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Yangbanization in Comparative Perspective: The View from South China

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This essay summarizes observations made at the Taniguchi Conference on Korean Ethnology. My role as discussant was to comment on Korean ethnographic issues from the perspective of China—specifically that part of south China (Guangdong Province and the Hong Kong New Territories) where I have worked for the past 28 years. Although I am most assuredly not a Koreanist, I have toured portions of the Korean countryside (Andong District) in the company of Korean anthropologists and I have visited Seoul on several occasions.[1] During my 1990 Andong tour I was privileged to see the inner workings of the national Confucian cult and local forms of ancestor worship; I visited yangban primogeniture descendants at their rural estates and observed lineage rituals. The Taniguchi Conference gave me a unique opportunity to rethink what I had seen in Andong and compare it to ethnographic reports of life in other parts of Korea.

Ideology and Social Stratification

A central theme that emerged from the conference is the interrelationship between ideology and social stratification. The ideology I am referring to is, of course, Confucianism—or, more specifically, the version of Neo-Confucianism orthopraxy[2] that emerged in Korea [see e.g., Deuchler 1992]. Like many China specialists I have grown accustomed to arid discourses on Confucianism, focusing on abstract philosophical principles that bear little relation to life on the ground. Most of these discussions end up extolling the "Confucian family" (a concept that is often taken for granted but seldom defined) as the catalyst of the East Asian economic miracle.

When the subject of Confucianism was raised during the Taniguchi Conference I expected to hear similar arguments, but with a Korean twist. I was wrong. In Korea, it soon became clear, the *practice* of Confucianism is still very much alive, as are debates regarding the proper *conduct* of Confucian rites (see note 2). This cannot be said of Taiwan, China, Singapore, or Hong Kong. Religious and ritual preoccupations are evident in those societies but the promotion of Confucianism as a living system of rites is not one of them.

Confucianism continues to be a central issue in Korea because its practice is intimately associated with and dominated by the yangban elite. Although this may be obvious to Koreanists, I was skeptical when I first heard such claims. Parallel

arguments are often made for contemporary Chinese elites, but little concrete evidence is available to support such arguments. The ethnographic sources presented at the Taniguchi Conference (working papers, publications, discussions, slides, and videos) convinced me that Korean Confucianism is indeed an integral feature of contemporary politics. There are a handful of communities in the People's Republic of China where Confucianism has been revived or, more precisely, reinvented after 40 years of communist repression. In parts of Gansu Province, for instance, temple organizations devoted to the worship of Confucius are now playing an important role in local affairs.[3] Notwithstanding these recent developments, however, Chinese Confucianism does not constitute a ritual system that is practiced on a national scale, as in Korea.

Comparative Ethnography and the Missing Yangban

Anthropologists who specialize in Chinese ethnography often deal with convoluted social hierarchies, but the modes of stratification one encounters in Korea are much more complex (and, hence, more difficult to analyze). The complexities begin when one attempts to situate the yangban system in comparative ethnography. There are, of course, various ways of defining yangban [see e.g., Kim (this volume); Suenari 1994] but what is needed—and is curiously missing from the literature—is a comprehensive study of the yangban phenomenon. As an outside observer of these issues, it has proved exceptionally difficult to pin down what exactly is meant by yangban in various contexts. Conference discussions helped to unveil the multiplex nature of the yangban as a social category, but it is obvious that more work needs to be done on this topic.

The yangban system has not received the attention it deserves in the general anthropological literature. Students of social stratification throughout the world speak knowledgeably about the Hindu caste system and the Sanskritization process, primarily because so much has been published on these subjects. The debate regarding the structure of China's so-called "gentry" elite (scholar-bureaucrats) is better known to comparativists than is the yangban case—even though the latter is far more engaging from an analytic perspective. Why is it that Koreanists themselves have apparently steered clear of the yangban question? Anthropologists have devoted vast amounts of time and energy to unraveling social hierarchies in India, China, Japan, Europe, Africa, and nearly every other region on the ethnographic map. Why is Korea different?

My own speculation is that studies of the yangban phenomenon have been avoided—or at least underplayed—precisely because it is such a hot social issue in present-day Korea. Discussions of who is, and more importantly who is *not* an "authentic" yangban cut to the heart of Korea's historical legacy of social inequality and economic exploitation. This legacy cannot be attributed to the outside influences of Japanese colonialism or American imperialism: it is internal to the culture.

