

## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

#### 1. Courtship and Marriage

The barriers against free socializing by males and females that were formerly strongly maintained in all spheres of traditional life are fading out in the contemporary village. This change has much to do with the improved social status of women. Young females actively participate in farming and all other aspects of life on the farm, and socializing between young members of the opposite sex appears considerably freer than in the past. Activities in the farm clubhouse and of the Socialist Working Youth League, for example, provide excellent opportunities for young men and women to mingle. Such social gatherings, especially for political purposes, take place almost every evening. Love affairs are said not to be uncommon, but the overt expression of affection in public is strongly disapproved. Pre-marital sexual affairs are unacceptable behavior, and cases that do occur are criticized in public sessions unless there is an intention to marry. In the past, village endogamy had been avoided as much as possible. The frequent social contacts between the sexes today result in many marriages of residents of the same village or farm.

The "Law of Equality between Sexes" promulgated in 1946 specifies that males must be eighteen years of age and girls seventeen years before they may marry. This law relates to the old custom of very early marriage, which the law now prohibits. Modern North Koreans, however, seem to marry much later in life than the lawful minimum allows. According to one report (Hwang et al. 1960:159), men generally marry at twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, and women at twenty-one or twenty-two. If we take into account the present system of military service, this information about males seems questionable. Enlisted men are called to service at eighteen to twenty-four years of age. Once selected, they must serve until they are twenty-eight, regardless of when they entered service. Thus the duration of one's military service varies; the longest is ten years and the shortest four years. As a rule, during their entire military service, the men are not allowed to visit their families or take vacations outside the military camps. They may write to their families, but their whereabouts are kept secret. Married men must leave their wives behind during the entire period. Only the officers and professional servicemen are allowed to live with their wives and families. Military service

therefore appears to have important bearing on the age of marriage; that is, the young men usually do not marry until they are past the age for military service or until their service has ended.

For the average young man, selection for military service is a great honor, since the regime carefully selects its soldiers. Personal traits and loyalty to the Party are the most important attributes, and physical qualifications seem to be a lesser, although necessary, factor. It is said that a bright future is open only to those who have completed military service. Therefore, the majority of North Korean girls are said to look for mates among men who have had military service. According to one informant who served in the People's Army for thirteen years, the vast majority of enlisted men are unmarried and "girls are not willing to marry a man who is not qualified for the military." Those who are disqualified for service have difficulty in finding desirable mates. The same informant states that the average man marries at about age thirty, after establishing himself on a farm following his discharge from military service.

Women also enter military service, on a voluntary basis, where they serve in non-combat positions as nurses, clerks, telephone operators, and the like. Girls from eighteen to twenty-two years of age are eligible and, once selected, serve until age twenty-four. Since the number of women in military service is very small, it does not seem to have much influence on the average age of women at marriage.

The network of interpersonal relationships in rural North Korea hardly extends beyond the village or farm, a circumstance which fosters marriages among people of the same community. Some young people choose their mates themselves on the basis of mutual attraction, but the approval of their parents is required by custom. Love marriages between members of different farms are quite rare. Generally, the tradition of arranged marriages continues to be followed; people still rely upon a go-between to find mates. In the past, the go-between was generally an old woman. Farm leaders or members of the cadre now frequently play this role, and these are usually males. They maintain a wide range of social contacts that extend beyond the boundary of the farm, and they also tend to be more persuasive in arranging unions than were the go-betweens of former times.

As young men and women approach marriageable age, their parents seek a reliable intermediary, who is usually male. The go-between, called *maep'a* or *chungmae-chaengi*, gathers information on the young man or woman whom he represents and on the person's family. He also gathers information on prospective spouses and their families, and then conducts negotiations that involve parents as well as the marriageable young people. When both sides express interest in a match, a meeting between the prospective bride and groom and their parents is arranged, usually at the home of the prospective bride. On the day of meeting, the prospective

bridegroom goes to the girl's house with one or both of his parents, the go-between, and possibly a few other relatives. The girl's house prepares fine food for the event, and since the purpose of the meeting is to take a close look at the prospective bride, she serves as hostess. The prospective groom and his party carefully observe the girl's appearance and manners as she serves the food. Sometimes she may be asked simply to give a cup of cold water to the prospective bridegroom. During the meeting, the prospective bride and her family similarly observe the prospective bridegroom and his parents.

A few days after the initial meeting at the girl's home, the prospective bridegroom's side sends word to the girl's house through the go-between regarding its view on the match. If both sides respond favorably to the first meeting, the go-between arranges a second meeting, this time at the prospective groom's house, so that representatives from the girl's family may observe the prospective groom and his family. This visit is generally made by a group composed of one or both of the parents and other close relatives of the girl, but excludes the girl. Sometimes a trip of inspection is made secretly by one of the girl's relatives, who does not visit the prospective groom's family but inquires about it through their neighbors.

Family background is one of the most important factors in selecting spouses. No clearcut class distinctions exist today, but one class of people appears to be discriminated against in this allegedly classless society. These are, again, the former landlords and their descendants, people who were pro-Japanese during the Japanese occupation, collaborators with the Allied Forces during the war, relatives of people who fled to South Korea, and other so-called reactionaries. People in this class face great difficulty in every aspect of social life. A matrimonial alliance with a socially unfavored family would endanger one's future and such marriages are avoided whenever possible.

An example of such a union, as given by an informant, illustrates the problems it incurs. (See also Appendix I.) The brother of the informant, a middle school principal, experienced trouble because of his wife's family background. His father-in-law had served as a policeman during the Japanese occupation, and was therefore regarded as a pro-Japanese reactionary. In 1948 the father-in-law was tried, and he died in 1957 in a forced labor camp. The principal was described as well-educated and capable, but he was never promoted to a position in which he could utilize his capabilities. The Party authorities even suggested that he divorce his wife, the mother of their six children. He had barely been able to hold his marriage together. According to the informant, his brother would say, even in the presence of his wife, "I am always watched by the Party because of her father."

In addition to family background, one's physical appearance, health, and educational background are also important in the selection of spouses.

In describing a cooperative farm in a suburb of P'yongyang, Kim Sin-suk (1957:60) lists the following traits of a "good prospective mate": being a hard worker; having public confidence; trustworthiness; active participation in the Socialist Working Youth League and in circle activities; and having other special talents. The report adds that, above all, the prime consideration is the political aspect of the prospective mate, which includes family background, participation in political activities, and loyalty toward the Party and the state.

