so quickly, there has also been criticism that materialism and selfishness are rampant. Industrial advances have been accompanied by a sense of insecurity as some people have come to believe that too much importance has been placed on high technology and economics. This self-reflection and opposition to modernization have encouraged a search for new values, and the *yangban* way of life has won new respect as a "moral culture."

2) *Democratization*. The establishment of military government in 1961 marked the beginning of the era of modernization and, particularly, economic development. In the course of political change that is often referred to as revolutionary, the government of 1961 cut itself off from the old regime. People criticized the military government for its high-handed control, and clamored for democratization. *Yangban*, who had always stressed that political power legitimately belonged to scholars and civil officers, aligned themselves with the opposition in this confrontation and demanded democratization. In so doing, they successfully claimed their political legitimacy while sidestepping any self-criticism for their own misgovernment in the past.

3) *Urbanization*. As evidenced by the concentration of people in large cities, a great majority of South Koreans have had to leave their hometowns in order to make a living. Formerly, it was vital for *yangban* to reside permanently near the land of their ancestors. There is a saying: "*i-hyang-chŭk-ch'ŏn*," meaning that anyone who leaves their native land (*kohyang*) and lives away from their agnates must accept some humiliation from the strangers among whom they reside. The word *kohyang* expresses the place one belongs where one's status is not questioned.¹⁷⁾ Goldberg discusses in detail the importance of the concept of native place (*kohyang*) in understanding Korean society [1979].

People who remain in their native land can prove that they are *yangban* with relative ease. For people who have moved to the cities, it is more important than ever to stay in touch with their hometowns in order to remain *yangban*. The activities of lineage associations (*chongch'inhoe*) provide one means of doing this.

4) *Unification of the Korean Peninsula*. Koreans share a cultural identity, although their country has been divided between North and South. Because of Japanese colonial domination in the past, anti-Japanism has been manipulated as a symbol to promote national identity in South Korea. Since the Korean War of 1950-53, anticommunism has provided another such symbol.¹⁸⁾ At the same time, however, there has been a policy promoting an all-Korean ethnic identity aimed at achieving reunification. Attention has been drawn to the Chosŏn Dynasty when the population of the peninsula was united and there was great stability. In the search for the all-Korean traditional culture, special scrutiny has been directed to the culture of *yangban*, who formed the ruling class of that era.¹⁹⁾

5) *Internationalization*. While Korea has become increasingly internationalized, the flood of incoming foreign culture has caused many South Koreans to feel a need to define their own national culture. Internationalization has also meant

showing Korean culture to the world, as exemplified by the 1988 Seoul Olympics slogan "The World to Seoul, Seoul to the World." This trend has lent further impetus to efforts to identify what constitutes Korean culture, including a reappraisal of the *yangban* way of life as a major component of a uniquely Korean cultural tradition. For several centuries Koreans have proudly called their country "The Eastern Land of Propriety," where "propriety" refers to Confucian norms.

Modernization, democratization, urbanization, national unification, and internationalization: these are the slogans that have been upheld in South Korea in constructing a new society since liberation. We may understand that the reappraisal of *yangban* culture occurred not only as a response to these slogans, but also as a part of the counterculture against the omnipotent forces of Westernization and modernization since liberation. *Yangban* culture, which had been the culture of the ruling class, has been reinterpreted as a national culture.

In this process, negative evaluations of *yangban* culture as being outdated or hindering modernization have been played down. Instead, *yangban* culture has come to be viewed as aristocratic culture that should be inherited. It has attained the status of the legitimate classic, the aristocratic model to follow [Im 1991:30]. In this sense, *yangbanization* means the re-creation of the classic culture.

Yangban in Historical Perspective

Yangban literally means "the two orders." Originally, during the Koryŏ period, it referred to the officers selected through the newly established examination system; the civil officers were called the eastern order, the military ones were termed the western order, and together they were called the two orders. These officers received financial support from the government according to their rank, either in kind in the form of cultivated land. In theory, the privileges associated with the ranked offices were restricted to the office holders themselves, but, in fact, arable land became inheritable under various excuses.

During the Chosŏn Dynasty, the *yangban* placed great importance on family background and monopolized the examination system, barring non-*yangban* from taking the examinations. Thus, they came to form an exclusive ruling class. With the spread of Neo-Confucianism, there developed the so-called *yangban* society.

Beginning in the mid-Chosŏn Dynasty, many people illicitly obtained *yangban* status through bribery or deception. The government also sold official titles in an effort to augment state income. By these means the proportion of *yangban* in the total population greatly increased, and the nature of *yangban* status changed significantly.

