

# **“Traditional” Korean Family**

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# How Old is “Tradition”

- Silla/Koryŏ (4th c. AD-1392)—bilateral family
- Chosŏn (1392-1910)—transition to patrilineal lineage organization modeled on China
  - 1401 Zhu Xi’s “Family Ritual” made compulsory for elites
  - After 1600 lineages began to be formed among elites, women were disinherited, and elites formed clan villages
- Kabo Reforms of 1895
  - Abolished slavery and inherited status distinctions (“yangban” abolished), and raised the age of marriage

# Early Colonial Period

- Decree on Civil Affairs 1912
  - Codified Korea customary law for Koreans and gave all Koreans surnames and clan seats (song and pon) even though only upper classes traditionally had both of these
- Created “legal pluralism”
  - Japanese families regulated by Japanese Civil Code
  - Korean families regulated by “custom” that the Japanese systematized based on upper-class Confucian practices
  - Legal pluralism is a typical colonial legal formation

# 20<sup>th</sup> Century Continuous Change

- Japanization 1921-3, 1939
  - Family registers (hojōk) made legal basis for family organization, uxori-local marriage allowed, attempt to switch from patrilineal bloodlines to house line system and everybody given song and pon
- 1960 New Civil Code
  - Retraditionalization of Korean family that abolished most Japanese innovations to the family system
- Feminist reforms 1977, 1989, 2005 (especially following democratization)
  - Reduced power of family heads and equalized inheritances among all siblings
- Constitutional Court Ruling 1997
  - Invalidated rule of clan exogamy “tongsōng tongbon purhon” 同性同本不婚



# Complexity of Understanding Change

- All changes to the family in Korea were not simply driven by modernization
- Some changes (and non-changes) were related to the desire to maintain a distinct national identity
- Some changes were designed by elites to adapt the family to capitalism
- Some changes have come about in response to feminist citizen movements
- Some things have *not* changed despite modernization
- North and South Korea are no longer identical in family structures

# What is “traditional”

- The notion of “tradition” 전통 傳統 (대대로 내려 온 줄기나 핏줄) only comes into being when modernity 근대성 近代性 is introduced
  - Before “tradition” there are notions of customs and practices (풍속風俗, 습관習慣, 미풍美風, 가풍家風) but these are not idealized as national and traditional
  - Modernity brings with it the notion of “rational reform of outdated customs” that in retrospect are now defined as traditional
- Tradition become, in effect, everything that precedes modernity that defines national culture

# Practical Definition of Tradition

- The notion that “traditional” is whatever precedes “modern” is a fiction by which “modernity” “Orientalizes” and “Others” the past
  - By “Orientalizing the past” I mean thinking of the past as unchanging
  - By “Othering” the past, I mean that “modernity” is not interested in the past per se, but rather uses a stereotyped view of the past in order to define itself
  - It is a fiction because, as historians know, what preceded the modern also has its own history of change and development
  - Moreover, the line between tradition and modernity is arbitrary because modernity is a moving target
    - i.e. what seemed modern 20 years ago seems traditional today
- For practical reasons in this course we’ ll define Korean traditional family as that during the colonial period 1910-1945
  - Practical reason #1: North and South Korea have changed in different ways since 1945, so we want to define tradition for a time when north and south were alike
  - Practical reason #2: The Japanese went to a great deal of trouble to define Korean tradition for legal purposes, so we have good information about tradition during this period. Anthropological study of the family began during this period
  - *Disadvantage*: the family was already influenced by the colonial experience by this time so it was not “pure pre-colonial Korean”

# What is a “corporate” family?

- Four formal criteria
  - (1) Defined membership boundaries
    - “I belong to one and only one corporate 가 家 family, and I know exactly who are its members.” (고유어: 집)
    - The precise membership of the corporate family used to be recorded on the family record (a government document) 호적 戶籍
  - (2) the family has a formal head 호주 戶主 with significant rights and duties (고유어: 바깥주인, 안주인)
  - (3) There is succession to the house headship 호주계승 戶主繼承
  - (4) The corporate family has an estate which is family property rather than an individuals’ property 가산 家産