Traditionally, the fondest dream of the average young woman was to marry a man in a city, and some rural girls did so. This was the only possible channel to escape the hard conditions of farm life, and young men in the city traditionally preferred to marry rural girls because they were said to be more dependable than city girls. During the early period of Communist rule, the trend toward such rural-urban marriages remained unchanged. In their study of the Korea-China Friendship Cooperative Farm, Hwang et al. (1960:225) found that of the sixty-four girls at the farm who married in 1958, all except four moved to "cities," a term which might include the towns that were county seats as well as larger communities. The movement of the women away from agriculture seems to have made it difficult for rural males to find wives, a problem that the Communist regime tried to solve. According to our informants, when a man from the city marries a farm woman, the man is required to join his wife on the farm, opposing a deeply-rooted custom of patrilocality. For a time unions resulting in such matrilocality, that is, marriages of urban males and farm women, were fairly common, but, according to our informants, the incidence of such unions later decreased considerably.

When agreement to marry has been reached, formal steps are followed. The groom's household prepares a formal letter giving the groom's name and birth date and proposing marriage, which is wrapped in a red cloth and taken to the bride's household by the go-between. The prospective bride's household sends back a responding letter expressing consent. This letter, also wrapped in a red cloth, is brought to the groom's house by the bride's father or one of his relatives and the go-between. This traditional formality is still observed in many parts of rural North Korea. Although young people do not care to follow and may even ignore this Confucian formality, their parents still tend to cling to it, and, out of deference to them, the custom is still often observed.

The exchange of letters was traditionally followed by an engagement ceremony, which usually took place on a holiday. The farm management staff and cadre of the farm and some of the village elders were invited to a feast at the expense of the groom's household, a ceremony which announced the engagement publicly. Today this engagement ceremony is generally not held, perhaps for economic reasons.

A couple of months before the wedding day, the groom's house customarily sends betrothal presents called *yejang* or *napch'ae*, usually including bedding and clothes for the bride. These items are often prepared by the parents long before the wedding, sometimes during the childhood of their sons. The groom's house selects from the villagers a virile man with many children to deliver the presents to the bride's house. The bride's household then busies itself in preparation for the wedding, and village women help make bedding and dresses for the bride. Gifts called *pongsong* that consist of clothing for the groom's parents and other family members are also prepared and presented on the bride's arrival at the groom's residence.

The wedding date is no longer a matter to be decided by a fortune-teller or a religious practitioner, who have reportedly ceased to exist in North Korea. A convenient day is simply chosen by mutual agreement of both parties, a selection that avoids the busy agricultural seasons and does not otherwise interfere with work. Holidays are highly preferred. According to Hwang et al. (1960:165) most weddings are held during the months from late fall until early spring, that is, from the end of harvest until the beginning of spring plowing, a circumstance that also reflects familial finances. By the nature of agricultural production, farmers are paid only once annually, near the end of the year. When a woman marries out, she is expected to take with her the share of annual payment that she earned the preceding year. Otherwise no other funds are available for her until the next annual payment. If a marriage takes place during mid-year, the bride's household gives her about half of her share for her previous year's work, and her earnings during the current year until the time that she joined her husband are given to her at the end of the year. A mid-year wedding involves various other inconveniences, such as the transfer to the bride of rice and other cereals and changes in work organization and production quotas. According to one informant, such weddings occasionally result in conflict between the bride and members of her family of birth or between the two households over the bride's share of earnings.

As we have noted, in-village marriage was formerly uncommon, and was generally limited to very poor people. Instead, it had been customary for a bride to begin a new life in a new community. Today, in-village unions tend to be encouraged by the farm authorities, since they involve no changes in the membership of production units. When in-village or in-farm marriages occur, the transfer of earnings is settled by a simple adjustment of the accounts of both households within the same cooperative farm.

Marriage ceremonies vary somewhat according to local custom and individual circumstances. The most common marriage ceremony is the *tangilch'igi*, in which all wedding rites are conducted in one day and the bride moves to her husband's residence on that day. This ceremony is held when a woman marries a man in the same village or an adjacent village.



When the bride's new home is farther away, the ceremony takes place at her home and she leaves about two days later. Traditionally it was common for a bride to move to her groom's home several months to a year after the first wedding ceremony, during which interval the groom might occasionally visit her at her natal home. This custom has died out. The old custom of conducting a first wedding ceremony at the bride's home and a second ceremony of equal importance upon the arrival of the bride at her groom's residence is still often observed in rural areas. Especially when in-village marriages occur, however, the weddings are now reduced to a single ceremony, usually held at the farm clubhouse.

On the day of the wedding, the groom goes to the bride's home accompanied by his father and some of his close relatives and friends. As in the past, those who accompany the groom are all males. If the bride's residence is not distant, they may walk; otherwise, a truck is provided by the farm authorities. Farm cadre members and village elders of both sexes are invited as guests, and even relatives living at a distance may attend the ceremony. The bride and, rarely, the groom may wear the native ceremonial wedding dress. Standardized work uniform for the groom and a native-style plain dress of *chogori* (long-sleeved, high-waisted jacket) and *ch'ima* (long skirt) for the bride are reported to be more common. Occasionally, the bride wears a veil. After the brief wedding ceremony, the groom and bride are given a ceremonial meal symbolizing the beginning of their married life, a feast in which all guests join. The most common food of the wedding feast is a dish made with noodles, which symbolize longevity.

If the ceremony observed is the *tangilch'igi* rite, the groom, bride, and their parties soon leave the bride's home after the ceremony and the feast that follows and go to the groom's home, where a second ceremonial feast is conducted. When a bride is from another village, a farm truck may be provided for the trip, since all the bride's belongings and wedding goods are to be moved to her new residence.

At the groom's home, the bride is introduced to each of the family members and relatives of the groom, and gives a full bow to all seniors in age among them. Soon a wedding feast begins, at which the guests eat only a dish prepared with noodles; other foods are wrapped and taken home (Kim Sin-suk 1957:63). On the evening of the day, young people of both sexes, especially members of the Socialist Working Youth League, gather for a wedding party at the groom's home. Both bride and groom usually join in the singing and dancing of the party.

