



Subsistence and Productivity in Mid-20th Century Korean Agriculture

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Over the Mountains are Mountains

- Fieldwork in 1977 and 1983
 - This book describes a way of life that no longer exists in rural Korea
 - I characterized the rural agriculturalists of that time as “peasants” (a technical term in anthropology), but I would not say that of contemporary rural Korea
 - “Peasants” in anthropology are traditional agriculturalists who produce both for subsistence and for sale in the market (in the 1970s it was about 50:50)
 - They use “traditional” technology so their productivity is limited, but they are not mere “subsistence agriculturalists” because they always live in relationship to cities and governments with which they interact
 - Contemporary farmers in Korea produce primarily for sale in markets, and their farms are highly mechanized using chemical fertilizers and pesticides (unless they are organic)
- Read the Preface to the 2013 edition to grasp the contrast between then and now



“Peasant” as a Technical Term

- Anthropological theorists such as Robert Redfield (*Peasant Society and Culture*) have hypothesized that “peasants” are a world-wide anthropological type who pursue “agriculture as a livelihood and a way of life”
- A. L. Kroeber sees “part-societies and part-cultures”
 - Always exist in relationship to cities, and are thus distinguished from tribal agriculturalists
 - Mostly self-sufficient for their own needs with a “safety first” conservatism, thus not farmers (who sell all of their crop for money to buy what they need)



Farmers and Fishermen

- Raymond Firth includes fishermen in the category “peasant”, but others do not
- In Korea there is an interesting contrast between farmers and fisherman in sociological types
 - Vincent Brandt who studied the mixed farming-fishing village of “Sökp’o-ri” in South Ch’ungch’öng Province in the 1960s found personality differences between farmers and fishermen
 - People in the hamlets of pure farmers were Confucian quiet and orderly, with women staying near home and not interacting much with strangers
 - People in the fishing hamlets were noisy drinkers with a much higher tolerance of risk-taking—because fishing boats required loose groups of men recruited for voyages
- In the Korea of the 1960s and 1970s farmers were respectable no matter how poor, but fishermen were not not matter how rich—fishermen also patronize shamans more



Marx and the peasants

- *Eighth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte* (chapter 7)
 - The small holding peasants [of France] form a vast mass, the membership of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse . . . Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, a peasant and his family, alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.



How the peasant category applied to Korea

- Peasant households still largely self-sufficient in the 1970s
 - 98% of the rice and 85% of the vegetables they consumed were self-produced (p93)
 - 50% of their household consumption overall was self-produced
- But all households were not alike as Marx would have it
 - Landlords, tenants, and owner-cultivators (of various sizes)—i.e. villages were class-differentiated
 - All had strong relations to markets that influenced their social sphere
 - Villages were knitted together by kinship, lineages in which houses were differentiative by seniority, administrative ties, and folk religious activity
 - Very rapid rural-to-urban migration linked rural families with cities, and robbed the village of people between the ages of 15 and 35

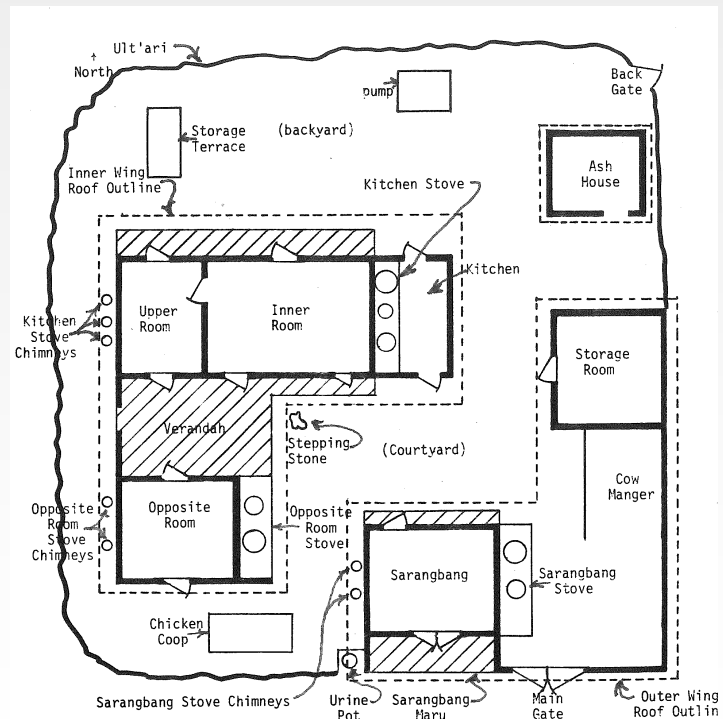


What's specific about a mountain village?

