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The Troubled Category of Rural Bachelors in Contemporary South Korea

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Hannah Saeyoung Lim

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Troubled Category of Rural Bachelors in Contemporary Korean Society

by

Hannah Saeyoung Lim

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Namhee Lee, Chair

This dissertation takes the rural bachelor as a social category through whom to analyze the dialectic relationship between the rural community and state-led industrialization policies in reconfiguring the landscape of contemporary Korean society. This project is the first to examine this figure from an academic perspective and historicizes the surge of cross-border marriages between Korean men and non-Korean women in recent decades. Previous scholarship on contemporary Korea generally focuses on urbanites, industrial laborers, and issues of femininity and women's experiences. While this scholarship tends to overlook the role of the countryside in the nation's rapid post-1960 socio-economic transformation, this dissertation redresses this issue by focusing on the masculine subjectivity of rural bachelors as an avenue for analyzing how uneven economic development hit particularly hard in rural Korea. Through discursive analysis of post-1960s films, television programs, and newspaper articles about the countryside, this project demonstrates how public anxiety over rural bachelors and their marriage woes refracts distress over how to preserve the national "heartland" in the global turn to neoliberalism.

This study argues that the rural bachelor embodies public concerns over the deterioration of rural communities, and by extension, the well-being of the Korean nation. This research traces how anxiety emerges in the articulation of a crisis of rural masculinity that I term “disabled masculinity” in two parts. First, I argue that while concern over the plight of the rural bachelor demonstrates a struggle over maintaining normative gender roles and a conflict between “traditional” and “modern,” the contemporary issue of rural bachelorhood is also a product of South Korea’s tenuous position in the world economy. More specifically, I highlight the role of systematic rural underdevelopment in promoting the nation’s socioeconomic growth by focusing on the nationwide proliferation of the NACF (National Agricultural Cooperative Federation, Nonghyŏp). Second, I demonstrate how concerns over the inability of rural society to continue to both feed and reproduce the traditions of the Korean nation is rooted a sense of rural nostalgia that erupts in national concern over the rural bachelor’s unmarriageability. Thus, the rural heartland of the nation is depicted as “left behind” and emasculated in representations of the countryside like *The Countryside Diaries* (*Chŏnwŏn ilgi*, 1980-2002) and *My Wedding Campaign* (*Na ūi kyŏrhon wŏnjŏnggi*, 2008).

The dissertation of Hannah Saeyoung Lim is approved.

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This dissertation is dedicated
to
Pak Chang Kūm,
without whose unwavering love, joy, and support,
this dissertation would not be possible.

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GLOSSARY

Abbreviation	English		Romanized Korean
	Chosŏn Organization of Credit Associations	朝鮮金融組合聯合會	<i>Chosŏn kŭmyung chohap yŏnhaphoe</i>
	Decree on Korean Agricultural Associations	朝鮮農會令	<i>Chosŏn nonghoe ryŏng</i>
EPB	Economic Planning Board	經濟企劃院	<i>Kyŏngje kihoekwŏn</i>
FYEDP	Five Year Economic Development Plan	經濟社會發展五個年計畫	<i>Kyŏngje sahoe paljŏn 5-kaenyŏn kyehoek</i>
HCI	Heavy Chemical Industrialization Policy	重化學工業政策	<i>Chunghwahak kongŏphwa chŏngch'aek</i>
IAE	Irrigation association enterprises	水利組合事業	<i>Suri chohap saŏp</i>
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries	農林部	<i>Nongnimbu</i>
MCI	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	商工部	<i>Sangkongbu</i>
	Mutual Aid Association to Increase Production	殖產契	<i>Siksan kye</i>
NACF	National Agricultural Cooperative Federation	農業協同組合	<i>Nongŏp hyŏpdong chohap; abbr. Nonghyŏp</i>
PIRP	Program to Increase Rice Production	產米增殖計畫	<i>Sanmi chŭngsik kyehoek</i>
PMNR	People's Movement for National Reconstruction	國土建設團	<i>Kukt'o kŏnsŏl tan</i>
RDA	Rural Development Administration	農村振興廳	<i>Nongch'on chinhŭng ch'ŏng</i>
RRM	Rural Revitalization Movement	農村振興運動	<i>Nongch'on chinhŭng undong</i>
SCNR	Supreme Council for National Reconstruction	國家再建最高會議	<i>Kukka chaegŏn ch'oego hoeŭi</i>
USMGIK	United States Military Government in Korea	在朝鮮美陸軍司令部軍政廳	<i>Chae Chosŏn Miguk kunsaryŏngbu kunjŏngch'ŏng</i>

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, sensational newspaper articles included statements of nameless Korean rural bachelors crying out: “Farmers are people, too! Let us get married!”¹ In newspaper reports of bachelors’ self-immolating protest suicides, bachelorhood is not a choice for these men, nor is it something to be envied. Rather, bachelorhood is narrated as a profound social impairment due to Korean women’s unwillingness to marry them. Why is the rural bachelor such a compelling figure in public culture? The answer to this question lays in the modern trope of rural nostalgia within the context of Korea’s rapid shift from an agrarian to industrial economy beginning in the 1960s. In the context of Korea’s exposure to modern global capitalism, the rural space and its inhabitants—the *nongmin* (farmer, peasant)—embodied the definition of what was Korean. This dissertation asserts that as a result of Korea’s rapid economic development, the rural space becomes a site of desire, anxiety, and nostalgia. This rural nostalgia extends to concern over the viability of maintaining a perceived Korean way of life in the global neoliberal marketplace and manifests in anxiety over the marriage woes of single rural men. This dissertation explores the rural bachelor as a social category through whom to investigate the relationship between economic development, state-led agricultural reforms and changes in rural society.

The rural bachelor and his marriage woes come to embody the deterioration of rural communities starting with the rapid post-1960 industrialization that escalated through the present day with the rise of a neoliberal economy. While concern over the plight of the rural bachelor

¹ Chairman of Research Institute for Korea’s Farming and Fishing Villages, “Nongch’on ch’onggak kyōrhon taech’aek sok’i sewōya [We Must Quickly Set Up Marriage Policies for Rural Bachelors],” *Tonga ilbo*, July 24, 1997.

demonstrates a struggle over maintaining normative gender roles and a conflict between “traditional” and “modern,” the contemporary issue of rural bachelorhood is also a product of South Korea’s increasingly tenuous position in a world economy of lowered trade barriers. Through discursive analysis of post-1960 films, television programs, and newspaper articles about the countryside, in conjunction with economic and demographic statistics as contextualization, I demonstrate how rural bachelors and their marriage woes refract the anxiety of a nation in distress over how to preserve its rural “heartland” amidst the global turn to neoliberalism.

Despite the public outcry reported in the news media, little academic attention has been paid to rural bachelors. Moreover, the role of the rural sector in Korea’s rapid economic growth has yet to be studied in depth. My dissertation will correct these absences. As Anna Tsing asserts that “prosperity is best understood through its disparities,” analysis into Korea’s contemporary rural socioeconomic marginalization sheds light on Korean society at large.² My dissertation is a cultural history that considers how the rural heartland of the nation is narrated as “left behind” and emasculated by industrialization and increased internationalization. The Korean national economy achieved dramatic success under years of state-led authoritarian dictatorship. Table 1-1, for example, details how the GDP growth rate remained steadily high throughout the 1960s to 1980s. Despite overall national economic growth, uneven economic development hit particularly hard in rural Korea with the dramatic shift from an agricultural to industrial economy in the early 1960s. The state did attempt to address inclusive rural development through top-down reform and institutionalization measures, including the establishment of the NACF—which has now “grown into Korea’s largest and the world’s second

² Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 22.

largest agro-commodity cooperative”³—and rural mobilization campaigns. Nevertheless, the state protection of the domestic rice market dropped dramatically after the 1997 IMF crisis, leaving many small-scale farmers struggling even more to compete against the influx of grain imports. This dissertation asserts that changing public culture representations of rural society reflect concerns over the inability of rural society to continue to both feed and reproduce the traditions of the Korean nation in the midst of Korea’s rapidly shifting position in the global marketplace.

Table 1-1. Average Annual GDP Growth Rates in Four Year Increments, 1955-2004

Year	GDP Growth Rate
1955-1959	4.2
1960-1965	6
1966-1970	10.6
1971-1975	7.4
1976-1980	7.2
1981-1985	7.8
1986-1990	9.8
1991-1995	6
1996-2000	4.4
2001-2004	4.75

Source: Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen, “Introduction,” in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979*, ed. Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 4.

This dissertation also unpacks the historical context necessary to understand the extent to the institutionalization of rural socioeconomic marginalization embedded in Korea’s state-guided push of uneven development. The opening of the Korean economy to greater global market penetration began symbolically with the regional 1986 Asian Games and internationally with the 1988 Summer Olympics. More measurably, the economy opened up with a turn to *seggyehwa* (globalization) under the Kim Young Sam administration, the Uruguay Round Agreements Act

³ Michael Reinschmidt, “Rural Development: Lessons from the Liberalization of Korean Trade,” *Korea Journal*, Winter 2009, 99.

(URAA) and Korea's entry into the WTO, the Asian Financial Crisis and subsequent IMF bailout, and negotiations for free trade agreements with the US, India, and other East Asian neighbors. Economist John Beghin asserts that despite partial trade liberalization of the South Korean rice economy since the URAA, South Korea continues to enforce policy measures in accordance with a "food security" policy designed to ensure Korean food autonomy.⁴ Furthermore, while much public protest centers on the potential dangers of increased imports from the United States, Myung-keun Eor emphasizes that products from the US are generally luxury items not produced in Korea domestically. Chinese products, on the other hand, which are similar to domestic agricultural products seems to pose the "biggest challenge to Korean agriculture" due to their lower price point and similarity with Korean agricultural products.⁵ Scholars who study farmers' political activism in response to the neoliberalization of the Korean economy focus on farmers as mobilizing to resist their increased vulnerability to exploitative global market conditions, such as a "squeezing economic policy"⁶ and the intensification of aging rural communities as young generations continue to flock to urban centers in search of non-farming work with the increased importation of agricultural products.⁷ While these scholars attempt to shed light on the implications of international trade agreements on rural South Koreans, they also inaccurately portray overt political protest as rural residents' only viable option for response. Whereas the state introduced rice import protections in the 1970s to ensure

⁴ John Beghin, Jean-Christophe Bureau, and Sung Joon Park, "Food Security and Agricultural Protection in South Korea," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 85, no. 3 (August 2003): 630.

⁵ Myong Keun Eor, Bae Sung Kim, and Joo Myung Heo, "Effects of FTA Among China, Japan and Korea on Agriculture," *Han'guk nongch'on kyongje yon'guwon* 28, no. 1 (2005): 47.

⁶ Man-su Han, *Han'guk nongmin ūi chongch'i kaltung kwa nongmin undong* (Seoul: Pibong Ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 33.

⁷ Park Jung-Geun, "Han'guk nongŏp ūi kisul, sŏngjŏng mit paljŏn, kwagŏ, hyŏnjae kŭrigo mirae," in *Tong Asia nongŏp ūi chŏnt'ong kwa pyŏnhwa*, ed. Han'guk nongŏpsa hakhoe (Seoul: Han'guk nongch'on kyongje yon'guwon, 2003), 307.

continued food autonomy, pressures from neoliberal market forces to open up the Korean economy by decreasing its tariffs and other protective measures to increased agricultural imports in the form of the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, the IMF bailout, and US and East Asian FTA treaty negotiations is reported in Korean newspapers as highly unpopular throughout the rural populace.

In a nation that once prided itself on its ethnic homogeneity, after passing the 2008 Multicultural Family Support Act, over 170 Multicultural Family Support Centers proliferated nationwide to provide social welfare services—including Korean language, culture, and child-rearing classes—for the unprecedented influx of female marriage migrants (*yŏsŏng kyŏrhon iminja*).⁸ By 2009, the Korean National Statistics Office (KNSO) expanded its duties to collecting statistics on whether or not female marriage migrants would recommend foreigners marrying Korean nationals.⁹ This surge in regulation is a response to a perceived social crisis resounding throughout the countryside: divorce, domestic violence, and discrimination against children arising from the very unions that were supposed to restore order to the farmlands. Further destabilizing conceptions of Korean national identity, demography projections predict that if the foreign migration to Korea continues at its pace, by 2050, one in ten in Korea will be foreign.¹⁰

⁸ Grace H. Chung and Joan P. Yoo, “Using the Multicultural Family Support Centers and Adjustment among Interethnic and Interracial Families in South Korea,” *Family Relations* 62, no. 1 (February 2013): 241–53. As of April 2014, marriage migrant resident visa (F-6) requirements now 1) limit the Korean national to only sponsoring one foreign spouse every five years, and require the migrant to 2) prove proof of annual income of approximately 14.8 million won and 3) if the couple is childless, demonstrate ability to communicate with spouse by passing a Korean language test.

⁹ Only 15.3% of respondents are against marrying a Korean, while 46.2% recommend marrying a Korean man and 38.4% are neither for nor against it. KNSO, “Whether or not female marriage migrants are in favor of their marriages with Korean men,” 2009.

¹⁰ Han, *Han’guk nongmin ūi chŏngch’i kaltŭng kwa nongmin undong*, 33.

The relationship between farmers, rice, and the Korean nation is exemplified in the recent *sint'oburi* (身土不二) campaign to promote consumption of domestic agricultural products rather than imported foods.¹¹ Caren Freeman highlights how farmers are “believed to embody *sint'oburi*, having invested their ‘sweat and blood’ in the cultivation of the land handed down to them by their ancestors.”¹² Thus, rural bachelors’ difficulty in finding willing marriage partners from within their own communities demonstrates the potential demise of the traditional small-scale family amidst rapid industrialization and neo-liberal global market forces, which engenders much anxiety over the future of Korean food autonomy and the maintenance of Korean “tradition.” After the economic turmoil and recovery of South Korea’s “IMF Crisis,” a “back-to-the-land movement” (*kwinong undong*) began in which small numbers of mostly Buddhist, “highly educated, young, urban workers” shirked the fast-paced life found in cities and returned to the countryside to work the land.¹³ This movement demonstrates the nostalgia at work in representations of the rural space: in times of national economic crisis, the countryside and the nation’s agricultural roots are enduringly meaningful symbols that continue to deeply resonate with Koreans.

I wed analysis of representations of the rural in film, television, and news media to an examination of the role of the rural sector in post-1960 economic growth. Rather than approaching nostalgic representations as a “perpetual recession into history,” this project focuses

¹¹ The phrase *sint'oburi* (身土不二) argues that as the body and land are one, Korean people should consume products grown from Korean soil.

¹² Caren Freeman, “Forging Kinship across Borders: Paradoxes of Gender, Kinship and Nation between China and South Korea” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2006), 35.

¹³ Reinschmidt, “Rural Development: Lessons from the Liberalization of Korean Trade,” 92.

on the specific socioeconomic contexts in which these changing representations emerged.¹⁴ In this dissertation, I propose that, as a result of this economic development, rural space becomes a site of desire and nostalgia for a public anxious about the viability of the Korean economy in the free market.

This rural nostalgia extends to concern over the viability of maintaining a perceived Korean way of life and distinct national identity in a neoliberal world, manifesting in anxiety over the symbol of this national identity crisis: the rural bachelor and his difficulties finding a wife with whom he can reproduce a Korean household. Ultimately, then, this discourse on the rural bachelor is rooted in these concerns over the inability for rural society—represented in a rural masculinity disabled from marriage prospects—to perpetuate the traditions of the Korean nation. This will be accomplished through an analysis of these representations in film such as *My Wedding Campaign* (*Na ūi kyōrhon wōnjōnggi*, 2005), television serials such as *The Countryside Diaries* (*Chōnwōn ilgi*, 1980-2002) and *The Golden Bride* (*Hwanggūm sinbu*), and news media, and will be complemented with a close examination of the vital role of the rural sector in post-1960 economic transformation. In doing so, my project also considers how Korea's industrialization is a process built upon romanticization and marginalization of the rural space.

Literature Review

I analyze the dialectic relationship between the rural community and national industrialization policies in reconfiguring the landscape of contemporary Korean society. The rural bachelor crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s—which erupted in the midst of Korea growing more vulnerable to fluctuations in global capital flows—has not yet been researched in depth.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 12.

This dissertation, then, seeks to fill a gap in existing research on contemporary Korea. My research is primarily in dialogue with two bodies of literature: historical scholarship of contemporary Korea and gender studies scholarship. Historical scholarship on post-1960 Korea generally takes the rural bachelor for granted as an unproblematic by-product of industrialization. Moreover, the growing body of literature on the international marriage market highlights how the rural bachelor's international marriage is an aspect of transnationalism in contemporary Korea.

In historical studies of rural space in post-1960 Korea, representative literature privileges the experiences of urban Koreans and industrial laborers. For example, Seungsook Moon and Hwasook Nam's sociological analyses of the gendered nature of socio-economic development under the Park Chung Hee regime ultimately focus on urban and industrial sectors of Korean society. Scholarship on the impact of industrialization and urbanization on rural Korea generally focus on how national and international political and economic forces drove these changes. Moreover, scholarship on contemporary rural society tends to situate rural society as a repository of Korean tradition. Early English-language anthropological studies attempted to capture and study a disappearing "traditional Korean culture" by travelling to remote rural villages. For example, in 1965, Vincent Brandt searched for a research site where "traditional forms of social organization and ideology would still be relatively intact" and found it in "Sokp'o."¹⁵ More recent Korean-language research also reinforces the location of tradition in rural society. For example, in his study of "traditional village culture (*chǒnt'ong maül munhwa*)," Yi Hae-jun argues that despite vast social changes throughout the centuries—namely, the dissolution of the

¹⁵ Vincent S. R. Brandt, *A Korean Village: Between Farm and Sea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 5. See also Clark Sorensen, *Over the Mountains Are Mountains: Korean Peasant Households and Their Adaptations to Rapid Industrialization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988) for an analysis which focuses on the maintenance of traditional village family structure in adaptations to industrialization of the Korean economy.

hereditary social status system—early Chosŏn period village concepts of democracy, equality, autonomy, self-government, and communalism continue to structure contemporary rural society.¹⁶ Small-scale rural farming households are associated with the labor-intensive cultivation of rice; Michael Reinschmidt emphasizes the symbolic importance of this staple food as “being synonymous with life itself” and remaining a “factor that indisputably allows all Koreans to distinguish themselves as Koreans at various points in their lives and even at death.”¹⁷ Scholars such as Seung Mi Han and Myung Seok Oh, who delve into the cultural impact of the New Village Movement, represent a new strand of scholarship on this period of developmental authoritarianism. My dissertation contributes to this existing scholarship by foregrounding the rural bachelor as a social category and emphasizing the countryside’s primary role in the nation’s economic transformation.

In gender studies, rural bachelors have been taken into consideration *only* as a secondary object of study by sociologists and anthropologists interested in female marriage immigrants (*kyŏrhon iminja*) and their multicultural families. Minjeong Kim’s recent publication on how rural husbands engaged in international marriages reconstruct their perceptions of their masculinity is a rare exception to this trend.¹⁸ Categories of *men*, as well as women, are marginalized in contemporary Korean society. Studies concerned with gender in Korea overwhelmingly focus on issues of femininity and women’s experiences. In the face of growing numbers of female marriage immigrants living in Korea, a rich body of anthropological and

¹⁶ Yi Hae-jun, “Han’guk ū maül munhwa wa chach’i/chayul ūi chŏnt’ong,” *Han’gukhak nonjip* 32 (2005): 213–214.

¹⁷ Michael Reinschmidt, “Rice in South Korean Life: The Transformation of Agricultural Icons,” in *The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia*, ed. Roy Hamilton (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2003), 525.

¹⁸ Minjeong Kim, “South Korean Rural Husbands, Compensatory Masculinity, and International Marriage,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 291–325.

sociological literature has grown focusing on the experiences of foreign brides engaged in international marriages (*kukje kyōrhon*) and living in Korean communities. This research includes insights on a range of topics including class, race, and gender inequality in the rural bachelor's international marriages. My project offers a way to historicize this recent trend in transnational marriage migration within the context of Korea's transition to an international neoliberal society.

By focusing on the masculine subjectivity of rural bachelors, I extend analysis of the complex transnational hierarchies of international marriages to consider how the gendered hierarchies within contemporary Korea society contribute to enduring rural socioeconomic marginalization. Since the rural bachelor does not marry during his youth or even by middle age, he does not fulfill his normative male social duty of establishing himself as the head of a stable household through heterosexual marriage. This status causes a great deal of anxiety over the state of rural society, and by extension, the well-being of the Korean nation. Thus, rural bachelors' difficulty in finding willing marriage partners from within their own communities demonstrates the potential demise of the traditional small-scale family farm amidst rapid industrialization and neoliberal global market forces. Minjeong Kim highlights how single male farmers internalize this sense to the extent that her male rural informants "in their thirties and forties expressed a sense of incompleteness at being single."¹⁹ This fear of the demise of the family farm, in turn, engenders much anxiety over the future of Korean food autonomy and the maintenance of Korean "tradition."

¹⁹ Ibid., 303.

Framework

Whereas rural bachelorhood is not a new social issue, discourse on the rural bachelor escalated within the context of neoliberalization. Since the post-1960 industrialization and the immense in-flows of global capital after the 1980s, small-scale farming households associated with the rural bachelor struggled to remain viable in a free market economy dominated by global agribusiness. My research on this is grounded in both discursive analysis and quantitative analysis.

Changing cultural representations from an idyllic countryside to the disabled masculinity of the rural bachelor reflect a fundamental sense of dislocation that emerged from Korea's state-led transition from "tradition" to modern world capitalism. Clark Sorensen highlights how "farmers, or *nongmin*, as the basis of the state is an ancient trope of East Asian Civilization" to the extent that farmers came to embody the "definition of what was Korean."²⁰ Through analyzing changing representations of the countryside in film, television, and news media from the 1960s to the 2000s, I demonstrate how the rural space becomes a site of desire and nostalgia as a result of this economic development and transition to a neoliberal society. This dissertation also unpacks how the state celebration of Korea as a multicultural society over the past decade obfuscates fundamental and enduring problems of rural marginalization unaddressed by the existing state's social welfare system.

I approach my analysis of uneven economic development in terms of David Harvey's analysis of the proliferation of neoliberalism through the concept of "accumulation by

²⁰ Clark Sorensen, "National Identity and the Creation of the Category 'Peasant' in Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Edson. Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 294 and 307.

dispossession.”²¹ Harvey asserts that in neoliberal economies, the state and economic elite accumulate capital through dispossessing the masses of rights and land, which thereby creates economic crises. These crises prompt the masses to accept solutions that superficially stabilize the economy, yet in fact further consolidate power in the hands of the state and economic elite. In the case of post-1960 South Korea, as rapid rural depopulation arose amidst industrialization and urbanization, the figure of the rural bachelor emerged in the 1980s and 90s as a symbol of the Korean heartland. In the midst of the neoliberalization of the Korean economy of the 1990s and accompanying economic crisis of 1997, the public focused on the marriage problems facing Korean rural bachelors. With quantitative analysis, including demographic statistics and economic development plans, I highlight how the state’s recent support of marriages with foreign brides is a short-term solution for rural marginalization that symbolizes Korea’s so-called entry into multiculturalism. Nevertheless, while multiculturalism is championed as the triumphal outcome of economic development and a demonstration of Korea as a late-capitalist society, thereby further legitimating the state and economic elite, this short-term solution ultimately does not resolve the underlying cause of rural bachelorhood: chronic rural underdevelopment and socioeconomic marginalization.

I consider the rural bachelor’s masculinity represented in public culture as one disabled from performing his heteronormative duty, by powers beyond his control. In addition to his marginalized position in the global marketplace as a small-scale farmer producing primarily for a domestic market flooded with growing numbers of imports, the Korean state also promotes cross-border marriages and invests in the assimilation of foreign brides into traditionally homogeneous rural communities, rather than pursuing other solutions, such as supporting plans

²¹ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

to keep domestic agricultural economies viable in the global marketplace. My theorization of “masculinity,” which I strive to ground in historical specificity, diverges from film studies scholar Kyung Hyun Kim’s psychoanalytic approach to public culture representations of masculinity. My approach to the study of discourse on the rural bachelor’s masculinity draws from the work of R.W. Connell, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, and Seungsook Moon. First, Connell asserts that within “hegemonic masculinity,” it is “the *group* that is the bearer of masculinity” through subordination.²² The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” amidst hierarchies of multiple gender identities illuminates how the rural bachelor’s masculinity is enforced to comply with heteronormative ideals of marriage. Second, Brownell and Wasserstrom’s assertion that “we must always be ready to ask, *Whose* femininity and masculinity are being produced and displayed, and *by whom?* and *Whose* purposes are served by this production and display?”²³ emphasizes how gender is a primary field in which power is articulated in Korean society. Brownell and Wasserstrom’s questions highlight how the production of the rural bachelor’s masculinity in public culture displays are not controlled by rural bachelors themselves. Third and finally, Moon asserts that South Korea developed a “militarized modernity” during the Park Chung Hee regime in which men were mobilized to be martial and women were mobilized to be domestic through coercive economic incentives and punitive measures. Whereas men were to serve in the military and masculinized industries such as engineering, women’s subjectivity was defined through feminized industries such as textiles and their role as reproducers of future generations. The state thus constructed a gendered sense

²² R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 107 Emphasis in the original.