In the *tangilch'igi* wedding, the newlyweds make a visit of a few days to the bride's native home on the third day following the wedding, usually bringing a gift that includes rice wine and a cooked chicken. For the members of the bride's native household and her relatives, this provides an opportunity to get acquainted with the groom for the first time. On the first

day of the visit, the groom undergoes an ordeal called *tongsangrye*, an elaborate game which is thought to test his personality and intelligence. Generally the ordeal dramatizes a trial in which the groom is charged with abducting a young woman, namely, his bride. A judge orders his assistants to tie and beat the groom's feet if the groom is not responsive in telling about the "abduction," how he "abducted" her and what he then did with her. The severity of punishment depends upon the groom's response. He is forced to ask his mother-in-law to bring more food for everyone and to ask his wife to sing. No malice is involved and the ordeal is looked upon as entertainment for everyone. This old custom is reportedly disappearing or becoming much simplified. It is gradually being replaced by a feast with singing and dancing held in the evening at the bride's home with members of the local Socialist Working Youth League in attendance. This new trend applies especially when the groom is from the same village or farm as the bride and is already well acquainted with the members of the bride's family. After a few days the bride and groom return to their home.

Two more events are yet to come in connection with the wedding. A few months after the wedding, the bride's parents make a visit to their daughter's new home. This trip is for the purpose of taking a look at the new life of the couple and to wish them well. After a few months of married life, the bride visits her native home, accompanied by her parents-in-law or a few of her husband's relatives, but not by her husband. For women who have moved to distant communities and have not been married in accord with the *tangilch'igi* rite, this trip is the first visit to their native homes after their marriage. On this occasion, a bride prepares food to bring with her as a gift.

A modern marriage ceremony does not necessarily conform with all of the procedures described above. Today, according to my informants, a simplified ceremony has become common. Only a single ceremony may be held in one party's home, or in a public hall, usually the farm clubhouse, and it is not uncommon for two or more couples to have a single wedding ceremony. Such joint weddings occur especially when a number of discharged soldiers have been assigned within a short time to the same farm. Appendix I describes the marriage of an informant. His case may be considered a variation of the standard type, since he was an army officer who married a school teacher. The wedding was held in a rural setting, however, and generally accords with modern wedding customs of rural residents.

Modern weddings and related customs have unquestionably changed, but it is clear that they preserve in simplified form much that is old, such as the services of the go-between, the meetings between groom's and bride's families, the formal letters of proposal and acceptance, gift exchanges, the wedding ceremony itself, the ordeal of the groom, the parents' visit to their daughter's new residence, and, finally, the bride's visit to her native home. Today, the eldest son and his wife do not necessarily reside with his parents.

One son, usually the youngest, remains with his parents and is expected to take care of them in their old age. Since there is no private ownership of major means of production, the setting up of a new household upon marriage is not a difficult problem. Kitchen furnishings, clothing, and some personal belongings are all that are taken from parental households upon the establishment of a new household.

Communality is also reflected in the modern criteria for desirable spouses. One's health, ability to work and earn a livelihood, and political circumstances are the primary criteria. In contemporary marriages, the ancestral background of one's own family plays a role exactly the reverse of that of the past. Descendants of the old elite today suffer for their ancestor's past glory.

The choice of a prospective spouse is not made entirely by the young people today, although they have a larger voice in selection than in the past. Our informants agree that few rural people dare to marry without their parents' approval.

In pre-Communist years, the wedding ceremony and banquet had provided for the households concerned an opportunity to demonstrate wealth. Among the poor, weddings were simple and involved few guests. Weddings of the rich were grand affairs that followed rules prescribed by the Confucian ethical code of *Chu Hsi Chia Li*, or "Chu Hsi's Family Rituals," and their wedding banquets were often enjoyed by the entire village. Today little difference due to financial reasons is seen among weddings taking place in the same locality, and, of course, elaborate wedding ceremonies and sumptuous banquets are no longer possible for anyone.

The old custom of giving mutual aid survives in diminished strength in connection with marriages. All people of marriageable age belong to the Socialist Working Youth League, and aid in conducting a wedding is usually arranged through the League. In addition to giving help in wedding preparations, this aid consists of small gifts of food to be consumed at the banquet and sometimes *ryanggwon*, food tickets, which are issued to authorized travelers, such as newlyweds proceeding to their home, by the County People's Committee in return for rice and other cereals and which may be used to secure food during travel. These gifts reduce the expense of a wedding. Relatives commonly give food produced in their private garden plots or chickens that are raised as private property.

In the past, Korean men held much higher social status than women. The concept of male dominance extended to marriage, and, in relations between the two families, the groom's family was regarded as having higher status than the bride's. This circumstance seems to apply even in contemporary North Korea. In most arranged marriages, the groom's family plays an active role in the search for a prospective bride, and the bride's family responds only passively. With few exceptions, it is the groom's side



that makes the first visit, the *sonbogi*. Only afterwards does the bride's family make an investigative trip to the groom's residence, if such a visit is thought to be needed, and the prospective bride is excluded from this trip. Upon her arrival at the groom's house, a bride gives each member of the groom's family a wedding gift, usually of clothing, but the groom gives no reciprocal gifts to the bride's family. When, as sometimes happens, the groom's family gives a wedding present to the bride's house, it is only for the bride, who takes it with her upon marriage.

Summarizing the above description and discussion, it may be said that the traditional ways of contracting marriages have survived under Communist rule, insofar as they do not conflict with Communist rules and customs. Modifications and simplifications are adaptations to changes in the socio-economic structure under Communism.

## 2. Family

A common Western idea that the family has been destroyed in Communist societies seems to be untrue of North Korea, although the traditional family has lost some of its former roles. For example, the family has ceased to be an important unit of production and many of the tasks of child care are now done by public facilities such as the nursery and kindergarten. Recreation is similarly no longer a family affair. Despite these changes and the demise of private property and the customs of succession and inheritance, the family continues to be a basic unit of society. North Koreans now call the family a *saepo*, or cell, of society.