Furthermore, the ideology that underpins the yangban system—Confucianism—is a vibrant, living system; it is not simply a framework for private belief or philosophical discourse, as in the Chinese world. Discussions at the Taniguchi Conference made it abundantly clear that mastery of Confucian rites is an essential and defining characteristic of the "authentic" yangban. Actions speak louder than words. Claims to elite status have to be backed up with evidence of regular (and correct) ritual performance at recognized locations—lineage tombs, ancestral halls, national monuments, Confucian shrines. Of course, not everyone knows the accepted ritual forms. Furthermore, the sites of worship are guarded with great care; they are usually closed to women and to male outsiders who do not meet certain criteria. It is obvious, therefore, that Korean Confucianism has no real meaning—either as an abstract ideology or as a system of practice—outside the context of yangban identity politics.

A Comparative Perspective: Social Hierarchy in South China

My goal in the remainder of this paper is to draw comparisons between the Korean system of social stratification and that prevailing in south China. As I hope to illustrate, Chinese patterns of elite formation may throw light on the process of yangbanization as it has operated in Korea during the past century.

The region where I have conducted most of my field research is characterized by an exceedingly complex social hierarchy. Parts of south China were superficially analogous to Korea in the sense that chattel slavery, hereditary tenancy, and corporate landlordism constituted integral features of the social landscape [J. Watson 1976, 1977]. Prior to collectivization under the Communists in the 1950s, the best agricultural lands were owned as corporate estates by powerful lineages [see Potter 1970]. There were vast differences in wealth and educational attainment within these lineages but many remained intact for centuries, irrespective of class tensions [R. Watson 1985].

Powerful lineages of the type described above often controlled whole communities, referred to as single-lineage villages. There are 12 of these communities in Hong Kong's New Territories; the largest have populations of between 3,000 and 4,000, most of whom descend from the founding ancestors of their respective lineages. Social life in such communities was dominated by lineage activities and, as outlined below, there were clear restrictions on public behavior.

The hinterlands surrounding these powerful lineages were populated by hereditary tenants and landless laborers who formed what are known in the China literature as "satellite villages" [Freedman 1966; J. Watson 1977]. These communities were satellites in the sense that residents depended almost entirely on economic resources (land, oyster beds, mills, kilns, markets, industries) owned by the dominant lineages. As outlined below, the inherent subordination of satellite villagers was reflected in nearly every aspect of their private and public lives.

Elite Versus Non-elite Patterns of Community Life

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the differences between modes of social life in two communities located in Hong Kong's New Territories. One community, San Tin, is the home of the powerful Man lineage, which settled in its present location over six hundred years ago. I lived in San Tin for 17 months in 1969–1970 [see J. Watson 1975b] and have kept track of the community ever since. The other village, Ho Uk Tsuen (a pseudonym), is only half a mile from San Tin, near the Anglo-Chinese border. Ho Uk Tsuen has been a satellite of the Man lineage for over two hundred years and continues to live in the political shadow of its more powerful neighbor. This community, and other satellite villages in the New Territories, were the subject of my 1977–78 field investigation. I have also made efforts to monitor developments in these communities during subsequent summer field trips.

The residents of San Tin and Ho Uk Tsuen speak the same dialect of rural Cantonese and are devotees of the same deity, Tian-hou, the Empress of Heaven. When one explores the microdetails of everyday life in these two communities, however, it becomes apparent that they belong to separate and radically different subcultures. For the purposes of this essay, these subcultures will be referred to as elite and non-elite.

Table 1. Characteristics of Elite and Non-Elite Communities

ELITE San Tin (Man Lineage)	NON-ELITE Ho Uk Tsuen (satellite of San Tin)
Population: 2000+ households, multi-class	Population: 40+ households, mono-class
1. Single lineage and single surname	Multi-surname/no lineage organization
2. Ancestral estates (corporate land)	No ancestral estates
3. Ancestral halls (central and branch)	No ancestral hall
4. Community banquet halls	No banquet hall
5. Annual pilgrimages to ancestral tombs	Worship of immediate ancestors only
6. Written genealogies	No written records
7. Council of elders (with ritual authority)	No formal recognition of elderhood
8. Division of ritual pork	No shares of pork distributed
9. Powerful sense of lineage history	Weak sense of local history
10. Part of higher-order lineage system	No outside agnatic links
11. Part of province-level clan system	No ties to clan/surname associations