# Formal Characteristics of Korean Traditional Family

- Patrilineal (부계제 父系制)
  - Patriliney is a mode of reckoning who does and does not belong to my kin group
  - Rule: I belong to the kin group of my father (patrilineage), and I don't belong to the kin group of my mother (even though I am related to my mother's kin)
  - Three kinds of relatives:
    - (1) members of my patrilineage 친족親族
    - (2) other blood relatives through female links (outside relatives)
      - Male's mother's family: 외갓집 (外家~)
      - Female: birth family: 친갓집 (親家~), mother's family 외갓집 (外家~)
    - (3) relatives through marriage (affines)
      - Male: 처갓집 (妻家~), 사돈집 (查頓~)
      - Female: 시집 (媳~) (the family a woman marries into)
- Patriarchal (가부장제 家父長制)
  - “All, or almost all power lies in the hands of males.”
  - House head is eldest male relative
- NB patrilineal≠patriarchal



# Formal Characteristics (2)

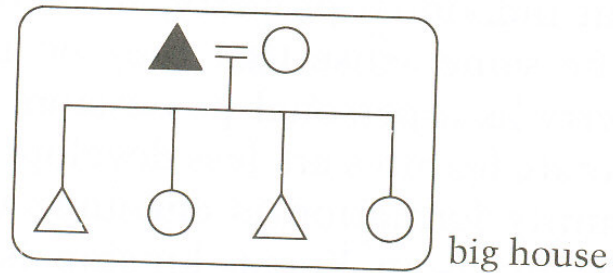
- “Monogamous”
  - One can only have one true wife 적처 適妻 at a time
  - In the past men could have concubines 첩 妾, 소실 小室 (고유어: 작은 마누라: 적처 쓰는 말은 시앗) whose children were legitimate (사생자私生子 아니다) but did not inherit their father’s social status and thus were nothoi 서자 庶子, 庶孽
- Patrilocal
  - Woman leaves her birth house and joins her husband’s house at the time of marriage 친가집을 떠나고 시집에 살러 가다
- Eldest son favored in inheritance and succession (partible, unequal inheritance)
- Eldest son inherits the house headship (가독 家督), and the right to do ancestor worship (제주 祭主)
  - All sons should inherit at least some property (partible)—rule of thumb that eldest gets twice what others get, or at least half of the estate—but many families were too poor to divide the estate and younger sons got nothing
  - *Not primogeniture*—that would be if eldest inherits house headship *and* all of the estate at the same time (as in Japan)

# Family Cycle

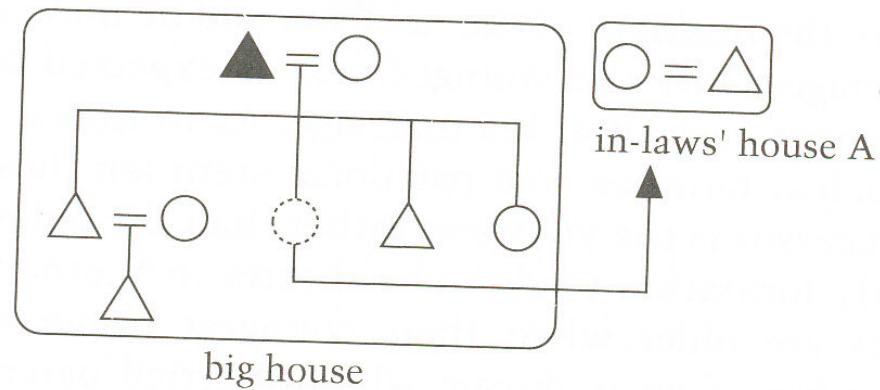
- Start with married couple
- Expansion
  - Couple have children
  - Eldest son brings in daughter-in-law (stem family)
  - Other sons bring in daughters-in-law (joint family)
- Fission
  - Daughters leave the house at marriage
  - Partition: younger sons receive their “livelihood” and form their own new “little house” (작은 집) while house of the father and eldest son is the “big house” (큰 집)
- Replacement
  - Father dies and is replaced by eldest son
  - (Mother dies and is replaced by eldest daughter-in-law)