The Communist regime attempted, however, to bring about a "revolution in family life" as a first step toward revolutionizing the entire society. The abolition of private ownership of land and associated practices of inheritance appear to have been the events which affected the family most strongly. One change has been in the composition of the family. Lacking nation-wide statistical data, I am unable to give with assurance an account of national family composition. Fortunately, however, the ethnographic study of Hwang et al. (1960) of a cooperative farm near P'yongyang provides a picture of the North Korean family which may be representative. According to this study, the family is small. Table 4 gives statistical data on the structure of the family in Taek'am-li hamlet, which later became a part of the farm. The average household consists of 4.57 persons. Of 739 households, 508 (68.75%) were composed of from three to six persons. From this figure one might assume that the average household consists of two parents and two or three children, and one might question the relatively small number of children in a country where no serious attention has been given to birth control until recently. Of the small households of four or less members, however, a total of 387, almost one half (191 or 49.4%), are headed by women. Undoubtedly the female heads are widows, a few women whose husbands are

TABLE 4  
STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY IN TAEK'AM-LI

No. of family members	No. of families	No. of families headed by males	No. of families headed by females	No. of family members	Percentage
1	29	4	25	29	0.8
2	78	40	38	156	4.6
3	146	70	76	438	13.0
4	134	82	52	536	15.9
5	125	85	40	625	18.6
6	103	82	21	618	18.0
7	57	46	11	399	11.8
8	34	31	3	272	8.0
9	21	20	1	182	5.0
10	7	6	1	70	2.0
11	3	3	-	33	0.9
12	-	-	-	-	-
13	2	2	-	26	0.7
Total	739	471	268	3,384	100.0

Source: Hwang et al. (1960:147).

in military service, and eldest daughters who have taken charge of households following their parents' death. Since this survey was made in 1959, it seems highly probable that the Korean War might have contributed to the high proportion of households headed by women, that is, to the number of families headed by widows or by wives of men in active military service. According to our informants, the number of war widows in North Korea is quite large.

Most households seem to include only the two generations of parents and unmarried children. Since it is customary that one son and his wife remain with his parents, however, households composed of three generations are not uncommon. Households of four generations are rare. Hwang et al. (1960:149) found that among the 739 households in Taek'am-li, about 19.2% (142 households) included one or both parents of the male head, and only seven families embraced four generations. The traditional practice of setting up separate households for younger sons was called *punga*, or division of the household, and it involved the difficult problem of dividing property. Today the *punga* is rare. As long as the parents can manage to gain a livelihood, their sons, and especially younger sons, leave the parental home to set up separate households when they marry. Occasionally two married sons and their families live together with their parents. These are generally households in transition, in which a newly married man and his wife temporarily live with his parents, or in which young married males are away

from home temporarily for study or military service, leaving their families behind with their parents.

The modern household rarely includes non-family members. In pre-Communist years, well-to-do families often employed agricultural laborers on a yearly basis who were members of their households, and some households included maidservants. A few aged people live with married daughters. Hwang et al. (1960:149) report six such cases in Taek'am-li, which seemed to occur principally when the aged had no sons. The same authors report a new trend in which some of the aged live with their married daughters even when they have at least one married son, but my informants knew of no such cases.

Parent-child relationships in the traditional Korean family were close, particularly between father and son. A son was supposed to revere his parents and care for them when they became old in everlasting reciprocity for what the parents had done for him. The obligation of parents to sons does not seem to have been much emphasized, however. As we have earlier noted, the Confucian principle of filial piety had long been an important integrating mechanism in the traditional family. The hardship of obedience to parental authority was repaid by one's own children. The parental acts of giving birth and rearing a child were regarded as "receiving benevolence" (*unhae*) from the parents. One's entire life was traditionally devoted to repaying *unhae* to parents, that is, to filial piety, which had no limits in time or deeds. This traditional concept of filial piety is, of course, incongruent with modern conditions of life and has changed greatly. Parental authority has also weakened.

Despite the strong campaign against "familism" as a vestige of Confucianism, however, the Communist regime has never taken any strong measures to break the relationship between parents and children, and there are some indications that the idea of filial piety has survived to some degree. The official North Korean ethnological publication, *Kogo Minsok* (1966, Nov., No. 52:3), describes filial piety as one of the *mipung ryangsok*, "fine customs and virtues," that should be preserved as a cultural heritage. Describing maternal love for one's children, a woman writer likens a mother's love to "the height of a mountain and the depth of the ocean," which is precisely the expression used in Confucian teachings (*Choson Nyosong*, Jan. 1962:22). It is still the moral duty of a son to respect his parents and care for them in old age. Any failure in this duty is still considered *paen mandok*, "a betrayal of the benevolence received, or a loss of gratitude" (Yi Hong-jong 1958:67).

In order to fulfill the obligations of filial piety today, one does not necessarily reside with his parents. If he lives with his wife and children in a city, leaving his parents behind in the countryside, he should continue to revere them. Financial support of parents was common in traditional Korea,

and this custom may have survived in some measure. For example, in response to the questions of a newspaper reporter concerning the way in which the family savings were used, a housewife in P'yongyang stated that, among other expenditures, some were for the parents (her parents-in-law) in the country (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 11/19/71). Emotional bonds between parents and children appear generally to be maintained despite geographical separation.

As we have seen, the head of a household is no longer the leader and chief organizer of its economic activities and each working member of a household participates in economic production individually, earning work points individually. When it comes to remuneration, however, the unit is not the individual farmer but the household. Each household is paid according to the total of work points earned by all its members. Individual members who move away, such as daughters who have married out, may claim their own shares of the total payment for the period of the year that they have worked. Generally the head of the household is in charge of the household income. These procedures of remuneration and income management appear to have helped maintain the household as a social unit and also to have preserved the bonds between parents and children. Often old men officially represent their households, but their sons play the actual roles of household heads. Even when parents are too old to work it is common for their sons to allow them to "control" the cash income. Whenever the sons need cash, they consult with their parents about its use (Hwang et al. 1960:152). This may be interpreted as a dramatization of mutual trust between parents and children, but it is also considered good manners, a way of showing respect for one's parents.

The son's duty to his parents is no longer blind or absolute. Filial piety can be justified only when it coincides with the interest of the people. Today merely giving birth to and rearing children are not sufficient reasons for being revered by them. The young are taught to consider what their parents have done for the state in their lifetimes. A parent can be an enemy of society, "if he has been a reactionary" (Yi Hong-jong 1958:66). Our informants have observed some instances of sons publicly criticizing their fathers' conduct, principally the sons of men of the former privileged class. No matter how devoted a son is to his parents, he should not obey them if they are not wholly committed to the interests of the people.