²³ Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Introduction: Theorizing Femininities and Masculinities,” in *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 34.

of citizenship in which men and women were mobilized differently to be disciplined, economically productive, and vigilantly anti-communist South Korean citizens “and the specific paths of gendered mobilization shaped the ways in which men and women forged their new political subjectivity as citizens.”²⁴

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is divided into three body chapters loosely organized both topically and chronologically from the colonial period to the 2000s. The first body chapter, Chapter 2, overviews the historical background to Korea’s modern rural underdevelopment. It analyzes how state-led modernization efforts from as early as the colonial period attempted to interject central authority into the village level through reform measures that reconfigured the social landscape of the countryside without significantly improving rural living standards. This chapter focuses on the impact of state-led rural (under)development plans on cultural practices in the countryside. The chapter begins with an overview of colonial period agricultural modernization reforms—such as the establishment of irrigation association enterprises, rural credit societies, and the Rural Revitalization Movement—which were focused attempts to increase agricultural productivity at the expense of addressing farmer concerns over the modernization process. The chapter then details how in the post-liberation period, the USMGIK (1945-1948) and the Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) regime confronted rural unrest through direct state intervention in village leadership and the promulgation of a lukewarm land reform in the midst of the Korean War. The chapter then analyzes how the Park Chung Hee regime (1960-1979) restructured government institutions in support of a state-driven push to strengthen the national economy and

²⁴ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

decrease dependence on foreign aid. Finally, this chapter concludes by tracing the origins and penetration of the NACF (National Agricultural Cooperative Federation, *Nonghyŏp*) to centralize rural finances and support national industrialization to mobilize the countryside for increased food production and opening more domestic markets. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Park regime's authoritarian intervention reshaped rural Korea. Attempts to modernize farming practices and monetization of the rural economy contributed to the industrialization of the national economy while also marginalizing members of rural communities.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between Korea's rapid and uneven economic development the inability of poor male farmers to find willing marriage partners erupts into a perceived national crisis in the 1980s-90s. As Korea shifts from an agrarian to industrialized economy in a period of developmental authoritarianism, concerns grow over the nation's vulnerability in the global marketplace. Through analyses of national economic policies and rural development reforms, in addition to analyses of media chronicling the growing urban-rural divide, I trace the public culture articulation of a crisis of rural masculinity over male farmers' difficult finding willing marriage partners. This chapter begins by overviewing Korea's transition from a recipient of international food aid to a bilateral economic trade partner through Park's Yusin-period Heavy Chemical Industrialization Policy, which focused on growing Korea's heavy industry and military weapons manufacturing sectors. Economic development during this time was uneven, with institutionalization of benefits that systematized a gendered division of labor in the burgeoning industries and distribution of development funds revealing a regional bias.

The chapter then details how the rural space becomes a fetishized site of nostalgia—bucolic and idyllic—and also in need of aid to modernize. The centrally directed *Saemaŭl undong* (New Village Movement) launched in 1971 to ostensibly mobilize the rural population to inspire villagers to become more self-sufficient and able to modernize. The program utilized the existing NACF infrastructure to permeate state control to the lowest levels of the massive state agrobureaucracy with minimal capital investment from the state. Although this mobilization campaign did correspond with an increase in paved roads and electrification throughout the countryside, it also effectively bound previously self-sufficient rural households who produced for their own household consumption to producing agricultural commodities. Anxiety over poor farmers' marriage woes extend to a national crisis in industrializing Korea. For example, *Chŏnwŏn ilgi* (The Countryside Diaries, 1980-2002), the longest-running Korean drama spanning 22 years and 1088 episodes, while offering glimpses into an idyllic farming village that upholds traditional values for urban viewers, also follows the lives of sympathetic male farmers struggling to marry and become full-fledged adults in their communities. In doing so, I demonstrate how these public culture representations also illuminate growing problems in rural communities in the face of neoliberal trade policies. This chapter argues that the eruption of public concern over rural bachelors' marriage woes and a crisis of masculinity in the countryside beginning in the late 1980s, then is firmly rooted in anxiety over the future of the Korean countryside—and by extension the heart of Korean national identity—in an increasingly neoliberalizing world.

Chapter 4, the third and final body chapter, is divided in two sections. The first section explores the efficacy of promoting international marriage migration in alleviating the crisis of the countryside in the 1990s and early 2000s. First, I approach developments in contemporary

Korean economy with Harvey's conceptualization of neoliberalism as a process of crisis creation and management through state and economic elite-driven capital "accumulation by dispossession. I also focus on the impact of these neoliberalizing forces—participation in the WTO, adherence to massive financial reform mandates in exchange for an IMF bailout, and decrease in protection measures against imports—on anxiety over the stability of the Korean heartland.

The second part of Chapter 4 analyzes how the banner of multiculturalism glosses over the rural marginalization at the heart of rural bachelors' marriage woes. Through analyses of print media and television serials that trace the emergence of cross-border marriages as a cure-all for rural bachelors' marriage crisis—with an emphasis on characters from *The Golden Bride* (*Hwanggŭm sinbu*, 2007-2008) and *My Wedding Campaign* (*Na ūi kyŏrhon wŏnjŏnggi*, 2005)—Chapter 4 explores how foreign brides are depicted as figures of empowered femininity with the power to heal rural bachelor's social impairment. I explore how in representations of the short-term solution of cross-border marriages, analysis of dramatized figures of hegemonic and disabled masculinity and empowered femininity shed light on the gendered structures of power in late capitalist Korean society. Rather than healing the countryside, however, this chapter emphasizes how these marriages bolster existing gendered hierarchies. Moreover, the recent surge in foreign female marriage migrants in Korea exacerbates the problems of the rural bachelor into a marginalized social category. This chapter demonstrates that the state's recent celebration of multicultural policies obfuscates more than it resolves. Rather than effectively addressing consequences of Korea's crisis-laden uneven development, including the enduring problem of rural socioeconomic marginalization, the state focuses its funding on multicultural

family support centers instead of funding measures for sustainable methods for overcoming rural poverty.

These chapters seek to address a gap in scholarship of contemporary Korean studies that privileges the role of urban centers, industry, and labor in the making of modern Korea. The dissertation concludes with consideration of potential measures for future reform for more sustainable and inclusive rural development. By focusing on the vital role the countryside has and continues to play in the creation of modern Korean society, and the long-term historical processes behind the recent influx of female marriage migrants in contemporary rural Korea, this dissertation seeks to understand Korea's prosperity through the systematic perpetuation of disparities.

CHAPTER 2 : AGRICULTURAL MODERNIZATION AND THE ORIGINS OF CONTEMPORARY RURAL MARGINALIZATION

This chapter examines how state-led agricultural institutions transformed rural Korean society from the colonial period (1910-1945) through the first half of the Park Chung Hee period (1960-1979). This chapter outlines the origins of state organized semi-official mechanisms designed to spearhead rural modernization. Beginning with an overview of institutional reforms to modernize agriculture during the colonial period through regulating credit and interjecting the state into the local village level, this chapter outlines attempts to deal with rural instability by the USMGIK and Syngman Rhee administration in the immediate post-liberation years. This chapter then focuses on top-down rural underdevelopment policies begun in the 1960s. In particular, it highlights the systematic reconfiguration of agrarian social relationships in the commercialization of agriculture through the proliferation of semi-official rural institutions like the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (*nongŏp hyŏpdong chohap*, hereafter NACF). Institutions imposed at the village level by the state emphasized adherence to national level economic development goals, which focused on developing the industrial sector, more so than addressing how to develop the agricultural sector. In so doing, this chapter traces how the emergence of rural bachelors as a stigmatized social group in later decades is firmly rooted in the socioeconomic marginalization and underdevelopment of the Korean countryside from early modernization efforts.

Colonial Origins of State-led Agricultural Modernization

Korea's integration into the Japanese colonial system also marked its entry into the modern world capitalist system. With this shift, Korea's traditional agricultural economy was restructured and incorporated within the Japanese imperial economic system. As commonly observed in processes of industrialization, the primary goal of agricultural policy was to enhance

the colony's position as the lifeline of the growing working class of the industrial economy across the empire. In order to increase food production, the Japanese colonial authority attempted to modernize Korean agricultural production through introducing modern farming practices and developing rural infrastructure. The legacies of the colonial period political economy are a highly contested issue in modern Korean history. Whereas scholars like Kim Yong-sop emphasize the damaging and exploitative impact of modernization under colonial rule, scholars including Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson advocate the concept of "colonial modernity" to analyze the ambiguous relationship between Japanese colonialism and modernity in Korea.¹ By expanding the concept of modernity beyond the colonial state apparatus, Albert Park highlights how changes in the countryside were not exclusively limited to the confines of the colonial government.² This section focuses on how colonial period agricultural policies embarked on state-led strategies to modernize the rural Korean economy. This modernization led to increased mobilization of the countryside that laid the groundwork for post-liberation reform efforts. Three primary institutions established in this period with significant impact on post-liberation rural Korea are: irrigation association enterprises (水利組合事業, *suri chohap saöp*, hereafter IAE), rural credit societies (金融組合, *kümyung chohap*), and the Rural Revitalization Movement (農村振興運動, *nongch'on chinhŭng undong*, hereafter RRM). By outlining the development of these institutions throughout the countryside, this section highlights how the fundamental transformation of rural social order is clearly visible in the changing role of

¹ Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, "Rethinking Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–18.

² For example, faith-based rural revitalization movements of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Presbyterian Church, and Ch'öndogyo flourished during this period. Albert Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015).

village leadership from hereditary landowners to middlemen leading rural semi-official organizations.

The first stage of colonial agricultural policy focused on mobilizing the countryside in order to increase food exports to the metropole through introducing modern farming practices. In addition to the implementation of a comprehensive tax system after the 1910-1918 cadastral survey, the Government General reshaped the rural economy in the 1920s with the Program to Increase Rice Production (産米増殖計劃, *sanmi chūngsik kyehoek*, hereafter PIRP). The main objective of the PIRP was to maximize food extraction from the rice basket of the empire in response to rice riots throughout Japan.³ Beginning in 1920, the focal point of the PIRP was to increase arable land and improve irrigation for water-intensive rice cultivation to feed Japanese workers. Whereas irrigation enterprises in Japan extended the work of existing collective irrigation groups, in the Korean colony, previous collective irrigation groups were abolished in favor of irrigation association enterprises (IAE) controlled by the colonial administration.⁴ Table 2-1 highlights the spread of IAE and increase of irrigated land throughout the colony during this period. In order to fund the replacement of traditional infrastructure and installation of new irrigation systems, IAE members paid association fees and took out loans that were a huge financial burden on residents of the countryside. The significance of conceiving of land as a commodity with value to be bought, sold, and traded—rather than mere soil that yields crops—

³ Kim Yong-sop, “The Landlord System and the Agricultural Economy During the Japanese Occupation Period,” in *Landlords, Peasants, and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, ed. Kie-Chung Pang and Michael D. Shin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 135–138.

⁴ Chŏn Kangsu, “Ilche ha suri chohap saŏp i chiju chejŏngae e mich’in yŏngnyang: sanmi chūngsik kyehoekgi (1920-34) rŭl chungsimŭro [The impact of irrigation association enterprises on landlord development under the rule of Japanese imperialism: with a focus on the Program to Increase Rice Production (1920-34)],” *Kyŏngje sahak* 8 (1984): 119–128.

cannot be overstated.⁵ While the area of irrigated land increased with IAEs, since land was the primary form of collateral for loans, a surge in land seizures lead to the dramatic fall of land prices (see Table 2-2). The spread of IAEs effectively drove out small-scale landowners from agriculture, for “considerable time and effort had to be expended by the landlords themselves” in order to make investments profitable.⁶

Table 2-1. Establishment of Irrigation Associations, 1920-1934

Year	No. Of Associations	Area of Irrigated Land (chǒng) ⁷	Year	No. of Associations	Area of Irrigated Land (chǒng)
1920	9	14,514	1928	20	12,270
1921	8	3,944	1929	24	38,720
1922	12	14,515	1930	26	14,178
1923	10	15,939	1931	26	9,521
1924	3	3,195	1932	5	1,229
1925	12	30,192	1933	2	1,309
1926	14	17,467	1934	1	38
1927	15	7,899	TOTAL	187	184,940

Source: Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen dochi kairyō kabushiki kaisha*.⁸

⁵ Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea*, 57–58.

⁶ Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 39.

⁷ 1 chǒng (卍) is approximately 109.1m.

⁸ Park Su Hyun, “Ilche ha suri chohap saōp kwa nongch'on sahoe ūi pyōndong [Irrigation association enterprises and transformations of rural society under the rule of Japanese imperialism],” *Chungang saron* 15 (December 2001): 86.

Table 2-2. Changes in Average Land Price per Panbo⁹ in Provinces with Irrigation Associations

Assoc.	Province	Year Est.	Land Price (won)		Assoc.	Province	Year Est.	Land Price (won)	
			Before Est.	After Est.				Before Est.	After Est.
Simgok	Kyōnggi	1919	250	50	Kyōngsan	Kyōngbuk	1925	210	75
Yōngbuk	Kyōnggi	1922	120	36	Chungnam	Kyōngnam	1925	225	90
P'ungdōk	Kyōnggi	1929	180	45	P'yōngan	P'yōngnam	1925	120	45
Ch'ungju	Ch'ungbuk	1922	180	90	Munmak	Kangwōn	1919	130	35
Chōksōng	Chōnbuk	1925	165	55	Kimhwa	Kangwōn	1928	130	30
Masan	Chōnnam	1929	180	60					

Source: Chōsen sōtokufū, *Chōsen dochi kairyō kabushiki kaisha* and Chang Hyōnch'il, "Chosōn suri chohap kwa chungnong kyegūp" *Sintonga* 40 (1935): 28.¹⁰

Under the auspices of rural development, the colonial government oversaw the implementation of infrastructural changes that thoroughly reshaped the social landscape of the countryside. As small-scale landowners sold their properties to invest in burgeoning industrial sectors, the gulf between social classes widened with the commercialization of agriculture and development of urban centers. The departure of many small-scale landowners away from the countryside with the industrialization of the economy thus bore significant impact on subsequent rural modernization efforts into the post-liberation period.

State-led infrastructural modernization efforts in the countryside also introduced mechanisms for increasing rural credit through promoting the proliferation of financial institutions throughout the countryside. As loan recipients applied rural credit to fund efforts to maximize rice crop yields, agriculture grew more vulnerable to price fluctuations in the global rice market. In order to finance government-mandated modernization efforts, large-scale

⁹ 1 panbo (反步) is approximately 991m².

¹⁰ Park, "Ilche ha suri chohap saōp kwa nongch'on sahoe ūi pyōndong [Irrigation association enterprises and transformations of rural society under the rule of Japanese imperialism]," 98.

landlords relied on loans from ever-pervasive colonial financial institutions. The spread of Government General-supported lending institutions marks a shift from earlier lending systems like the grain loan system, which was intended to alleviate starvation during famine periods by loaning out grain reserves at interest.¹¹ Under the 1927 Decree on Korean Agricultural Associations (朝鮮農會令, *Chosŏn nonghoe ryŏng*), existing local credit associations were consolidated under the Chosŏn Organization of Credit Associations (朝鮮金融組合聯合會, *Chosŏn kŭmyung chohap yŏnhaphoe*) to finance the modernization and commercialization of agriculture.¹² Although this was a state-led top-down financial institution, historian Mun Yŏngju highlights how local level officials in the Chosŏn Organization of Credit Associations maintained a unique identity distinct from the Government General and advocated financial policies that would better suit the colony than the mainland.¹³ Nevertheless, lending institutions generally overlooked peasants in favor of lending to Japanese settlers in Korea and large-scale Korean landowners.¹⁴ The monetization of the countryside further restructured rural society as poor farmers unable to pay their taxes sold their land to landlords and became tenant farmers, leading to a rise in rates of landlordism. Although these credit unions may have been established to promote rural credit throughout the countryside, they developed a “bad reputation among Korean peasants for lending money to landlords which they re-lent at higher interest to tenants”

¹¹ In addition to famine relief, the grain loan system also offered “military provisions, price stabilization, and working capital loans” for the Chosŏn dynasty. James Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 134.

¹² Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea*, 58.

¹³ Mun Yŏngju, “Ilche sigi Chosŏn kŭmyung chohap yŏnhaphoe ūi unyŏng chuch’e wa ‘kŭmyung chohap chuŭi’ [The operating bodies of and ‘credit society-ism’ of the Chosŏn Organization of Credit Associations during the Japanese Occupation Period],” *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* 145 (June 2009): 226–33.

¹⁴ Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea*, 173.

unable to lend directly from financial institutions.¹⁵ By 1935, mutual aid associations to increase production (殖産契, *siksan kye*) were established to include poor farmers previously excluded from participating in existing credit associations, the proliferation of mutual aid associations thereby intensified the commercialization of agriculture by extending their reach beyond association members to the general rural population in establishing rice trade networks.¹⁶ With this increasing monetization of the countryside, the dissemination of rural credit associations exacerbated the nascent rural debt and bound local agriculture markets to fluctuations in the global marketplace. Thus, the modernization of rural finances is a significant factor in the departure of many small-scale landowners from agriculture to investing in the fledgling industrial sector.¹⁷

In the midst of the global economic depression and local socioeconomic instability, the Rural Revitalization Movement of 1932-1940 arose to nominally raise living standards through increasing state control in rural villages. Small-scale landowners were not the only social group leaving the countryside. A “significant number of peasant tenant families had barely enough money to make a living and went into serious debt” in order to sustain daily life and were pushed out of the countryside.¹⁸ Impoverished rural peasants were pulled into the growing industrial sector throughout the Japanese empire and expanding war economy to industrial centers within

¹⁵ Clark Sorensen, “Rural Modernization under the Park Regime in the 1960s,” in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979*, ed. Hyung-A Kim and Clark Sorensen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 155.

¹⁶ Lee Kyung-Lan, “1930-yöndae chönbangi kūmyung chohap üi nongch'on chojik hwakdae wa Siksan kye söllip [The expansion of rural organizations and the establishment of the Mutual Aid Association to Increase Production under credit unions in the early 1930s],” *Tongbang hakji* 115 (2002): 155.

¹⁷ Carter Eckert takes the Koch'ang Kims as a case study in his analysis of the role of rural capital conversion in Korea's industrializing economy. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945*.

¹⁸ Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea*, 67.

the peninsula and beyond to the imperial labor market in Manchuria and Japan.¹⁹ Since the depression curbed the metropole's import of rice, the Korean countryside now had to absorb these exports, further intensifying rural poverty.²⁰ Historian Edwin Gragert highlights how the depression hit absentee urban landlords hardest. As these medium-sized landholdings were increasingly sold to local landlords, this early period of agricultural policy also promoted the growth of *nongjang* (農場), or agricultural estates, which employed tenant farmers based on landlords' capital conversion.²¹ With this shift to agricultural estates, the remaining small-scale landlords in agriculture became entrepreneurial landlords who took a more active role in managing farmers who "effectively turned the tenants into wage laborers, by taking complete control over the whole process of production, distribution, and marketing."²² Under the rule of Governor General Ugaki Kazushige (宇垣 一成 1927, 1931-1936), the primary objective of the RRM was for rural households to cut themselves free from dependence on the global market economy through cultivation of self-sufficiency and spiritual revitalization. Furthermore, in line with this spirit of self-sufficiency, the Government General did not invest many financial resources in the program and instead designed the program for participants to fund their own activities. By establishing semi-official control at the village level throughout the countryside, the Government General staunchly resisted widespread unrest by establishing tenancy dispute arbitration

¹⁹ Soon-Won Park, "Colonial Industrial Growth and the Emergence of the Korean Working Class," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 139–145.

²⁰ Edwin H. Gragert, *Landownership under Colonial Rule: Korea's Japanese Experience, 1900-1935* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²² Hong Sung-Chan, "The Emergence of New Types of Landlords in the Occupation Period," in *Landlords, Peasants, and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, ed. Pang Kie-Chung and Michael D. Shin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 185.

councils and a series of tenancy ordinances during its wartime mobilization.²³ Table 2-3 demonstrates the high degree of village participation in the RRM across the colony's provinces, with an average of 39% participation of total villages in establishing rehabilitation villages from 1933-1939.

Table 2-3. Number of Rehabilitation Villages by Province, 1933-39

Province	Total Villages	Rehabilitation Villages	
		Number	% of total
Kyōnggi	7,479	2,563	34
North Ch'ungch'ōng	3,695	1,342	36
South Ch'ungch'ōng	6,448	2,409	37
North Chōlla	5,680	2,739	48
South Chōlla	7,599	2,929	39
North Kyōngsang	7,916	2,807	36
South Kyōngsang	7,220	2,782	39
Hwanghae	8,146	3,369	41
South P'yōngan	4,513	1,659	37
North P'yōngan	4,594	1,748	38
Kangwōn	4,950	2,119	43
South Hamgyōng	3,947	1,427	36
North Hamgyōng	1,320	619	47
TOTAL	73,507	28,512	39

Source: Chōsen sōtokufu, Chōsen ni okeru nōson shinkō undo no jisshi gaikyō to sono jisseci (Keijō, 1940), p. 36-37.²⁴

²³ Yi Yungap, "Nongch'on chinhūng undong ki (1932-1940) ūi Chosōn ch'ongdokbu ūi sojak chōngch'aek [Tenancy policies of the Japanese Government-General of Korea during the Rural Revitalization Movement]," *Taegu sahak* 91 (2008): 266.

²⁴ Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, "The Rural Revitalization Campaign," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 85.

Table 2-4. Outcomes of Economic Rehabilitation, 1933-38

unit = households

Year	Food Shortage			Indebtedness			Cash income imbalance		
	Pre-rehabilitation	Current (1939)	%	Pre-rehabilitation	Current (1939)	%	Pre-rehabilitation	Current (1939)	%
1933	2,612	1,174	45	3,964	1,929	49	2,396	785	33
1934	29,460	10,601	36	40,998	18,830	46	26,601	7,079	27
1935	40,935	21,327	52	54,514	33,381	61	35,093	14,625	42
1936	67,898	41,251	61	88,601	64,470	73	53,519	27,672	52
1937	67,898	45,060	66	91,970	70,329	76	56,545	32,814	58
1938	68,721	57,025	83	99,981	87,799	88	55,865	42,928	77
TOTAL	277,524	176,438	64	380,028	276,739	73	230,019	125,903	55

Source: Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen ni okeru nōson shinkō undo no jisshi gaikyō to sono jisseki* (Keijō, 1940), p. 26-27.²⁵

The RRM did noticeably improve rural economic stability by reducing food shortages, indebtedness, and cash income imbalances (see Table 2-4). Village leadership was reorganized under rural revitalization councils in each participating village, which oversaw financial institutions and was a “more direct, tight, and corporatist linkage of the state to villages was less coercive yet more effectively achieved local control and mobilization.”²⁶ Appointed council leaders replaced landlords as heads of village life, which restructured village life and led to the abolishment of many mutual aid associations not sanctioned by the state. As wartime mobilization heightened, the village leaders (區長, *kujang*) became the “lowest-level petty officials responsible for the mobilization for war,” thereby supplanting traditional hereditary landlords as the middlemen between the state and village.²⁷ This shift in local village-level leadership from large-scale landowners to entrepreneurial landlords acting as officials at the helm of state-led institutions bears significant impact on post-liberation mechanisms of state

²⁵ Ibid., 90.

²⁶ Ibid., 93.

²⁷ Songsoon Lee, “The Rural Control Policy and Peasant Ruling Strategy of the Government-General of Chosōn in the 1930s-1940s,” *International Journal of Korean History* 15, no. 2 (August 2010): 24.

control of the countryside. In the midst of this institutional transformation that increased rice production and monetization, the entrenched rural debt and poverty continued, leaving the countryside a powder keg of unrest.

Post-Liberation Rural Instability

State-led efforts to modernize the countryside in the post-liberation period extended the infrastructural groundwork laid during the colonial period and solidified the socio-economic marginalization of residents of the countryside. As this dissertation traces the origins of the rural bachelors' marriage crisis in contemporary South Korea, this section will focus on how events south of the 38th parallel shaped the development of farmers as a stigmatized social group. Primarily, this section will highlight the impact of agriculture infrastructure restructuring efforts during the period of the United States Military Government in Korea (1945-1948, 在朝鮮美陸軍司令部軍政廳, *Chae Chosŏn Miguk kunsu ryŏngbu kunjŏng ch'ŏng*, hereafter USMGIK), the nationwide surge in rural unrest from the autumn of 1946 to the outbreak of war, and the implementation of the Republic of Korea's lukewarm land reform in 1948. With the sudden removal of strict oversight imposed by colonial authorities, a power vacuum emerged in Korean villages that remained unfilled in the post-liberation period until the Park Chung Hee period. Ineffective stabilization policies in the immediate post-liberation years further exacerbated the socio-economic marginalization of the countryside established during the colonial period.

