

Preface to the Paperback Edition

In the 1970s and 1980s, I used to allow six hours for the one-way trip from Seoul to San'gongni: an hour to get to the Ch'ongnyangni train station, buy the ticket, and board the train; two hours and twenty minutes on the train to Ch'unch'ŏn; a thirty-to-forty-minute wait in the Ch'unch'ŏn bus station; another hour on the slow country bus on bumpy, unpaved roads to Fishplay Shore; and then an hour walking over Tang Kogae Pass to San'gongni itself. I had to leave Seoul no later than 11:00 AM or risk walking over the mountain pass in the dark.

In a return trip in 2012, I checked the Internet for the direct bus to San'gok Mountain. Boarding the bus at the Kangbyŏn terminal at 2:25 in the afternoon, I sped up the Kangwŏn Freeway [*kosok toro*] through tunnel after tunnel, exiting to proceed by smooth, paved highway through the mountains to Broadmart, the local market town. I noticed the huge, new, two-story school there as we headed toward Fishplay Shore, the old jumping-off place for the village of San'gongni. I was surprised when the bus passed the large parking lot with its concession stands serving river and mountain visitors on the Fishplay side of the river and went straight across the bridge to drop me off—less than an hour after departure—at the foot of the mountain at a vaguely Swiss-looking hotel and shop labeled “San'gok Mountain House.” I could have ridden all the way into the village and been dropped off in the middle of Big Hamlet, where I had lived in the 1970s and '80s, but for old times' sake, I wanted to disembark at the foot of the mountain and walk into the village over Tang Kogae, something I hadn't done for twenty-plus years.¹

1 The original fieldwork upon which this book was based was carried out in 1976–77 and 1983, but I visited the village again in 1988. (I took the bus to the foot of the mountain once in the 1990s, but, being on a day-trip, I didn't have time to walk into the village, which was still not accessible by bus.)

Crossing the pass in 2012 wasn't the same as in 1976, 1977, or 1983, of course. Cars and trucks whizzed by me at forty and fifty miles an hour as I trudged alone up the wide, paved road over the pass. The traditional terraced rice fields were no longer in use, replaced by a succession of restaurants, shops advertising rental skis and boards, and hostels built in a variety of national styles, from French Swiss to ultra-modern to traditional Korean. When I reached the top of the pass, the view of the village took my breath away. To my left, I could view a five- to six-story Italianate "pension," and while to my right Big Hamlet was recognizable, a dozen or so two- and three-story commercial buildings stuck out. Welcome to the ski gateway and river resort village of San'gongni!

My Japanese colleague Itō Abito had joked with me just two weeks earlier, when I mentioned my plans to visit San'gongni, that I would have to rename this book "San nŏmŏ ap'at'ŭ itta"—"Over the mountains are apartments." We had a good laugh; I never dreamed it would be true. Now, however, I had to face up to what Koreans call a "new heaven and earth"—*sinchŏnji*.

Walking into the heart of the village, I oriented myself only with difficulty, but eventually I encountered some villagers, introduced myself, and was able to chat. The local dialect started coming back. One man had been a child when I lived in the village, and he remembered me. I asked about my former host family, since I couldn't find their house. Their old house had burned down. They were now living in a new brick house with hot and cold running water and indoor plumbing, next to the bus stop. When I mentioned the pensions, he volunteered that the "picnic ladies" who visited the pensions were a problem because of the "boom, boom, boom" of their music late into the night.²

I had expected to find a village full of aged empty nesters with a few entrepreneurial farmers farming on a larger scale than in the past. The empty nesters and larger-scale farmers were indeed there, but so were an even larger number of new business owners—those running pensions, restaurants, stores, and other businesses. Far from stagnating, the village was thriving—although not necessarily for the old-time residents, since the entrepreneurs were entirely from the outside. San'gongni may now be even more interesting than it was in the past, but because of the numerous different social groups in the village today, studying it would be much more difficult than studying the straightforward agricultural village of some forty years before.

2 The word he used was *p'iknik ajumŏnidŭl*. This seems to be an English rendering of the old Korean concept of *sop'ung*, "an outing by a school or other group involving organized activities such as sports and nature observation." Drinking and singing often accompanied these activities.