1. The first item in Table 1 (as numbered in the left-hand column) refers to San Tin's mode of internal organization: It is a classic example of the single-lineage village. Ninty-eight percent of the indigenous (i.e., pre-1970) population trace

direct descent from a single ancestor, Man Sai-gok, which means that they all share their founder's surname: *Man* (in Cantonese, Mandarin *Wen*). Before 1970, the only residents who did not inherit this surname were a few remaining descendants of domestic slaves who had once been attached to San Tin's wealthiest families. (By the 1920s this form of slavery had disappeared in the New Territories, but it survived until the early 1950s in parts of Guangdong Province.) In contrast, Ho Uk Tsuen is a multi-surname village; its residents trace descent from a variety of ancestors whose personal names are no longer recalled.

2. The Man lineage has 105 major ancestral estates, each of which is named in honor of a specific male ancestor. These estates are owned and managed as corporations, with shares divided on a *per stirpes* basis among descendants of the relevant ancestor. The majority of property holdings are paddy fields that have been redeveloped as industrial sites, housing complexes, or retail outlets (shops, restaurants, offices). Profits from the estates pay for ancestral rituals, maintenance of ancestral halls, scholarships, banquets, and a wide variety of other activities. The wealthiest estates provide annual dividends—in cash—to shareholders. The people of Ho Uk Tsuen, on the other hand, do not have ancestral estates and, hence, are unable to support any form of lineage organization.

3. San Tin has five ancestral halls, one central hall dedicated to the founder of the entire lineage and four branch halls built in honor of his wealthiest offspring. Branch halls are ritual centers for important segments of the Man lineage; all male descendants of the founder are, by definition, members of the central hall. San Tin's five halls are large and imposing; the wooden tablets of individual male ancestors are kept on altars inside these structures and are treated with great reverence. Hall construction and maintenance is financed by the proceeds of ancestral estates, which means that only the wealthiest segments of the lineage can afford them. Given that Ho Uk Tsuen lacks ancestral estates, it also has no ancestral halls.

4. In addition to the ancestral halls, San Tin contains 15 minor halls that serve as banquet centers for local residents. Banquet halls are financed from corporate resources and public fees raised among residents of various neighborhoods. Halls of this type are excellent indicators of an active community life; they are used for weddings, birth celebrations, and other festive occasions. The complete absence of banquet halls in Ho Uk Tsuen is, thus, clear evidence of community fragmentation and poverty.

5. One of the most conspicuous symbols of elite status in south China was (and still is in the New Territories) the maintenance of ancient tombs, dating from the earliest generations of Han pioneers who settled in this region during the Tang and Song dynasties. The Man are fiercely proud of their ancestral tombs and guard them with great care. Several hundred descendants, from all over the world, return to Hong Kong each year to participate in a pilgrimage to the founder's tomb. This pilgrimage is a Durkheimian rite of renewal in the sense that lineage members see their kinship system unfold before their eyes—as a living set of relationships—and

treat the event as a welcome opportunity to rekindle personal ties. According to lineage records, this annual ritual has been performed for over three hundred years. The pilgrimage is ostentatious in the extreme: a noisy caravan of buses and private cars escort the elders to the founder's tomb. Nowadays the pilgrims are accompanied by a police escort.

The people of Ho Uk Tsuen witness the Man pilgrimage every year, but they do not themselves visit the graves of any but the most immediate of their predecessors. Like most satellite villagers they have no collective cult of ancestors that extends beyond the three-generational family.

6. Residents of San Tin keep numerous written records that testify to their illustrious history, the most important being genealogies. These documents are the most treasured possessions of the lineage and are rarely shown to outsiders. Records of birth, marriage, adoption, death, and achievement are updated approximately every third generation. However, no one in Ho Uk Tsuen is listed in any written genealogy, even those compiled by publishing companies (so-called "clan" genealogies that incorporate people who share a given surname—irrespective of origin or lineage affiliation—for a fee).

7. The Man lineage had a council of elders that met regularly in San Tin's central ancestral hall until the 1980s. Males who attained the age of 60 were expected to participate and most did. The council did not have any real political power, as such, but it did have the right to review—and thereby delay—important community decisions. Unless handled carefully, the elders could cause problems for the community's actual political leaders (who were wealthy entrepreneurs and landlords). Man elders still play important ceremonial roles in the community. No wedding banquet is complete without the elders in attendance; their role is to confer legitimacy on the union.