The USMGIK's attempts to overhaul Korean agriculture devastated the rural economy in the immediate post-liberation years. With terms agreed upon at the Cairo Conference (1943) and Potsdam Conference (1945), after the surrender of the Japanese Imperial forces, transfer of power shifted immediately from colonial rule to joint trusteeship of the Korean peninsula between the Soviet Union to the north and the United States to the south of the 38th parallel in

August 1945. The USMGIK's primary goal in its first year of administration was to contain Soviet expansion southward and stomp out any sparks of internal revolution, including suppression of political opposition in the capital and at the village level.²⁸ To facilitate this goal, the USMGIK formed the Department of Agriculture and Commerce (later designated the Bureau of Agriculture) to establish control at the village level and disbanded many colonial period policies. The Department of Agriculture consisted of the following sections: the Agriculture Section, the Food Section, the Land Reclamation Section, the Forestry Section, and the Fishery Section. The Food Section had a lasting impact on the Korean economy at large, for it introduced a free market to the national economy. While rice prices were under strict control under the colonial period with quotas and heavy government subsidies, Americans stopped subsidies and removed the unpopular rice collection quotas. In the wake of wartime rice export quotas, the average Korean diet adapted to a decrease of rice consumption with an increase of millet consumption imported from Manchuria. Thus, with the removal of collection quotas and subsidies to stabilize prices, rice prices soared so rapidly with the increase in average rice consumption and subsequent surge in food shortages that the Korean economy faced a state of national emergency a mere "two weeks after it had established the free rice market."²⁹ In areas with preexisting influential people's committees (人民委員會, *inmin wiwŏnhoe*) and farmers' associations, these institutions filled the power vacuum to stabilize and control rice collections. By 1946, the USMGIK focused on centralization of state power and stabilization in the countryside by returning to the despised colonial period control mechanisms. Namely, the

²⁸ Hyun Sook Kim, "The Politics of Repression, Resistance, and Revolution: State-Making in Postwar Korea, 1945-1948" (PhD dissertation, New School for Social Research, 1992), 103–106.

²⁹ E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, Columbia University, 1951), 195.

widely unpopular national police again enforced grain collection and regulated village-level meetings, attempting to reduce the power of these people’s committees and farmers’ associations in the name of increasing central authority in order to stop Soviet expansion southward.³⁰ The drastic reversals in rice collection policies and return to power of the national police within such a short period of time effectively “wreaked havoc on rice prices, the extractive capability of the central government, and the very willingness of peasants to sow and harvest crops” in southern Korea (see Table 2-5).³¹ Whereas the Soviet Union oversaw the implementation of comprehensive land reform in the northern half of the peninsula during the occupation period, for the sake of socioeconomic stabilization and to staunch peasant protest, under the USMGIK, the American Occupation oversaw the bemoaned return of institutional continuity with the colonial period.

Table 2-5. Price Increases in Agricultural Products, February 1946 to February 1947

Product	(in wŏn per sŏk)	
	February 1946	February 1947
Rice	1,348	10,146
Barley	810	5,000
Wheat	1,390	6,785
Millet	1,410	7,310
Soy beans	1,060	7,805

Source: Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, 377.³²

The eruption of protest and violence that spread nationwide in the autumn of 1946 demonstrates how significant the Korean countryside remains in the stability of modern Korean administrations. Unions of textile workers and railway workers in southern Korean began

³⁰ Kim, “The Politics of Repression, Resistance, and Revolution: State-Making in Postwar Korea, 1945-1948,” 114.

³¹ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 375.

³² *Ibid.*, 377.

striking for more rations, higher wages, and democratic labor laws. When members of the South Korean Railway Workers' Union, a member of the Korean Federation of Trade Unions, went on strike in Pusan in September 1946, the strike quickly spread to a general strike by workers across trades and throughout southern Korea. In spite of violent suppression by over 2,000 policemen and American military police, the movement grew as many farmers and students joined the protest.³³ By October 1946, violence erupted in Taegu and escalated into what Gi-Wook Shin terms an "agrarian rebellion that swept through the countryside."³⁴ Within two months, however, the strikes and uprisings were crushed under the weight of widespread arrests, implementation of surveillance networks, and imposition of martial law, effectively undermining the influence of people's committees and farmers' associations.³⁵ Sociologist Hyun Sook Kim highlights how the USMGIK suppression methods focused on replacing existing village-level sources of power with center-appointed leadership, which is a strategy that continued to be employed by heads of the Republic of Korea. As the *kujang* became the middlemen between the state and village in the late colonial period, the USMGIK attempted to strengthen its local-level control through directly appointing semi-official leaders. In particular, the 1948 Cheju Uprising (4.3 *sat'ae*) that initially demanded the departure of US forces and national elections was initially dealt with ineffective measures such as the imposition of martial law. As violent suppression of the movement continued into 1949 with the death of approximately 1/6 of the population and setting the island ablaze, the newly formed Republic of Korea oversaw the

³³ Kim, "The Politics of Repression, Resistance, and Revolution: State-Making in Postwar Korea, 1945-1948," 119–122.

³⁴ Gi-Wook Shin, "Neither 'Sprouts' nor 'Offspring': The Agrarian Roots of Korean Capitalism," in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, ed. Yun-shik Chang and Steven Hugh Lee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 51–52.

³⁵ Kim, "The Politics of Repression, Resistance, and Revolution: State-Making in Postwar Korea, 1945-1948," 161–162.

restructuring of the island's civil and military administrations with appointing such high level positions as a new police chief and governor.³⁶ This strategy of direct state intervention at the village level to control the countryside continues well into the contemporary period.

Upholding the rhetoric of the *nongmin* (農民, peasant, farmer) owning and protecting his own land, the newly elected Syngman Rhee administration began overseeing the promulgation of comprehensive land reform in 1948.³⁷ This land reform was, in theory, designed to overturn any remnants of old agrarian social order such as landlords amassing large-scale holdings and consolidating wealth through usurious loans to peasants. The reform was also a means for the government to amass much-needed crops to feed its troops, as peasants paid for their redistributed land in kind with their crops. Moreover, rather than confiscating land for redistribution as in the north, the South Korean government issued bonds to compensate landowners for their property. Former landlords were in turn supposed to reinvest these bonds into the developing South Korean industrial economy. While the outbreak of war in 1950 disrupted the implementation of land reform, by “April 15, 1951, about 71.5 percent of the targeted land was redistributed to peasants.”³⁸ This high percentage of redistribution is a misleading figure for determining the degree of success of land reform. The land reform was designed for the average Korean rice farming family to live off the fruits of their labor from their own land, while the state collected crops to feed its troops, and former landlords reinvested their capital from agriculture to industry. Moreover, the architects of the land reform attempted to

³⁶ Ibid., 194–196.

³⁷ Paek Yōngch'ŏl, *Che il konghwaguk kwa Han'guk minjujuūi: ūihoe chōngch'i rŭl chungsim ūro* [The First Republic and Korean Democracy: A Focus on the Politics of the Legislature] (Seoul: Nanam ch'ulp'an, 1995), 240.

³⁸ Sin Pyōngsik, “Che il konghwaguk t'oji kaehyōk ūi chōngch'i kyōngje [The Political Economy of the First Republic],” *Han'guk chōngch'i hakhoebo* 31, no. 3 (November 1997): 31.

include homeless laborers and citizens repatriating to Korea from across the Japanese empire to prevent any further poverty-driven unrest.³⁹ In reality, however, many farming households—who had little access to capital to invest in high-cost irrigation and fertilization ventures—found land ownership unfeasible. Faced with scarce financial resources, the 3-hectare maximum plot of land allotted to each household was too small to sustain subsistence living conditions and some quickly resold their land to become tenant farmers or took out usurious loans and fell into debt once again. Nevertheless, despite continued rural poverty and low grain prices, after the land reform, those who worked the land tended to also own the land and no longer needed to pay half of their crop in rent. With a greater percentage of the rural population becoming owner-cultivators than ever before, more farmers bought and sold their agricultural products and entered the marketplace.

The cycle of modernization, state intervention and ineffective institutional reforms, and enduring rural poverty continues well into the post-war years. In the wake of massive and widespread bombing and wartime devastation, the Korean economy was in shambles by the 1953 armistice. As Bruce Cumings states, “war is also a devil of heartbreak and an angel of destruction.”⁴⁰ In the immediate post-war years, the ROK economy pushed forward under the leadership of Syngman Rhee (1948-1960), who balanced American support from the military and State Department to promote import substitution policies. Although the Rhee regime attempted to build the Korean economy as a “second Japan,” with lack of economic stabilization, widespread accusations of cronyism, and decline in USAID, Rhee was forced to resign amidst

³⁹ Paek, *Che il konghwaguk kwa Han'guk minjujuui: ūihoe chōngch'i rŭl chungsim ūro* [The First Republic and Korean Democracy: A Focus on the Politics of the Legislature], 134.

⁴⁰ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 302.

the nationwide protests of the April 19 Uprising (4.19) of 1960.⁴¹ Despite the hope for a bright democratic future in the wake of successfully demonstrating for Rhee's resignation, under the subsequent Second Republic, lead by Prime Minister Chang Myŏn (1960-1961), the national economy continued to stagnate and the agrarian economy fell further into poverty. This ineffectual democratic government dissolved with the May 16 coup of 1961 led by Lieutenant General Park Chung Hee, which marked the beginning of decades of military rule over South Korean politics. With the memory of a triumphant 4.19 still fresh, coup leaders coopted the mobilization of democracy activists, claiming "to have inherited the 4.19 spirit and aiming to complete its unfinished revolution."⁴² As the majority of the nation either lived in the countryside or recently migrated to urban centers from a village, stabilizing rural Korea was a crucial component to maintaining control of the nation. While "anticommunism and industrial development became their *raison d'être* and state policy," leaders of the Park regime also oversaw the overhaul of the agrarian economy.⁴³ With the promise of national economic development and a continuation of the "spirit of 4.19," Park's military regime began with a sense of hope and optimism for the South Korean nation.

⁴¹ Pak T'aesun Pak and Kim Tongch'un, *1960-yŏndae ŭi sahoe undong* [Social Movements of the 1960s] (Seoul: Kkach'i, 1991).

⁴² Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

Table 2-6. Farm Household Income and Off-Farm Migration, South Korea, 1954-79

	Real Farm Household Income (1975 prices)	Farm/Urban Household Income	Share of Farm Household Income from Non-agricultural sectors	Farm Population	Share of Population Living in Farm Household
	('000 won)	(%)	(\$)	(millions)	(%)
1954	287	56	10	13.2	61
1955	451	78	9	13.3	62
1956	542	96	9	13.5	60
1957	491	84	14	13.6	59
1958	497	73	17	13.8	58
1959	387	55	29	14.1	58
1960	415	61	24	14.6	58
1961	449	72	25	14.5	56
1962	422	70	21	15.1	57
1963	479	116	18	15.3	56
1964	481	129	18	15.6	56
1965	389	100	30	15.8	55
1966	414	81	22	15.8	54
1967	446	60	16	16.1	53
1968	494	63	24	15.9	52
1969	566	65	23	15.6	49
1970	610	67	24	14.4	45
1971	779	79	18	14.7	45
1972	825	83	18	14.7	44
1973	865	87	19	14.6	43
1974	853	105	20	13.5	39
1975	873	102	18	13.2	38
1976	1037	100	20	12.8	36
1977	1173	102	28	12.3	34
1978	1380	98	28	11.5	31
1979	1374	85	31	10.9	29

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Report on the Results of Farm Household Economy Survey*, various issues and *Yearbook of Agricultural Economy 1965*; Economic Planning Board, *Annual Report on the Family Income and Expenditure Survey*, various issues, *Handbook of Korean Economy 1980*; Bank of Korea, *Annual Economic Review and Summary Report on the Family Living Survey 1951-1963* (for urban income data from 1954 to 1961); Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Yearbook of Agricultural and Forestry Statistics*, various issues.)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Kym Anderson, "Northeast Asian Agricultural Protection in Historical and Comparative Perspective: The Case of South Korea," Research Paper, Pacific Economic Papers (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981), 82-83.

In 1960, 58% of the population lived in a farm household (see Table 2-6). In Korea's transition to an industrialized economy—with only 29% of the population living in a farming household by the end of the Park regime in 1979—further analysis will highlight how this transformation came at the expense of the socioeconomic development of the rural sector.

Restructuring the National Economy under Military Rule in the 1960s

The foundations for the post-war economic transformation were laid during the Park Chung Hee regime. The military junta (軍事政權, *kunsa chǒngkwǒn*) period (1961-1963) heralded an approach to economic planning that set the stage for the dramatic economic growth of the 1970s-80s commonly referred to as the “Miracle on the Han River.” The rapid economic development and industrialization achieved during this period of authoritarian rule is one of the primary factors behind the so-called “Park Chung Hee syndrome,” in which many Koreans remember Park as a “nationalist hero and are nostalgic for the time of his regime.”⁴⁵ This popular phenomenon heightened during the 1997 IMF Crisis, during which Park “came to be seen as the infallible modernizer” while the national economy underwent massive restructuring to pay off its \$58 billion IMF loan.⁴⁶ Not only does this nostalgia overlook the violence and lack of freedoms during Park's authoritarian rule, it also overlooks how the rapid economic development came at the expense of an enduring rural poverty. The Park regime utilized the resources available to it in the heightening Cold War climate to centralize state control over the economy and inject foreign capital to fund further growth of the industrial sector. This section will overview these maneuvers, with special focus on the content of the first set of Five Year

⁴⁵ Namhee Lee, “The Theory of Mass Dictatorship: A Re-Examination of the Park Chung Hee Period,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 42.

⁴⁶ Hyung-A Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 7.

Economic Development Plans (經濟社會發展五個年計畫, *Kyöngje sahoe paljön 5-kaenyön kyehoek*, hereafter FYEDP) of the Park regime's plan of "guided capitalism" under the direction of a strong authoritarian state. In doing so, this section will place the Park regime's transformation of rural Korea (explored further in the following section) within the context of restructuring the national economy.

At the time of the military coup, the South Korean economic growth was sluggish. Efforts to stop inflation and build through import substitution policies left little resources available for developing an industrial sector during Rhee's rule. While North Korea touted its industrial growth fueled by aid from its communist allies, South Korea was in desperate need of economic restructuring. While GNP growth rate between 1953-1955 and 1960-1962 was "a modest" 4.1%, the GNP growth rate jumped to 9.6% to 1962-1976.⁴⁷ Under the authoritarian rule of Park, the growth rate of the Gross National Product (GNP) increased dramatically to the extent that some economists deemed it the "fastest growing economy in the world" during this period.⁴⁸

Immediately after ousting the Chang Myön administration (1960-1961), the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction (國家再建最高會議, *Kukka chaegön ch'oego hoeüi*, 1961-1963, hereafter SCNR) proclaimed it would address key factors of economic instability including usurious loans, illicit wealth accumulation, and unstable grain prices. While Yun Posön remained president in name, Park led through the SCNR. Under Park, the state bureaucracy focused on politically mobilizing large segments of society, namely residents of the countryside

⁴⁷ Edward Mason et al., *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 97.

⁴⁸ Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979*, 210.

who were the majority of the population, to secure election votes. One of Park's first acts, on May 25, 1961, was designed to stabilize the countryside. Only "nine days after he ousted Chang Myŏn, Park pledged to free the farmers of any legal obligations to pay back high-interest debts."⁴⁹ This pledge fell in line with the junta's policy of "stable rural households" (安定農家 *anjŏng nongga*), which was promulgated through a series of legislations to solve the "rural problem" of deep-seeded poverty.⁵⁰ As the Park regime transitioned through the military junta period with winning the 1963 election, the leadership made significant progress in centralizing economic decision-making through significant institutional reforms, beginning with an overhaul of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (商工部, *Sangkongbu*, hereafter MCI). Originally established with the founding of the ROK in 1948, the MCI had not developed Korean industry significantly under Syngman Rhee or Chang Myŏn's leadership. Under the leadership of Chŏng Naehyŏk beginning in 1961 with the junta administration, however, many senior level officials were replaced with "technological experts, or simply technocrats" who implemented a "military-style administrative structure."⁵¹ With this type of restructuring, the Park regime ensured that the technocrats leading its institutions efficiently communicated with each other and adhered to its policy of "guided capitalism."

In addition to restructuring existing institutions, the Park regime also introduced new institutions for control from and access to state institutions and resources. One primary

⁴⁹ Young Jo Lee, "The Countryside," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 351.

⁵⁰ O Yu-sŏk, "T'ŭkjiŭp. Han'guk ūi sanŏphwa wa minjok kyŏngjeron: segyehwa sidae taeanjŏk kungmin kyŏngje paljŏn inyŏm ūi mosaek-Pak Chŏng-hŭi kŭndaehwa chŏllyak kwa nongch'on Saemaŭl undong [Special feature. Korea's industrialization and national economic theory: investigation of alternative citizen economic development ideologies of the globalization era-Park Chung Hee-Style modernization strategies and the rural New Village Movement]," *Tonghyang kwa chŏnmang t'ongkwŏn* 55 (December 2002): 160.

⁵¹ Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979*, 77.

mechanism for the Park regime's economic restructuring was the Economic Planning Board (經濟企劃院, *Kyōngje kihoekwōn*, hereafter EPB). Established in 1961 to prepare the annual budget, the EPB quickly expanded to control the state's budgeting function. Within the next year, it expanded further to control the import of foreign capital and designate which imports and importers would receive government-supported payment privileges. Thus, by 1962, according to political scientists Haggard, et al., the EPB thereby effectively gained "complete control over Korea's import of foreign capital. As the Korean economy was still primarily agrarian, it was in need of foreign capital to finance industrial growth. The EPB was the central institution in overseeing this transition.

Within the changing Cold War climate, the Park regime was able to offset a reduction in food aid from the US with an increase in foreign capital through shifts in its foreign policy. This period is notable for greater cooperation between the EPB and USAID (United States Agency for International Development). The Park administration effectively capitalized on the good graces of the Johnson administration to turn close diplomatic relationships into a means to "acquire seed money to jump-start growth."⁵² Demonstrating the scope of the role of foreign capital in its economic growth, South Korea received the second highest amount of US aid in the world, second only to India, and from 1951 to 1974 "received \$8 billion in U.S. food shipments, most of it under PL480" food aid.⁵³ In the face of waning food aid from the United States, the Park regime received foreign capital from two major sources: normalizing diplomatic relations with

⁵² Byung-Kook Kim, "The Leviathan: Economic Bureaucracy under Park," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 211.

⁵³ Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences," *International Organization* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 34.

Japan and sending troops to fight alongside the US in the Vietnam War.⁵⁴ In line with US President Johnson's escalation of military forces in the Vietnam War, South Korea began dispatching soldiers and officers to South Vietnam in exchange for approximately \$927 million in financial support.⁵⁵ Despite widespread protest, the Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty of 1965 was ratified and South Korea received approximately \$600 million in grants and loans and Japanese exports to Korea surged from "an annual average of \$180 million in 1965 to \$586 million in 1970."⁵⁶ Economists under Rhee were often at odds with US advisors, but the ROK under Park was able to utilize its "immense geopolitical leverage granted by the Cold War."⁵⁷ On the other hand, Chang Kiyōng—head of the EPB from 1964-1967—met regularly with the USAID chief and "would mobilize the bureaucracy for action."⁵⁸ Although Minister Chang's policies were unorthodox and untested, the USAID officials did not resolutely resist them due to the "honeymoon" period between the Park Chung Hee and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations (1963-1969).⁵⁹ Under the leadership of Chang, the EPB "constructed the expansionary part of

⁵⁴ For more detailed analysis of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty, see Victor Cha, "Bridging the Gap: The Strategic Context of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty," *Korean Studies* 20 (1996): 123–60; for more in-depth analysis of the impact of Korea's participation in the Vietnam War, see Jin-kyung Lee, "Surrogate Military, Subimperialism, and Masculinity: South Korea in the Vietnam War, 1965-73," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 17, no. 3 (2009): 655–82.

⁵⁵ Min Yong Lee, "The Vietnam War: South Korea's Search for National Security," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 425.

⁵⁶ Jung-Hoon Lee, "Normalization of Relations with Japan: Towards a New Partnership," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 453.

⁵⁷ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, 306.

⁵⁸ Stephan Haggard, Byung-Kook Kim, and Chung-in Moon, "The Transition to Export-Led Growth in South Korea: 1954-1966," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 4 (1991): 864; Minister Chang had a relatively lengthy tenure as head of the EPB. Prior to Chang's appointment, the Minister was "changed seven times within thirty-four months." Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979*, 115.

⁵⁹ Kim, "The Leviathan: Economic Bureaucracy under Park," 212.

Park’s growth strategy and left a dynamic albeit financially fragile big business sector as his legacy” funded by the huge injection of capital from the US and Japan into the Korean economy.⁶⁰

Turning back to the early years of the Park regime, a closer look at the first FYEDP will highlight how the development of Korea’s agriculture was deemphasized in Korea’s transition from an import substitution to export oriented economy. Despite significant restructuring to centralize political and economic control, the development and progress of the first FYEDP (1962-1966) was by no means a smooth process. While the plan was announced in 1962, after Park’s election in October 1963, his political legitimacy solidified and the plan was revised significantly by its implementation in 1964.⁶¹ The light industries were also growing more than anticipated. Table 2-7 outlines the major differences in target adjustments between 1962 and 1964.

Table 2-7. Difference between the Announced January 1962 Plan and the Adjusted 1964 Plan

Category	January 1962 Plan	Adjusted Plan
Rate of growth	7.1	5.0
Total available resources to investments ratio	21.0	15.5
Consumption rate	79.0	84.5
Domestic savings rate/ Overseas savings rate	9.2%/11.6	11.6%/9.9
Total investment rate	22.6	17.0
Agricultural sector growth rate	5.7	3.8

Source: Pak Tae-gyun, “Revisions to the economic development plans of the military government, 1961-1964,” 137.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 211.

⁶¹ Haggard, Kim, and Moon, “The Transition to Export-Led Growth in South Korea: 1954-1966,” 869.

While not all policy reforms were successful, this period marks the foundations of a basic strategy to turn towards export-oriented development that continued in subsequent and more successful FYEDPs.⁶² Unsuccessful policy reforms include a poorly executed currency conversion plan and cancelled plans to construct an integrated steel mill.⁶³ Other shortcomings of the first FYEDP include how “between December 1962 and May 1964, the consumer price index rose by 58 percent and the wholesome price index by 66 percent, reducing the real income of the majority of households.”⁶⁴ Political scientist Yi Wan-bŏm asserts that the plan was poorly developed, but “despite a lack of experience in planning, it at least had a simple focus on quantitative targets for large-scale macroeconomic indicators.”⁶⁵ In exchange for essentially being “placed on parole,” cooperation with the SCNR in line with its FYEDP provided access to privileges such as subsidies and foreign loan guarantees.⁶⁶ Of particular note in Table 2-6 is the decrease in agricultural sector growth rate from 5.7 in the 1962 plan to 3.8 in the adjusted 1964. Even with the injection of foreign capital from changing foreign policy, the ambitious FYEDP deprioritized the economic development of the agricultural sector in favor of supporting growth in savings and consumption and supporting the growth of Korea’s light industry sector.⁶⁷ While not a predetermined target of the first FYEDP, this plan and other policies of the 1960s is a clear example of what Albert Park highlights as how in general, governments’ “biasness toward

⁶² The FYEDPs continued until 1996. The years for subsequent plans are as follows: 1967-1971, 1972-1976, 1977-1981, 1982-1986, 1987-1991, and 1992-1996.

⁶³ Haggard, Kim, and Moon, “The Transition to Export-Led Growth in South Korea: 1954-1966,” 863; Tadashi Kimiya, “The Cold War and the Political Economy of the Park Chung Hee Regime,” in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979*, ed. Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 70.

⁶⁴ Lee, “The Countryside,” 357.

⁶⁵ Yi, 63.

⁶⁶ Kim, *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979*, 81.

⁶⁷ Kim, “The Leviathan: Economic Bureaucracy under Park,” 210.

industrialization and urbanization has continually contributed to the weakening of rural economics and societies” worldwide.⁶⁸ The following section will highlight how this bias towards industrialization and urbanization, while contributing to the unprecedented growth of the Korean national economy for which many consider Park a “nationalist hero,” contributed to rural underdevelopment when implemented at the local level. This underdevelopment, in turn, created the conditions aging and impoverished male farmers grew so socially stigmatized that they were deemed unsuitable for marriage.

Centralization of Rural Finances and the NACF

This section will outline major developments in the institutionalization of an agricultural squeeze to support national industrialization. Agriculture in the 1960s is marked by intense top-down state intervention to shift from a labor intensive to a more technology-based farming system. The state’s primary concern during this period was increasing food production for a growing population within the constraints of a fixed amount of arable land and increase of non-agricultural labor demand. In short, the state pursued its goal of reducing reliance on foreign food aid by promoting food sovereignty in order to feed an expanding industrial economy. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (農林部, *Nongnimbu*, hereafter MAF)⁶⁹ was the primary central government agency under which sweeping agricultural reforms were conducted in the 1960s. State intervention in the 1960s focused on mobilizing the rural populace to engage in agricultural modernization through institutional coercion and propaganda.⁷⁰ The Park regime’s

⁶⁸ Albert Park, “What We Need to Understand in Order to Design Inclusive Rural Development,” *Policy Context Briefs*, Pacific Basin Research Center, Soka University, September 2012, 1.

⁶⁹ The MAF was renamed the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries and as of 2013, the division was reconstituted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (MAFRA).

