



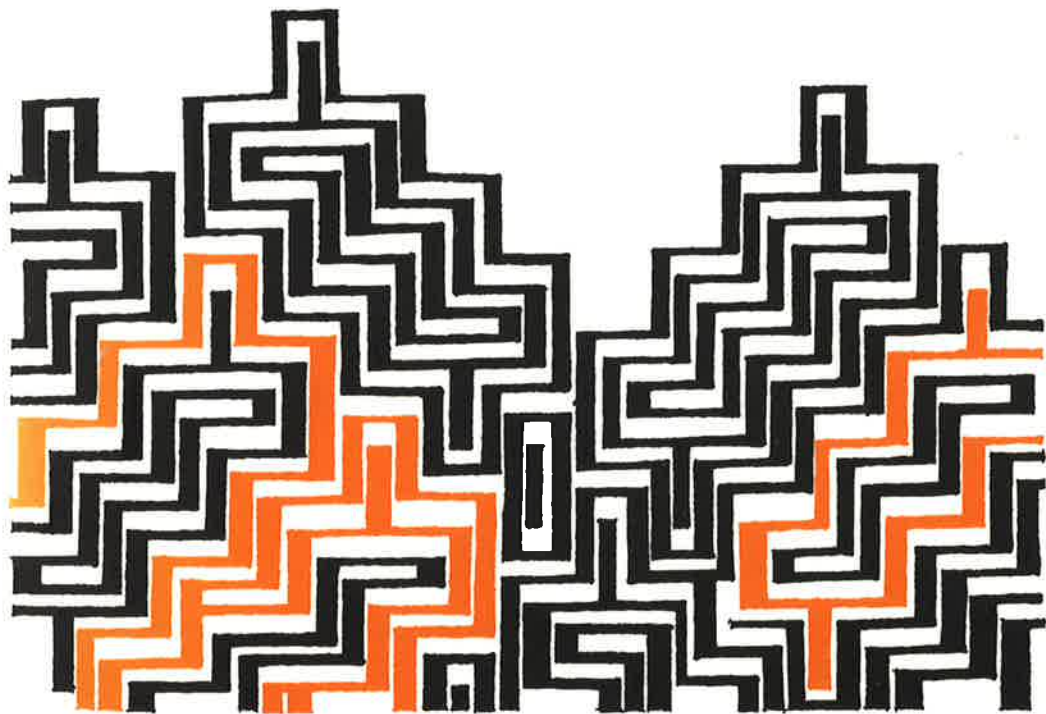
INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA • BERKELEY

CENTER FOR KOREAN STUDIES

# Modern Korean Society Its Development and Prospect

EDITED BY

Hyuk-Rae Kim and Bok Song





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# Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a six-year joint project by the Institute for Modern Korean Studies at the Graduate School of International Studies and the Institute for Social Development Studies at the Department of Sociology, Yonsei University. The two institutions agreed to launch the project to compile an introductory-level survey textbook on modern Korean society. The journey to the completion of this volume has been painstaking but also rewarding in that we have had the unique opportunity to bring together prominent scholars writing on Korean society from both Korea and the United States.

The past several years have witnessed the inception of several English-language Korean Studies curricula. There is still a need, however, for teaching materials on modern Korean society. The dearth of teaching materials that introduce and explicate Korea's modernization process, from its development thus far to its future prospects, had proven to be particularly burdensome to those who lecture at the university level. Although some insightful books related to Korean society exist, we feel that compilation of a comprehensive text is crucial for this field. The chapters in this book provide discussion on key issues of modern Korean Studies. Each chapter retains as common themes the impact of Korea's unique traditional elements on the modernization process and the prospects for the future.

For many years teaching students, we have resorted to a wide variety of chapters and academic articles. Not coincidentally at all, those oft-assigned authors are exactly the people whose work makes up this volume. In the future we will be able to lay our hands on essays covering the gamut of modern Korean society all conveniently bound into one volume.