Man elders are keenly aware of their generational rank, calculated by descending numbers from the founding ancestor who represents generation one. The oldest survivor of the most senior generation serves as "lineage master"; this man is always the first to offer incense at the tomb of the founding ancestor and plays an important (though strictly ceremonial) role in the community. In Ho Uk Tsuen, by contrast, elderhood was not marked in generational sequence. There was no elder council and no requirement that older male neighbors had to be invited to wedding celebrations.

8. A clear and unambiguous indicator of elite status in south China was the right to receive multiple shares of the pig meat offered to ancestors at annual rites. In San Tin, depending upon one's position in the segmentary system of the lineage, males received up to 15 separate parcels of meat each year. Sacrificial pork constituted an important feature of the local diet, given that fresh meat was expensive and difficult to obtain outside the ritual context. Residents of Ho Uk Tsuen reported that they rarely, if ever, ate meat of any kind until the 1960s; the regular consumption of pork was, for them, the supreme symbol of affluence.

9. The Man have a highly developed sense of their own significance in regional

history. For them, "history" is defined in concrete terms: it is evidenced in the buildings, temples, halls, monuments, markets, piers, fields, and dikes controlled by the Man lineage. Many of these structures bear stone inscriptions dating from the Ming and Qing eras. There are no comparable monuments or stone inscriptions in satellite villages. The Man dismiss everyone in Ho Uk Tsuen as "newcomers" who have played no role in local history—even though written records (appended to Man genealogies) show that specific lines of hereditary tenants have lived in Ho Uk Tsuen for over two hundred years.

10. The Man of San Tin are closely connected to other localized lineages in Bao-an County, Guangdong Province. In 1898 Bao-an (at that time known as Xin-an) was split in half and the southern portion leased to the British for 99 years. There is one other Man lineage settlement in the New Territories, plus five more located across the Hong Kong border (in what is, today, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone). Leaders from these seven localized lineages meet regularly to worship at the tombs of common ancestors and have formed a political alliance, known in the China literature as a "higher-order lineage." The people of San Tin thus have ready access to important leaders and wealthy merchants scattered throughout Bao-an County. The tenant farmers of Ho Uk Tsuen, on the other hand, are not even aware that kinship organizations of this type exist.

11. The Man higher-order lineage was, in turn, affiliated with a provincial-level "clan" organization that had headquarters in the city of Guangzhou—80 miles north. Only the wealthiest residents of San Tin ever visited Guangzhou, but for these men the clan hall was an important source of business connections. The Man clan drew members from dozens of localized lineages in the Pearl River Delta—one of China's richest agricultural regions. Their vast political network thus made it unwise for anyone to challenge the hegemony of the San Tin Man in their home territory. Satellite villagers were little more than pawns in this political universe.

"Proper" and "Improper" Modes of Behavior

Members of dominant lineages maintained what everyone in the region (including satellite villagers) accepted as "proper" standards of behavior. Practices associated with family organization, marriage, postmarital residence, adoption, and ancestor worship were subject to special scrutiny. It is probably no accident that "proper" forms of domestic organization, as practiced in dominant lineages, conformed to a style of life promoted by the founders of Chinese Neo-Confucianism, notably Zhuxi and Cheng Yi [e.g., Ebrey 1984:99, 1989]. If Confucianism had any meaning at the village level in south China it was reflected most obviously in family life.[4)]

Table 2 summarizes the modes of domestic organization that prevailed in San Tin and Ho Uk Tsuen.

12. Social life in San Tin is defined by the overpowering influences of a powerful lineage. Agnatic ties to fellow lineage members are stressed over links to

Table 2. Organizational Modes in Elite and Non-Elite Villages

ELITE San Tin (Man Lineage)	NON-ELITE Ho Uk Tsuen (satellite of San Tin)
"Proper" Modes of Organization	"Improper" Modes of Organization
12. Strong agnatic focus/denial of affinity	Affinal focus
13. Patrilocal residence enforced	Uxorilocal residence common
14. Agnatic adoption enforced	Non-agnatic adoption common
15. Major marriage pattern enforced (transfer of adult bride)	Minor marriage pattern common (transfer of child bride)
16. Widow remarriage discouraged	Widow marriage encouraged
17. Partible inheritance enforced (equal distribution among male heirs)	Unigeniture common (one male heir inherits tenancy rights)

affines ("in-laws"). In fact, as Rubie Watson has demonstrated [1981], males in elite lineages are discouraged from pursuing kinship ties with people outside their own patriline. In San Tin it is women, rather than men, who maintain close relationships to affines and matrilateral kin. Quite the opposite is true in Ho Uk Tsuen, where men actively nurture affinal ties. The role of mother's brother is paramount among satellite villagers, whereas in San Tin it is underplayed or, in some contexts, ignored.