⁷⁰ Pak, “Han’guk nongöp ūi kisul, sōngjang mit palchōn: kwagō, hyōnjae kūrigo mirae [Technology, growth and agricultural development in Korea: past, present and future],” 107.

economic plans marked a return to heavy state penetration at the local level, taking advantage of the village social restructuring begun during the colonial period. Coercion and propaganda measures such as the Saemaül Movement (*Saemaül undong*, also known as the New Village Movement or New Community Movement) will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter. This section will highlight how institutionalization of rural-centered economic development plans focused on centralizing rural finances—specifically through the NACF—impacted agrarian infrastructure and rural society.

The Park regime imposed heavy state centralization measures throughout the countryside in its efforts to stimulate national economic growth. In 1960, 58.3% of the total population lived in a farming household and by the later Park period, only 38.2% of the population was a part of a farming household (see Table 2-8).

Table 2-8. Agriculture's Share in GNP and Population, 1955-1975

	Share of Agriculture and Forestry in GNP in Constant 1970 Prices (%)	Farm Population (millions)	Share of Farm Population in Total Population (%)
1955	45.5	13.30	61.9
1960	39.9	14.56	58.3
1965	37.6	15.81	55.8
1970	26.2	14.42	45.9
1975	19.2	13.24	38.2

Sources: Bank of Korea, *National Income in Korea, 1975* and *Economic Statistics Yearbook, 1976*.⁷¹

In the wake of long-awaited but lukewarm land reform, the state attempted to staunch the potential for a collective mobilization of farmers through creating a “politically docile countryside could be harnessed to the industrialization drive.”⁷² In the early days of the military

⁷¹ Mason et al., *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea*, 211.

⁷² Larry Burmeister, “Agricultural Cooperative Development and Change: A Window on South Korea’s Agrarian Transformation,” in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, ed. Yun-shik Chang and Steven Hugh Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 68.

junta period, the 1961 Farm Products Price Maintenance Law, for example, aimed to stabilize prices of domestic crops in order to stabilize the stagnating rural economy and insure future growth of agricultural production.⁷³ By the late 1960s, the government further institutionalized its control over agricultural production with the Food Grain Control Act in 1967 and dual-price system for rice (different prices for purchasing and selling rice) in 1969. These measures were “designed to stimulate rice production, to support farm income and consumers’ surplus, and to stabilize seasonal price fluctuations.”⁷⁴ Throughout the 1960s, then, the Park regime oversaw the establishment and maintenance of deep-reaching mechanisms to control the countryside and its agricultural production.

The state control of the countryside was implemented through a series of semi-official institutions designed to increase food production and stabilize the agricultural sector. In April 1962, the Rural Development Agency (農村振興廳, *Nongch'on chinhŭng ch'ōng*, hereafter RDA) was established to oversee research and dispersing education on improving agriculture as an independent agency connected to the MAF.⁷⁵ The 1962 Fertilizer Control Law, which “placed the procurement and marketing of fertiliser entirely in government hands and a programme of construction of large-scale fertiliser plants was inaugurated,” was another institutional mechanism through which the state controlled the shift to technology-based agriculture to increase agricultural productivity.⁷⁶ These two developments had significant

⁷³ Jung Keun Park, “Induced Institutional Changes in the Korean Rice Economy,” *Nongŏpsa yŏn'gu* 4, no. 2 (December 2005): 59.

⁷⁴ Park, “Induced Institutional Changes in the Korean Rice Economy,” 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁶ Penelope Francks, Johanna Boestel, and Choo Hyop Kim, *Agriculture and Economic Development in East Asia: From Growth to Protectionism in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 122.

impact on rural life, particularly in conjunction with the coerced proliferation of the NACF throughout the countryside. This focus on modernizing the countryside was by no means begun by the Park regime and no one institution was charged with the sole task of rural development. Rather, several agencies “had overlapping responsibilities and competed for influence and resources within the bureaucracy,” including the MAF, Agriculture Extension Office, Ministry of Education, and the NACF.⁷⁷ The remainder of this section will focus on the NACF, which provides rural credit and focuses on promoting farmer-members’ agricultural products in the marketplace.

With the July 29, 1961 Agricultural Cooperatives Law, the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) was established on August 15, 1961 in conjunction with the Agricultural Bank. The NACF was a “cooperative” in name only, for it was not in any way established through grass-roots mobilization of farmer-members. Rather, in its very structure, the cooperative was under central authority; the NACF was a semi-official institution associated with the MAF that was a “de facto implementation arm of other central government agencies.”⁷⁸ Farmer-members did not form local branches and did not have any voting power within the institution. Instead, the lower level branch units (*tanwi chohap*) acted under the managerial authority of the central bureau (*chunganghoe*) and farmer-members were removed from the selection process of central bureau leaders. With no actual representative voice in the institution for its farmer-members, then, the NACF essentially functions as a center-driven para-state organization.

⁷⁷ Sorensen, “Rural Modernization under the Park Regime in the 1960s,” 153.

⁷⁸ Burmeister, “Agricultural Cooperative Development and Change: A Window on South Korea’s Agrarian Transformation,” 67–68.

A closer look at the functions of the NACF reveals the underlying rationale of state intervention in agricultural development. Despite attempts to increase arable land through such measures as the Accelerate Cultivation Law (開墾促進法 *Kaegan ch'okjin pŏp*) and continuing the development of more efficient irrigation systems begun during the colonial period, Korea has an overall land shortage for the land and labor-intensive rice paddy cultivation. Furthermore, while land reform under Rhee did reconfigure agrarian social relations by reducing tenancy rates with a sharp increase in owner-cultivator rates, sociologist Larry Burmeister asserts that due to the state's heavy intervention in increasing agricultural productivity, land reform in South Korea was never able to alleviate rural poverty because "landlords were, in essence, replaced by a supra-landlord, the state agrobureaucracy."⁷⁹ The NACF acted as a major arm of this state agrobureaucracy. The NACF was promoted to farmers as an organization that would introduce members to innovative techniques to increase productivity and protect their interests in selling their agricultural products. In reality, however, it was a state mechanism for stimulating the monetization of the countryside. The NACF had a monopoly over chemical fertilizers in the rural marketplace as the only distribution source to villagers. The chemical fertilizers farmers needed to increase their crop yields in accordance to government projects were only accessible to members of the NACF. As fertilizer prices were fixed with the 1962 Fertilizer Control Law, manufacturers in the fertilizer industry were given a "quid pro quo for their capital investment and technology transfer contributions to the industry."⁸⁰ Towards the later years of the Park

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 70–71.

regime, in the Yusin years, the NACF even set a “quota of fertilizer that [members] were ‘required’ to buy.”⁸¹

Membership in the NACF also provided access to rural credit, with the Agricultural Bank as the most reliable lending institution at the village level. While there were efforts to establish an agricultural bank in the Korean countryside during the Rhee administration, they did not receive enough political support until the early 1960s with the establishment of the NACF.⁸² By acting as the financial arm of the state agrobureaucracy, the NACF was an effective mechanism for moving farmers away from utilizing their crops as a means of feeding their families to a commodity to be exchanged for currency and credit. As the primary banking institution with relatively low interest rates compared to private sources (8-15% from the NACF compared to up to 50-60% from private loans), demand for NACF loans was high.

⁸¹ Sorensen, “Rural Modernization under the Park Regime in the 1960s,” 154.

⁸² Kim, “Nongŏp ūnhaeng ūi sŏllip kwa unyŏng [Establishment and management of agricultural banks],” 276–278.

Table 2-9. NACF Lending Trends, 1955-1974

(million won)

	Source of NACF Funds		Total	As % of Agricultural Value Added
	Government Sector (BOK, etc.)	Credit Sector		
1955	--	--	1,639	
1956	--	--	3,577	2.3
1957	--	--	7,286	8.2
1958	--	--	7,871	9.2
1959	--	--	8,216	10.7
1960	--	--	11,536	12.7
1961	8,554	8,134	16,688	14.0
1962	11,193	7,418	18,611	14.6
1963	12,195	7,509	17,704	8.6
1964	12,257	10,882	23,139	7.2
1965	11,899	11,360	23,259	7.5
1966	12,913	14,195	27,108	7.4
1967	16,112	18,265	34,377	8.6
1968	18,840	33,974	52,814	11.6
1969	31,053	53,360	84,413	14.1
1970	34,372	70,988	105,360	14.5
1971	35,420	87,648	123,068	13.5
1972	45,262	102,984	148,245	13.5
1973	47,506	116,894	164,400	12.8
1974	60,867	191,282	252,149	14.7

Source: National Agricultural Cooperative Federation.⁸³

Yet, similar to the impact of high demand for limited loan resources from mutual aid associations during the colonial period, the NACF tended to loan out to lower risk clients, i.e., richer farmers who “not incidentally, had more political clout.”⁸⁴ Thus, poorer farmers continued to lack access to affordable credit. These coercive membership measures were extremely effective, with 90% of total farming households as members of the NACF. Table 2-9 on NACF lending trends during the Park period highlights the extent of the surge in rural loans after the establishment of

⁸³ Mason et al., *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea*, 233.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 232–233.

the banking institution and the growing reliance on credit in financing economic growth in the rural sector.

In addition to coerced NACF membership, the state further penetrated into rural life with limiting the potential for mobilization outside the purview of its institutions. Farming households faced a daunting obstacle to grass-roots mobilization in the 1960s because “the fusion of all agricultural service activities under one administrative umbrella configured the organizational field in the rural/agricultural sector in ways that thwarted pluralist social, economic, and political development.”⁸⁵ Central state control of rural society to quell potential resistance to its policy measures expanded beyond the top-down infrastructure of the NACF with the establishment of the People’s Movement for National Reconstruction (國土建設團, *Kukt’o kōnsōl tan*, hereafter PMNR) in June 1961. The goal of the PMNR was to mobilize the rural populace at the local village level to “remold the farmers into model citizens” by “instilling in farmers the spirit of hard work, frugality, perseverance, and self-help” (in line with the rhetoric of the later *Saemaül undong*).⁸⁶ To facilitate the dispersion of political propaganda, the PMNR oversaw the distribution to villages nation-wide of “loudspeakers that were connected to an amplifier-equipped ‘wired broadcast station’” to the extent that “it is estimated that some 400,000 loudspeakers were distributed and installed in rural villages during the junta years.”⁸⁷ The state was able to thus manipulate rural farmers to mobilize under a centrally controlled institutional arm in order to work towards its goal of food sovereignty, while simultaneously

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁶ Lee, “The Countryside,” 349.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

curbing any potential for an agrarian revolution heralded by the implementation of land reform in the 1950s.

Despite the pervasiveness of the new state agrobureaucracy and restructuring of social relations at the village level, agricultural modernization efforts were ultimately not particularly effective. Some scholars argue that this is primarily due to lack of a coherent state-level strategy. Sociologist Han To-hyŏn notes how whereas the Park regime may have initially been influenced by the April 1960 Student Uprising to emphasize communal labor in its modernization reforms, by the late 1960s—under the auspices of industrialism-first policies—the regime supported more commercialization and mechanization of agriculture.⁸⁸ This pushed agriculture to be increasingly reliant on difficult-to-access rural credit to finance these ventures. Elaborating further on the complexities in crafting effective agricultural modernization policies, economists Cho Sŏk-gon and Hwang Su-ch'ŏl highlight how rather than a monolithic state agrobureaucracy, there was a high degree of fragmentation within the state institutions. The impact of the lack of a coherent strategy is particularly apparent in debates over whether to emphasize cooperative or entrepreneurial-focused agriculture. These fissures so disrupted the efficient promulgation of modernization policies by technocrats that, according to Cho and Hwang, since state institutions could not agree on one direction for modernizing agricultural practices, technocrats instead moved on to the entirely different issue of developing rural income stabilization policies.⁸⁹ Thus,

⁸⁸ Han, “1960-yŏndae nongch'on sahoe ūi kujo wa pyŏnhwa [The structure and change of 1960s rural society],” 141.

⁸⁹ The authors categorize Yu In-ho, Kim Mun-sik, Kim Wŏn-kyŏng, Ch'oe Ũngsa, and Sŏl Pong-sik as proponents of cooperative-focused agriculture, while Wŏn Yong-sŏk and Ch'ae Pong-kyu are categorized as proponents of entrepreneurial-focused agriculture. Cho Sŏkgon and Hwang Such'ŏl Hwang, “Nongŏp kujo chojŏng ūi chwajŏl kwa sodŭk chŏngch'aek ūro ūi chŏnhwan: 1960-yŏndae huban nongjipŏp chaejŏng nonŭi rŭl chungsimŭro [The Efforts for Executing Renovation Policies of the Agrarian Structure and Their Frustrations: A Focus on Debates over the Execution of Agricultural Land Laws in the Late 1960s],” *Tonghyang kwa chŏnmang* 61 (2004): 267 and 271.

while the state's rural development policies may have effectively controlled the populace and had a strong presence in villagers' daily lives, the strategy of dispersing responsibilities across competing institutions ultimately proved ineffective at modernizing agriculture for long-term and sustainable improvements in rural living standards and instead focused on stabilizing rural income levels.

Rural development plans of the 1960s, driven by a bias for industrialization and urbanization, promoted continued rural underdevelopment. Extending analysis of these top-down government-directed agricultural reforms to impact on rural society, Cho Sök-gon details how throughout the 1960s, attempts to foster cooperative or entrepreneurial agriculture failed. Cho argues that 1960s agricultural reforms stanching the potential for egalitarianism under land reform. Rather than supporting the establishment of self-sufficient farming households measures designed to protect Korean agricultural products, these policy measures henceforth left agriculture dependent on support from other industrial sectors. For example, the Grain Management Fund—which set prices low to insure access to cheap grain for urbanites and laborers at the expense of increasing farmers' profits—was only abolished in 1994 in negotiation trade partners to lower protective barriers in the neoliberalizing economy.⁹⁰ Thus, the nationwide push towards industrialization continued to squeeze the countryside for increasing food production in the achievement of food security with no effective plan for inclusive rural development.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Cho, “1960-yöndae nongöpp kujo kaehyök nonüi wa kü hamüi,” 349.

⁹¹ Francks, Boestel, and Kim, *Agriculture and Economic Development in East Asia: From Growth to Protectionism in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan*, 152–153.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the origins of contemporary South Korean rural marginalization policies in economic modernization efforts. From as early as the colonial period, agricultural advancement measures such as irrigation association enterprises, rural credit societies, and the Rural Revitalization Movement focused on maximizing the extraction of rice from the countryside with minimal investment from the state. In the immediate post-liberation period, rice collection by the national police continued, widespread protest and violence erupted, and governments struggled to stabilize rice prices under the USMGIK and Rhee administration. With the implementation of comprehensive land reform after the outbreak of war, there was the potential for sustainable economic development of the countryside. Nevertheless, the authoritarian Park regime prioritized industrialization over inclusive economic development in its path of state-guided capitalism. Sustainable models for economic development were overlooked by the vast state agrobureaucracy for the sake of maximizing food production and growing markets for the light industry sector, including chemical fertilizer. The state did invest in developing rural infrastructure by improving irrigation facilities to increase arable land, paving roads and highways to improve nationwide transportation networks, and increasing access to rural credit to finance further development. While top-down measures such as coerced membership in the NACF were designed to modernize agriculture with access to more efficient farming techniques, farmer-members nonetheless entered the commodities market with limited access to resources and credit.

The top-down rural underdevelopment measures introduced in the 1960s bore significant impact on those who remained in the countryside. While bearing the burden of feeding the growing industrial and urban population, rural residents grew increasingly stigmatized for their poverty and not keeping pace with the nation's rapid economic development. As the rest of the

nation transitioned away from an agrarian-based economy and moved to factories and urban centers, farmers were bound to their land. They toiled in rice paddies and continued their labor-intensive and un-lucrative farming occupation. The following chapter will analyze how the socioeconomic marginalization of the countryside escalates by the 1970s-80s. During Korea's continued rapid industrialization and economic growth, agriculture and the rural space became stigmatized to the extent that male villagers were considered unmarriageable—even by their fellow villagers.

CHAPTER 3 : UNEVEN RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE PHENOMENON OF RURAL BACHELORHOOD

This chapter analyzes the emergence of rural bachelors' marriage crisis in South Korean public culture within the rapid economic growth of the 1970s and 80s. This chapter begins with highlighting how rural development continues to be overlooked in Korea's transition to a post-industrialized society before outlining how the countryside comes to be narrated in public culture as an object in need of rescue. In so doing, this chapter traces how rural socioeconomic marginalization amplifies with the frenetic pace of Korea's compressed modernization, erupting in a perceived "crisis of masculinity" of rural bachelors. As Korea transformed from an agrarian to industrialized economy within the span of a single generation, the economic development was unevenly distributed across the nation. I demonstrate how concerns over the inability of rural society to continue to both feed and reproduce the traditions of the Korean nation is rooted a sense of rural nostalgia that erupts in national concern over the rural bachelor's inability to get married and reproduce a normative household. Thus, the rural heartland of the nation is depicted as "left behind" and emasculated even in romantic representations of the heartland like *The Countryside Diaries* (*Chŏnwŏn ilgi*, 1980-2002).

Transitioning from Aid Recipient to Trade Partner in the International Economy

This section will begin by briefly introducing the turbulent changes in political leadership of the 1970s-80s before overviewing major developments in Korea's push for export-oriented growth that privileged rapid industrialization over developing the agricultural sector. Despite claiming to have inherited the revolutionary spirit of the 4.19 uprising to lead the "march toward national reconstruction,"¹ the Park regime confronted a citizenry willing to protest against its

¹ Park Chung Hee, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing Company, Ltd., 1962), 117.

increasingly draconian policies. Particularly in the wake of negotiations to resume diplomatic relations with Japan, which ostensibly injected foreign capital “for funds and investment only for the sake of the development of this nation,”² students and intellectuals mobilized protests against the Park regime. Forms of protest against the 1965 Normalization Treaty included hunger strikes and protest rallies that escalated into “bloody street battles.”³ Following a close victory in the 1971 presidential election and the US “withdrawal of one-third of its 62,000 servicemen in Korea,” Park’s hold on power was growing tenuous. In response to international and domestic calls for dramatic reforms, Park declared martial law and the promulgation of a new Yusin (維新) constitution in October 1972 that solidified his grasp on leadership over the nation as de facto president for life.⁴ Labor activism, particularly in textile and steel industries, and the regime’s brutal suppression of it was a significant problem under the Yusin system. The Park regime ended in October 1979 with his assassination by KCIA director Kim Chae-kyu. The succeeding interim government, headed by Ch’oe Kyu-ha, was quickly replaced with another military coup in May 1980 that was led by Major General Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988). In spite of widespread protest against Chun’s ascension, the Chun regime continued the economic development models of his predecessor, increased Korea’s presence in the international arena, and successfully transferred power to Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993)—whom Chun had handpicked in order to “continue to hold power behind the scenes.”⁵ For example, one of the Chun regime’s

² Ibid., 164.

³ Kwan Bong Kim, *The Korea-Japan Treaty Crisis and the Instability of the Korean Political System* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 109–116.

⁴ Hyung-A Kim, *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 110.

⁵ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 386.

strategies for appeasing a citizenry dissatisfied with continued militarized authoritarian rule was to pursue “a policy of social liberalization, relaxing, for example, dress codes in secondary schools and allowing, albeit only temporarily, the sale of books and magazines that had been banned by Park Chung Hee’s censors.”⁶ The rapid economic development of this period also entailed sharp regional discrimination against the Chōlla Province, which had a long history of regional discrimination and was the home of political opposition leader Kim Dae Jung. While Chōlla Province was the source of much of Korea’s agricultural products, it “was left virtually untouched by economic development. With only one large-scale industrial complex (compared to eight in [the Kyōngsang] region).”⁷ This contentious region will reemerge in later sections of this chapter. Intense regional discrimination is but one of many manifestations of this period’s uneven development.

The legacies of the Park Chung Hee period and decades of military rule, particularly the Yusin years (1972-1979), loom large in any study of contemporary Korea. Economist Yi Chōng-u highlights how the Park regime’s economic development overlooked a growing income divide in labor and land prices, leaving agricultural labor and land behind in the dust of urbanization and industrialization. For example, Table 3-1 details the rapid increase in urban land prices between 1963-1979.

⁶ John B. Duncan, “Uses of Confucianism in Modern Korea,” in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, ed. Benjamin Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles: UCLA Asia Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), 454.

⁷ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 49.

Table 3-1. Trends in Land Price Increases during the Developmental Authoritarianism Period, 1963-1979

	Nominal deposit interest rate (%)	Rate of increase in land value of major cities (%)	Land Value
1963	15.0	-	100
1964	15.0	50.0	150
1965	30.0	35.3	201
1966	30.0	41.4	329
1967	30.0	43.6	407
1968	25.2	48.5	613
1969	22.8	80.7	1,152
1970	22.8	29.7	1,236
1971	21.3	33.4	1,918
1972	12.6	7.5	2,067
1973	12.6	5.8	2,181
1974	15.0	18.7	2,587
1975	15.0	25.5	3,449
1976	16.2	24.9	4,547
1977	14.4	50.0	5,872
1978	18.6	79.1	10,700
1979	18.6	22.0	18,734

Source: Yi Chŏng-u, “Kaebal tokchae wa pinbu kyŏkch’a [Developmental authoritarianism and the gap between rich and poor],” in *Kaebal tokchae wa Pak Chŏng-Hŭi sidae: uri sidae ūi chŏngch’i kyŏngjejŏk kiwŏn* [Developmental Authoritarianism and the Park Chung Hee period: the political and economic origins of our age], ed. Yi Pyŏng-ch’ŏn (Seoul: Ch’angbi, 2003), 239.

Historian Namhee Lee’s *The Making of Minjung* situates Park’s dictatorial rule within Korea’s long history of dissident mobilization, in which the conceptualization of Korean history as a “failure” that must be overcome for the sake of the future was utilized to support both military authoritarianism. Democracy activists repurposed this crisis of historical subjectivity in their counter-movement.⁸ While many scholars describe the 1970s as a “dark period” of Korea’s path to democracy in light of the Yusin regime’s firm grasp on national control, sociologist Paul Chang highlights this as a vital period of reorganizing and forming new strategies in the decades-

⁸ Ibid., 23–69.

long protest movement in *Protest Dialectics*.⁹ Sociologist Seungsook Moon's *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* examines how the "mass dictatorship" of the Park Chung Hee regime constructed a gendered citizenship through military service and mass mobilization of the workforce, finding similarities in the South Korean context with the "fascist modernity" of Germany and Japan in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ In her research on 1960s and 1970s labor activities of the Korea Shipbuilding and Engineering Corporation (KSEC, one of Korea's largest shipyards, known today as Hanjin Heavy Industries) in *Building Ships, Building a Nation*, historian Hwasook Nam argues that the authoritarian labor policies of the 1970s were the Park regime's response to the labor movement's successes in the 1960s. Thus, Nam asserts that the remarkable success of Park's post-1972 "economic miracle" was the result of authoritarian suppression of "popular resistance to its vision of modernity."¹¹ In order to contextualize the development of the countryside as a socioeconomically marginalized region, for the purposes of this dissertation, the remainder of this section will focus on the impact of authoritarian leadership of the national economy in the 1970s-80s in developing global trade policies that prioritized industrialization and overlooked the development of Korea's agricultural sector.

The global trade negotiations that consolidated the institutionalization of rural socioeconomic marginalization arose in the context of Park's Yusin-era Heavy Chemical Industrialization Policy (重化學工業政策, *Chunghwahak kongŏphwa chŏngch'aek*, hereafter

⁹ Paul Chang, *Protest Dialectics: State Repression and South Korea's Democracy Movement, 1970-1979* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation: Korea's Democratic Unionism under Park Chung Hee* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 9.

HCI). In the wake of a global recession fuelled by a global oil crisis in the late 1970s, the Chun regime modified these policies to continue export-oriented economic growth throughout the 1980s. Shipping and automobile manufacture are two of Korea’s most notable exports from this period. In the 1970s-80s, then, Korea experienced rapid economic growth even in the face of difficulties with inflation stabilization. Demonstrating the resiliency of the Korean economic growth model, GNP growth from 1974-75 was 7.3%, dipped down to 3% in 1979-81, then rose up again to 12.6% in 1986-1988 (see Table 3-2).

Table 3-2. Major Macroeconomic Indicators, 1974-1988

Major Indicators	1974-1975	1976-1978	1979-1981	1983-1985	1986-1988
Real GNP Growth (%)	7.3	10.9	3	9	12.6
Current Account Balance (billions US dollars)	-2	-0.5	-4.7	-1.6	9.5
CPI Inflation (%)	24.8	13.2	22.8	3.8	4.3

Source: Bank of Korea. *Monthly Bulletin*, various issues.¹²

¹² Dong-Se Cha and Inchul Kim, “Development of Korea’s Financial Policies and the Financial Market,” in *Development Experience of the Korean Economy*, ed. Keuk Je Sung (Seoul: Kyung Hee University Press, 2010), 199.