In the process of compiling this volume we have been assisted by a good number of wonderful institutions and individuals. First of all, this project would never have gotten off the ground without

the encouragement and initial financial support offered by the Institute for Modern Korean Studies and the Institute for Social Development Studies at Yonsei University. We are deeply grateful for their continuous support, encouragement, and valuable guidance over the past few years. Each of the contributors deserves our hearty thanks for their careful authorship and patience through a good number of e-mail messages, faxes, and letters back and forth. Colleagues Yong-Hak Kim and Dong-No Kim provided valuable comments on earlier drafts of chapters. They took the trouble to go through the manuscript while it was still quite rough. Their comments they gave were of great help, but their encouragement and support were of even greater value. We would also like to note that earlier versions of some chapters were published elsewhere: chapter 5 in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (2000) and chapter 10 in *Korea Observer* (2002).

Notwithstanding these efforts, the project would have come to naught without a whole cast of other wonderful individuals and institutions. First of all, we must thank Joanne Sandstrom, managing editor at the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, for her support and work in shepherding the publication from manuscript to bound book and the two anonymous reviewers who read the manuscript for IEAS for their comments and belief in this project. Michele Wright's copyediting work on several chapters is also greatly appreciated. Research assistants Aileen Cabigayan, Frank O'Brien, and Cedar Bough Saeji provided invaluable assistance during the manuscript stages. In particular, Cedar Bough Saeji did a fine job of seeing the manuscript through the copyediting and proofing stages. Finally, the Korea Foundation, an angel to all of us in Korean Studies, blessed this project with an important infusion of funding in the final stages.

Perhaps most important was the motivation provided by students who deserve a comprehensive survey textbook on Korean society. It is our fervent wish that the kindred spirits who are studying and teaching modern Korean society will find this volume useful.

ONE

# The Contour of Modern Korean Society

HYUK-RAE KIM

The forced opening of Korea to the Western world in the latter half of the nineteenth century thrust it into a dynamic process of modernization. One brief century has wrought significant political, economic, and social change in Korea, largely through such dramatic events as an onerous period of repressive colonization and the Korean War. Soon after the end of Japanese colonialism, the destructive civil war that ensued divided Korea into two hostile states—the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). In 1953, when the armistice that called for cessation of hostilities was signed, the ravages of that war had turned the peninsula into an impoverished, pale shadow of its traditional agrarian form. A rapid series of reforms and measures in both North and South Korea have since profoundly affected their respective social infrastructures.

South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has significantly focused on three major national projects: economic development (H. R. Kim and Fields in this volume), political democratization (D. Kim and H. R. Kim in this volume), and national reunification (Cumings in this volume). At considerable social cost, seven consecutive five-year economic plans implemented from the early 1960s to 1997 under authoritarian regimes elevated Korea as a "model country" of the East Asian miracle or capitalist model (Fields in this volume; Kim et al. 2000). State intervention in economic governance was a crucial force in this advance, but that same intervention impeded the growth of civil society and democracy (Choi and Lim 1993; H. R. Kim 2003; S. Kim 2000; Lim and Choi 1997; Koo, ed. 1993; KSA and KPSA, eds. 1992). Successive authoritarian regimes until the 1987 Democratic Movement selectively co-opted capital interests to forge a developmental coalition and con-

## Regionalism and National Networks

YONG-HAK KIM

A man newly retired from the military completed numerous job application forms, invariably leaving blank the entry line for listing family members of social influence or serving as managers in the company. He repeatedly failed to secure a job and thought that his lack of social connection might be the reason. One day, while waiting for an elevator at a company he planned to apply to, he encountered an employee identified by a name tag as Mr. Kim B. S., director of general affairs. He subsequently identified Mr. Kim on his application as his cousin. He secured an interview, only to find himself facing an astonished Mr. Kim among his interviewers. When Mr. Kim inquired, "Do you know me?" the man deftly replied, "I have respected you as my cousin." Mr. Kim smiled and asked a few questions, and a week later the man received an acceptance letter. Mr. Kim took him aside on his first day of work and confided that he had used the same ruse to obtain employment, commencing and sealing a unique sort of kinship.

### Introduction

MBC Radio's recent broadcast of the above story vividly depicts the importance of social networks in the modern Korean labor market. Firms routinely ask job applicants to list names of socially influential persons in their families because they use personal connections to conduct business. Firms in legal trouble, for instance, benefit from connections with prosecutors; those seeking government permits use connections with bureaucrats to get results.