The changes the village has undergone since the time this book was written help one contextualize the historical moment that this study records. San'gongni in the late seventies was a poor and remote mountain village in a conservative part of South Korea just at the time Korea was beginning the change from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban economy. San'gongni was inevitably affected by Korea's urbanization: most of the villagers between ages fifteen and thirty had already left for urban schooling or factory work when I was there. Yet I chose, I think with justification, to call the villagers "peasants" because for those living in the village, agriculture was still "a livelihood and a way of life."³ Most households were self-sufficient in food production to a considerable degree and sold on the market only what was left over after their household needs were met. Little money circulated within the village, and hospitality was a cardinal virtue; I could just show up without worrying about whether somebody would put me up overnight. Time was not money. I was able to interview at least one person in every household in the village, and I spent many an hour chatting or drinking with a variety of villagers.

The New Village Movement was in full swing. The first mechanical "tractors"—engines that could be equipped to plow as one walked behind them, or be harnessed as a power source for carts or for threshers—had arrived in the village the same year I did. Most people still plowed and harrowed the fields with cattle throughout the 1970s. The village had all the organizations promoted by the government—a nominal 4-H Club, a women's organization that ran cooperative stores, a village strongbox, and a couple of cooperative credit societies (*kye*) organized by the Agricultural Cooperative to foster purchase of the first mechanical plows, in addition to the traditional "marriage and funeral" societies. I was told the village was going to be electrified soon and maybe furnished with a bridge across the river. There were plans for tourism, too, but with the area's primitive transportation infrastructure, these plans seemed pie-in-the-sky to me.

In 1983, when I did the re-study included in this book, both the electricity and the bridge had become a reality. Tractors had largely, though not entirely, replaced cattle for plowing, but otherwise life didn't seem that

3 For a discussion of the term, see Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 27.

much different from what it had been six years earlier. People had heard that the area was slated to be inundated by a reservoir needed for the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and they worried about the level of compensation the government was planning for their land.

Only during my 1988 visit (a period not covered in this book) did I begin to feel that people were becoming more market-oriented. When I arrived on foot that year, for example, my host family exclaimed, "Why didn't you call us? We would have picked you up at the bus stop with the tractor." People had televisions. An old friend I visited casually picked up the phone and invited other friends over for drinks with me. The threat of inundation had passed, and I found a few farmers growing cash crops rather than subsistence crops: ginseng and Oriental medicines for sale on the market. Others had increased the scale of their animal husbandry to ten to twelve head of cattle instead of the one or two cows raised in the 1970s. The villagers fretted that the years of expecting inundation had inhibited investment in the transportation infrastructure, which they badly needed to prosper. And so I thought the village would continue to age without dramatic change as only a few farmers adapted their agriculture to market conditions.

But San'gongni has moved on, as Korea has moved on. When I first studied San'gongni, it was "Korea" to me. Now that I have done research in different parts of Korea over more than thirty-five years, I would not claim that San'gongni—or any village—could be "typical" of rural Korea at any point in time. While there were other villages as remote and poor as San'gongni—particularly in mountain areas—there were also villages that had been fully incorporated into the capitalist money economy since the 1920s, if not before. In some areas by the 1970s, hired field labor had replaced labor exchange and labor teams for a generation or more, or cash cropping had been common for a century or more. Many villages then and for the next decade were prospering through market gardening to the cities, and peasants located in proximity to urban development were selling their land and retiring on the proceeds. Many parts of even rural Korea have never been as socially conservative as were the stolid peasants of the relatively undifferentiated Yōngsŏ region of Kangwŏn Province that, like all Korean regions, has its own distinct cultural tradition.

Some of the people I knew in the 1970s and 1980s (or their children and grandchildren) were still living in the village in 2012, but the way of life described in the pages of this book has largely disappeared. When the book was first published in 1988, urban Koreans still recognized the lifestyle described here as one familiar from their own youth or that of their parents or grandparents. This is no longer the case for the Korean

youth of today, who are removed three generations or more from village life. So, today this study must be read historically. It's about San'gongni—a particular village at a particular historical juncture—isolated, operating as a coherent social unit, and maintaining relatively conservative notions of family and clan organization. What it would later become is a very different story that will have to be told elsewhere.

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