Table 3-3. Government Expenditures for the Heavy and Chemical Industry (HCI)

Year	Total Gov't Budget (A)	Gov't Exp. For Economic Services (B)	Total Gov't Exp. For HCI (C)	Industrial Complex	Gov't Subscriptions	Compensation for Interest Rate Differences	Others	C/A (%)	(C/A) (%)
1970	599.6	150.9	16.1	6.0	8.1	2.0	--	2.7	10.6
1971	735.8	180.3	23.3	4.0	16.7	2.6	--	3.2	12.9
1972	966.4	195.0	78.3	3.4	72.1	2.8	--	8.1	40.1
1973	960.2	145.6	13.4	3.5	8.4	1.4	0.1	1.4	9.2
1974	1,428.3	211.9	38.1	20.7	122.	4.8	0.5	2.7	18.0
1975	2,123.6	490.3	77.1	26.5	40.5	9.9	0.2	3.6	18.8
1976	2,895.2	535.6	66.9	36.8	17.0	12.8	0.2	2.3	12.5
1977	3,717.8	623.4	89.3	41.6	25.0	22.4	0.3	2.4	14.3
1978	4,755.3	725.1	137.2	47.7	63.8	25.1	0.5	2.9	18.9
1979	6,466.5	1,405.4	93.6	44.3	-	48.6	0.7	1.4	6.7
1980	8,814.2	1,338.8	229.4	52.2	138.6	36.3	2.4	2.6	17.1
Total	33,462.9	5,912.3	862.7	286.7	402.4	168.7	5.0	2.6	14.6

Source: Park, Chong Kee and Kyu Uck Lee, ed. *Government Budget and Policy Goals*. Seoul: Korea Development Institute, 1981.¹³

Park's HCI policy was a significant component to this frenetic and compressed economic development. Table 3-3 details the importance of HCI policies for the state, with the government spending an average of 14.6% of its overall budget in support of HCI policies between 1970 and 1980. Whereas Korea in the 1950s depended on foreign food aid and on foreign investment capital in the 1960s, Park was determined to transform the national economy into a regional leader through a protectionist and fiercely nationalist set of development policies. In a policy-level analysis of the rapid industrialization under the Park regime, Hyung-A Kim focuses on the role of the leadership in the form of the "HCI triumvirate" in the policies' success. The triumvirate was headed by Park and supported by O Wŏn-ch'ŏl—Park's Senior Economic Secretary in the Second Economic Secretariat and key advisor on military weapons programs

¹³ Chuk Kyo Kim, "Heavy Chemical Industry Promotion Policy in the 1970s," in *Development Experience of the Korean Economy*, ed. Keuk Je Sung (Seoul: Kyung Hee University Press, 2010), 152.

and the HCI program beginning 1973—and Kim Chŏng-nyŏm as key advisor on general economic matters. Kim asserts that “Park’s strong leadership, Kim’s financial-economic expertise and O’s industrial vision and skills” were the “three essential ingredients” in the HCI’s success and focus on developing Korea’s military weapon manufacturing sector.¹⁴ In an interview with Kim, Park’s former advisor O Wŏn-ch’ŏl defends Park’s authoritarianism, suggesting, “Park’s Yusin system was the price Korea paid for high-speed economic growth.”¹⁵ With a surge in light and heavy manufacturing, Korea’s economy flourished with its export-oriented growth.

In line with Park’s push for Korean-style capitalist development, planners developed measures to usher the nation into a more prominent position in the international arena. The Chun regime focused on a policy of sports nationalism to increase Korea’s prestige globally. Demonstrating Korea’s international stature, in 1981, the International Olympic Committee announced that Seoul would host the 1988 Summer Olympics, soundly defeating Nagoya, Japan for the honor to host the sporting spectacle on a world stage. Leading up to the global event, Korea hosted the 10th Asian Games in 1986; with Chun boasting of a “new chapter in national history” in which Korea’s athletes will assume a “central position in the global village and play a leading role in world development.”¹⁶

David Harvey highlights this period as the beginning of the United States’ strategy to maintain global hegemony in a post-Cold War era.¹⁷ Harvey asserts that this hegemony hinges

¹⁴ Kim, *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979*, 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁶ Chun Doo Hwan, *The 1980s: Meeting a New Challenge VI: Selected Speeches of President Chun Doo Hwan* (Seoul: The Secretariat for the President, Republic of Korea, 1987), 217.

¹⁷ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62–74.

on a predatory relationship of coercion and consent in a cycle of “accumulation by dispossession,” in which periods of rapid post-industrial economic growth—i.e., over accumulation—are interrupted by periods of dispossession, or economic crisis and massive capital devaluation.¹⁸ Thus, for Harvey, the 1997 IMF crisis is a necessary corollary to the economic boom of the 1980s. Theories of global macroeconomic hegemony notwithstanding, Korea’s growing dependence on international trade in its post-industrial economy has significant ramifications for an agricultural sector not prepared to face global market forces. The 1980s ushered in the beginning of trade liberalization policies, chipping away at the government’s previous protectionist measures against foreign agricultural imports through a reduction in tariff rates in its FYEDPs. Economist Yu Ch’öl-kyu characterizes this as a determined turn towards strengthening its export markets through regional economic growth in an industrialized Korea post-1987.¹⁹

Korea’s changing position in the global marketplace from recipient of international food aid to economic trade partner had significant impact on Korean society. Seungsook Moon highlights how HCI privileged masculine labor in its industrialization by exempting license holders in industry and defense fields from military service and focusing vocational training programs to men.²⁰ Hwasook Nam asserts that KSEC unionists internalized the Park regime’s rhetoric of sacrifice and modernization as a nation-building project to the extent that unionists argued that they deserved a higher living wage as equal and full partners with the state, with the

¹⁸ Ibid., 150–152.

¹⁹ Yu Ch’öl-kyu, “Sanõphwa ihu kyõngje kujo ùi pyõnhwa wa sanõp chõngch’aek ùi hamüi: 1987-yõn ihu Han’guk kyõngje ùi pyõnhwa wa Tongbuk-A kyõngje chungsim kõnsõl mit kukka kyunhyõng paljõn chõngch’aek ùi kwallyõn [Changes in post-industrialization economic structures and implications for industrial policies: changes in the Korean economy post-1987 and policies for balance between nations within Northeast Asian regional economic policies],” *Tonghyang kwa chõnmang t’ongkwõn* 60 (2004): 99–129.

²⁰ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 58–64.

“right to share in the fruits of industrialization.”²¹ Both Moon and Nam focus on the masculinization of an increasingly urban and industrial labor force channeled from growing rates of rural out-migration. The following section will analyze this transformation in the Korean labor force from primarily agrarian to predominately industrial and white-collar, highlighting the ramifications of this shift on the enduring rural socioeconomic marginalization that sets the stage for rural bachelors’ marriage crisis.

Transformation to an Industrialized Urban Workforce

This section will analyze how Korea’s transformation from an agrarian economy to a society based on an industrialized urban workforce, in combination with the state’s authoritarian development plans, contributed to the heightening of a growing bias against the countryside. This section will first provide a brief overview of the development of an industrial labor force, particularly in the textile and shipping industries. This section will then highlight the impact of rapid industrialization on the widening development gap between the urban and rural parts of the nation. The purpose of this section is to connect Korea’s turn to a post-industrial society to the phenomenalization of rural bachelors’ struggles to wed.

Korea’s rapid economic development, within the context of successive coups and military leaders, can be described as occurring under a policy of developmental authoritarianism. This term suggests that the draconian measures to suppress political dissent were a necessary step in Korea’s journey of economic growth. This revisionist line of generously framing the legacies of the Park regime in terms of Korea’s “economic miracle” may be tempered significantly with skepticism over the strength of the nation’s unparalleled economic development. For example, political scientist David Kang demonstrates that the export statistics reported by Korean agencies

²¹ Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation: Korea’s Democratic Unionism under Park Chung Hee*, 10.

were highly inaccurate, probably as a result of internal pressures to adhere to inflexible and ambitious export targets. By comparing export rates reported by Korean and US agencies, Kang reveals how “throughout the 1970s and 1980s, South Korean companies overestimated their exports by hundreds of millions of dollars.”²² See Table 3-4 for more specific figures of this increasingly egregious over-invoicing.

Table 3-4. Overestimation of Korean Exports, 1970-1985 (million US\$)

Year	Over-invoicing of Exports
1970	87
1971	145
1972	174
1973	396
1974	93
1975	206
1976	123
1977	403
1978	921
1979	1,172
1980	1,128
1981	2,073
1982	2,764
1983	3,650
1984	4,354
1985	2,597

Source: David Kang, “Cut from the Same Cloth: Bureaucracies and Rulers in South Korea, 1948-1979,” in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, ed. Yun-shik Chang and Steven Hugh Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 204.

In the midst of these (most likely) intentional reporting inaccuracies on the degree of economic growth, the Korean population experienced a significant demographic shift. In Vincent Brandt’s seminal anthropological study of a remote Korean village in the 1960s, Brandt defines the village resident—the peasant—not in terms of his agriculture-based occupation, but instead on his isolation from outside forces. For Brandt, the Korean peasant—the object of his study—lives in

²² David Kang, “Cut from the Same Cloth: Bureaucracies and Rulers in South Korea, 1948-1979,” in *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, ed. Yun-shik Chang and Steven Hugh Lee (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 204.

a “small face-to-face community that is relatively self-contained in the sense that the focus of village life might be called inward rather than outward.”²³ Not surprisingly, as Korea shifts into the 1980s, this idyllic and bucolic image of an isolated Korean farming village becomes violently disrupted by the outward forces of industrialization and modernization that pulls villagers away from the countryside and into factories.

As the Korean employed population grows increasingly industrialized during this period, employment statistics also highlight a growing gender division between male and female labor. Table 3-5 details how 63.1% of the employed Korean population was engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishery in 1963. Less than two decades later, that number is nearly halved. By 1981, only 34.2% of the employed population is in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sector and instead, the labor force shifts into the burgeoning mining, quarrying, manufacturing, services, and construction sectors.

²³ Vincent S. R. Brandt, *A Korean Village: Between Farm and Sea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 11.

Table 3-5. Employment by sectors, 1963-81 (in percentages)

	Em- ployed Popu- lation	Agriculture, forestry, and fishery	Agri- culture and for- estry	Fishery	Mining, quarrying, and manu- facturing	Mining and quar- rying	Manu- facturing	Ser- vices	Con- struc- tion	Other Services
1963	100.0	63.1	60.6	2.5	8.7	0.7	8.0	28.2	2.5	25.6
1964	100.0	61.9	59.7	2.2	8.8	0.7	8.2	29.3	2.3	26.9
1965	100.0	58.6	56.1	2.5	10.3	0.9	9.4	31.0	2.9	28.1
1966	100.0	57.9	55.7	2.1	10.8	0.9	9.9	31.3	2.5	28.8
1967	100.0	55.2	52.7	2.4	12.8	1.1	11.7	32.0	3.0	29.0
1968	100.0	52.4	50.0	2.4	14.0	1.2	12.8	33.6	3.5	30.1
1969	100.0	51.3	49.8	1.5	14.3	1.2	13.1	34.4	3.6	30.9
1970	100.0	50.4	49.5	0.9	14.3	1.1	13.2	35.2	2.9	32.3
1971	100.0	48.4	47.3	1.2	14.2	0.9	13.3	37.4	3.5	33.9
1972	100.0	50.6	48.4	2.2	14.2	0.5	13.7	35.2	3.7	31.5
1973	100.0	50.0	47.2	2.8	16.3	0.4	15.9	33.7	3.3	30.3
1974	100.0	48.2	45.8	2.4	17.8	0.4	17.4	34.0	3.9	30.1
1975	100.0	45.9	43.3	2.6	19.1	0.5	18.6	35.0	4.3	30.7
1976	100.0	44.6	42.4	2.2	21.8	0.5	21.3	33.5	4.2	29.3
1977	100.0	41.6	39.9	1.9	22.4	0.8	21.6	35.8	4.8	30.9
1978	100.0	38.4	36.5	1.9	23.2	0.8	22.4	38.4	6.1	32.4
1979	100.0	35.8	34.0	1.8	23.7	0.8	22.9	40.5	6.1	34.4
1980	100.0	34.0	32.3	1.6	22.6	0.9	21.7	43.4	6.1	37.3
1981	100.0	34.2	32.5	1.8	21.3	0.9	20.4	44.5	6.2	38.2

Source: Economic Planning Board, *Major Statistics of the Korean Economy*.²⁴

This shift towards an industrialized workforce also marks changes in the labor force with the entry of more female employees. As rural families grow increasingly bound up in the commercial economy, they are more willing to allow women—primarily unwed daughters—to work and travel away from home. Table 3-6 highlights how the 26.8% of the labor force was female in 1960 and 38.4% of the overall labor force by 1980. Table 3-7 details the growing percentage of economically active women (EAC), “who are able and willing to work.”²⁵

²⁴ Tony Michell, *From a Developing to a Newly Industrialized Country: The Republic of Korea, 1961-1982* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1988), 34.

²⁵ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 71.

Table 3-6. Proportion of Labor Force by Gender, 1960-1980

Year	Both	Male	Female
1960	49.0	73.4	26.8
1970	54.8	72.5	37.6
1980	54.7	72.4	38.4

Source: Hangan Kim, “The Labor Force Transformation in Korea: 1960~1980,” *The Journal of Population Association of Korea* 9, no. 2 (1986): 110.

Table 3-7. Women's Economic Participation, 1960-1989

Year	Total number of women over 14 years old (in thousands)	Number of EAW (in thousands)	EAW as percentage of the total number of women over 14 years old	Percentage of women in economically active population
1960	8,054	2,156	26.8	28.6
1970	9,629	3,625	37.6	34.9
1975	11,319	5,175	45.7	38.8
1980	12,945	4,973	38.4	36.6
1985	14,867	5,218	35.1	35.9
1989	15,576	7,274	46.7	43.5

Sources: Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI), *Yösöng baeksö* [White Paper on Women] (1991), 463; KWDI, *Yösöng baeksö* [White Paper on Women] (1985), 510; Kang I-su and Pak Ki-nam, “Yösöng kwa nodong” [Women and labor], in *Yösöng hak kang’üi: Han’guk yösöng hyönsil üi ihae* [Women’s Studies Lectures: Understanding Korean Women’s Reality], ed. Han’guk yösöng yön’guhoe (Seoul: Tongnyöok, 1991), 137.²⁶

Moon emphasizes how while the Park regime mobilized the male workforce through gender-specific training programs for increasing skilled labor, the primarily young and unmarried female laboring population was “mobilized to be domestic” through such gendered campaigns as family planning seminars that offered free intra-uterine devices (IUD) and insertion in addition to female sterilization shots—without necessary post-procedure care—as “patriotic” forms of contraception.²⁷ The “factory girl” (女工, *yögon*) plays a prominent role in the contemporary Korean labor movement, with a series of labor strikes in the late 1970s and state control over the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 81–89.

changing labor force.²⁸ Textiles and shipping are two sectors that exemplify this shift in Korea's labor force. Women's role in Korea's textile industry has its roots in the colonial period and is a topic that has generated much scholarly interest. Historian Janice Kim details how female labor industries such as spinning and weaving, silk reeling, and rubber shoe sole manufacture flourished during the colonial period industrialization efforts, with 59.4% of the female workforce in textiles by 1943.²⁹ This marked a significant demographic shift, as young women left their households to earn an income and live at the textile factories or work as domestic servants. Ruth Barraclough highlights the connection between farm to factory proletarianization, female labor, and sexual violence in colonial period representations of the factory girl, for "the license for violence inherent in a bonded-labor economy, became the marker by which newspaper readers comprehended the class of women who shared their cities."³⁰ After liberation, spinning and weaving continued to be a major component of the nation's economy and the state played a "midwife role in both markets and manufacture" during the Rhee regime's First Republic by protecting against textile imports.³¹ Anthropologist Robert Spencer details how despite the stigma attached to allowing a daughter to work away from her village, the need for financial supplementation in the 1980s is a stronger pull and "the city, with potentially higher paying posts, seems the reasonable alternative" to staying in her village or working in nearby

²⁸ For a more in depth analysis of representations of the factory girl in activist discourse, see Kim Won, *Yōgong 1970: kūnyō tūl ūi pan yōksa* [1970 Factory Girls: A Counterhistory] (Seoul: Imagine Press, 2006).

²⁹ Janice Kim, *To Live to Work: Factory Women in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 65.

³⁰ Ruth Barraclough, *Factory Girl Literature: Sexuality, Violence, and Representation in Industrializing Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 20.

³¹ Dennis L. McNamara, "From Patron to Partner: Korean State Role in the Textile Transition," in *Corporatism and Korean Capitalism*, ed. Dennis L. McNamara (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 98–99.

smaller towns.³² Although maintenance of textile industry protection was overlooked in the 1960s and 70s in the push for industrial development, with the passing of the 1980 Textile Industry Modernization Promotion Law, the sector received a \$14 million injection of state and private capital under the “KOFOTI (Korean Federation of Textile Industries) among the multiple sub-sectoral trade associations such as the Spinners and Weavers Association.”³³ Development was steadier in shipping and steel manufacture sectors. Nam asserts that KSEC unionists internalized the hegemonic narrative of individual sacrifice for the sake of national development and adapted the rhetoric for their own labor movement. For example, Nam emphasizes how the demands of protesting unionists—who were predominately male—that called for equality at the negotiating table and higher wages was “ultimately a claim about their manhood as dignified heads of households.”³⁴ The following section will draw connections between this shift in distribution of the employed population across different sectors to the impact on those who stayed behind in the rural exodus.

³² Robert F. Spencer, *Yōgong: Factory Girl* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1988), 31.

³³ McNamara, “From Patron to Partner: Korean State Role in the Textile Transition,” 100.

³⁴ Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation: Korea’s Democratic Unionism under Park Chung Hee*, 104.

Table 3-8. Changes in Relative Position of Farmers and Laborers, 1965-1981

		Household Normalized Income		Household Real Income		
		Farmer	Laborer	Farmer (A)	Laborer (B)	(A)/(B)
Year	1965	112,201	112,560	447,016	409,309	1.09
	1966	130,176	161,520	464,914	526,124	0.88
	1967	149,470	248,640	493,300	733,451	0.67
	1968	178,959	285,950	527,903	760,532	0.69
	1969	217,874	333,600	561,531	788,652	0.71
	1970	255,804	381,240	580,054	776,456	0.75
	1971	356,382	451,920	715,627	811,346	0.88
	1972	429,394	517,400	761,337	831,833	0.91
	1973	480,711	550,200	780,375	857,099	0.91
	1974	674,451	644,520	835,751	807,669	1.03
	1975	872,933	859,320	872,933	859,320	1.02
	1976	1,156,254	1,151,760	925,744	998,925	0.93
	1977	1,432,809	1,405,080	980,034	1,106,362	0.93
	1978	1,884,200	1,916,280	991,163	1,318,844	0.75
	1979	2,227,483	2,629,556	1,030,288	1,529,701	0.67
	1980	2,693,110	3,205,152	999,299	1,448,329	0.69
1981	3,687,856	3,817,244	1,005,139	1,398,763	0.72	
% Increase	1965-70			5.3	13.7	
	1970-75			8.5	2.0	
	1975-80			2.7	11.0	

Source: Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 206.

The transformation of the labor force from farming to laboring in factories, shipping yards, and construction zones also solidifies a growing income gap between farmers in the countryside and laborers in industrial zones. A comparison of farmer and laborer incomes from 1965-1981 in Table 3-9 details growing disparity between household real income increase percentage between the two occupation types from 1975-1980, with 2.7% income increase for farmers compared to 11.0% income increase for laborers. Anthropologist Nancy Abelmann

asserts that this disparity indicates the “significant dip in the early 1970s rural support of the rural party and Park’s early 1970s rural campaigns.”³⁵

Fetishizing the Rural Space in Industrializing Korea

This section analyze how, in Korea’s transition away from receiving aid from the international community, the industrializing state turned inwards to the countryside as an object in need of aid in the 1970s. This section begins with a defense of traditional village life written ostensibly from a farmer’s wife and an overview of how the state’s rural mobilization campaign, the *Saemaül undong*, utilized existing institutions like the NACF to consolidate village level control. This section then asserts that this state-driven modernization effort relegates the rural space into a fetishized object of tradition, an embodiment of national identity, and a symbol of nostalgia—leaving little room for any substantial reforms to address the socioeconomic needs of the countryside. This section concludes with an overview of how democratization activists participated in and perpetuated this fetishization, incorporating farmer protests in their dissident mobilization but not continuing their support after the waning of the *minjung* movement in the 1990s.

Nostalgia for an idyllic past located in a near-distant memory of pastoralism untouched by the rigors of modern urban life is not unique to Korea. Raymond Williams describes how a trope of rural nostalgia in which the rural space and its inhabitants are narrated as a repository of national traditions in literature that defines the city in contrast to the country as a “perpetual recession into history.”³⁶ Gail Hershatter highlights how a focus on rural women’s narratives of the Chinese collectivization period demonstrates how gender lays “at the heart of the story” of

³⁵ Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 205.

³⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 12.

China's revolution."³⁷ Loka Ashwood delineates how in contemporary Ireland, "rural" has evolved into a social expression intertwined with loss.³⁸ In spite of this universal sense of loss and longing to return to one's agrarian roots in any modernizing society, Korea's experience remains somewhat peculiar due to the confluence of compressed modernity, developmental authoritarianism, and nationalist capitalism. "Our Proud Farm" is an impassioned defense of life in the countryside published in 1977, supposedly penned by Ms. Yu Sun-cha of Chŏnbuk (Northern Chŏlla)—the region mentioned in the previous section as an example of systemic regional underdevelopment—Namwŏn-gun that is the personal story of a woman's enduring love for her farming life and also a call for other rural women to stay in the countryside.³⁹ Ms. Yu writes of the busy, yet idyllic and close-to-nature life she and her husband lead as farmers in the early days of summer. Defiant against those who criticized her, a woman educated in the city, for returning to her village to marry a farmer, she is proud of her choice to stay in the countryside. She would much rather sweat in the fields and smell the sweet fragrance of the acacias than toil and struggle in the overcrowded and dank city. She wants to "boast to all her friends" how her husband and she delight in pursuing a shared dream through hard work in the countryside. Her farmer husband, however, remains silent, suggestive of how rural men are rendered static and immobile—bound to unprofitable land—in representations of the countryside.

³⁷ Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 266.

³⁸ Loka Ashwood, "Without Categories and Classifications: 'Rural' as a Social Expression," in *From Community to Consumption: New and Classical Themes in Rural Sociological Research*, ed. Alessandro Bonanno et al., vol. 16, *Research in Rural Sociology and Development* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2010), 122.

³⁹ Yu Sun-cha, "Charangsŭrŏn nongch'on [Our Proud Farm]," *Kyŏngnyang sinmun*, May 31, 1977.

This curiously articulate piece aligns suspiciously well with the Yusin regime’s push to slow down the rural exodus to overcrowded urban centers. Nevertheless, the article also hints at a growing sense of national anxiety over the exodus of youth, particularly single women, from the countryside to pursue an industrialized life in burgeoning urban centers. In this article, the country is a romanticized space of solace from the fast-paced city. It nevertheless overlooks the struggles faced by members of rural communities in how to maintain a sustainable livelihood in an increasingly unstable agricultural marketplace. The article was published in 1977, after the state amplified its top-down measures to control the rural space in the widespread *Saemaül undong*. In effect, as the state invested less physical resources in the program and emphasized the need for villagers’ moral self-cultivation in the latter half of the 1970s, Nancy Abelmann argues that the *Saemaül undong* “functioned as a massive state indoctrination campaign” to encourage villagers’ sacrifice for the sake of the national economy.⁴⁰ Highlighting how the rural mobilization campaign hinged on a trope of rural nostalgia, Oh Myung-Seok argues that the rhetoric of self-cultivation took shape in official calls to restore a glorious agrarian past through practice of traditional village customs of communalism that were “in fact no longer practiced in the villages.”⁴¹ Table 3-9 details how the economic development plans of the Park regime were uneven, with residents from Kyōnggi Province—which is home to the capital Seoul—received the highest benefits of economic development.

⁴⁰ Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement*, 208.

⁴¹ Myung-seok Oh, “Peasant Culture and Modernization in Korea: Cultural Implications of Saemaueul Movement in the 1970s,” *Korea Journal* 38, no. 3 (1998): 77–95.

Table 3-9. Regional per Capita Gross Farm Income, 1959-1975

(thousand won in current prices deflated to 1970 prices by farm consumer index)

	Kyōnggi	Kangwōn	North Ch'ungch'ōng	South Chōlla	South Kyōngsang	South Korea
1959	30.6	21.2	22.5	23.2	21.8	21.5
1960	32.8	22.3	25.4	24.0	23.1	25.9
1961	37.3	25.5	32.2	32.1	31.4	32.9
1962	34.9	30.3	29.4	29.7	28.3	20.6
1963	50.5	32.1	38.9	34.9	34.2	39.5
1964	57.9	37.5	51.6	47.0	49.1	50.4
1965	38.9	29.2	38.9	36.3	46.7	40.0
1966	46.0	32.2	45.8	40.0	43.3	43.4
1967	46.4	36.8	42.8	30.1	42.1	39.7
1968	41.5	32.0	38.2	30.7	39.1	37.4
1969	55.2	35.1	41.9	41.3	48.9	45.7
1970	60.9	37.1	50.8	41.5	49.9	48.3
1971	63.4	42.5	55.6	49.2	55.2	52.9
1972	61.0	46.0	59.2	55.8	57.2	57.3
1973	70.9	51.9	64.3	55.3	54.2	58.9
1974	83.4	50.1	76.7	59.4	66.8	67.7
1975	95.2	66.3	83.7	75.6	74.3	79.6

Source: Albert Keidel, III, *Korean Regional Farm Product and Income: 1910-1975* (Seoul: Korea Development Institute, 1981), 103.⁴²

In the midst of the export-oriented development projects touted as the source of Korea's rapid economic growth and industrialization, the Park Chung Hee administration launched a series of development plans targeted at the economic modernization of rural communities.