13. Members of the Man lineage follow the patrilocal pattern of postmarital residence, which dictates that the bride must move to the village of her husband. Uxorilocal residence, whereby the groom relocates to the bride's natal home, is proscribed; it is considered to be among the worst forms of "improper" family organization. In San Tin, anyone attempting to negotiate a uxorilocal arrangement would be expelled from the lineage. In Ho Uk Tsuen, however, the rate of uxorilocal residence was between 10 and 15 percent of all households in the period from 1910 to 1960. Satellite villagers were aware that their elite neighbors considered uxorilocality to be shameful, but there were no prohibitions and no sanctions against such arrangements in tenant communities.

14. Members of elite lineages who did not produce their own male offspring were encouraged to adopt heirs from the preexisting agnatic group. By doing so, adopters transferred the rights of inheritance from one branch of the lineage to another—avoiding any dissipation of corporate resources. This form of adoption conforms closely to the norms promoted by Neo-Confucian scholars in many parts of East Asia [McMullen 1975]. A 1970 analysis of adoption cases in the Man lineage revealed that fewer than 0.08 percent of approximately 1,700 living males originated from outside the lineage [J. Watson 1975a:305, n. 7]. Severe restrictions were placed on non-agnatic adoption because each new member admitted from outside the group constituted a drain on Man ancestral estates. Those who wished to bring in an outsider had to pay for an expensive banquet, during which they were

humiliated by lineage elders. In contrast, adopters in Ho Uk Tsuen took their heirs from any family that happened to have excess sons; restrictions did not apply because, among tenants, there were no bodies of collective responsibility beyond the immediate family.

15. The Man, irrespective of wealth or class, followed what Wolf and Huang [1980] have called the "major" form of marriage, which involves the transfer of an adult bride to the household of the groom. The transfer was preceded by the exchange of brideprice and dowry, and marked by an elaborate (and expensive) set of banquets. The Man did not take brides who had been transferred as infants into their prospective groom's households—an arrangement referred to by Wolf and Huang as "minor" marriage (also known as little daughter-in-law marriage).

During my fieldwork I discovered that minor marriage was common in Ho Uk Tsuen, even though it was publicly condemned by many satellite villagers. Given that no dowry was involved in minor marriage, the arrangement was often thought of as little more than the purchase of a potential reproducer. No public ceremonies (outside the family) marked the acquisition of an infant bride or the consummation of her marriage in early adulthood. Women from elite households were scandalized by minor marriage and used the colloquial expression for "little daughter-in-law" as a term of abuse.

16. The fate of widows was a subject of considerable interest to Chinese Neo-Confucian scholars, many of whom argued that forced remarriage upon the death of a husband was a cruel and inhumane practice [Ebrey 1984:99]. Widows in San Tin had a right, enshrined in local custom, to expect support from their deceased husband's estate or from other family resources. Remarriage to another member of the Man lineage was considered a form of incest and accordingly was banned. But in Ho Uk Tsuen widows of childbearing age invariably remarried—often to men who lived in the same community, irrespective of surname. The Man considered such actions to be shocking departures from "proper" conduct, demonstrating a lack of virtue among the satellite villagers.

17. In San Tin every recognized male heir had a right to share in his father's estate. Fraternal-partible inheritance was backed by customary law and was never seriously challenged, even in families that had little of significance to pass to the next generation. Tenant farmers in Ho Uk Tsuen observed what amounted to a system of unigeniture: upon the death or retirement of a household head, rights to till assigned fields (which were owned by Man lineage estates) were passed to a single, designated heir. Managers of Man estates would not permit the division of tillage rights and treated each tenant household as an undifferentiated unit. Non-inheriting males had no choice but to leave Ho Uk Tsuen when they reached adulthood. This system of unigeniture helped ensure that the population of satellite villages remained more or less stable for nearly two hundred years. Meanwhile the Man lineage quadrupled in size over the same period.