The Kabo Reform of 1894 brought about even more social and political change. Status distinction was formally abolished, as was the privileged *yangban* class. However, most of the former *yangban* retained their de facto power, and status consciousness underwent little change. Today, *yangban* does not exist as

part of a social class system, but *yangban* consciousness survives. Modern *yangbanization* can be characterized as consciousness turned into social behavior.

The Chosŏn Dynasty put great emphasis on legitimacy of descent and learning, and disputes between political factions concretely exemplify this. For the most part, these factional disputes over political hegemony were not violent, but took the form of arguments over the legitimate interpretation of Confucian morals and theories. *Yangban* consciousness is deeply related to the quest for legitimacy.

At the end of the twentieth century, the concept of legitimacy lingers unchanged among South Koreans.²⁰⁾ Modern political administrations often emphasize their own legitimacy with respect to history. Lineages continue to haggle over the legitimate order for placing the tablets of ancient sages on the altars in Confucian ritual centers. Segments of lineages argue among themselves over which of their ancestors were legitimate or illegitimate sons. In other words, the mode of thinking so characteristic of the Chosŏn Dynasty survives today and coexists with modern trends. The Chosŏn Dynasty cannot yet be totally relegated to the past.

Although the legacy of the Chosŏn Dynasty has been passed down, a century has already passed since the social class system was legally abolished. What substantial value is there to being *yangban* today?

One advantage is that self-recognition as *yangban* offers psychological security. As Suenari claims, "These days, people in cities who do not have their names entered in written genealogies are not hindered in social activities such as work and schooling, but, psychologically, they find themselves in a very disadvantageous position" [1987:75]. Adds Tanaka, "*Yangban* have no choice but to live in a *yangban* way" [1993:32]. Tanaka refers to the fact that while being *yangban* confirms one's own legitimacy, the fear exists that one's claim to legitimacy may be denied.

It has been observed that "*yangban* are what all Koreans wish to be" [Yun 1985], and this perception is probably correct. In daily conversation, South Koreans often state that they themselves are *yangban*. Even more frequently, South Koreans claim that certain other Koreans are *not yangban*. People reassure themselves by noting the great efforts they are making to achieve *yangban* status, while saying that others, no matter how hard they try, have certain weak points that prohibit them from reaching this goal. Thus, *yangban* status is determined in very subjective and relative ways rather than by established laws. As a result, in order to be acknowledged as *yangban*, one must expend an exasperatingly large amount of effort.

This striving for *yangban* status may be observed not only inside South Korea, but also among Korean nationals living in Japan. For example, the Kwangsan Kims from Cheju-do Island, who reside in Japan, organized the Kwangsan Kim Lineage Association of Japan and set up their own cemetery in Ikoma near Osaka. The association is quite active and in close touch with the clan association in South Korea. Their Confucianist leader, Kim Yong-Hae, claims that later generations

will regard him as the first ancestor of the Kwangsan Kims to settle in Japan [Iida 1993]. Thus, *yangbanization* is a force even in Japan.

Furuta writes with insight that "for modern South Koreans, *yangban* is a kind of ethos, and the ethos is constantly being reproduced. To say that '*yangban* is alive' means '*yangban* spirit is alive.' This consciousness transcends time and rises up in individuals. It resembles nostalgia" [1988:92]. In order to understand Korean society and culture, it is advisable, even today, to look at the climate surrounding the spirit of *yangban*.

Yangbanization and East Asian Anthropology

Suenari has compared the process of *yangbanization* in Korea with that of Sanskritization in India.²¹⁾ He points out that there are some differences between these processes. For example, in Sanskritization the units aspiring to move upward are endogamous subcastes, while exogamous lineages are the units in *yangbanization*. *Yangbanization* is closely related to national bureaucracy while Sanskritization is not. Furthermore, the ideologies underlying these two processes are entirely different. However, the overall pattern is similar in that there are status rankings in which members of the lower strata imitate the lifestyles of the upper strata. In this process the ideologies of the respective systems spread from the upper to the lower strata and throughout the society [Suenari 1987].

In a series of symposia at the National Museum of Ethnology in Ōsaka under the general title "Tradition and Change in Modern Japanese Culture," a scheme has been proposed to depict the trend from creation of a normative national culture to development of diverse popular cultures. With the goal of transforming Japan into a modern industrial nation, the Meiji government promoted a national culture featuring a set of normative values as exemplified in the slogan of the period, "Generating Industrial and Military Strength." But when Japan entered the high-growth period of the 1960s, a qualitatively different culture emerged which is characterized by a diversity of value sets. The former period corresponds to the molding of a national culture, while the product of the latter period has been a multitude of popular cultures. Moriya termed the former process "samurai-ization," or the spread of samurai-like values [Moriya 1989:22-23].