- Western Kangwŏn Province (Yŏngsŏ Region) culturally belongs in Central Korea (including Ch'ungch'ŏng, Kyŏnggi, and Hwanghae)
 - Speaks central Korean dialect (similar but not identical to Seoul speech)
 - Built L-shaped farmhouses (southern Korea has I-shaped farmhouses)
- Less developed marketing network than densely populated plains, and few high value crops (say strawberries or persimmons) because of transportation problems
- Ratio of irrigated riceland (non) to rainfall field (pat) low, and forest (sup'ul) available for wood and tombs
- Lack of access to fresh seafood made nutrition poorer than coastal villages
- Villages are smaller and poorer than in other areas



Fully Elaborated Western Kangwon-do Farmhouse





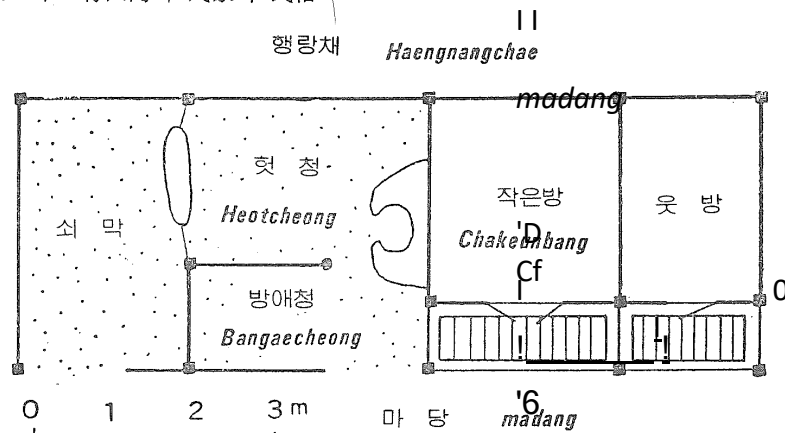
What's specific about coastal villages

- Land ownership is less important than in purely agricultural villages
 - Women can gather seaweed and shellfish along the shore
 - Although people could be poor, their nutritional status was usually better than inland people who did not have access to marine resources
- Cultural distinction between fishermen and farmers
 - Farming is respectable--no matter how poor you are you can live an orderly life
 - Fishing is iffy—sometimes you make a killing, sometimes you get nothing
 - Boat owners hire shifting crews of sailors, catch varies
 - Gambling personality, noisy disorderly life, very superstitious (i.e. use shamans a lot)
- Coastal villages are larger and more diverse than most inland village



Island Workers' Cottage (I-shaped)

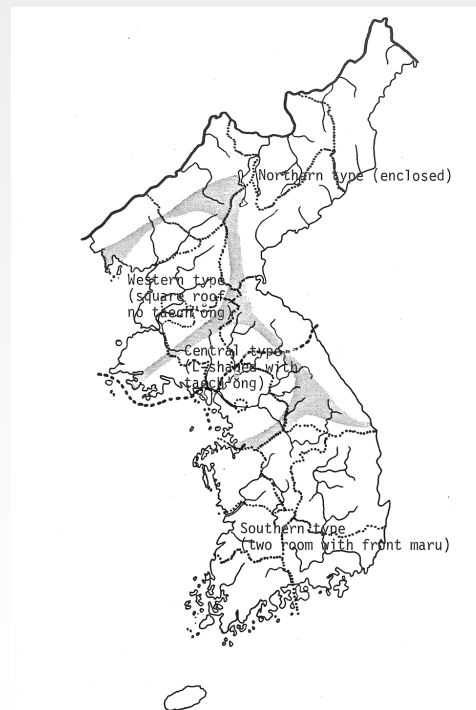
224 第7章 青山島の 民家と 民俗



(그림 7-6) 邑里의 鄭成漢氏宅 行랑채 平面圖



House Type Areas





Peasant Agriculture—self sufficient families need some of each type of field

- Three kinds of fields
 - Non (논)—irrigated fields always planted in rice (because rice is twice as productive as other crops)—straw used to thatch roofs and feed cattle
 - Pat (밭)—rainfall field
 - Some planted in field crops with a complex crop rotation—barley, wheat, kaoliang, soybeans, adzuki beans, maize
 - Kitchen garden—Chinese cabbage, chili pepper, garlic, daikon radish, lettuce, balloon flower (toraji), potatoes, sweet potatoes, zucchini, squash
- House lot (집터)
- Forest (수풀)—wood for fuel, graves
 - Firefield farms (hwajŏn) in the old days (ended in 1970s)