# Korean Expansion/Fission

## 1. Nuclear big house

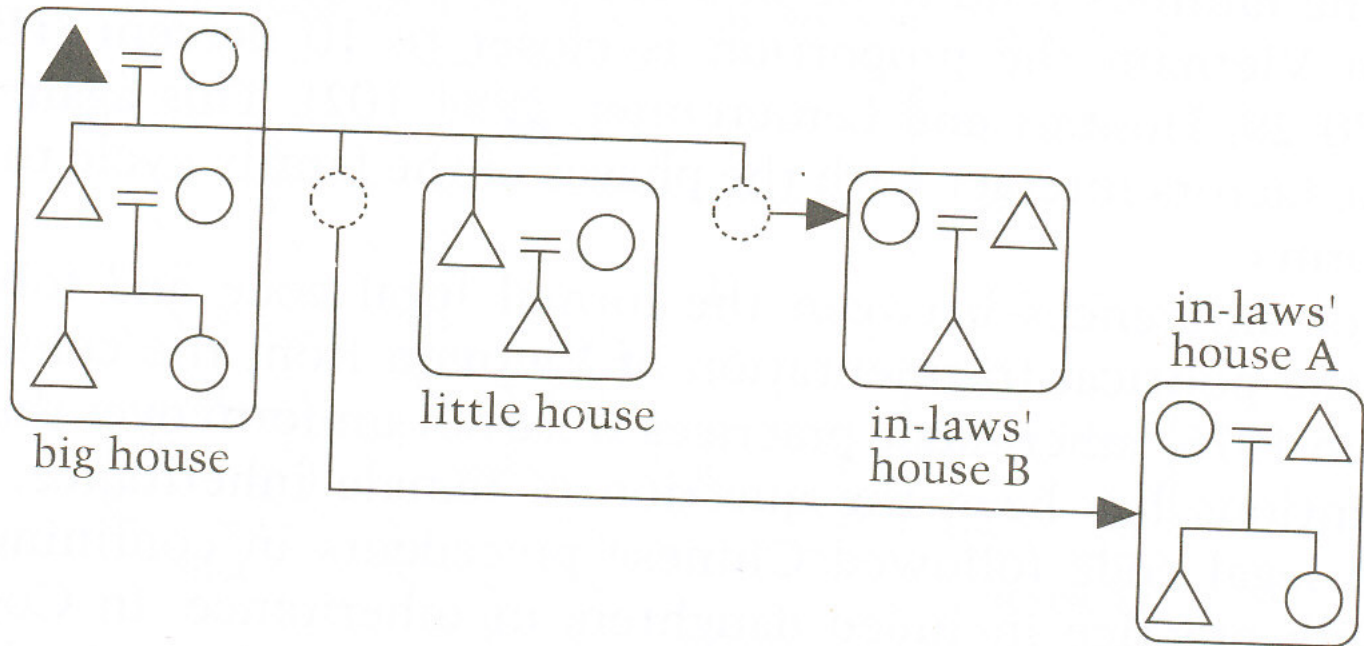


## 2. Stem big house



# Korean Family after Partition

3.



**Figure 4.3**  
*Korean Patrilineal Stem Family Cycle*

# Class Variations

- Among upper class, boys married young (12-14) and girls married old (20+)
  - Wives often older than husbands
- Among poorer classes, girls married young (12+) while boys (especially 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sons) married later (20+)
- Among the really impoverished, female child marriage (민며느리) was one way to reduce the size of family and cost of the wedding
- Among poor people, if there were no sons, a son-in-law could be brought in an uxori-local marriage 데릴사위 (unlike Japan, this did not change succession or inheritance)
- The upper classes didn't do uxori-local marriage. If there was no son, a man would take a concubine, or a nephew would be adopted to the line of the sonless man. Adoption was often done after the death of the adopter (사후양자 死後養子).
  - Boys from a clan different from the father could not be adopted. The best choice would be a son of a brother.



# Family Roles (sinbun)

- House head (hoju, chip chuin, pakkat chuin)
- House mistress (woman who runs the house—either the wife of the house head, or his mother)
- Eldest son (hyōng)
- Eldest son's wife (k'ŭn myōnŭri)
- Younger sons (tongsaeng)
- Younger son's wives (chagŭn myōnŭri)
- Married out daughters and their husbands

# Family relations

- Father/son
- Mother/son
- Husband/wife?
- Father-in-law/daughter-in-law?
- Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law?
- Older and younger brothers?
- Daughters-in-law to each other?