Shiba Ryōtarō, in his book entitled *The Nation Called "Meiji,"* describes the process of samurai-ization beginning in the Meiji Period in the following way:

Upright and clean public consciousness and sincere morality were the marks of that nation.... When asked "what is Japan, and who are the Japanese?" the citizens of the Meiji nation had no choice but to take recourse to the way of samurai in explanation. If asked to define samurai, the answer was self-control.... It is an irony that people became conscious of the way of samurai only after the samurai system had been abolished. Just as the past is often idealized, so the way of samurai was idealized and turned into the spirit of Meiji [Shiba 1989:254].

Exactly when the samurai class was legally abolished and the notion of "Japanese citizens" was being created, the spirit of samurai was recalled. Samurai-ization of Meiji Japan, then, was a part of creating a national culture. Whether it is possible to look at *yangbanization* in South Korea in a similar framework remains to be examined.

Munchū-ization in Okinawa parallels Korean *yangbanization* more closely in both its content and historical period. Patrilineal kin groups in Okinawa are called *munchū*, written with the same Chinese characters as Korean *munjung* (lineage). An exclusively patrilineal principle was established among the ruling class in the capital of Okinawa, then called Ryūkyū, towards the end of the seventeenth century. Studies done since the 1960s report many cases where kin groups in rural areas and on smaller islands are being reorganized along the patrilineal principle [e.g. Yamaji 1967; Matsuzono 1970]. Typically, a shaman (*yuta*) divines that a misfortune is caused because there are non-agnates among the ancestors whom the victim worships; the lines are mixed (*tachii majikui*). The process of rearranging ancestral genealogies according to the patrilineal principle is called *shiji-tadashi*, or correcting the lines. Formerly, non-agnates could be adopted, but now adoptees are selected only from among the agnates. The dead used to be buried in a village cemetery, but now kin groups, reorganizing themselves into patrilineal *munchū*, tend to prepare exclusive tomb sites for themselves. These are the prominent features of *munchū-ization*.

More than a century has passed since the abrogation of the Ryūkyū monarchy, and still *munchū* presents the legitimate model of social organization in Okinawa. A comparison between *yangbanization* and *munchū-ization* is inviting in terms of both historical and contemporary developments.²²⁾ Both processes emphasize the patrilineal principle. This principle shapes the identity of individuals, an identity that in both societies refers back to the past, to the ancestors.

Through the comparative study of Korean and Okinawan kinship organizations, researchers can learn a lot about how Chinese culture has been accepted and transformed in other Asian societies. Although the importance of comparative studies dealing with Okinawa, Japan, Korea and China was pointed out more than twenty years ago [Nakane 1973], few comparative studies have been made involving Korea and Okinawa and how they have been strongly influenced by China.²³⁾ Consequently, important areas of research remain for East Asian anthropologists.

Conclusion

Using the concept of *yangbanization*, this paper has examined modern South Korean phenomena at the levels of the individual, the lineage, and the nation as a whole. Also, *yangbanization* was viewed in three periods from the Chosŏn Dynasty to the present.

One aspect looked at *yangbanization* historically since the Chosŏn Dynasty. The five hundred years of the Chosŏn Dynasty shaped the ethos of Koreans around the values of *yangban* which continue to thrive today.

A second perspective examined societal changes in South Korea since liberation. Even though *yangban* were abolished as a social class, a consciousness remains, and the former *yangban* class persistently clings to its identity. On the other hand, the transformation in social class structure due to high levels of economic growth has created a large middle class, and these people have formed a new *yangban* class. This development represents the *yangbanization* of the general population.

In the late 1980s, South Korea registered negative growth and economic expansion ended. Koreans who once were charging forward, seeking only modernization, are now looking back and examining their roots and traditions. *Yangban* culture has been reevaluated, and even recreated, as a tradition. *Yangban* orientation is like magma flowing from the heart of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Resurfacing during the great societal changes since liberation, it continues to run its course today.

Notes

- 1) The following passage from the Korean literary scholar Tanaka Akira emphasizes the importance of knowing the function of *yangban* for an understanding of the consciousness of Koreans: "When explaining what the most important words to remember are for people going to Korea, one must include the word *yangban*. Granted, even if a person does not know this word, he or she will have little trouble shopping or getting food. However, *yangban* encompasses an important part of history—an onus which all Koreans carry—and it is a part of daily jokes and spoken nuances. If one does not know about *yangban*, like a baseball batter failing to swing at a good ball, one will probably fail to get the chance to be close to Koreans" [*Asahi Journal* 16 Jan 1966; quoted from Yun 1983:21].