The relationship between husband and wife appears to be so greatly changed that it is no longer a relationship of clearcut authority and submission. Love and mutual understanding are now greatly emphasized as desirable between husband and wife. These changes relate largely to the rise in women's social status. As noted previously, no marked differences now exist in the participation in production activities by males and females, and even before Communism the economic value of women's work probably differed little from that of males. In former times, however, the work done by

the women was hardly acknowledged, and all credit for household income went to the male head. Today, a wife earns work points and household income that is acknowledged and is little less important than that earned by her husband.

The traditional custom at marriage of a woman's joining her husband's family in a position of inferiority seems to be fading out. The most important asset for gaining a livelihood is the ability to work. Cooperation and solidarity between husband and wife are stronger than ever, and marital life based upon genuine "comradeship" is highly valued. An authoritative, autocratic husband, the traditional stereotype, is seldom seen. Pressure from the Women's League and other national political groups may have helped to raise the status of women. Despite the trend toward equality, the ideal is that a husband's "love" for his wife be reciprocated by her "respect" for him (*Kogo Minsok*, 1966, No. 4:3). Thus the relationship is not wholly equal and the traditional view of male superiority appears to exist in weakened form.

The relationship between mother and daughter-in-law has long attracted the attention of scholars studying the traditional Korean family. As J. R. Moose (1911:160) put it, a daughter-in-law was a "real slave" of the household into which she married. The mother-in-law ruled her with a "hand of iron and rod of steel" (p. 110). The strain between mother and daughter-in-law usually continued until the latter gave birth to a son. It took years for a newly married woman to become fully accepted, especially by her mother-in-law. Often, the birth of a child was the event that brought peace between the two.

Under modern conditions, the old relationship between these two women is strongly discouraged by economic circumstances and also by attitudes reinforced by political pressure. Some elderly women are said to try to follow the traditional customs in their relations with their daughters-in-law, but pressure groups such as the Women's League often take action to ridicule them. As the authority of mothers-in-law has weakened, brides appear to be taking fewer pains to become "full members" of their husbands' households. There is considerable emphasis on the "new" relationship in which the mother-in-law should treat the daughter-in-law as a daughter and the daughter-in-law should treat the mother-in-law with the same respect that she gives her mother. Mutual understanding and cooperation between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are explicitly valued in order to maintain a harmonious family life. A good part of the roles formerly performed by the daughter-in-law is now assumed by the mother-in-law. Domestic work and child care are tasks in which the mother-in-law can be of great help. During the busy agricultural season, it is not uncommon for the mother-in-law to get up early and prepare breakfast for the family, and she often also prepares dinner (Hwang et al. 1960:154). In general, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in contemporary rural North Korea appears to be cordial and complementary, without much tension.



A similarly tension-free relationship is also found between daughter-in-law and her husband's younger, unmarried sister, a relationship that formerly had often been full of suspicion and hostility. It was common for an unmarried girl to say unkind things about her brother's wife that led to domestic discord. For this reason, the husband's sister was often called a "foxy girl," an uncomplimentary term. Today the two women appear to regard each other as sisters. This modern relationship should be understood in its connection with the communal group. Problems within the family affect the entire social group, and political pressures within the hamlet play an important role in fostering domestic harmony.

Among brothers, differences in age do not seem to be important until they marry. Their behavior toward each other is informal until the eldest brother marries, when younger brothers begin to use respectful language toward him. Fraternal love, however, is now emphasized more than ever. Problems of inheritance, which formerly often created much family discord, no longer exist, and the birth order of brothers has therefore lost most of its importance.

A married daughter maintains close ties with the household of her birth for some years after marriage. During this period, the young bride may visit her native household for important events, such as funerals and weddings. Married daughters often return to their natal families to give birth to their first children (*Ch'ongnyon Saenghwal*, July-Aug., 1965:58; my informants also reported this custom). Although the mother-in-law is available to provide post-obstetric care, the new mother generally chooses to be with her own mother. Women generally do not return to their natal homes at times of subsequent childbirth. As time passes, the married daughter's ties to the family of her birth gradually loosen. As long as her parents are alive a nominal tie remains, but older women rarely visit their native homes once their parents have died.

Adoption is common today among families having no children of their own, and sometimes families lacking sons adopt them. In the past, adoption was also common but was limited principally to sons. The Korean War left a tremendous number of orphaned children, and the regime has waged a nationwide campaign to encourage adoption of both female and male children.

The adoption of male children of appropriate age from the same patrilineage had been the predominant custom in pre-Communist times. Since adoption was for the purpose of maintaining family lines, girls were seldom adopted. Adopted children were often nephews, sons of the foster father's brothers. If a boy was not available among close kinsmen, one of more distant relationship might be adopted. If a man died without leaving a male heir by birth or adoption, it was his kinsmen's responsibility to choose a boy as successor in order to keep the family line unbroken. In some cases, a

couple with no son but having a daughter arranged for her to marry a man who later inherited their property. This kind of son-in-law was called *taeril sawi*. Although he lived with his parents-in-law he retained his natal family name.

This kind of marriage and semi-adoption was not intended to preserve the family line of the bride, and was uncommon. If a couple lacking a son lived away from other kinsmen and did not want their daughter to marry out, the adoptive marriage might be acceptable as a way of providing for their old age. The *taeril sawi* or son-in-law who married into a family had always been looked down upon, however, and men married in this way only when their economic prospects were otherwise poor.

Some traces of these customs of adoption appear to have survived, but the concept of adoption has undergone change. Children of either sex are often now said to be adopted for the pleasure of rearing them, rather than to maintain the family line, and adoption is no longer the concern of a large kin group but only of the foster parents themselves. When a child is adopted from outside the circle of kinship, he continues to assume the family name of his foster father, but this practice appears principally to be a means of identification. There has been no truly radical turning from traditional customs, however. Sons are still more highly desired than daughters, since males are of somewhat greater economic value and sons who care for foster parents in their old age are economically and otherwise very important to their parents.

A woman's barrenness or failure to give birth to a son is no longer justifiable grounds for divorce. The concubine, who was a traditional solution to the problem of marriages that produced no sons, is unlawful and is said no longer to exist. The North Korean Criminal Law (Article 256) specifies that a man who has a concubine be sentenced to prison for a maximum of two years or sentenced to a maximum of one year of indoctrination, which includes compulsory labor. (For an English translation of the Law, see *JPRS/DC-406*, CSO DC-1427.)