Gentrification and the Pursuit of Status

The Man, and their rivals in other elite lineages, were self-appointed guardians of "proper" social behavior. In their own communities the observance of proper modes of action was enforced by the threat of severe sanctions, which included flogging, expulsion, and execution. Uxorilocality, non-agnatic adoption, minor marriage, widow remarriage, and adultery were thought to reflect badly on the entire lineage and, hence, were proscribed. There are several documented cases of formal expulsion from the Man lineage (usually for breaching the rules of adoption and inheritance), and I uncovered at least one case of execution (for adultery) in the 1940s. State authorities did not interfere with these local sanctions until the 1960s.

As noted above, satellite villagers were not subject to rigorous controls of their public behavior. In Ho Uk Tsuen, which is representative of tenant communities, there were no sanctions operating outside the family and no corporate lineages to impose standards. No one cared what tenants did in their private or public lives because they played only a passive role in regional politics.

Hereditary tenancy began to decline in the San Tin area during the 1950s as Man estates became less profitable; farming was gradually replaced by waged labor in Hong Kong's urban areas and by emigration to Europe. During the 1970s and early 1980s, former tenants became economically independent and, as a consequence, many tried to elevate themselves in the local status hierarchy. Minor marriage disappeared in the 1950s and by the 1970s residents of Ho Uk Tsuen were turning away from uxorilocality as a mode of residence. Satellite villagers also began to build ancestral halls and "rediscover" the tombs of long-lost ancestors. There was, in other words, a movement among former tenants to compete with those who had dominated local society for centuries.

For lack of a better term I prefer to call this a pattern of *gentrification*, akin in many ways to the processes of sanskritization and yangbanization described in the writings of Srinivas [1989] and Suenari [1994]. My use of the concept of gentrification draws on European parallels, notably the process by which nouveaux riches have tried to emulate aristocratic lifestyles during the past several centuries. The rules of the game are constantly changing in any system of social mobility based on gentrification: status aspirants rarely control the field of play and are forced to use whatever resources are available to them.

Prior to the 1950s satellite villagers were kept in a subordinate position by the threat of violence and by economic dependence on elite lineage estates. In more recent decades members of elite lineages have relied on more subtle—but equally effective—means of control, namely ridicule, humor, and satire. For instance, the Man refer to the recently constructed ancestral halls of their former tenants as "little halls," attaching a derogatory diminutive to the common term for "hall." They also insist on using older, embarrassing names for satellite villages rather than the newly minted place names promoted by residents: (old name) "Chicken Flapping Place" versus (new name) "Phoenix Gliding Ridge"; or (old name) "Southern Snake

Hole" versus (new name) "Sand River Village." The Man laugh openly at the brightly painted temples and the pretentious inscriptions that have begun to appear in satellite villages. "They always overdo it," commented one Man elder. "They decorate their temples too garishly. Everyone knows they have no history, so why do they want to have stone inscriptions. It is all so laughable."

But the competition for status is far from over. The Man have become involved in the redevelopment of rural lands that has swept through Hong Kong's New Territories in anticipation of the reversion to Communist control in 1997. Man estates are now worth millions (in any currency) and, given San Tin's location on the old Anglo-Chinese border, the prospects of yet more money flowing into the lineage are strong.

New business elites have emerged in the old lineage communities, and these people are less preoccupied with maintaining a mode of life that their grandparents defined as "proper." Today, one gains status in the New Territories by engaging in conspicuous consumption and ostentatious displays of private wealth; patterns of family life no longer count for much in the new social environment.

Nonetheless, former tenants in satellite villages have continued to play by the old rules of gentrification, investing in public symbols that once brought status to their rivals in elite lineages. I will be returning to the New Territories for another round of fieldwork in 1996–97 and I expect to continue my research in San Tin and Ho Uk Tsuen. Revisits to these communities in the 1980s revealed that former tenants were engaging in a campaign of lagging emulation, whereby they have continued to lag behind their elite rivals who have grown tired of the old game. Srinivas describes a similar process of social mobility among lower caste groups in India [1989]. No matter how hard they try or how much they invest, subordinate groups tend to emulate cultural symbols that are no longer fashionable. The local elites are always one step ahead, and the target—social recognition—remains ever elusive.

Conclusions: Status Mobility in Korea

What does any of this have to do with the process of yangbanization? My reading of the ethnography presented at the Taniguchi Conference leads me to conclude that the Chinese experience of gentrification is indeed helpful in understanding the Korean case.