Itō states that "in understanding traditional Korean culture and society, one cannot ignore the *yangban* culture which has been the ruling upper class since the Chosŏn Dynasty.... Most Japanese have a very shallow understanding of *yangban* culture and society, and this proves to be an obstacle, delaying an integrated understanding of traditional Korean society" [Itō 1980b:27].

- 2) For the historical processes that formed the *yangban* social status, and the legal background of *yangban*, see Kim Yŏng-mo 1977; Yi Sŏng-mu 1980; and Song 1987.
- 3) For example, folklorists depict the thought and emotion of the lower class through research on ancient novels, folktales, legends, and masked dances. They also shed light on the disputes between the classes from the point of view of non-*yangban* [Chŏn 1984:157]. Other studies analyze *yangban* images in literature [Kim Yŏl-gyu 1987:73–96] or proverbs [Wakamatsu 1987].
- 4) The daily newspaper *Chosŏn ilbo* [7 June 1986] carried an article on this trend under the headline, "Publication Boom on 'Home Life,' Books on Inner Disciplines in Competition."

- 5) Concerning *honban*, see Hattori 1980 and Cho 1984.
- 6) Since 1980, the present author has studied changing rural life in this village, with particular emphasis on the changes in family lifestyles.
- 7) Itō [1991] delineates the process of genealogy compilation. On the one hand, he says, powerful *yangban* lineages keep the forms of old genealogies and continue to update them. On the other hand, lower-class lineage members who have not achieved large local population concentrations begin by compiling small genealogies based on oral traditions, gradually combining them to compile larger ones.
- 8) As can be seen in the newspaper headline "May 20th, Becoming-Adult Day Approaches: Traditional Coming-of-Age Ceremonies Are Revived Everywhere" [*Chosŏn ilbo* 1 May 1991], traditional rites of passage have become popular.
- 9) While residing in Korea in 1991, the author saw a television commercial promoting a food product called "Yangban Seaweed." The dialog in the commercial included the question, "These days, where do you find people who are not *yangban*?"
- 10) Filial piety awards are given out each year by groups such as the Samsung Cultural and Art Foundation and the Asan Social Welfare Foundation.

At the Sejong Culture Center on 1 September 1991, a symposium on filial piety was held to promote "*hyo* culture." In a paper entitled *Korean Hyo: Yesterday and Today*, data concerning 817 *hyo* prize winners during the past thirty years were analyzed and made public [*Chung'ang ilbo* 30 August, 1992].

In Suwŏn City, Kyŏnggi Province, known as the "City of *Hyo* Paradise," the first "*hyo* park" in the nation is being prepared with educational facilities and a statue symbolizing *hyo*. [*Chung'ang ilbo* 21 October 1992].

Hyo is also used in the names of candies and the advertisements for food, such as milk.

- 11) On 3 June 1991, the prime minister was assaulted while visiting the Korean University of Foreign Languages. The general reaction was one of shock, not so much because the prime minister was attacked, but because he was a former professor of that university. It was considered a contravention of Confucian ethics for students to attack their teacher.

During a series of murders and reckless cases of arson in October of 1991, newspaper editorials blamed a breakdown in social morals and human relations and recommended a strengthening of moral education along with revisions in curricula [*Han'guk ilbo* 26 October 1991].
- 12) Sociological and anthropological research on the changes in *yangban*-commoner relations shows that it is not a simple or unitary phenomenon. See Yi Man-gap [1984].
- 13) Concerning the relation between the national and local levels, Itō points out that "many case studies show in common that the formal authority and ideals functional at the level of national government constantly and directly affect daily life in the villages, and kinship organizations hold an important position as mediators between these levels" [1987:iv].
- 14) Speaking of Seoul in the 1980s, Kuroda states: "During these ten years, Seoul experienced a real *sin param* (new wind).... What this 'wind' brought about in Seoul was, in essence, change and restoration. Since the 'wind' of change has been of such magnitude, people may be trying to maintain their psychological balance by holding on to history" [1988:256-257].
- 15) For data on the middle class in Korea, refer to the Seoul National University Social Science Institute 1987.
- 16) KBS, the public-funded broadcasting station, first appeared on the air in December 1961.