Although the Park administration focused on state-led development to successfully engage with global capitalism as a heavy industrial economy, the *Saemaŭl undong* (New Village Movement)—launched in 1971—was a centrally directed effort to promote self-help, centralization, and agricultural productivity that drew inspiration from the colonial period Rural

⁴² Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences," *International Organization* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 29; Stephan Haggard, Byung-Kook Kim, and Chung-in Moon, "The Transition to Export-Led Growth in South Korea: 1954-1966," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 4 (1991): 860.

Revitalization Movement and cooperative movements in modern Denmark.⁴³ State coercion in local agricultural economies ushered in the “Green Revolution,” noted for its promulgation of the “unification rice” (*t’ongilbyō*) variety, highly unpopular amongst farmers due to its heavy dependency on fertilizer and pesticides available for purchase exclusively through the NACF.⁴⁴ In addition to state-mandated reforms for more efficient farming practices, the *Saemaül undong* also entered into the structure of rural communities themselves, ranging from incorporation into networks of paved highways, the banning of thatched roofs on homes (initially for villages which lined the newly built highways), providing cement and iron rods for village construction projects, and the destruction of local village gods.⁴⁵ These rural reform measures were touted to be designed to modernize the countryside in order to feed the nation and bolster the export-oriented national economy. The spirit of *Saemaül* was also adapted to new contexts, extending to cities and manufacturing centers in the New Factory Movement and the New Spirit Movement (*Saemaüm undong*) in which the President’s daughter, Park Geun Hye, was sent “around the country to address mass rallies on such cardinal Confucian values as loyalty and filial piety.”⁴⁶ Despite these calls for spiritual revitalization and the rhetoric of rural modernization, a significant driving force for this movement was to increase markets for the state-protected burgeoning construction manufacture industry. For example, the state only supplied a limited

⁴³ Sung Hwan Ban, Pal Yong Moon, and Dwight Perkins, *Rural Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁴⁴ Michael Reinschmidt, “Rural Development: Lessons from the Liberalization of Korean Trade,” *Korea Journal*, Winter 2009, 110. The moniker “unification rice” employs the rhetoric of unification of the Korean peninsula while the Republic of Korea was still recovering from the ravages of the Korean War (1950-1953).

⁴⁵ According to Kwang-Kyu Lee, “[t]he single most important Saemaul objective for the government was the destruction of the village gods,” which included a village god, a god for the front gate of the village, a god of the hearth, a god of the toilet, and a god of the house site. Kwang-Kyu Lee, “Social and Agricultural Change in Korea’s Rice Farming Communities,” in *The Art of Rice: Spirit and Sustenance in Asia*, ed. Roy Hamilton (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2003), 505.

⁴⁶ Duncan, “Uses of Confucianism in Modern Korea,” 451.

supply of free construction materials and farmers had to purchase additional materials on their own to build their new state-mandated homes. The success of the burgeoning cement manufacture industry, then, “was indebted to the farmers as a consistent body of consumers who together composed a solid domestic market.”⁴⁷

The *Saemaül undong* was designed to embody the Park regime’s push for self-reliance—i.e., minimal state funding—and Korean-style democracy—i.e., semi-official control at the village level.⁴⁸ For example, expensive village electrification projects were required to be funded primarily by farmers themselves in order to foster a spirit of self-reliance. Hwang Pyŏng-chu asserts that under heavy-handed coercion, villagers had little choice but to either abandon their farmland and move to urban slums or acquiesce to state authoritarianism and participate in the movement.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sungjo Kim, “Constructing Rural Houses for the ‘New Village’: Farmers’ Debt, Consumption, and Unequal Exchange in 1970s South Korea” (UCLA and Yonsei University Graduate Student Workshop, UCLA Center for Korean Studies, 2014), 26.

⁴⁸ Yu Pyŏng-yong, Ch’oe Pong-tae, and O Yu-sŏk, *Kŭndaehwa chŏllyak kwa Saemaül undong* [Strategies for modernization and the Saemaul movement] (Seoul: Baeksan sŏdang, 2001), 50.

⁴⁹ Hwang Pyŏng-chu, “Saemaül undong ūl t’onghan nongŏp saengsan kwajŏng ūi pyŏnhwa wa nongmin p’osŏp [Changes in agricultural production and state appropriation of peasants through the Saemaul undong],” *Sahoe wa yŏksa* 90 (2011): 40.

Table 3-10. NACF employees, selected years, 1970-1995

Year	Total number of employees (T)	Primary cooperative employees (P)	P/T
1970	15,901	4,585	0.29
1971	18,110	6,280	0.35
1972	21,392	9,428	0.44
1973	25,376	14,292	0.54
1974	32,249	19,067	0.59
1975	34,236	20,270	0.59
1976	35,393	21,942	0.62
1977	40,154	24,248	0.60
1978	42,049	25,664	0.61
1979	41,674	25,291	0.61
1980	42,625	26,064	0.61
1981	44,318	28,495	0.64
1982	39,588*	27,617	0.70
1983	39,501	27,871	0.71
1984	40,678	28,673	0.70
1985	42,575	30,291	0.71
1986	44,600	31,786	0.71
1987	46,657	33,188	0.71
1990	57,749	39,683	0.69
1995	69,984	50,191	0.72

Source: NACF Yearbook.

* A separate livestock cooperative (*chuk hyop*) was split off from the NACF at this time (Steinberg, 1994) resulting in a temporary reduction in the number of NACF employees.⁵⁰

The local-level *Saemaül* branches coordinated with the pre-existing NACF branches to consolidate penetration of village control. Table 3-11 details the dramatic increase of NACF employees after the launch of *Saemaül* in 1971. With personnel increases “concentrated at the primary cooperative level, the lowest unit of the organization in direct operational contact with farmer members.”⁵¹ The massive state agrobureaucracy, represented by the NACF, was effectively deployed to ensure the success of *Saemaül* projections. Moreover, extending the

⁵⁰ Larry Burmeister, “From Parastatal Control to Corporatist Intermediation: The Korean Agricultural Cooperative in Transition,” in *Corporatism and Korean Capitalism*, ed. McNamara (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 117.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

colonial period tactics of appointing village level leadership to quell local mobilization, the pervasive nature of the *Saemaül* institutions effectively curbed the potential for rural protest mobilization through semi-official control and observation at the lowest rung of village government.⁵²

The government has sponsored much research on the policy and technical components of the *Saemaül undong*, which anthropologist Oh Myung-seok describes as “a flood of publications ... since the government began channeling funds into universities for Saemaeul-related research, conferences, and publications.”⁵³ One such publication is an English-language monograph by economist Park Jin Hwan, former advisor to President Park Chung Hee, written to tout *Saemaül* accomplishments and suggest its application to Southeast Asian rural communities. Park Jin Hwan credits the President’s own will in the successes of the rural modernizing campaign. He states that the President’s motto of “movement for better living” was received favorably by farmers.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in another publication, Park claims that participation in *Saemaül* not only taught farmers “that poverty can be overcome by penny saving,” but also provided farmers with the ability to learn about “democratic process of decision making” under the guidance of state authorities.⁵⁵ This characterization of farmers as incapable of learning such basic survival skills as setting aside “a spoonful of rice” at mealtime in preparation for potential future financial

⁵² Yöng-mi Kim, *Ködül üi Saemaül undong* [Their Saemaül movement] (Seoul: P’urün yöksa, 2009), 85.

⁵³ Oh Myung-Seok, “Peasant Culture and Modernization in Korea: Cultural Implications of Saemaul Movement in the 1970s,” in *Korean Anthropology: Contemporary Korean Culture in Flux*, ed. Korean National Commission for UNESCO (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2003), 160.

⁵⁴ Jin Hwan Park, *The Saemaul Movement: Korea’s Approach to Rural Modernization in 1970s* (Seoul: Korea Rural Economic Institute, 1998), 56. Park also argues that the Saemaül undong fostered the development of “grass roots democracy” in the 1970s, which he implies laid the groundwork for democratization movements in the 1980s (12).

⁵⁵ Jin Hwan Park, “Process of Saemaul Undong Project Implementation in Korea,” in *Toward a New Community: Reports of International Research-Seminar on the Saemaul Movement*, ed. Man-Gap Lee (Seoul: Institute of Saemaul Undong Studies, 1981), 158.

hardship by state officials demonstrates how the degree to which they objectify rural residents into bumbling country bumpkins at fault for their own generational poverty.⁵⁶

Outside of the scope of government-sponsored research on the rural mobilization campaign, scholars continue to debate the legacies of this rural revitalization campaign. Some scholars highlight the increase of market penetration in rural communities brought forth by the *Saemaül* modernizing reforms. For example, Oh Myung-Seok asserts that rapid urbanization and industrialization since the 1960s and the *Saemaül undong* “intensified the impact of market relations on the life of the peasants” to the extent that rural family dynamics changed drastically.⁵⁷ Michael Reinschmidt also emphasizes that the introduction of the unpopular *t’ongilbyõ* rice variety during the *Saemaül undong* and Green Revolution “caused an agriculture dependency on oil-based fertilizers and pesticides.”⁵⁸ This increase in market penetration leaves rural communities more vulnerable to shifts in the global marketplace, most notably in trade liberalization policies and introduction of imported agricultural products in the Korean economy (which will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter). Although the *Saemaül undong* may have produced tangible results in the form of paved roads, construction of cement bridges and buildings, and removal of thatched roofs, less tangible implications must also be considered when evaluating the movement including increased state intervention in rural communities, the utilization of communal “traditions” invoked by *Saemaül* officials, and the impact of increased market penetration. Nancy Abelmann emphasizes that underneath the rhetoric of improving the daily lives of villagers through aesthetic modernizing reforms, “many of the program’s initiatives

⁵⁶ Park, “Process of Saemaül Undong Project Implementation in Korea.”

⁵⁷ Oh Myung-Seok, 170.

⁵⁸ Reinschmidt, “Rural Development,” 110.

set out to control villages through intensified intervention.”⁵⁹ In effect, as the state invested less physical resources in the program and emphasized the need for villagers’ moral self-cultivation in the latter half of the 1970s, the *Saemaül undong* “functioned as a massive state indoctrination campaign” to encourage villagers’ sacrifice for the sake of the national economy.⁶⁰ The rhetoric of self-cultivation took shape in official calls to restore a glorious agrarian past through practice of traditional village customs of communalism that were “in fact no longer practiced in the villages”⁶¹ Rather, *Saemaül* officials at the local and state level “represented a tradition that was reworked to include modern elements of a newly emerging mass.”⁶² Paradoxically, farmers in the 1970s were encouraged to return to reconfigured village “traditions” of communalism and egalitarianism in this modernizing movement. Furthermore, farmers were represented by state officials as lazy, superstitious, and generally ill equipped to adapt to South Korea’s rapidly changing socio-economic structure on their own. This representation of the indigent farmer overlooks the high degree of discipline and hard work required to succeed in small-scale agriculture, especially in labor-intensive rice paddy farming.

Democratization activists also perpetuate this patronizing representation of the countryside and its residents as helpless and in need of outside aid from modern city dwellers during this period. Rural society became the subject of *minjung*-centered history in post-1960 scholarship. Rather than focusing on political or intellectual leaders as in more conventional histories, scholars such as Kang Man-gil, Kim Yǒng-sǒp, Kim Do-hyung, and Park Ch’an-sǔng

⁵⁹ Abelmann, 209.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶¹ Oh Myung-Seok, 165-166.

⁶² Seung-Mi Han, “The New Community Movement: Park Chung Hee and the Making of State Populism in Korea,” *Pacific Affairs* 77, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 82.

focused on *minjung* as the subject of history driven by socio-economic motivations. Whereas political and intellectual leaders throughout Korean history were criticized for a perceived failure of the Korean nation—the plans of “bourgeois” leaders of the *Kaehwa* movement, for example, were fundamentally flawed for “attempting a bourgeois revolution without undertaking land reform”⁶³—these scholars highlight the revolutionary potential in a peasant consciousness emerging during the early modern period. By taking *minjung* as the center of history, the popular movements of inhabitants of rural society in the nineteenth century were linked together in a long history of developing class consciousness beginning with the 1811 and 1862 *ũibyŏng* (righteous army) movements and culminating in the “Tonghak peasant war (*Tonghak nongmin chŏnjaeng*).”⁶⁴ As anthropologist Nancy Abelmann notes, “Tonghak discourse has been strikingly present oriented: although the revolution occurred in another century, it is easily discussed as a contemporary historical and cultural repository.”⁶⁵ Post-liberation attempts at land reform are another major current in post-1960 scholarship on rural South Korea as a conflict between bourgeois landowners and tenant farmers.⁶⁶ Historian Namhee Lee details how activists

⁶³ Yong-sŏp Kim, “The Two Courses of Agrarian Reform in Korea’s Modernization,” in *Landlords, Peasants, and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, ed. Kie-Chung Pang and Michael D. Shin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 49.

⁶⁴ Dohyung Kim, *Taehan Chegukki ũi chŏngch’i sasang yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Chisik sanŏpsa, 1994), 311–370.

⁶⁵ Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement*, 27.

⁶⁶ See Yu In-ho, “Haebang hu nongji kaehyŏk ũi chŏngae kwajŏng kwa sŏngkyŏk: nongji kaehyŏk ũi t’oji chaedosa chŏk ũiŭi,” in *Haebang chŏnhusa ũi insik*, vol. 1, ed. Song Kŏn-ho, 447-540 (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1976); Hwang Han-sik, “Migunjŏng ha nongŏp kwa t’oji kaehyŏk chŏngch’aek,” in *Haebang chŏnhusa ũi insik*, vol. 2, ed. Kang Man-gil (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1976), 284-329; and Chang Sang-hwan, “Nongji kaehyŏk kwajŏng e kwanhan siljŏng chŏk yŏn’gu: Ch’ungnam sŏsangun kŭnhŭngmyŏn ũi silt’ae chosa rŭl chungsimŭro,” in *Haebang chŏnhusa ũi insik*, vol. 2, 330-401. One may also argue that these processes of rural exploitation began as early as the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). For example, reading Nancy Abelmann’s study of the 1987 occupation of the Samyang Corporation in Seoul by tenant farmers alongside Carter Eckert’s study of the entrepreneurial activities of the Koch’ang Kim family (founders of the Samyang group) during the colonial period illuminates colonial legacies of conflicts over landownership. See Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Carter Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Ko’chang Kims and the Colonial Origin of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

coopted the state's appropriation of folk culture to develop mask-dance drama into a counterpublic performance of *madanggŭk*. Lee asserts that this symbolic form of resistance created "dispersed and fitful attempts at critique, when accumulated over a period of more than two decades, can weaken the hegemonic position of the dominant culture."⁶⁷ As *Saemaŭl* mobilization waned in the 1980s,⁶⁸ space opened up for farmer mobilization in protest against the state's predatory NACF policies, enduring rural debt, and negotiations for beef imports. Although protesting farmers' interests coalesced with democracy activists in the 1970s and 80s and learned from their mobilization techniques, while the *minjung* movement waned in the 1990s, farmer protests continued into well into the 1990s and 2000s with the lead-up to Korea's entry into the WTO and FTAs.

Crisis of Masculinity and Rural Bachelors' Marriage Woes

Despite improvements to the standard of living—including increasing electrification rates and more access to education and health resources—the benefits of Korea's rapid GNP growth overlooked the agricultural sector. When state-led modernizing efforts turned to the countryside, the most enduring impact was increasing dependence on currency and commodity exchange. For example, the *Saemaŭl* call to modernize village kitchens by banning wood-burning stoves—which villagers could previously fuel on their own with the aid of an ax—was a state-mandated modernization effort that effectively drove all villagers to purchase new gas stoves and gas. State reform efforts such as this drove rural residents away from producing for their own consumption to producing for commodity consumption. This, then, deepened villagers'

⁶⁷ Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, 211.

⁶⁸ Demonstrating the de-prioritization of the movement in the 1980s, Chun Doo Hwan appointed his brother as the Saemaŭl head, who was later charged with embezzlement.

“dependency on financial capital.”⁶⁹ This section will begin with a brief discussion of farmers’ protest movements during the period of developmental authoritarianism, highlighting the difficulties they face in transforming grass-roots protest into success at the national level. Then, this section will demonstrate how the heightening of rural social marginalization during the Yusin period and Chun Doo Hwan years shaped changing marriage and residence patterns to the extent that by the late 1980s, newspapers began reporting on a phenomenon of rural bachelorhood nationwide, in which Korean women no longer deemed aging male farmers worthy of marrying. The rural bachelor became such a prominent figment of the national imaginary that they were a featured group of characters in the long-running popular television series *Chŏnwŏn ilgi*.⁷⁰

The rise of farmer protests in the late 1970s continues a long history of rural mobilization against the state that endures to this day. Farmer mobilization as a result of frustration from continued state bias against incorporating agriculture and the countryside in its economic development plans will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter, which will address the role of the Korean countryside in the neoliberal economy. This section will briefly overview the protests known as the “Sweet Potato Incident” (*Koguma sagŏn*)—which began in September 1976—for the purpose of demonstrating the growing level of rural discontent in the face of state-led rural mobilization efforts. The years-long struggle began in Chŏnnam Hamp’yŏng, when an unresolved conflict over compensation between sweet potato farmers and

⁶⁹ Kim, “Constructing Rural Houses for the ‘New Village’: Farmers’ Debt, Consumption, and Unequal Exchange in 1970s South Korea,” 29.

⁷⁰ *Chŏnwŏn ilgi* (田園日記) [The countryside diaries], broadcast October 1980 to December 2002 on MBC.

the local NACF office resulted in rotting of the crops.⁷¹ Although farmers mobilized small-scale local protests against the NACF branches, their movement initially failed to gain traction until it gained much more momentum with the participation of the regionally based Korean Catholic Farmers Association connected to the national network of democracy activists. In a protest rally in 1978, activists declared that “the farmer’s social position and dignity as humans dropped precipitously while their agony escalated as sacrifices were hoisted upon them” in the name of the authoritarian state’s export-first policy. Rather than representing the needs of their farmer-members as a cooperative should, activists charged that the NACF was founded on an agricultural policy that was “anti-farmer and anti-democratic.”⁷² The protest reached some success after the government finally compensated the sweet potato farmers for their crops in the wake of a hunger strike in April 1979. Yet, the hunger strikers were not themselves sweet potato farmers or even frustrated members of the local NACF. Rather, the hunger strikers who scored a victory for the farmers were primarily “CFU (Catholic Farmers Union) members from many regions, students from Kwangju, and people fighting for democracy.”⁷³ Moreover, the protest did not result in substantial reforms in the state agro-bureaucracy. The long-awaited success and limited success of this agricultural protest, then, demonstrates the difficulties of raising awareness of farmers’ plight without the aid of a broader urban-based protest movement with greater potential to garner widespread attention.

While farmer-led campaigns for substantial nation-wide agricultural reforms struggle to succeed from lack of public or state interest, the countryside’s marriage rates become a subject of

⁷¹ Sō Kyōng-wōn, “Hamp’yōng koguma sagōn: nongmin undong ūi konoe wa hūimang [The Hamp’yōng sweet potato incident: the anguish and hope of the farmers’ movement],” *Kiōk kwa chōnmang* 3 (2003): 216.

⁷² Korean Catholic Farmer’s Association, “Ssōkūn koguma rŭl pongсахara [Compensate us for the rotten sweet potatoes],” April 26, 1978.

⁷³ Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement*, 215.

great interest in the public culture.⁷⁴ Korean newspapers began reporting a troubling trend in the late 1980s: amidst the rapid growth of the Korean economy, rural societies were in great danger because “74% of rural people want to leave the so-called ‘heartland’ (*maũm ũi kohyang*) for the city.”⁷⁵ As rural youth, particularly young women, flocked to metropolitan areas and away from agrarian life, the average age of rural communities rapidly rose. A growing social category emerged with these demographic changes: the Korean rural bachelor (*nongch'on ch'onggak*), who faces a dire marriage problem (*kyõrhon munje, kyõrhonnan*).

Marriage and establishing oneself as head of his own household is a prerequisite for male adulthood in Korean society. Laurel Kendall, in her study of the role of marriage ceremonies in contemporary South Korean society, observes that the “wedding ceremony initiates men and women into adulthood.” Her analysis of a 1912 photograph illustrates her point. It is of an adolescent “man” wearing a topknot standing beside a much taller middle-aged “boy” wearing his hair in the plaited style of the unmarried.⁷⁶ Affirming the enduring significance of marriage in contemporary Korean society, sociologist Minjeong Kim highlights how “unmarried South Korean rural bachelors in their thirties and forties expressed a sense of incompleteness at being

⁷⁴ I employ the term public culture in my project—rather than popular culture—precisely because of its emphasis on publics. Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge argue that the concept of public culture enables theorizing “zone[s] of cultural debate.” “The concept of public culture not only avoids ‘such highly specific Western dichotomies and debates as high versus low culture; mass versus elite culture; and popular or folk versus classical culture,’ it also enables a study of the circulation of cosmopolitan cultural forms.” Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, “Why Public Culture,” *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 5–9.

⁷⁵ Yi Inu, “Hyõnjang chindan Han’guk nongminch’on ũi onũl (5) nongch’on saenghwal [Field Diagnosis: Five Rural Lives of Today in Korea’s Villages],” *Hankyõre sinmun*, October 26, 1988.

⁷⁶ Laurel Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 6–7 The topknots (*sangt’u*), worn only after marriage and thus a symbol of adulthood and masculinity, factored into the outbreak of righteous armies (*ũibyõng*) in 1895-1896—an event touted by Marxist historians as an eruption of nascent peasant consciousness. Historian Sukman Jang highlights how the roots of violent protest began against the 1895 Hair-Cropping Decree (*Tanballyõng*), which ordered the cutting off of men’s topknots in Sukman Jang, “The Politics of Haircutting in Korea: A Symbol of Modernity and the ‘Righteous Army Movement’ (1895-1896),” *Review of Korean Studies* 1 (1998): 40.

single.”⁷⁷ One newspaper article asserts that “the biggest reason for this marriage problem is that growing numbers of women of marriageable age say ‘I hate everything about the countryside’.”⁷⁸ The figure of the rural bachelor circulated in public culture—scorned by Korean women, impoverished and left behind in Korea’s rapid economic development—has engendered much anxiety and pity. Although the Korean national economy was generally growing, the rural bachelors in these articles are powerless to stop the decline of their socioeconomic status, their marriageability, and the exodus of young women out of villages. Unable to find willing marriage partners from within their own communities, rural bachelors are portrayed as feeble and unable to perpetuate the hegemonic normative patriarchal social order through marriage. In these narratives, rural bachelors confront a crippling crisis of masculinity. The plight of rural bachelors’ marriage woes, then, embodies public culture anxiety over the consequences of Korea’s frenetic socioeconomic transformation.

Unmarried male farmers are not unique to contemporary Korea; nor, are they unique to Korea, for that matter. In a series of essays on bachelorhood of rural French men, Pierre Bourdieu notes that although his informants may state that rural bachelorhood is a new phenomenon, the marriage rate in the French countryside has not dropped significantly in the early 20th century. This leads Bourdieu to ask, “why is bachelorhood now experienced as exceptionally dramatic and totally unusual?”⁷⁹ Bourdieu examines at length how the category of peasant becomes an pejorative in which rural men “internalize the image that others have of

⁷⁷ Minjeong Kim, “South Korean Rural Husbands, Compensatory Masculinity, and International Marriage,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 303.

⁷⁸ Yi Sūnggu, “Ighwa sidae nongch’on ch’onggak tūl ūi piaē [The Woes of Rural Bachelors in the Age of the Self],” *Kyōngnyang sinmun*, January 30, 1990.

⁷⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Bachelors’ Ball*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 10.

him,” namely from women, that they “are worthless” for their very “em-peasanted” bodies.⁸⁰ While rural bachelorhood is not a new phenomenon, then, how the concern over the issue manifests and circulates in a markedly different manner. Minjeong Kim’s research on rural husbands in contemporary Korea yields similar results, as many of her respondents “accepted the dichotomous construction of city-rural identities and the subaltern status of rural residents, especially men.”⁸¹ The consequences of Korea’s rapid state-led economic growth, push to industrialization, and developing a strong export-oriented economy left the rural sector as an afterthought in state development plans. Table 3-11 details the development of a gendered division of labor in the industrializing employment population. Even when the Yusin regime did turn its attention to rural development, the *Saemaül undong*—which was touted as the state’s campaign to inspire villagers to strive for the trappings of modern life—effectively opened up the countryside as another market for the industrial sector. As the countryside was represented as a repository for Korean identity and an object in need of outside (urban and state-led) aid, newspapers focused on the disastrous impact of continued rates of bachelorhood on the countryside. These articles reporting on villages in the midst of social crisis are a far cry from the peaceful and content depiction of farming life offered by Yu Sun-cha in 1977.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 86–87.

⁸¹ Kim, “South Korean Rural Husbands, Compensatory Masculinity, and International Marriage,” 303.