# Social Psychological Considerations

- Men are born into a family, while women are married in
  - Women move from ch'in'gatchip to sijip
  - Men have term for wife's family (ch'ögatchip), but have no distinctive name for their own birth family
- Are father/son ties different from mother/son ties?  
How about father-in-law/daughter-in-law or mother-in-law/daughter-in-law
- Theory of uterine family (Margery Wolf)
  - Mother ties children to herself emotionally (especially oldest sons) in order to stabilize an insecure position in the household?

# Traditional Arranged Marriage

- (1) Marriage Discussions
- (2) Gift Exchanges
- (3) Marriage Ceremony at Bride's House
- (4) New Room at Bride's House
- (5) New Procession to Groom's House
- (6) P'yebaek

# Marriage Discussions 의혼 議婚

- Go-between (중매쟁이, 중신애비) usually a kinsman or friend who finds about family status and character of bride
- Usually initiated by the boy's side
- Check out the “bride or groom material” 신부감을 찾으러 선을 보다 done by family of both sides
- Divination of auspiciousness of marriage 궁합 宮合 (delivery of saju 四柱 sometimes equated with napch'ae of Chinese marriage)
- Choose master of ceremonies 주혼자 主婚者



# Gift Exchanges

- Groom's family sends the gift box to the bride's house
  - Marriage letter, red and green silk, gifts for bride *and her family*
  - *napp'yeham* 納弊函—place a steamer (siru) on top of a tray table (soban), and tie the box on top of them
  - Traditionally delivered by a servant, now by friends of the groom
- Bride's family will often provide a suit and watch for the groom and gifts for his brothers (yedan 예단 禮緞) and/or mother
- Groom's side supposed to provide a place to live
- Bride will bring her dowry in the form of household goods with her when she moves in

# Bride Price and Dowry

- Bride price
  - Substantial payment from groom's family to bride's family that does *not* go to the married couple (traditional in China and Japan, but not Korea)
- Dowry
  - Wealth from the girl's family that is brought in at marriage (usually but not always managed by husband)—traditionally small in Korea except among the upper classes
- Dower
  - Wealth of the husband pledged to support a widow after her husband's death, or to support a woman in the case of divorce (in Muslim societies, but not traditional in Korea)
- Indirect Dowry
  - Payment from the groom's family to bride's family that comes back with the bride into the groom's family (similar in some respects to dower, and the box delivery in Korea can be partially understood this way)

# Interpretation of Korean Marriage Exchanges

- Gift Box delivery (納弊) 函을 보냄
  - Most goes to the bride and comes back in indirect dowry
  - Some gifts go to the bride's family, but not enough to qualify as bride price. Any cash in the box would be used for the wedding.
- Dowry (honsu 혼수 婚需)
  - Some dowry brought in by wife, but traditionally dowry was not that substantial in Korea

# Theoretical Considerations

- Descent Theory (A. R. Radcliffe-Brown)
  - Brideprice effects the transfer of rights to the groom's descent group
  - Rights in genetricum—right to filiate children to groom's descent group
  - Rights in uxorem—rights to domestic service of woman as wife
- Alliance Theory (Claude Levi-Strauss)
  - Brideprice payments are part of a comprehensive relationship of reciprocity between descent groups
  - Exchange of both women and goods through marriage creates an alliance between descent groups



# Marriage Ceremony 친영親迎

- First procession 초행 初行—groom and his entourage proceed to bride's village the day before the wedding
- Little ceremony (sorye 소례 小禮)—the groom gives a gift of geese to the bride's parents (also known as chonan 존안 尊雁)
- Big ceremony (taerye 대례 大禮)—bride and groom exchange bows (three times, each time bride bows twice and groom once), and exchange three cups of liquor
- Wedding banquet at bride's house



# New Room 신방新房

- A new room is prepared for the bride and groom at the bride's house
- Groom undresses bride
- Bride and groom spend 1-3 nights together at the bride's house (can go on as long as a year in wealthy families in the Southeast)