- TBC followed in December 1964, and MBC in August 1969. There were fewer than 40,000 television sets in South Korea in 1963, but the number grew to 240,000 in 1969, 1,410,000 in 1973 and to over 5,600,000 in 1979. Color television became available in 1980. By 1982, 85% of all households had at least one television (89% in Seoul), and 27% of all households had a color TV (46% in Seoul) [Takizawa 1988:18].
- 17) Suenari also points out the difficulty of being recognized as *yangban* when a person leaves his or her hometown [1987:73-74].
 - 18) Concerning Korea's national identity, see Maruyama 1980.
 - 19) The *yangban* culture of the Chosŏn Dynasty may have been chosen as the national culture because the rivalry between Shilla and Paekche is often cited as the origin of modern regional antagonisms. The kingdom of Shilla originated in the southeastern part of the Korean peninsula, while the kingdom of Paekche occupied the southwest. Shilla conquered Paekche in 660 C.E.
 - 20) The word "*chŏngt'ong*" (authentic) is used often in daily life in Korean society. It can be seen even on the signs in front of restaurants that feature "*chŏngt'ong* food."
 - 21) Concerning the comparison between Korean *yangbanization* and Indian Sanskritization, Sugishima warns that "a comparative study of phenomena in different 'ethnologisch studieveld' may not be valid." An ethnologisch studieveld, a concept originally proposed by P.E. De Josselin de Jong, is a "geographical area sharing common basic culture with only subtle differences" [Sugishima 1990:511].
 - 22) While discussing *munchū-ization* in Okinawa, Muratake points out that "Human relations in Okinawan culture are strongly ancestor-oriented. People feverishly desire to maintain a legitimate relationship between ancestors and the living. If an "illegitimate" genealogical connection is found, or such connections are suspected through sickness, an accident, a dream, or the like, they will look for a judgment from a spiritual specialist, called *yuta*" [1971:32].
 - 23) The Asian Comparative Folklore Society was established in South Korea in 1983, indicating that interest in such comparative research is increasing. We may cite Miyata's work [1982] as one of the first attempts at comparing Korean and Okinawan lineages.

Romanizations

bu (J)	武
bun (J)	文
Cheju (K)	제주 (濟州)
chokpo (K)	족보 (族譜)
Ch'ŏn (K)	천 (千)
chongch'inhoe (K)	종친회 (宗親會)
chongson (K)	宗손 (宗孫)
chŏngt'ong (K)	정통 (正統)
Chosŏn ilbo (K)	조선일보 (朝鮮日報)
Chuja karye (K)	(朱子家禮)
Han'guk ilbo (K)	한국일보 (韓國日報)
honban (K)	혼반 (婚班)
hwan'gap (K)	환갑 (還甲)
hwasuhoe (K)	화수회 (花樹會)
hyanggyo (K)	향교 (鄉校)
hyo (K)	효 (孝)

hyodo kwan'gwang (K)	효도관광 (孝道觀光)
i-hyang-chük-ch'on (K)	이향즉천 (離鄉即賤)
illyun (K)	인륜 (人倫)
kohüi (K)	고희 (古希)
kohyang (K)	고향 (故鄉)
kwagö (K)	과거 (科擧)
Kwangsang (K)	광산 (光山)
Kyöngsang (K)	경상 (慶尙)
mip'ung yangsok (K)	미풍양속 (美風良俗)
mu (K)	무 (武)
mun (K)	문 (文)
munchü (O)	門中
munjung (K)	문중 (門中)
myöngdang (K)	명당 (明堂)
Nangju Ch'oe (K)	낭주 최 (郎州 崔)
P'ap'yöng Yun (K)	파평 윤 (坡平 尹)
ppuri ch'akki (K)	뿌리 찾기
P'ungsan Yu (K)	풍산 유 (豊山 柳)
sadang (K)	사당 (祠堂)
Saemaül (K)	새마을
Saesaram undong (K)	새사람운동 (새사람 運動)
shiji-tadashi (O)	しじただし
sinparam (K)	신바람
sömbi (K)	선비
söwön (K)	서원 (書院)
tachii majikui (O)	たちいまじくい
Toch'o-do (K)	도초도 (都草島)
T'ongjöng-taebu	통정대부 (通政大夫)
yangban (K)	양반 (兩班)
Yangbanjön (K)	양반전 (兩班傳)
Yech'ön (K)	예천 (禮泉)
Yu Söng-nyong (K)	유성룡 (柳成龍)
Yu Yöng-ha (K)	유영하 (柳寧夏)
yudohoe (K)	유도회 (儒道會)
yurim (K)	유림 (儒林)
yuta (O)	ユタ

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