Table 3-11. Percentage Distribution of the Labor Force by Industry Sectors and Intermediate Industry Groups by Gender, 1970-1980

Sectors and Industries	Both		Male		Female	
	1970	1980	1970	1980	1970	1980
<u>Extractive</u>	44.0	24.2	51.7	35.7	35.1	15.58
Agriculture	43.4	23.9	50.8	35.1	34.9	15.5
Mining	0.6	0.3	0.9	0.6	0.15	0.08
<u>Transformative</u>	30.7	52.2	26.7	43.8	35.17	61.58
Manufacturing	28.2	52.0	22.6	3.9	34.6	60.9
Elec. & Utility	0.2	1.3	0.2	0.2	0.07	0.08
Construction	2.3	1.9	3.9	3.7	0.5	0.6
<u>Distributive Services</u>	7.4	8.7	9.6	9.0	4.9	8.4
Wholesale	0.5	1.1	0.5	0.9	0.4	1.2
Retail	5.0	4.8	6.6	5.7	3.1	4.1
Transportation	1.6	2.4	2.1	2.0	1.0	2.7
Communication	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
<u>Producer Services</u>	0.44	1.76	0.44	1.29	0.45	2.18
Banking	0.26	0.9	0.2	0.6	0.3	1.2
Insurance	0.04	0.2	0.02	0.06	0.07	0.3
Real estate	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.03	0	0.08
Legal service	0.12	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.08	0.6
<u>Social Services</u>	2.81	3.46	2.19	2.2	3.53	4.6
Government	0.87	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.2
Medical	0.01	0	0.02	0	0	0
Social	1.5	2.1	0.9	1.0	2.1	3.0
Education	0.37	0.36	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4
Miscellaneous	0.06	0.	0.07	0	0.05	0
<u>Personal</u>	14.4	7.7	8.8	8.0	20.7	7.5
Hotel and restaurant	3.2	3.1	3.2	4.3	3.1	2.3
Personal and domestic	11.2	4.6	5.6	3.7	17.6	5.2
Total Labor Force	99.8	99.0	100.2	100.0	99.7	99.9

Source: Hangan Kim, "The Labor Force Transformation in Korea: 1960~1980," *The Journal of Population Association of Korea* 9, no. 2 (1986): 116.

Public interest in the plight of the rural bachelor reached the extent that their marriage woes became a regular fixture in *Chŏnwŏn ilgi* [The countryside diaries]. Broadcast on MBC on a weekly basis from 1980 to 2002, this hour-long series developed into the most successful series

in the rural drama genre and is the longest-running Korean drama with a total of 1088 episodes. The popularity of this genre of rural drama is demonstrated by a similarly lengthy run of 852 episodes by KBS's *Taech'u namu sarang kollyotne* [Love hangs on the jujube tree]. *Chŏnwŏn ilgi* chronicles the lives a small farming community in the fictional Yangch'on village in Kyŏnggi Province. The show focuses on the family of Kim Hŭi-chang (Ch'oe Pol-am), who is a learned and landed farmer with hereditary land holdings trying to maintain a traditional way of life with his wife (Kim Hye-cha), mother, two sons, and three daughters. In response to flagging viewership ratings, the show was reworked in 1996 to age the characters by five years in order to focus on the love lives of the village children. The episodes are presented to urban viewers as a documentary-style look at village life. Enduring themes in the series include the reliable kindness, compassion, and communal spirit of the villagers, the importance of stable marriages, and need to continue honoring filial piety. The bucolic idyll is only rarely disrupted from outside contact with modern life—in such forms as the threat to married fidelity after a *tabang* (coffee shop) opens outside the town, physical ailments from drinking too much coffee, and debt-inducing over-spending consumer habits, and the dangerous allure of the Seoul's hustle and bustle.

Although the series primarily presents an idealized representation of lives of the countryside, the cast of characters also highlights public interest in villagers' efforts to marry in a post-industrial era, represented by a group of aging single male farmers who periodically gather, drink, bemoan their singlehood, and console each other after numerous failed attempts to get married. Towards the beginning of the series, the middle-aged men take a break from their farming duties to gossip about the village women, discussing the potential marriage prospects of one of Kim Hŭi-chang's daughters (and younger sister of Yong-sik).

ŬNG-SAM: Yŏng-ae is going on a *sŏn*?⁸²

YONG-SIK: Seems so. Looks like she dressed up really nicely before heading out.

ŬNG-SAM: Hey, what about the other side?

CH'ANG-SU: Who knows?

YONG-SIK: You don't know? He was wearing a suit.

ŬNG-SAM: Then, if Yŏng-ae is getting hitched to a boss, then hey, who's left? In our neighborhood? Huh? The single women?

CH'ANG-SU: Mi-sŭk has one left, but...

ŬNG-SAM: Well, she's engaged so it's like she's already gone. *Aigo!*⁸³ There's no one! No one.

CH'ANG-SU: What about your little sister in Seoul?

ŬNG-SAM: Now that's an idea!

MYŎNG-SŎK: Let's see. In Seoul there's Sun-hŭi, Kyo-yuk, and who's that...O-suk and Sam-suk!

YONG-SIK: When the wind blows hard, daughters scatter to the corners!

MYŎNG-SŎK: Over in Inch'ŏn there's Mi-cha, Ŭn-mi, So-ok.

Ch'ang-su stands up and stares into the distance.

CH'ANG-SU: Humph...do you all think the city is that great? Is it so great to spin machines around, falling ill if you make a mistake?

ŬNG-SAM: Oh, come one now. What gives?

MYŎNG-SŎK: What's this about?

CH'ANG-SU: I'm a *ch'onnom*!⁸⁴

Ch'ang-su walks away with his hands in his pockets.

YONG-SIK: *Aigo.*

ŬNG-SAM: *Aigo*, beats me.

Through exchanges such as this dialogue bemoaning the lack of marriageable women in their neighborhood—for they have all already married or moved away to work in factories—viewers

⁸² *Sŏn* is a procedure in marriage matchmaking when the prospective arranged marriage partners meet under the watchful eyes of chaperones. For more detailed analysis of Korean marriage practices, see Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity*, 52–119.

⁸³ *Aigo* is a commonly used onomatopoeia.

⁸⁴ “*Ch'onnom*” (country man) has a pejorative connotation in certain contexts, but can also be employed as a term of willful defiance, much like “redneck” in contemporary US.

of the series watch each member of the bachelor group struggle to find a wife and reproduce the normative social order of married life. Kim Hŭi-cha's second son, Yong-sik (Yu In-ch'on), is the first of the bachelors to marry, quickly followed by Il-yong (Pak Ŭn-su). The remaining single men struggle over the years with their romances. Although Ch'ang-su (Yi Ch'ang-hwan) eventually enters into a love marriage with a woman from a nearby village, the relationship ends tragically and abruptly when his wife runs away from the hardship of farm life, abandoning him and his child. Later in the series, as Ŭng-sam's (Pak Yun-bae) inability to get married continues, he takes the advice of a professional matchmaker to invest in upgrading his kitchen with modern appliances, because she asserts that young women nowadays will run away at the first sight of a backwards village kitchen. The pricey kitchen renovation puts him in debt but does not result in a successful bride wooing. Nevertheless, after many years and many bungled attempts, even Ŭng-sam (Pak Yun-bae), the quintessential aged bachelor (*noch'onggak*), marries by the end of the show to a woman who left the village to earn money in the city for many years to pay off her family's debt. His wedding takes place in a modern wedding hall with Kim Hŭi-cha officiating as the honored *churye*.

The plight of sympathetic poor single farmers is echoed in sensational newspaper reports. Unable to find willing marriage partners on their own or with the aid of their fellow villagers, newspapers highlight the need for more organized support to resolve the marriage crisis. In one article, the reporter highlights how the government and community organizations should work quickly to solve rural bachelor's marriage woes by encouraging young women to marry rural men. The reporter highlights how "rural bachelors and single city women meet and play a game" at a YWCA event designed to help rural bachelors find marriage partners is one means for helping country men overcome the trap of their singlehood. Moreover, the reporter emphasizes

that rather than merely focusing on marrying the men off, the most effective and sustainable measure for solving the decline in marriage rates is to resuscitate agriculture with more direct state funding.⁸⁵

Conclusion

This chapter details the emergence of rural bachelor's struggles to marry in industrialized Korea as a captivating public culture subject. Farmers' local level protest against national trade policies deleterious to the stability of the domestic agriculture market, the predatory institutional organization of the NACF, and tenant disputes against mega-landlords received little attention or success. Nancy Abelmann's astute analysis in *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent* of the Koch'ang Tenant Farmers Movement—based in North Ch'olla Province—in the mid- to late-1980s chronicles a rare exception. This chapter begins by overviewing how the systematic rural underdevelopment policies in Korean economic modernization reforms escalated under the Yusin-period push for export-oriented growth focused on a Heavy Chemical Industrialization Policy. As Korea transitioned into an industrial economy, the workforce in the 1970s-80s transforms from primarily agrarian to predominantly in labor and white-collar employment by the 1980s. This rush to industrialize contributed to significantly uneven development across provinces and between urban and rural sectors, and promoted a sharp gendered division of labor. Thus, this chapter highlights how the state-driven rural modernization campaign *Saemaül undong* capitalized on the existing institutional proliferation of the NACF to consolidate village level control. This top-down movement effectively incorporated the countryside in the growing national commodity exchange-based economy while simultaneously narrating the countryside as a space in need of rescuing from its own stubborn backwardness.

⁸⁵ Ch'ong S'ongh'ui, "Nongch'on ch'onggak ky'orhon munje nong'op sally'oya p'ullinda [Resuscitation of agriculture to solve rural bachelors' marriage problem]," *Tonga ilbo*, June 24, 1989.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the plight of poor farmers struggling to get married comes to be represented and circulated in public culture as a crisis of masculinity that must be resolved with aid from outside the villages. Thus, while grass-roots farmer mobilizations for systematic reform to alleviate enduring rural socio-economic marginalization receives little public attention, urban consumers are able to view these public culture representations—of pitiable single men in need of outside assistance—from a safe and comfortable distance. The following chapter will analyze how public anxiety over the rural marriage problem escalates even further as the Korean economy neoliberalizes in the 1990s-2000s, leading to calls to resolve the problem by introducing Korean rural bachelors to willing brides from abroad.

CHAPTER 4: CRISIS AVERTED? RURAL MARGINALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGES IN NEOLIBERAL KOREA

This chapter analyzes how the push to address Korean rural bachelors' difficulties in finding a wife by encouraging international marriages beginning in the 1990s overlooks underlining issues of rural socioeconomic marginalization. In order to contextualize the rise of international marriages in rural Korea, this chapter will begin by briefly overviewing the neoliberalization and crises of the Korean economy in the 1990s. This section posits that this turn to neoliberalism constructs an environment in which the Korean neoliberal subject is confronted with uncertainty and anxiety over the lack of stability in Korea's position in the global marketplace. This anxiety, then, manifests in public concern over the ability of Korea's agriculture—mainly rice—to withstand the rigors of the international free market economy. Concern over the viability of rice, in conjunction with a declining fertility rate, then erupts in a public narrative of a crisis in the countryside in which the poor rice farmer—already failing to compete against lower cost or higher quality agricultural imports—also fails in his attempts in the Korean marriage market. The second section of this chapter details how the Korean state and public seek to resolve this crisis by promoting international marriages between male Korean farmers and foreign female marriage migrants. The third section then addresses how while the efforts to promote international marriages in the 1990s and 2000s were successful in increasing the marriage rate throughout the countryside, the state's celebration of multiculturalism in the 2000s obfuscates significant social problems, including the implications for reconstituting national identity and enduring rural socioeconomic marginalization.

Crisis and Protest in the Wake of Trade Liberalization

This section frames state support of international marriages as a salve for public alarm over male farmers' singlehood within the context of a neoliberalizing economy. I begin this

section by overviewing changes in Korea’s national leadership and policy shifts before introducing my approach to neoliberalism in Korea. Then, this section overviews major facets of Korea’s neoliberal turn, focusing on its liberalizing trade policies, economic crises, and resistance to these shifts in the 1990s-2000s. The purpose of this section is to highlight how the rural socioeconomic marginalization institutionalized in previous decades amplifies during this period.

My approach to Korea’s rapid transition to late capitalism is rooted in Korea’s transformation from an agrarian to neoliberal society. Scholars such as David Harvey highlight how national economies worldwide became increasingly interconnected from the 1980s-on through trade agreements—which removed protective measures that proponents of neoliberalism consider as barriers to trade—and global financial institutions—which regulate adherence to standards to maintain unimpeded global capital flows. The WTO (World Trade Organization) and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) are the two primary mechanisms through which these standards are implemented. Harvey notes that the degree of neoliberalization is unevenly distributed worldwide—with economies adopting neoliberal standards in a piecemeal manner—and moreover emphasizes that “financial crises were both endemic and contagious” in this global structure.¹ For example, Harvey pinpoints the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis as a “classic case” of how “capitalism perpetually creates its own ‘other’ in order to feed upon it.”² In Harvey’s approach to neoliberalism, regional economic crises are a vital component to a process of “accumulation by dispossession” for capitalists to maintain their dominant position in global economic unevenness. Diverging from Harvey’s focus on approaching this process as an

¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94.

² David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 151.

international campaign of “consent to coercion” manipulated by capitalists in the US and UK, this chapter considers the local social implications in Korea for these financial policies. Lisa Rofel, for example, explores how neoliberalism in post-socialist China creates a desiring subject “who will help usher in a new era in China” in “official, intellectual, and popular discourses” in *Desiring China*.³ If neoliberalism manifests in the creation of a desiring subject in post-socialist China, then, this chapter posits that an anxious subject emerges in post-democratized and post-financial crisis Korea. This anxiety, then, manifests in concern over the plight of the rural bachelor and attempts to solve his marriage crisis as a stand-in for public concern over the Korean nation’s ability to weather the rigors of the global neoliberal marketplace. While overlooking the fundamental root of rural socioeconomic marginalization, the state, religious organizations, and commercial organizations in the 1990s and 2000s focus on the short-sighted solution of wedding poor farmers to foreign women to maintain social stability in remote rural villages—which will be addressed in greater detail in the following section.

Cracks in Korea’s economy developed and quickly fissured in the 1990s as the nation shifted from state-led developmental authoritarianism to less regulation and opening up to foreign markets. The presidency of Kim Young Sam (1993-1998) is notable for many developments, including the first sustained transfer of power between opposition parties in a presidential election and the first election of a civilian-led presidency since Syngman Rhee’s election in 1948. The Kim administration promulgated a policy of *seggyehwa* (globalization) in

³ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3. Rofel elaborates that her take on desire can be seen as an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault: “Foucault eschews this universalizing essentialism, seeking instead to understand how and when Western societies defined it as such in their search for the truth of their humanity. On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari are interested in the relationship between multiple desires and capitalism. Foucault has no interest in capitalism. Furthermore, he tends to narrow the meaning of desire to sexual desire, whereas Deleuze and Guattari consider ‘desire’ to encompass a broad range of social practices and relations. My approach to desire combines Foucault’s anti-essentialism with Deleuze and Guattari’s opening out of the category.” *Ibid.*, 211-213.

1992 and entered into negotiations in the 1994 Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations—which created the WTO—to liberalize its trade policies, pledging to lower barriers to agricultural imports by 1997 and even further by 2004. Farmer activists effectively utilized rice as a symbol of national identity, equating the opening of the domestic rice market to unregulated international trade as tantamount to an attack on Korean identity. GATT-focused protests emerged in the wake of growing farmer-mobilization momentum: the National League of Farmers Associations (*Chŏn'guk nongminhoe ch'ong yŏnmaeng*) was established in 1987 as an organization to unify farmer-led movements nationwide and farmer-members of the NACF were finally granted the right to elect their cooperative heads in 1988. Nancy Abelmann highlights how in addition to growing concerns over agriculture, newspapers in the period of GATT negotiations began revealing “other more general anxieties, including food security, the unsuitability of foreign rice for Korean consumption, the environment, and suspicions that foreign rice is contaminated.”⁴ In the wake of nationwide protests, the Korean government did not acquiesce entirely to the recommendations of GATT participants and maintained some of its trade barriers against free trade. Nevertheless, while some economists criticized the state for persisting in maintaining illiberal domestic protections to restrict capital flows—“only 4 per cent of the rice market would be open by 2004”⁵—national imports of rice skyrocketed from “51,000 tons to 205,000 tons” within a decade.”⁶

⁴ Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 224.

⁵ Daljit Singh and Reza Siregar, eds., *ASEAN and Korea: Emerging Issues in Trade and Investment Relations* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 163.

⁶ Sukjong Hong and Fuzhi Cheng, “Trade Liberalization in South Korea’s Rice Sector: Some Policy Implications” (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2007), 1.

Table 4-1. Korean Firms' Overseas Financing

(Unit: \$ million, no. of cases)

Classification	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996		1997	
	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.
Loan	2,728	47	3,387	47	7,955	93	7,601	159	11,783	280	10,317	186
Floating Rate Bonds	545	11	1,160	20	3,318	41	5,965	68	6,991	66	5,193	45
Fixed Rate Bonds	2,424	11	4,464	20	2,645	27	4,826	23	7,091	32	7,994	36
Equity Linked Bonds	639	10	916	15	1,857	34	2,286	52	2,738	45	1,875	23
Total	6,366	78	9,927	112	15,775	195	20,678	302	28,603	423	25,332	289

Source: Korea Development Bank (1998), *The Review of International Finance*, various issues.⁷

As Korea lowered its trade barriers and accrued more foreign debt, it grew increasingly vulnerable to market shifts. Critics place the ability for Korean conglomerates (*chaeböl*) to accrue high debt-to-equity ratios to “excessive dependence on government regulated debt-financing methods alongside the government’s implicit or explicit loan guarantee” since the 1960s.⁸ For example, Table 4-1 details how the level of debt Korean firms owed to overseas financing increased dramatically on a yearly basis—leading the Korean economy increasingly vulnerable to fluctuations in the global marketplace—up until the bubble burst in 1997. By the election of Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003), the long-time opposition and democracy leader confronted the regional financial crisis that spread from Thailand to across Asia in 1997. As conglomerates and the central bank were unable to repay their international creditors, Korea turned to the IMF for a bailout loan to pay off its debt in exchange for adhering to the IMF’s

⁷ Yong Sae Lee and Yongseung Jung, *Financial Crisis and Industrial Policy in Korea* (Seoul: Institute for Global Economics, 2000), 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

“universal application of tighter budget policies.”⁹ As Anna Tsing describes how moments of crisis are “a time for realignments within capitalism,” the Kim Dae Jung administration adhered to IMF mandates and oversaw the restructuring of the national economy to be more flexible and open to foreign capital investment.¹⁰ This was a humiliating blow for an economy that had just begun celebrating an “era of \$10,000” (*manbul sidae*, in reference to South Korea reaching an annual per capita income of \$10,000). In this process of restructuring, the nation underwent a dramatic shift in the face of widespread bankruptcies and layoffs, with widespread protests against the “IMF conditionality.” In the midst of the national financial and social restructuring, Korean agriculture—particularly rice—continued to remain a powerful symbol of national identity. Pak Kwang-sŏ stresses that as Korean agriculture and the agricultural structures represent the Korean economic structure in the midst of the IMF, reforms must be made to protect it.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Korean government reduced its role in keeping the domestic rice more competitively priced over imported rice. Government purchase of rice is a significant protection measure of the domestic agriculture market. Table 4-2 details how the rate of rice purchased by the government dropped as rice production fell, with the government purchasing 20.5% of domestic rice in 1985 and only 10.6% by 2003. Despite domestic protests against increasing the neoliberalization of the national economy, Korea began negotiations with the US in 2006 and signed the KORUS FTA in 2007.¹² The KORUS FTA lowered trade barriers to

⁹ Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁰ Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 42.

¹¹ Pak Kwang-sŏ, “IMF sidae ūi nongch’ŏn kyŏngje chinhŭng chŏllyak [Strategies for rural economic revitalization during the IMF period],” *Kukt’o*, no. 198 (April 1998): 16.

¹² Terms of the treaty were renegotiated in 2010 under the presidency of Lee Myung Bak (2008-2013).

increase Korean exports into the US while also allowing for the greater market penetration of US agricultural imports.

Table 4-2. Government Purchase of Rice, 1985-2003

Indicator	(Thousands of metric tons)						
	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
Rice Production (A)	5,626	5,606	4,695	5,291	5,515	4,927	4,451
Government Purchase (B)	1,153	1,203	792	456	416	397	472
B/A (%)	20.5	21.5	16.9	8.6	7.5	8.1	10.6

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries.

As the national economy struggled to overcome the financial crisis, Koreans were asked to sacrifice on behalf of the nation, including a widely successful campaign to collect gold donations as a means for everyday citizens to do their part in repaying the national debt. Anthropologist Jesook Song analyzes how the Kim Dae Jung administration mobilized intellectuals, activists, and civil servants to construct a neoliberal welfare state that emphasized individuals to “collectively choose an optimal form of social management in pursuit of common good and economic prosperity” in order to relieve the social unrest.¹³ The state funded social relief institutions to address urban problems like unemployment and homelessness that for Song is “as much an epistemological transition as an organizational change” by including the middle-class in government driven civil movements.¹⁴ Despite the scope of this change, Song also highlights how these institutions overlooked the needs of large segments of society. For example, women were not deemed worthy of being categorized as “IMF homeless”—and thus deserving of social welfare—because they were instead “rootless” and “vagabonds” who live “outside of normative family and gender roles.”¹⁵ This neoliberal welfare state expanded even

¹³ Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

further under the Roh Moo Hyun government (2003-2008), including the establishment of a Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (*Yŏsŏng kajok bu*) in 2005. A huge surge of anti-American protests also rose up during the Roh period after the acquittal of two U.S. servicemen who were driving an armored vehicle that ran over and killed two schoolgirls. The anti-American protests focused on calling for a more equitable balance of power in the alliance between the US and Korea, the U.S. Forces, Korea (USFK), which Katherine Moon argues is the result of a “redistribution of power within Korea.”¹⁶ Chaibong Hahm contends that one of the long-term factors behind the anti-Americanism is a “deep-seated sense of anxiety regarding Korean identity” that posits America as a neo-imperialist aggressor.”¹⁷ Within the context of Korea’s rapid transformation into an industrialized economy, bursts of frustration and anxiety emerged in protest against the state, the US, and international financial institutions after the 1990s. Amidst these dramatic changes, rice continued to be a symbol of national identity that was utilized by protesting farmer-activists. When reports over declining birth rates and growing population of aging rural bachelors circulated in the news media, then, public calls to save rural bachelors from their marriage crisis swiftly spread, for if those farmers nobly toiling in the Korean soil to grow rice to feed the nation are struggling in globalized Korea, the health of the very nation was perceived to be at stake.

The Rise of International Marriages and Reconfiguration of the Korean Countryside

This section will detail how international marriages came to be the agreed upon solution to the rural bachelors’ marriage crisis by the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1990s-2000s. This section begins with a brief overview of how Korea transitioned from a

¹⁶ Katherine H.S. Moon, *Protesting America: Democracy and the U.S.-Korea Alliance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 3.

¹⁷ Chaibong Hahm, “Anti-Americanism, Korean Style,” in *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics*, ed. David I. Steinberg (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 229.

primarily out-migration nation to a destination point for regional migration from the colonial period through the 1960s. Korean public culture erupted in concern over the symbol of generational rural socio-economic marginalization, plummeting fertility rates, and anxiety over the viability of Korean agriculture in a free market structure: the rural bachelor (*nongch'on ch'onggak*) or aging bachelor (*noch'onggak*). This section will outline major policies adopted to address this perceived crisis through promoting marriages with foreign brides. While these marriages may have originally been a last resort to maintain stability in the countryside, the influx of female marriage migrants and the children of these unions is fundamentally reconfiguring rural Korean society.

In addition to massive migration to labor throughout the Japanese empire, the late colonial period marked a stage of encouraging assimilation into the empire through marriage with imperial subjects.¹⁸ This early instance of state-supported international marriages in Korea began during the period of wartime mobilization in the wake of the launch of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, after which Koreans were encouraged to labor and fight as Japanese imperial subjects under the ideology of *naesŏn ilch'e* (內鮮一體, J. *naissen ittai*, Japan and Korea as one body). Marriages between Korean and Japanese imperial subjects were encouraged and were referred to as *naesŏn kyŏrhon* (內鮮結婚).¹⁹ Inter-marriages between Koreans and Japanese were promoted with such strategies as Governor General Minami Jirō's (1936-1942) proclamation that "it must be that the outward appearance, spirit, blood, and flesh are all

¹⁸ For a more comprehensive history of Korean labor during the colonial period, see Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Works in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 25–66.

¹⁹ While *nae* refers to Japanese, *sŏn* refers to Koreans.

united”²⁰ and the legal sanction of these marriages in 1939.²¹ According to literary scholar Cho Chin-ki, while the Name Change Policy (1939) focused on uniting through outward appearances, intermarriages promoted the unity of Korean and Japanese flesh and blood.²² Unions between Korean men and Japanese women in particular were encouraged, for Korean men were considered by the state as able to “help as middlemen between Japan and Korea.”²³ The 1920 intermarriage between crowned Prince Ŭimin (Yi Ŭn, reign name: Yōngch’in) of the Taehan Empire (1897-1910) and Princess Pang-ja (J: Masako) was the most prominent of these wedded unions, which literary scholar Su Yun Kim notes “shocked the nation, breaking what was believed to be 500 years of Chosŏn Kingdom’s pure royal blood lineage through mixture with that of the foreign colonizer.”²⁴ These marriages were further promoted through the publication of the Japanese-language magazine *Naisen ittai* (1940-1944) and features in various newspaper articles throughout the empire. Yet the recorded statistics of intermarriages, roughly numbers 1,200 in 1937 and 5,700 in 1941 suggest that the idea of intermarriage was “more public and visible than its actual practice in the population” as an ideal path to take for greater assimilation.²⁵

²⁰ Cho Chin-ki, “Naesŏn ilch’e ũi silch’ŏn kwa naesŏn kyŏrhon sosŏl [The practice of naesŏn ilch’e and intermarriage fiction],” *Hanminjokŏ munhak* 50 (2007): 438.