Connections are important in every society, including advanced industrial nations. Whether a *guanxi* (Yang 1994), an old boys' network, an F-connection, an alumni network, or a cozy

### THREE

## The Korean Stratification System: Continuity and Change

HAGEN KOO

Koreans frequently give the impression to foreigners that they are very status-conscious people. Indeed, Koreans seem to pay extra attention to their clothes and seem to be very concerned about how they appear in public. They all seem anxious to send their children to prestigious schools, and they are willing to devote an incredible amount of time and money to give extra edge to their children. They pay much attention to others' family backgrounds, especially when it comes to selecting marriage partners for their children. Foreign visitors to Seoul these days are often impressed by the rows of fashionable boutique shops, high-class department stores and hotels, and fancy restaurants and bars, and by the many well-dressed and good-looking people, all exuding the image of an affluent, middle-class society. What a remarkable change for a country that was one of the world's poorest countries in the world only one generation ago!

One of the most remarkable changes resulting from rapid industrial development in South Korea over the past four decades is a profound change in Korea's stratification system, from a relatively simple and fluid stratification system to a fully class-divided structure with diminishing social mobility. A significant change in the stratification system is usually accompanied by a concomitant change in the individuals' desires, aspirations, anxieties, and social relations. It is this large-scale social change in Korea's status system that is at the base of the intense status competition and status-conscious behavior patterns that seem to strike many foreign visitors. How has the Korean stratification system changed over time, and what is the nature of the newly emerged class structure in contemporary South Korean society? What are the dominant social characteristics of the major social classes in

## FOUR

# Inequality and Class Reproduction in Everyday Life

WANG-BAE KIM and BOK SONG

Class structure in contemporary South Korea has diversified rapidly in the past several decades in tandem with the country's stunning growth and export-led industrialization. Given the high social mobility that was achieved during this period of rapid industrialization, many observers seem to have concluded that class boundaries in South Korean society are relatively porous and flexible. Some have even pointed out that class antagonisms based on class-conscious conflicts are relatively scarce in South Korean society. However, frequent Korean workers' strikes and movements have garnered worldwide attention for their uncompromising militancy and rebelliousness in spite of the decline of the power of the working class around the globe, and there has been a widening gap between classes. At first sight, class boundaries seem to be obscured by the workings of mass consumer society in the postindustrialized era, but class boundaries have become more rigid, deepening inequalities in life opportunities based on social resources such as power, prestige, and property.

### **Distinction in Lifestyle and Class Reproduction**

Existing class studies have focused mainly on the position and roles in production relations. Yet how are those classes reproduced? Classes are not just empty concepts hypostatized by production relations. They are formed by complicated social relations reproduced by the various lifestyles and practices of their constituents. As Bourdieu (2000) describes, class boundaries are constantly changing and ambiguous and are defined by social and cultural capital as well as economic capital.

# Economic Governance: Its Historical Development and Future Prospects

HYUK-RAE KIM

For the past several decades, the Korean economy has evolved rapidly from a poor agrarian economy to an advanced industrial economy, tripling in size every decade since 1960. This record of growth and transformation has been regarded as one of the most noteworthy economic success stories in the history of capitalist development. Some attribute the phenomenon to pervasive state intervention through export-driven industrialization strategies (Amsden 1989; Haggard 1990; Wade 1990); others, to liberal industrial policies and the invisible hand of the market (Balassa 1988; World Bank 1993; Young 1994). Although interpretation of the roles of the state and market remains controversial, it is widely agreed that state intervention has been a crucial factor in economic development, but also that it has impeded full development of the financial and corporate sectors.

With the increasing role of global capital markets, the domestic financial sector has shown various signs of weakness. Significant numbers of nonperforming loans, excessive and poor lending practices, and increasingly high levels of risky investment left Korean financial institutions vulnerable to fluctuations in credit availability.<sup>1</sup> In the corporate sector, excess investment in a few

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<sup>1</sup> According to Korea's Ministry of Finance and Economy (1998), combined nonperforming loans of the country's twenty-six commercial banks amounted to 55.93 trillion won at the end of 1997, or 14.9 percent of total credits. Bad debt problems were equally serious in other financial sectors. Nonperforming loans in banking, securities, insurance, merchant banking, and leasing amounted to 67.79 trillion won, or 13.2 percent of total credits. Some bank analysts warned that such loans at all financial institutions could swell to 100 trillion won, or 25 percent of GDP, by the end of 1998. Others projected a surge to 157 trillion won, as the bankruptcy ratio was expected to reach 1 percent on average.