During the first decade under Communist rule, "freedom of divorce" prevailed in North Korea. Discontented couples were granted divorces by mutual consent, and the consent of the families involved was no longer required. Throughout North Korea a flood of divorces occurred during this period. The Women's League often intervened in support of women who were ill-treated or deserted by their husbands. Some politicians appear to have exploited the policy of "freedom of divorce" to abandon illiterate country-born wives and marry well-educated city girls, and the Women's League often supported these actions on the grounds that the attributes of the wives of political leaders should be appropriate for their husbands' statuses. The Korean War led to a large number of troubled or dissolved marriages. Many marriages were dissolved because of the death of one of the spouses. Many

other marriages were dissolved because one of the spouses, usually the male, committed a political crime such as fleeing to the south, cooperating with the South Korean army or the Allied Forces, or engaging in reactionary activities. The other spouse often tried to eradicate the stigma of being reactionary and to demonstrate loyalty to the Party and state by obtaining a divorce.

Since the mid-1950s, divorce has been discouraged, and has been obtainable only through a People's Court. Couples seeking divorce must pay a high application fee, and the court generally tries to reconcile them unless a political crime is involved, when divorce can be obtained with relative ease and at a reduced fee. We have no reliable statistical data on the divorce rate; according to our informants, however, the actual number of divorces today is very small, especially in rural areas.

Widows or widowers may freely remarry. Widowers are more likely to remarry than widows, and they very commonly remarry within a few years of the deaths of their wives. Second wives may be widows or divorcees, but women who have not previously married are preferred. The circumstances for widows differ somewhat. If they are still young and have no children, they are generally encouraged to remarry. Few middle-aged widows with children remarry. Many widows never remarry and those who do usually marry widowers. There still appears to be a strong general distaste for a man to choose a widow for his first marriage.

The modern household is a distinct unit of consumption but, as we have seen, it is not officially a corporate unit of production since its members may be in different work teams and the household head lacks authority over its members in communal activities of production. The household may serve as a production unit in a few activities, however, such as those included in the campaign to increase the collection of organic fertilizers. Although North Korea produces much chemical fertilizer, the national policy has been to encourage the use of self-supplied organic fertilizers and to keep the use of chemical fertilizers at the minimum. Night-soil, animal manure (including cow, pig, chicken, duck, and rabbit), wood ash, grass, and the new fertilizer previously described, baked soil (*sot'o*), are the principal organic or partly organic fertilizers. Baked soil is believed to be the most effective fertilizer, even though its processing is arduous work. The fertilizer campaign is usually organized on the village level, but sometimes each household is responsible for collecting or producing a quota. The following case illustrates the organization of a household for these activities. *Choson Nyosong* (Feb. 1962:29) describes a family on Yondong Cooperative Farm in Inhung County, South Hamgyong Province, composed of seven members: the household head and his wife, his mother, two sons, and two daughters. All except the mother, who has retired, and the second daughter, who attends elementary school, are working members of the farm. In their spare time, all

seven collect or manufacture organic fertilizers, and each has assigned tasks. The elderly mother of the household head is supervisor or chief organizer of this family undertaking. In about two months, the family was reported to have collected 1.5 tons of *sot'o*, 1.5 tons of compost, 2 tons of a mixture of soil, night-soil, and waste kitchen water, and 200 kg. of animal manure. The joint effort was rewarded by additional work points for the family.

If the range of changes in familial composition and relationships is reviewed, it seems reasonable to conclude that almost every aspect has undergone considerable change correlated with the social and economic conditions of Communist life. It seems clear also, however, that these changes allow many elements of the past to survive, that the family, in altered form, continues to be a vitally important social unit, and that certain of the Communist policies have both fostered the maintenance of some of the traditional family bonds and have taken their form in part from ancient, deeply entrenched customs associated with the family.

### 3. Kinship Organization

In pre-Communist times, when primogeniture prevailed, a united group of related households often developed as time passed. The founding household of these complexes, which was headed by a succession of eldest sons, was generally called *k'unjip*, or main household. As younger sons married, they were sometimes set up as the heads of separate households called *chagunjip*, or branch households, which were usually near their parents' house. Residence after marriage was patrilocal, and, as noted earlier, villages tended strongly to be exogamous. The patrilineage thus tended to be primarily a local group. As time passed, the process of segmentation into main and branch households continued. Several generations after the establishment of a family in a new settlement a patrilineage composed of descendants of the first settler had usually formed. Outsiders might have moved into the village during this time and formed other lineages. Each lineage maintained solidarity. Formerly a village was generally composed of one lineage or a few lineages and some single families who had recently settled there. A large lineage might be scattered over two or more neighboring villages. The lineage provided socio-political and psychological security for its members. Unless there were special reasons to move away, younger sons and their wives tended to take up residence in or near the ancestral village.

Within a lineage were distinct groups of families, each of which maintained strong internal solidarity as well as ties with the entire lineage. These groups were called *tangnae*, "in group" or "close relatives." A *tangnae* was composed of the patrilineal descendants of a common male ancestor. It included all patrilineally related lineal kin and collateral relatives to the third patrilateral line. Within a village, there might be several such

*tangnae* groups. According to Korean custom, apparently drawn from the Confucian ceremonial code, the main household was responsible for memorial ceremonies for patrilineal ancestors to the fourth ascending generation and several ancestors might be the subjects of the ceremonies. On memorial days, the *tangnae* gathered at the main household to perform the ceremonies. Similar ceremonies honoring ancestors were performed by the *tangnae* on such occasions as New Year's Day and Moon Festival Day. These ceremonies served to maintain the solidarity of the group as descendants of a common ancestor. For ancestors beyond the fourth ascending generation, patrilineal descendants performed a commemorative ceremony at the graveyard only once a year, after the fall harvest. Members of a *tangnae* wore mourning dress for a fixed period after the death of any member.

The largest unit of patrilineal kinship was the surname group. When Koreans talk about a surname, they always identify it with a prefix called a *bon*, which indicates its origin, that is, the locality where the first ancestor is believed to have lived. For instance, *Kimhae-Kim-ssi* means Mr. Kim (or Kim lineage) of Kimhae, and *Chonju-Yi-ssi* means Mr. Yi (or Yi lineage) of Chonju. People with the same surname but different *bon* do not regard themselves as kin. *Kim* of *Kimhae* and *Kim* of *Andong* share the surname *Kim*, for example, but the two groups that are so named regard each other as totally unrelated. The same is also true for those who have different surnames but the same *bon*.