# New Procession 신행新行

- Groom brings his new bride back to his house
- In upper class:
  - Accompanied by lots of servants carrying goods
  - Grooms rides a horse
  - Bride carried in a sedan chair 가마 (sedan chair carriers a distinct social status 가마꾼)
- In lower class:
  - Both bride and groom walk
  - Bride may carry a small box of personal effects

# P'yebaek 폐백幣帛

- Held the day after the new bride arrives at her husband's house
- Bride offers gifts to in-laws
- Ancestor worship to ancestors of groom
- Bride bows to father-in-law and mother-in-law, and then all her husbands patrikin
  - May bow hundreds of times with a sister-in-law holding each arm to help her go up and down

# Divorce

- Seven Reasons for Going 칠거지악七去之惡
  - 1. wife is disobedient to her parents-in-law
  - 2. wife is barren
  - 3. wife is unfaithful
  - 4. wife is jealous
  - 5. wife has an incurable and serious illness
  - 6. wife is too quarrelsome
  - 7. wife commits a crime
- Three Reasons for Not Going 삼불거삼不去
  - 1. wife mourned parents-in-law three years
  - 2. husband was poor when she married him and how he is rich
  - 3. the wife has no place to which she can return

# Less Common Marriage Forms

- Minor marriage (min myonuri 민며느리)
  - When a girl was married younger than 12
  - Only done among the very poor to reduce family size and save on marriage expenses
- Uxorilocal marriage (teril sawi 데릴 사위)
  - Man moves in with wife
  - Only done when neither side has any property
- Concubinage (작은 마누라, 축첩)
  - Done by free consent of parties involved
  - Wife and children have right to support and limited inheritance rights (but these seldom enforced)



# Partition

- When a man marries, he brings his wife into his birth home
- Eldest son supposed to stay home all his life with his wife caring for parents
- Younger sons eventually split off to form new families
  - Traditionally each son gradually split off when he was individually ready
  - Father (or brother) would “give him his livelihood” 세간을 내다 (if they had anything to give)
  - Formally this is called partition (pun’ga 분가分家)

# Modern Changes in the Wedding

- Masson 맞선 from 1930's on became popular (probably modeled on Japanese miai 見合)
- Wedding moved from village to wedding parlor 예식장 禮式場 in the 1970s
  - “Western Style” (or “modern”) wedding with master of ceremonies 주혼자 主婚者
  - P'yebaek optional: if done, done after wedding in separate room in traditional dress with both sides of the family
    - Elders give envelopes of money to couple, who often use it for a honeymoon

# Changes in Social Mores

- “Traditional”: women *inside* 안사람 and doesn't interact with unrelated males
  - Upper class women used to be secluded, and wore changot 장옷 if they had to go out
  - In Seoul, once the Chongno bell rang, men had to stay indoors so women could go out and socialize
  - Later “homosocial” tendency: men socialize with men, and women socialize with women, but male-female relations confined to the family

## Women in changot



# Relations between the Sexes

- People began routinely choosing their own spouses from about the 1970s (in 1980s 50:50)
  - Now most marriages are “love matches”, or “half love, half arranged” 연애결혼/반연애 반중매
  - Some are still arranged when social status or education is a particular concern (image of Madam Ttu 마담뚜)
- A dating scene has developed
  - First through mit'ing 미팅 (소개팅, 여러 가지)
  - Club scene (booking club, for example)
- Parents still tend to participate in decision-making



# Changes in Family Economic Role

- Among peasants, family is a unit of production *and* a unit of consumption
  - Inside/outside distinction very important:
  - Men: pakkat chuin (pakkat ōrŭn), pakkannil, sarangch'ae 바깥주인 (바깥 어른), 바깥일, 사랑채
  - Women: an chuin, annil, anpang 안주인, 안일, 안방
  - Men did marketing, and handled money
- Today's urban family a unit of consumption, but not a unit of production
  - women still in charge of household, which means they control family budget, and many even do investments (chae t'aek'ŭ) 재테크
  - Revolving credit clubs 계契
  - Real estate speculation