# From Take-off to Drop-off?: Postwar Economic Development and Industrialization

KARL J. FIELDS

The twentieth century descended upon South Korea (hereafter Korea) with stunning intensity, bringing to a dramatic and certain end its former "hermit" status. Brutal colonization, devastating wars (hot and cold), foreign and civil and less tragically (but not the less transformative) hyper-rapid industrialization, and thoroughgoing socioeconomic change irrevocably transformed this East Asian nation. Korea's remarkable postwar industrialization was arguably the centerpiece of this drama. The largest of East Asia's miracle minidragons, Korea has had the most mercurial postwar developmental experience.

The destruction and division of both the Pacific War (1937–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953) left Korea among the poorest countries of the world. War damage destroyed nearly two-thirds of its production facilities, infrastructure, and even much of its housing, and claimed by one estimate the lives of nearly one-tenth of the population (Halliday and Cumings 1988 as cited by Lie 1998). By 1961, per capita income was still only US\$82 (in current prices), inflation persisted in the double digits, and social unrest and political instability plagued the country.

The next three decades witnessed an industrial development program of rapid (though somewhat uneven) growth in Korea that outpaced the efforts of almost all other postcolonial developing countries.<sup>1</sup> From 1962 to 1969, the real growth rate averaged

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<sup>1</sup> The only other exceptions among developing countries that have demonstrated comparable growth rates are the remaining East Asian "tigers" or "mini-dragons," which include Taiwan, a political economy with which Korea is frequently and favorably compared, and the entrepôts of Hong Kong and Singapore.

## Family, Gender, and Sexual Inequality

SEUNG-KYUNG KIM

The recent interest in family and women's studies in Korea marks the beginning of a process of self-examination within Korean society. Scholars considering issues of family cohesion, traditional values, and modern society have raised important questions about the future of Korean family structures and gender relations. Understanding the meaning of family requires examining it as an inherently gendered set of relationships and exploring how these gendered relationships have changed within the family and within the society as a whole. This chapter provides an overview of the changing gender roles; and by outlining the various movements under way to address issues of gender inequality, it maps out the rise of gender issues in Korean society and the increasing demands of women for greater participation in the decision-making process in society.

The meaning attached to the word "family" has changed tremendously over the past century. From being a conservative patrilineal and patriarchal institution that had as its most important function the continuation of the family line through a male heir, "family" has become a more individualized nuclear unit, which exists within a transformed society where economic production takes place away from the household. Nevertheless, contemporary Korean families retain cultural factors rooted in earlier periods. Specifically, many aspects of women's position in contemporary South Korean society are rooted in neo-Confucianism, which was Korea's state ideology under the Yi dynasty (1392–1910). Although Confucianism no longer occupies a formal position in the ideology of the state, it continues to be a core element of Korean cultural tradition (H. J. Cho 1986; Kihl 1994; Kim and Finch 2002; Robinson 1991; E. Yi 1993).

## Population Changes and Urbanization

KYE-CHOON AHN

Demographic transition generally refers to changes in features of a given population over a particular interval. These changes do not take place inside a vacuum, but are rather a culmination or outgrowth of varying forces that shape society and its people: war, peace, famine, and financial success. These multifaceted changes take place in numerous places all over the world, and the Korean peninsula is no exception.

This chapter focuses on levels of selected Korean demographic elements—population size and population composition as described by age, gender, religion, and urbanization—during a period of economic development and industrialization.

### Demographic Transition

Transition during periods of development usually starts with a decline in mortality followed considerably later by a decline in fertility. Because of the time lag, however, the rate of population growth is high throughout most of the period. This is typical of most countries that experience varying degrees of industrialization.