Each group of same-family-name-with-same-*bon* (*tongsong tongbon*) traditionally kept genealogical records going back to the first ancestor. Sometimes a patrilineage was divided into several branch lineages, each of which kept its own genealogical record. It is not clear how such segmentation of lineages came about. Almost all branch lineages bore the names of famous and prominent ancestors, however, which suggests fission under a forceful leader. Genealogical records were valued as evidence of the prominence of ancestors and of relationship to famous people. Prominent and wealthy lineages highly valued their genealogical records, and poor lineages gave little attention to theirs.

Since the number of members of large lineages is sometimes millions of people, no one is personally acquainted with all of his distant relatives. A convenient device, however, identifies the generational status of distant relatives within a lineage. Generally, one's personal name is composed of two Chinese characters. One of these is the generational name, *hangyolja*, prescribed by the lineage, and it may be either the first or the second character of the personal name. Parents choose only the other character of a child's name. Within a lineage, all sons of the same generation are given the same generational name. (See C. K. Yang 1959a:89 for an account of similar Chinese customs, from which the Korean practices were partly derived.)



Korean custom prohibited the marriage of two members of the same lineage, no matter how distant their genetic relationship. Lineage exogamy was not a matter of law. Marriage within a lineage was regarded as incest, firmly sanctioned by custom but not by law, even if the lineage was very large. In any attempt to establish a marital union, the first thing to be cleared up in connection with qualifications of prospective mates was identification of their family names and their *bon*.

Ancestor worship was a main factor in maintaining lineage solidarity. The more wealthy and prominent the lineage, the more elaborate its ancestral worship. With few exceptions, wealthy lineages held political power, which was the foundation of wealth in the traditional Korean society. (See the similar Chinese cases in Hsu 1967:286-287 and Fairbank 1958:43-44.) Once one rose to officialdom, sooner or later wealth followed. It was common to use a large proportion of the wealth to glorify ancestors, thereby strengthening the solidarity of the lineage. The lineage generally had certain common properties, mostly arable lands and mountains, that also served as social binders. Among wealthy lineages, holdings of common property were large. The revenue from the common property, such as arable lands and mountain forests, was used primarily for rites honoring ancestors rather than for the welfare of future generations.

Under Communism, systematic measures were taken to break the old kinship networks and to turn the individual's loyalty toward the state. In the land reform of 1946, most of the lands held and rented by lineages were confiscated. The reform was carefully designed in its dealing with the lineage properties to avoid strong opposition, however. For instance, forests associated with graveyards were not subject to confiscation (see Article 22 of the Regulations Concerning the Application of the Land Reform Law issued March 3, 1946; reprinted in Ko Sung-hyo 1971:214). The most important changes in kinship were brought about by agricultural cooperativization, as the preceding discussion of the family has brought out. Individual families may now continue to perform memorial ceremonies for their immediate ancestors at their own expense, but the ritual activities on the lineage level have lost their financial ground and consequently have ceased.

In an effort to break the kinship system, the regime relocated people of some areas where kinship played an especially strong role in village affairs. Some families of dominant lineages were required to move out and unrelated families moved in. Generally the cadre of a farm came from outside communities.

The following is an example, provided by an informant, of such a transplanting. This informant was born as a member of an old lineage which embraced most of the population of his village. After he had been away from the village for over ten years, he returned while on a ten-day military leave in 1964. It was no longer the village he had known. Many of the families of the

dominant lineage had moved away and all members of the village cadre were from other localities. No social activities were held exclusively by lineage members. Families of the lineage still formed the majority of the village population, but their roles as farmers had become more important than their lineage affiliation.

The People's Army has also been influential in weakening the strength of kinship in its function as a school to train its young members as revolutionary vanguards well-armed with Communist ideology. Upon completion of military service, most young men do not return to their home villages but are assigned to farms in other rural communities, where they generally marry local girls and remain. Since the parents have no authority over the future of their sons, they usually do not expect them to return home once they have left for military service or to receive advanced education. In this way, kinsmen have become dispersed throughout the country, cutting ties with their ancestral homes. The young people may still maintain close ties with their parents and other immediate family members, but the wider kinship networks hardly affect them.

Some families may still keep genealogical records, but these are no longer considered family treasures that demonstrate the past glories of their lineage. The official titles enjoyed by their ancestors that the accounts thoroughly recorded now have negative effects on their descendants' lives. As might readily be inferred, some prominent ancestors turned out to be the "exploiters" (high officials, landlords, and the like) whom the contemporary North Korean regime hates so much. Avoiding direct confrontation with deeply rooted tradition, the Communist regime has not undertaken any campaign against ancestral worship. Rather, the decline of ancestor worship may be described as the result of other changes brought by Communism. Large gatherings for ancestral worship that include residents of more than one village do not occur today. The annual graveyard ceremony honoring ancestors beyond the fourth ascending generation appears still to be held, as simply as possible, by a few descendants who reside near the graveyard. Since many years have passed since the death of these ancestors, however, their descendants are usually widely scattered. If people attend such rites, they lose potential income, and the farm authority does not allow them to "waste" their time in such non-productive activities.

Before Communism, local administrative authorities had long kept family registers, called *hojok*, of all families under their jurisdiction. This record contained vital statistics and included information such as family names, their origins (*bon*), marital statuses, and information on the natal familial backgrounds of women who married in. The regime abolished this record on the grounds that it was a product of "feudal" society based upon a status hierarchy that had been utilized to foster and maintain destructive sectarianism based upon kinship. In its place, the Communist regime

instituted the *kongminjung*, a civic registration or certificate of citizenship, which does not specify one's origin (*bon*).

The abolition of *bon* especially draws our attention, since it has important bearing on customs of marriage. If people who share the same family name are no longer identified by their *bon*, the question arises whether or not marriage within the lineage, as traditionally defined, is permissible. We find no clear answer in North Korean law, which appears to have no statute prohibiting such marriages. It appears, however, that the deep-rooted tradition of lineage exogamy still exists. Informants state that the majority of parents want their children to marry people who do not have the same family name and same *bon*. A Korean scholar in Japan, Yi Byong-su (1968:41), describes letters occasionally coming from North Koreans to their relatives in Japan informing of the marriages of their sons and giving their daughters-in-law's family backgrounds including family names and *bon*. Other letters from North Korean parents to their marriageable children residing in Japan inquire about similar information concerning the latter's prospective spouses. It appears that young people do not care about the significance of *bon* but their elders still tend to cling to tradition.