Animal husbandry

- Cattle
 - Need at least one cow to plow with
 - On *non*, one cow is enough to plow with
 - On *pat*, need a yoke of two oxen (get through sokkyöri 솟걸이)
 - Feed straw and gaoliang to cattle
- Chickens
 - Chickens eat grain and thus compete with humans when subsistence is difficult
- Dogs
 - Fed “kaebap” which is leftover human food
- Pigs (not kept in San’gongni, but again have to be provided with feed)
- Goats (not kept in San’gongni, but can eat anything)



Silkworms—fast cash for those with enough household labor

- Two seasons of one month—one in the spring (natural), and one in the fall if the mulberry trees have been properly pruned
- Get silkworm eggs from the Agricultural Coop, and hatch them
 - Ravenous young silkworms eat only freshly sprouted mulberry leaves
 - Full-time task to pick the leaves and feed the silkworms (usually for women)
- When silkworms are ready to spin after a month
 - People moved out of their house, put frames in for the silkworms to climb onto, and then let them spin
- Have to kill the silkworms before they chew their way out of their cocoons to become moths
- Sell to silk factories that unwind the cocoons to make silk thread



How much land did a family need/could farm?

- 1977 productivity levels to support a family of 5.5 people?
 - 1000 p'yŏng (1/3 hectare) of riceland
 - 2000 p'yŏng (2/3 hectare) of rainfall field
- How much land could a husband and wife cultivate?
 - About 1.6 hectares by themselves
 - But with labor exchange and a little bit of hired labor 2 hectares
- Conclusion
 - Not much room between the minimum for subsistence and the maximum able to farm with family labor—meaning with existing technology it was almost impossible to raise the standard of living very much



Seasonality an Important Adaptive Problem

- Pori kogae (barley pass)—when last years rice stores have been used up but before the winter barley can be harvested
 - Might eat unripe barley **꽃보리** or rice **꽃벼**, or mountain herbs (**산나물**)
- rice seedlings put out in April, and transplanted in May/June
- Transplanting should be completed before beginning of changma (or else the rice won't have time to ripen)
- Monsoon in late June early July
- Two weedings July/August
- Harvest September/October
- November/December ritual activity



Rural Diet Largely Vegetarian before the 1990s

- Bulk of diet came from carbohydrates
 - Rice, barley, wheat noodles, azuki beans (p'at) complement each other to make for complete protein—short on calcium, though
- Processing of soybeans for digestibility is an important traditional technology
 - Meju—cooked beans and wheat mixed and hung out to dry where enzymes come from the air and ferment it
 - Can make toenjang (miso) as soup stock
 - Can make kanjang (soysauce)
 - Can grind soybeans and make tubu (tofu)
 - Can sprout beans and put in soups (sprouted beans have more B vitamins)
- Kimchi important for winter vitamins
 - Brine head cabbage, stuff with sauce of toenjang, garlic, koch'u, etc. and store in a semi-buried large pot (kimch'idok) where it will last from November through March



Seasonal Labor Requirements

- Peak labor season transplantation of rice
 - Labor exchange (품앗이), labor piecework (품팔이/도급), ture 두레—these days kinsfolk might come from town to help out
 - Cow exchange for oxen
- Labor complementation
 - By cultivating a great variety of crops with different labor requirements and seasons one can space one's labor over the growing season
- Mechanization?
 - Just beginning in 1976 with hand-held tractors, and by 1983 cows were being phased out (because labor getting shorter—i.e. without migration to the cities for factory jobs, saving labor on the farm wouldn't have made economic sense)
 - Today (after the period of the book)—riceland has been consolidated into rectangular plots with tractors, transplanting machines, and combine harvesters—terraced fields abandoned