South Korea's industrialization has been a rapid, compressed process that has taken place within the years following the Korean War. Beginning most notably with the Park Chung Hee regime in the 1960s, South Korea began a rapid development of its technology and industry. South Korea's economy has produced a much higher standard of living than was imaginable in the era before the intensive economic reforms began. However, one must take note of the fact that this change followed, as has been mentioned elsewhere, both a devastating war and a protracted period of

## Social Grievances and Social Protests against the Oppressive State

DONG-NO KIM

Hyundai, a leading engine of economic development in Korea for four decades, stood on the verge of bankruptcy in January 2001. Curiosity about how the situation would resolve ran high. Not only were people reminded of the economic crisis that had struck three years before when two conglomerates, Hanbo and Kia, became insolvent. They wondered whether the state would respond in a way that matched the free market rhetoric it espoused to satisfy the IMF (International Monetary Fund) policy guidelines imposed for financial assistance in the previous crisis. To the contrary, Institute of Financial Supervisory Service officers announced that financial institutions could renew the corporation's existing loans and supply new subsidies only under government conditions designed to address management problems.

The announcement was not completely unexpected, as it reflected the custom of decades. It was, however, a disappointment, since collaboration between political leaders and business groups had brought on the economic crisis in the late 1990s. Evidently, the then-new government, led by Kim Dae Jung, who campaigned against such collaboration for decades before he captured power, would keep with tradition.

### **The Korean State and Society**

In Korea, an alliance between the state and economic elites has a long history, reaching back far beyond industrialization. As early as the Chosŏn dynasty the state and economic elites united to control the general population. The state occasionally sparred with *yangban* (the traditional ruling class) elites to obtain greater

## The Making of Civil Society in Historical Perspective

HYUK-RAE KIM

This chapter explores the form of civil society peculiar to the Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) and its genesis in historical perspective. For this, it analyzes academic discourses on the relationship between the state and civil society over three historical periods in modern Korea. The three distinct but intricately inter-related historical periods have characterized the relationship between the state and civil society and the development of civil society in particular. The first was from liberation to the end of the Park regime. Discourse on civil society during this period made no progress, as successive authoritarian governments practiced state corporatism and repressed civil society to achieve modernization through rapid economic growth. The second period lasted to the beginning of the 1987 Democratic Movement and abounded in academic discourse on the state and its critical role in economic development. Discussion of civil society as an alternative mechanism of governance emerged during this period. The third stage is the transitional period toward democracy, during which Korea is experiencing actual growth in civil society and interest-group politics. This chapter then evaluates the current state of civil society and proposes new visions in transition to democracy in Korea.

The concepts of state and civil society emerged as particular sets of institutional ensembles in specific historical circumstances and their meanings have varied over time and intellectual contexts. Both have grown out of the historical experience of state formation under European capitalism. The concept of civil society emerged in Europe at a time when those who controlled capitalist production sought access to political power. The search for political power constituted a space or relationship in which bourgeoisie

## Division, War, and Reunification

BRUCE CUMINGS

Korea is still in the era of national division and opposing states, but for the first time since the country was divided in 1945 it is finally possible to imagine a unified Korea that has transcended more than fifty years of hot war and cold war. The dramatic steps toward peaceful coexistence that the governments of South Korea (Republic of Korea; ROK) and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea; DPRK) have taken since the turn of the new millennium can best be appreciated by looking first at the origins of division and war, and then at the path toward compromise that began in the mid-1990s. As an American, it has always seemed appropriate to me to begin with the purely American decision that first divided Korea, just as World War II was drawing to a close.

### **The Division of Korea**

In the days just before Koreans heard the voice of Emperor Hirohito for the first time, broadcasting Japan's surrender and Korea's liberation on August 15, 1945, John J. McCloy of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) directed two young colonels, Dean Rusk and Charles H. Bonesteel, to withdraw to an adjoining room and find a place to divide Korea. It was about midnight on August 10; the atomic bombs had been dropped, the Soviet Red Army had entered the Pacific War, and American planners were rushing to arrange the Japanese surrender throughout the region. Given thirty minutes to do so, Rusk and Bonesteel looked at a map and chose the thirty-eighth parallel because it "would place the capital city in the American zone"; although the line was "further north than could be realistically reached...in the event of Soviet disagreement," the Soviets made no objections, which "somewhat surprised" Rusk (U.S.

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