Traditionally, among the wealthy and prominent families the lineage members had been particularly well organized on the basis of their relationship to prominent ancestors and had been firmly integrated. Unity was supported by abundant common property, and genealogical records were carefully maintained. Lineage members tended strongly to reside together. If a member achieved officialdom, he might move to a town or the capital city and make his way toward wealth. Later, he might retire in his ancestral community and, when he died, his remains would be buried in the ancestral graveyard. This pattern was the ideal for the *yangban*. For people of lower socio-economic status, life was quite different. In their search for a livelihood, they tended to scatter over a wide area rather than to form a residential group with their kinsmen. They could not afford elaborate ancestral ceremonies and they received little material benefit from their ancestors. Accordingly, group consciousness and kinship solidarity were poorly developed.

Today almost all people in responsible positions, at least on local levels, are from the formerly poor class, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain from the social reorganization under Communism. Their loosely-organized networks of kinship hardly conflicted with the revolutionary cause. Although their ancestors did little for the betterment of their present lives, they take pride in them today because they were not "exploiters of the people." Every aspect of the social life of the formerly elite class is now circumscribed overtly or covertly. An illustrative example, provided by one of my informants, concerns two unmarried sisters who barely escaped to South Korea in 1967 with the help of the informant, who was then serving as a

security (intelligence) officer at the cooperative farm where the elder sister lived.

The women were twenty-seven and twenty-three years old when they reached South Korea in 1967. Their grandfather was a wealthy landlord in a village of Hwanghae Province, where the two sisters were born. After the Communists took power in northern Korea, the family of the women lost its wealth and suffered otherwise in the ways previously described for elite families. Some years later, the elder sister was ordered to move to a cooperative farm in Kangwon Province, near the southern border, and the younger sister to a farm in Northern Hamgyong Province in northernmost Korea. Both were assigned to work as farm laborers. Since they were officially classified as *pulsun-bunja*, or "questionable elements," they lived under conditions of severe discrimination and continual surveillance. A directive reached the elder sister's farm in the summer of 1967 that required that "questionable elements" be moved to new settlements on newly developed lands in the northernmost area. This directive intended to move to remote areas all questionable people who lived near the southern border and thus to prevent them from fleeing to South Korea. After several days of serious thought, the elder sister decided to flee, taking her sister with her. She was able to send a false emergency telegram informing her sister of her death, and a few days later her sister joined her to attend her supposed funeral. Together with a man who was the son of another formerly wealthy family, they managed to escape to South Korea.

The social discrimination directed against "questionable elements" often extends to descendants of malefactors who cannot even recall their parents' or ancestors' "wrongdoing." The two sisters described above grew up under Communist rule, and their only wrongdoing was their birth in an "impure" family. As the experiences of the two sisters suggest, once members of the former elite class had been removed from their ancestral home town, the able-bodied among them were often sent to still other localities. Ties of kinship have also been weakened by administrative surveillance of every aspect of the daily life of the people in general. It is almost impossible for kinsmen who live far apart to make direct, unauthorized contact with one another.

The result of these conditions of modern life has been a weakening of the traditional solidarity of kinsmen. There is no question that the role of family as an agent of socialization or child-rearing has been considerably weakened. The Communists still consider the family a major agent of socialization, however, and a foundation for the formation of the personalities of children. According to Communist reasoning, children who grew up in families of "impure" elements tend to be ideologically polluted and to become reactionaries. Those "impure" elements and their children must endure ordeals to prove their loyalty to the Party and state. When anyone commits

an offense against the state or becomes known as a "questionable element," the solidarity of his kin group is weakened. Privately, kinfolk who live apart may wish to maintain close bonds, but fear leads to avoidance of direct contact with one another.

One of my informants has three elder sisters, the eldest of whom is a widow with one son. The son cooperated with the South Korean police corps for a short time when the Allied Forces had advanced to the northern part of Korea during the Korean War. After the war, these acts of the son were kept secret for several years but were then revealed by investigations of the intelligence agency and the man was executed. The informant, then an officer in the North Korean Army, visited his home village while on leave and saw his eldest sister for the first time in over ten years when she visited the old family home to attend his wedding. His elder sister cried very often and told him about her son and of the distressing life she had lived for many years. Since she was a "questionable element" under constant surveillance, his family had not maintained close contact with her even though she lived alone in a nearby village. The informant described the family reunion during his wedding, an event which should have been joyful, as a time when every member of his family including himself had been seized with fear.

It is quite understandable that families regarded as "questionable elements" do not wish to conduct rites honoring their ancestors. Village cadre members sometimes attend the memorial ceremonies of individual families to conduct indoctrination sessions on the occasion of the kinsmen's gathering. My informants believe that the majority of these people do not even perform most of the traditional religious services for their ancestors and seldom get together except for funerals and, to a lesser degree, mourning ceremonies. For some people, family background has now become the major obstacle in the way of a satisfactory social life and a successful political life. Networks of kinship beyond the immediate family appear to have survival value for no one.

As far as I could discern, traditional kinship nomenclature has largely survived in North Korea. Patrilocal residence after marriage continues to be preferred and, accordingly, many more patrilineal than matrilineal kin are distinguished by specific kin terms. Traditionally, as compared with terms of address, terms of reference were abundant and varied. Among people of the upper class, who ordinarily maintained bonds of kinship with many people, the variety of terms of reference was so great that some of the terms were unknown to those of lower social class. The use of rare kinship terms was often a symbol of prestige among intellectuals and Confucian scholars. Today, the special terms of the elite have been largely dropped and the use of kin terms seldom appears to reflect the speaker's socio-economic status. It may be said that kinship terms have been reduced in number and the entire terminological system has been simplified but otherwise follows tradition.



Fictive kinship (a socially defined equivalent of affinal or consanguine ties), which was formerly fairly common among young men and young women, is strongly discouraged today, and, if it exists at all, is kept secret. The traditional custom of using the kin terms father, mother, uncle, aunt, grandmother, and grandfather in addressing people who are not relatives continues to be the general practice. It has not been discouraged, probably because it is looked upon as fostering unity among the people. Details concerning Korean kinship nomenclature are given in Appendix II.