In both societies the pursuit of status is intimately involved with cultural performance—as reflected in ancestral rites, modes of family organization, and the conduct of extra-domestic kinship. High status is verified in public performance which, in turn, implies an audience that is capable of judging the quality of the show. Attempts to claim yangban status in Korea are accepted or rejected depending on the ability of aspirants to present irrefutable evidence of elite heritage; written genealogies are particularly important in this regard [Shima 1990, 1993]. Those whose identities are unmistakably yangban are the harshest judges

[Asakura 1993; Kim 1993] and, like members of the Man lineage described above, they are least likely to accept former subordinates as status equals.

Papers presented at the Taniguchi Conference demonstrate, to me at least, that more attention needs to be paid to the range of cultural differences within Korean society. As in south China, there appear to be a wide variety of family and kinship patterns (relating to marriage, adoption, post-marital residence, inheritance, and disposition of widows) in the Korean countryside. Communities that are dominated by resident yangban lineages [Janelli and Janelli 1982; Kim 1992] conform to many modes of public behavior that would be acceptable to Neo-Confucian scholars. Other communities follow what might be defined (from the yangban perspective) as non-elite patterns of family organization; these include uxorilocality, affinal preference, and non-agnatic adoption [Cho'e 1993; Yoo 1993]. One might expect, judging from recent changes in the Chinese gentrification process described above, that non-elite patterns of behavior would be disappearing rapidly as the Korean countryside becomes more affluent.

It is evident to even casual visitors that consumerism is likely to play a much larger role in future determinations of status in Korea. This has certainly been the case in Japan and, increasingly, in post-Mao China. Evidence presented at the Taniguchi Conference demonstrates quite clearly, however, that the yangban (or, rather, the image of the yangban) continues to be a key element in the symbolic construction of Korean national identity. If anything, debates regarding the true nature of the yangban are likely to intensify as Korea becomes more affluent. Speaking as a comparativist who retains a keen interest in Korean ethnography, I look forward to reading future studies of the yangbanization process.

Notes

1) The ethnographic tour of Andong was conducted in June, 1990, and was sponsored by a research grant from the Korea Research Foundation. I am grateful to Prof. Kim Kwang-ok of Seoul National University for organizing this tour.

2) Orthopraxy ("correct practice") implies a preoccupation with the performative aspects of ritual and is contrasted to orthodoxy ("correct belief"), which denotes a focus on ideological issues. This distinction is discussed at length in the book *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* [J. Watson and Rawski 1988]. In *Death Ritual* I argue that the Chinese preoccupation with orthopraxy was primarily responsible for China's long history of cultural unity; Evelyn Rawski, co-editor of *Death Ritual*, argues against this view, stressing the unifying role of shared beliefs.

   Korean ethnography presents an excellent opportunity to review these arguments in another cultural context. Although my 1990 ethnographic tour was very brief (see note 1 above), I was struck by the attention to ritual detail evident among members of the Andong elite. This impression was reinforced by videos presented at the Taniguchi Conference and discussions with participants. Prof. Suenari Michio maintains that the mechanisms for generating cultural unity in Korea do not necessarily parallel those described for China in *Death Ritual*. He agrees that more work needs to be done on the

nature of Korean orthopraxy before cross cultural comparisons can be attempted.

3) A forthcoming book by Jing Jun [1996] focuses on the reinvention of a local Confucian cult in Gansu Province. The people involved are surnamed Kong and claim direct descent from Confucius (Kong Fuzi). The Gansu Kong were dominant landlords prior to the revolution and lived in a cluster of single-lineage villages. The worship of Confucius, both as a deity/hero and as an ancestor, was outlawed by Communist authorities; the local Confucius Temple was destroyed during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960). Jing traces the social history of the Gansu Kong and shows how they have made the worship of Confucius into the focus of contemporary community life following the economic reform process that began in the 1980s. The Gansu Kong are now striving to connect themselves to other Kong lineages in China, including those associated with Qufu—Confucius's home town in Shandong Province.

4) It is important to note, however, that villagers themselves (irrespective of social status) never used the term "Confucian" to describe any aspect of family life. Instead, as noted above, certain practices were accepted as "proper," whereas other forms were condemned as "improper" or, worse, "barbarian/uncivilized." "Proper" forms of marriage and family organization tend to reinforce the centrality of the patriline and bolster male authority, thereby conforming to the popular teachings of Zhuxi. Nevertheless, only a handful of the most educated men in San Tin had heard of Zhuxi.

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