²¹ Kim Mi-yŏng, “Ilche kangjŏmgi naesŏn yŏnae (kyŏrhon) sosŏl e nat’anan Ilbon yŏsŏng e kwanhan p’yosang yŏn’gu [A study on the representations of Japanese women in Japanese Imperial period inter-love (marriage) fiction],” *Uri mal kŭl* 41 (2007): 248.

²² Cho, “Naesŏn ilch’e ũi silch’ŏn kwa naesŏn kyŏrhon sosŏl [The Practice of naesŏn ilch’e and intermarriage fiction],” 438.

²³ Su Yun Kim, “Romancing Race and Gender: Intermarriage and the Making of a ‘Modern Subjectivity’ in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945” (PhD dissertation, UC San Diego, 2009), 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

The post-liberation occupation of the southern half of the Korean peninsula by the US military marked a shift in the Korean marriage and migration policy. The primary type of international marriage during this time was between a Korean female and a non-Korean male—typically a US G.I. This relationship often received severe criticism for the stigmatized association with sex work outside the borders of military camp towns (*kijich'on*) in Korea. In the early years of the Korea-US relationship, however, the state established sex work as a type of “patriotic labor” because Korean women became “personal ambassadors to the many GIs with whom they came in contact.”²⁶ There was also a steady stream of overseas adoption in the post-war years from a “mass exodus of mixed-race war orphans of the immediate postwar period, the economic orphans of the 1960s and 1970s, and finally, the children born to single women” since the 1980s.²⁷

Korean marriage patterns continued in this manner, in which Korean women marry non-Korean men—primarily from the US and Japan—and immigrate out of Korea as part of the *jet'ŭgi* (jet airplane) era of migration out of Korea. While Koreans continued to immigrate for economic motivations to the US, the Korean diaspora also spread to Germany, Brazil, and more recently Canada and Australia. By the 1980s, however, Korea began experiencing domestic labor shortages for construction projects in the lead up to the Asian World Games and the Olympics. As the Korean economy and labor force grew more industrialized, then, growing

²⁶ Mary Lee, “Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family,” *Korean Studies* 32 (2008): 66.

²⁷ Eleana Kim, “Beyond Motherlands and Mother Love: Locating Korean Adoptees in Global Korea,” in *Multicultural Korea? Multiculturalism, Migration, and Peoplehood Diversity in Contemporary South Korea*, ed. John Lie (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Institute of East Asian Studies, 2014), 166. For a more comprehensive history of overseas Korean adoption, see Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

numbers of migrants travelled to labor in Korea in the 1980s.²⁸ By the 1990s, Korea relaxed its immigration policies to allow for more in-migration of unskilled labor. Table 4-3 details how the number of migrant workers skyrocketed from 18,402 in 1990 to 335,129 in 2002, primarily from undocumented migrant workers. The majority of this early wave of migrant labor to Korea is Filipinos and ethnically Korean Chinese nationals (Chosŏnjok), with Chosŏnjok comprising 59.3% of overall female migrant workers in Korea in 1993. While the growing female migrant population in Korea continued growing in the 1990s—primarily engaged in the manufacturing sector and domestic service sector—the state and public focused on addressing a growing population of female marriage migrants (*kyŏrhon iminja*) wedded to Korean men. As Korea became increasingly more industrialized, its birthrate also started dropping. After state-driven campaign to lower the birthrate in the 1960s and 70 with Korean women having an average 4.5 children, the fertility rate dropped to 2.08 in 1983 and 1.2 in 2003, which is the lowest of all OECD member nations. Demographer Elizabeth Hervey Stephen describes Korea’s declining fertility rate as “one of the most dramatic in the world.”²⁹ In addition to the declining fertility rate, the impact of decades of rural socioeconomic marginalization were manifesting in a decline in marriage rates for Korean men in the countryside. The only solution in newspaper articles reporting on the rural marriage crisis in the late 1980s and early 1990s are not with the bachelors themselves; *rather*, the reporters highlight the need for top-down policy measures or local community gatherings to encourage young Korean women to rethink their plans to live in

²⁸ For a more comprehensive analysis of Korea’s migration and diaspora history, see Hijoo Son, “Casting Diaspora: Cultural Production and Korean Identity Construction” (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2009), 55–156; Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

²⁹ Elizabeth Hervey Stephen, “Bracing for Low Fertility and a Large Elderly Population in South Korea,” Academic Paper (Seoul: Korea Economic Institute, April 18, 2012), 1.

cities.³⁰ Although the rural Korea and urban centers were growing increasingly connected—rural studies specialist Im Hyŏng-paek and economist Yi Sŏng-u detail how highway developments and increase in personal car ownership have led to higher rates of commuting between cities and the countryside, particularly after the 1990s “from the city to the countryside, to the countryside from the city, from one part of the countryside to another”—the gap in development remained a significant barrier.³¹

Table 4-3. Number of Migrant Workers by Status, 1990-2002

Year	Industrial trainees				Undocumented		Total migrant workers	
	Trainees	Regular workers						
1990	0	-	-	-	18,402	-	18,402	-
1991	599	-	-	-	41,877	-	42,476	-
1992	4,945	-	-	-	65,528	-	70,473	-
1993	8,048	(27.7)	-	-	54,508	(32.5)	62,556	(31.9)
1994	24,050	(31.3)	-	-	48,231	(30.7)	72,281	(30.9)
1995	42,716	(35.6)	-	-	83,103	(33.0)	125,819	(33.9)
1996	46,790	(32.4)	-	-	129,054	(32.1)	175,819	(32.2)
1997	61,416	(30.6)	-	-	148,048	(31.9)	209,464	(31.5)
1998	41,820	(33.5)	-	-	99,537	(34.6)	141,357	(34.3)
1999	52,944	(31.5)	-	-	135,338	(35.5)	196,433	(34.8)
2000	69,492	(29.2)	2,068	(24.2)	188,995	(36.0)	260,550	(34.1)
2001	43,855	(30.4)	8,065	(20.6)	255,206	(35.9)	307,126	(34.7)
2002	33,699	(30.0)	12,191	(22.1)	289,239	(36.3)	335,129	(35.1)

Source: Ministry of Justice³²

According to a 1989 survey reported in the newspaper *Kyŏngnyang sinmun*, 80.4% of polled rural men stated that they had difficulty getting married, citing their dire economic situation as

³⁰ Chŏng Sŏnghŭi, “Nongch’ on ch’onggak kyŏrhon munje nongŏp sallyŏya p’ullinda [Resuscitation of Agriculture to Solve Rural Bachelors’ Marriage Problem],” *Tonga ilbo*, June 24, 1989.

³¹ Im Hyŏng-paek and Yi Sŏng-u, *Nongch’ on saehoe ŭi hwankyŏng kwa kinŭng* [The Environment and Function of Rural Society] (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2004), 388.

³² Hye-Kyung Lee, “Changing Trends in Paid Domestic Work in South Korea,” in *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, ed. Shirlena Huang, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Noor Abdul Rahman (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), 348.

reason for their lack of marriage prospects.³³ This phenomenon is also reported in Japan where, since the 1960s, young women have been moving out of agricultural and fishing villages and “leaving to find happiness in cities.”³⁴ Marriage prospects for rural bachelors are so bleak that one rural bachelor declares that in order to get married, “even if it’s ‘*possam*’ (literally, placing a sack over a woman and dragging her off), I’m willing!”³⁵ Soon, international marriages in which male Korean nationals marry female non-Korean nationals) were narrated as the solution to the marriage crisis.

The Korean state reformed its citizenship and migration policies to accommodate and support this change in marriage patterns. In line with the “paradigmatic shift” in cultural policy with Kim Young Sam’s push for *seggyehwa*, the Korean Nationality Law was revised in 1997—for the first time since its creation—to expand Korean nationality so it could be transferred through either the Korean national mother or father of a child.³⁶ Previously, nationality could only be passed to children through patrilineal descent, creating a significant stateless population in Korea.³⁷ Tables 4-4, 4-5, and 4-6 detail the dramatic rise in marriages between male Korean nationals and female foreigners in the 1990s and 2000s.

³³ (No author credited), “Öttön salin [A kind of murder],” *Kyōnghyang sinmun*, 26 December 1989.

³⁴ “Foreign Press,” “İlsōdo sigol ch’onggak changga ponaegi undong [Movement to Send Village Bachelors to Marriage in Japan Also],” *Kyōnghyang sinmun*, 15 July 1982.

³⁵ Chang Ch’ōlho, “‘Possam’ irado haeogo sip’ōyo [Even If It’s *Possam*, I’m Willing],” *Tonga ilbo*, April 3, 1985, sec. Society.

³⁶ Son, “Casting Diaspora: Cultural Production and Korean Identity Construction,” 133.

³⁷ In Seop Chung et al., “The Treatment of Stateless Persons and the Reduction of Statelessness: Policy Suggestions for the Republic of Korea,” *Korea Review of International Studies* 13 (2010): 7–30.

Table 4-4. Number of Foreign Spouses of Korean Nationals by Gender and Nationality, 1990-2005

	1990-1999	2000-2005	Total	%
<i>Foreign wives</i>				
American	3,629	1,719	5,348	3.3%
Japanese	10,118	6,787	16,905	10.6%
Chinese	37,171	70,163	107,334	67.1%
Filipino	1,593b	4,623	6,216	3.9%
Vietnamese	—	10,392	10,392	6.5%
Thai	—	1,727	1,727	1.1%
Mongolian	—	1,773	1,773	1.1%
Russian	—	1,329	1,329	0.8%
Other	3,116	5,802	8,918	5.6%
TOTAL	55,627	104,315	159,942	100.0%
<i>Foreign husbands</i>				
American	12,209	7,435	19,644	24.3%
Japanese	19,266	15,962	35,228	43.6%
Chinese	2,010	10,574	12,584	15.6%
Pakistani	—	681a	681a	0.8%
Bangladeshi	—	696a	696a	0.9%
Filipino	—	121a	121a	0.1%
Nepali	—	116a	116a	0.1%
Other	3,951	7,792	11,743	14.5%
TOTAL	37,436	43,377	80,813	100.0%

Source: KNSO (1999-2005).³⁸

a KNSO (2006).

b CFO (2004).

—: not classified

³⁸ Hye-Kyung Lee, "International Marriage and the State in South Korea: Focusing on Governmental Policy," *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 1 (February 2008): 111.

Table 4-5. Comparison of Number of International Marriages to Total Number of Marriages per year, 2000-2008

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Marriages in Year	332,090	318,407	304,877	302,503	308,598	314,304	330,634	343,559	327,715
Total Marriages w/ Foreigners	11,605	14,523	15,202	24,776	34,640	42,356	38,759	37,560	36,204
Korean man + foreign woman	6,945	9,684	10,608	18,751	25,105	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163
Korean woman + foreign man	4,660	4,839	4,504	6,025	9,535	11,637	9,094	8,980	8,041

Source: KNSO (2008).

Table 4-6. Number of Marriages between Korean Husbands and Foreign Brides by Year and Country of Bride's Origin, 2000-2008

Country of Origin for Bride	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total for Country (2000-2008)
China	3,566	6,977	7,023	13,347	18,489	20,582	14,566	14,484	13,203	112,237
Vietnam	77	134	474	1,402	2,461	5,822	10,128	6,610	8,282	35,390
Philippines	1,174	502	838	928	947	980	1,117	1,497	1,857	9,840
Japan	819	701	690	844	809	883	1,945	1,206	1,162	9,059
Cambodia	*	*	*	19	72	157	394	1,804	659	3,105
Thailand	240	182	327	345	324	266	271	524	633	3,112
Mongolia	64	118	194	320	504	561	594	745	521	3,621
Uzbekistan	43	66	183	328	247	332	314	351	492	2,356
Others	962	1,004	969	1,252	1,252	1,136	1,236	1,359	1,354	10,524
Total for year	6,945	9,684	10,698	18,751	25,105	30,719	29,665	28,580	28,163	

Source: KNSO (2000-2008).

* included in "others"

After 2002 and rise of commercial agencies "from 2001 to 2009, the total number of marriage migrants in Korea grew nearly five-fold from 25,182 to 125,087, where nearly 88 percent were women. At the end of 2010, the Korean government reported 141,654 marriage

migrants residing in Korea.”³⁹ This is a significant difference from earlier patterns, in which international marriage broker agencies targeted introducing Korean females to potential non-Korean husbands.⁴⁰ The Nationality Law was revised once again in 2002 to allow foreigners with “exceptional talent,” Koreans who received dual citizenship at birth, overseas Koreans over 65, and marriage migrants married to a Korean national to receive Korean nationality. This was an unprecedented opening up of Korean national identity in the face of a surge of international marriages with Korean male nationals.

Table 4-7. Female Marriage Migrants' Length of Marriage, 1990-2007

Length of Marriage	No. of Persons	Percentage
Less than 1 year	74	24.3
Less than 1-3 years	117	38.5
Less than 3-5 years	56	18.4
Less than 5-10 years	36	11.8
More than 10 years	14	4.6
No response	7	2.3
Total	304	100.00
Average: 35.71 months	Shortest: 2 months	Longest: 255 months

Source: Kim Ūn-mi, Yang Ok-kyōng Yang, and Yi Hae-yōng, *Tamunhwa sahoe, Han'guk* [Multicultural Society of Korea] (Seoul: Nanam ch'ulp'an, 2009), 119.

Additional state support from budget to service these “multicultural families,” with 107 billion won to establish multicultural family support centers across the country to assimilate these.

Additional state regulation of the international marriage market developed under the Roh administration, placing restrictions on marriage brokers and instilling such requirements as requiring the foreign bride to be able to speak Korean and limiting marriage visa requests to once every five years and contingent upon demonstrating ability to financially support the future

³⁹ Erin Aeran Chung and Daisy Kim, “Citizenship and Marriage in a Globalizing World: Multicultural Families and Monocultural Nationality Laws in Korea and Japan,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 209–210.

⁴⁰ Sō Ho-ch'ōl, “Kukje kyōrhon chunggae changch'i ūi hyōngsang: myōt kaji yōksa kyegi tūl [The formation of cross-border marriage brokers: a few historical moments],” *Sahoe wa yōksa* 91 (2011): 99–151.

spouse.⁴¹ Confronting such hardships as enduring poverty, xenophobic racism, domestic violence, and language barriers, these international marriages often ended in a quick divorce, with 38.5% of marriages lasting between 1-3 years and 24.3% of marriages lasting less than one year (Table 4-7). While the push to marry rural Korean men off to foreign brides may have been an attempt to alleviate anxiety over the prospect of the stability of the Korean heartland, it ultimately is reconfiguring the social makeup of the countryside. In a region once considered ethnically homogenous and removed from the pressures of urban cosmopolitanism, by 2008, “one in five children is born into a mixed family in a rural area,” reconfiguring the social landscape of rural Korea.⁴²

Obfuscation under the Banner of Multiculturalism

The final section of this chapter is divided into two subsections in order to analyze more closely how the rise of international marriages in neoliberal Korea does little to alleviate the rural marginalization at the heart of rural bachelors’ marriage difficulties. The first sub-section begins by demonstrating how public culture representations of these relationships celebrate a sense of triumphal multiculturalism—that celebrates Korea as an advanced nation that respects its cultural traditions while also expanding its identity to include a more diverse ethnic and cultural makeup. This portion of the dissertation will focus on two prominent representations in the 2000s that demonstrate how this celebratory narrative of Korea as a multicultural society glides over the complex underlying issues that remain unresolved by state policies, including questions of race, national identity, and the enduring development gap between the countryside and urban centers. The second subsection will highlight local attempts to improve rural living standards through

⁴¹ “Farmed Out: Korean Men Are Marrying Foreigners More from Choice than Necessity,” *The Economist*, May 24, 2014.

⁴² Lee, “Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family,” 58.

sustainable development methods that are overlooked by the state's focus on assimilating multicultural families into normative Korean society.

Re-establishing Stable Korean Households in Public Culture Narratives of Multiculturalism

In the wake of recovery from the 1997 IMF crisis and surge in migrant labor population, the neoliberal welfare state expanded even further during the Roh Moo Hyun administration to transform Korea into a “multicultural” (*tamunhwa*) society. The Roh administration announced several major policy changes as part of a “Grand Plan” to coordinate between state ministries over issues including regulation of international marriage agencies, support, orientation, and social welfare for foreign wives, support for children of international marriages in schools, and raising social awareness of multicultural issues.⁴³ Multicultural Family Support Centers (*tamunhwa kajok chiwŏn sent'a*) have been established nation-wide to service this growing demographic. Hyun Mee Kim argues, however, that state involvement in cross-border marriages is merely a superficial solution to deeper problems in rural society. While this state intervention is designed to promote the continuation of normative families, the short-term solution does not address issues of racial discrimination against members of these “multicultural” families or the structural socioeconomic factors of contemporary rural bachelorhood. By “rushing rural men off into the international marriage market instead of making long-term policies that would help improve rural areas,” officials are treating the symptom and not the cause of marginalization in rural communities.⁴⁴ International marriages and the non-normative families they create remain an object of fascination in the 2000s, but the surge in public anxiety pressuring state and NGO

⁴³ Chung and Kim, “Citizenship and Marriage in a Globalizing World: Multicultural Families and Monocultural Nationality Laws in Korea and Japan,” 217.

⁴⁴ Hyun Mee Kim, “The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of ‘Multicultural Families’ in Contemporary Korea,” *Korea Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 110.

support to address declining marriage rates in rural Korea quickly gave way to a sense of relief and accomplishment that the marriage crisis was swiftly resolved. *The Golden Bride* and *My Wedding Campaign* are two representative texts of how this sense of successful resolution of a social crisis through international marriages overlooks enduring social problems that local communities still face.

The Problem of South Korean Bachelors: Disabled Masculinity

Even though I look fine, I'm not normal.

Kang Chun-u, The Golden Bride

Please find us young women.

Even if it's possam (stealing a bride), I'm willing.

Farmers are people, too. Let us get married.

*Unnamed rural bachelors*⁴⁵

The Golden Bride (*Hwanggŭm sinbu*) is the story of how a physically and socially handicapped young bachelor is brought back to health through marriage to a young Vietnamese bride. The widely watched serialized television “drama” (*tŭrama*),⁴⁶ SBS from November 2007 to February 2008, was extended from 50 to 64 episodes due to its popularity and reached a peak of 30.2% of total viewership for its timeslot, according to AGB Nielson Media.⁴⁷ *The Golden Bride* is the story of the union between Chin-chu Nguyen, a young half-Korean Vietnamese

⁴⁵ Kang Unghŭi, “Ch’ŏnyŏ chom kuhae chusyŏyo’ sigol noch’ongak sŏnghwa e [‘Please Find Us Young Women’ The Problem for Old Village Bachelors],” *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, June 2, 1984; Chang Ch’ŏlho, “‘Possam’ irado haeogo sip’ŏyo [Even If It’s *Possam*, I’m Willing],” *Tonga ilbo*, April 3, 1985; Chairman of Research Institute for Korea’s Farming and Fishing Villages, “Nongch’on ch’onggak kyŏrhon taech’aek sok’i sewŏya [We Must Quickly Set Up Marriage Policies for Rural Bachelors],” *Tonga ilbo*, July 24, 1997, sec. Society.

⁴⁶ Regarding the aptness of the genre of melodrama in representing turbulent and tragic periods of Korean history, Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann assert that the emotional excesses of South Korean melodrama “seemed uniquely suited to rendering the nation’s dramatic history and compressed modernity in the second half of the twentieth century.” Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, “Introduction: Gender, Genre, and Nation,” in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, ed. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 4.

⁴⁷ Kim Yongun, “SBS hyoja tŭrama *Hwanggŭm sinbu* 14 hoe yŏnjang kyŏljŏng [Decision to Extend the SBS Filial (High-ratings earner) Drama *The Golden Bride* by 14 Episodes],” *E-daily*, December 27, 2007, <http://starin.edaily.co.kr/news/NewsRead.edy?SCD=EA31&newsid=01203766583362784&DCD=A10102>.

woman, and Kang Chun-u, a young Korean bachelor who unbeknownst to her is suffering from a debilitating agoraphobic social anxiety disorder. Chun-u is so traumatized from being brutally rejected by his first love, independent and business-savvy Ok Chi-yŏng, that he is bound to the confines of his home for fear of inducing an anxiety attack. Chun-u's mother, Chŏng Han-suk, distraught by her only son's impairment, travels to Vietnam to search for a foreign bride who will not only heal him with her love and support, but will enable him to succeed in life. The happy ending of restored patriarchal order within the family thus hinges upon whether or not the international marriage between Chin-chu and Chun-u will heal Chun-u's disabled masculinity. Though not a rural bachelor himself—Chun-u is an urbanite who graduated with a bachelor's degree in business from the prestigious Seoul National University—both he and the rural bachelors are connected by the tragic way in which they are depicted: feeble, lacking, and disabled by modern life to the extent that they cannot attract brides for (and by) themselves. In the span of twenty years, the percentage of the farm population of the total population fell from 61.9% in 1955 to 38.2% in 1975. Whereas the figure the rural bachelor is bound to farmland in this rapid rural depopulation, the constructed ideal male of this time is militarized, industrialized, and by travelling to Saudi Arabia as a migrant laborer or to Vietnam as a soldier, relatively mobile.

The tale of the sweet yet incredibly socially awkward Hong Man-t'aek in the 2005 film by director Hwang Byŏng-kuk *My Wedding Campaign* (*Na ūi kyŏrhon wŏnjŏnggi*) provides another example. Thirty-eight year old Man-t'aek, a farmer bachelor, narrates how that since the age of fifteen—since the trauma of being caught peeping on a woman in the bath by his childhood crush—“for a very, very long time I couldn't look at a woman's face straight,” impairing him from interacting with women from a young age. Yet the shock of this moment

reverberates to his interactions with men. He is an awkward pushover who cannot refuse his neighbor, who cajoles Man-t'aek to drive a plow home for him in the pouring rain while he stays dry and drinks with friends in a local bar. He is a comically tragic figure of disabled masculinity. Anxious that Man-t'aek, a third generation only son of his family (*samdae tokja*) and only hope for carrying on the family name, will never be able to woo a Korean bride if left to his own devices, his family sends him off to be introduced to ethnic Korean women in Uzbekistan. Despite his best efforts, and those of Lara, an interpreter for the introduction services, and her boss, his social anxiety will not relent. Frustrated by Man-t'aek's lack of progress, the male manager upbraids Lara:

MANAGER: When will I ever make money if you sympathize with him? Is this some charity organization? Think I'm doing this for fun?

LARA: Sir, why are you being so hasty? It's only been two days, we're not even halfway.

MANAGER: I just don't see any promise. You saw how they (potential brides] all took off within an hour. This is rare.

LARA: He was still nervous today, and he wasn't feeling well.

MANAGER: Also, do you think the girls are stupid? No matter how Korean they are, who'd want to go marry a farmer who's almost forty? And whether he's eighteen years old or thirty-eight years old, who'd want to live digging dirt these days? Think we'd get a bonus if we hold on to him for a month?

Yet while aimed at his employee Lara, the viewer sees that the insults meet another mark: Man-t'aek. Silently standing under the stairs, looking up at the berating and domineering manager who does not even notice his presence, Man-t'aek overhears every biting word. The manager, who supplements a sizable income from the introduction services with profits from manufacturing counterfeit passports, feels superior over Man-t'aek, mocking his arduous agricultural livelihood as merely "digging dirt."

Similarly in *The Golden Bride*, Chun-u the bachelor is dominated by other men before marriage. Three years after being cast aside by his first love Chi-yŏng, his social anxiety

disorder is still debilitating. Chun-u finally ventures outside of the safety of his home to reenter the corporate world, but sitting in front of an intimidating row of interview panelists in competition for the coveted job opening, he crumbles under the stress of the interview process. When faced with the intimidating authority of his interviewer's questions, Chun-u is incapable of answering and becomes paralyzed by fear to the point that he is overtaken by an anxiety attack and must be rushed to the hospital. The scene hyperbolically represents the great extent to which the disabled bachelor Chun-u is utterly incapable of securing a job or functioning in a world dominated by hegemonic masculinity.

Afflicted by social anxiety disorders, lacking in confidence, unable to earn a respectable income, incapable of carrying on their family name, and dominated by other men, these bachelors are portrayed as suffering from a disabled masculinity that impairs them from attracting brides on their own, and fulfilling their heteronormative role. The figures of women circulated in public culture, who are their potential brides, are also central to the very development of the problem of marriage for these socially disabled bachelors and their potential to overcome it.

The Problem of Single South Korean Women: Disabling Masculinity

Apologize? Is it really that important....Is it entirely my fault that we broke up? If you had accepted it when I said it was over, you wouldn't have ended up like this! Do you even know how horrible and unbearable you were? So before you blame me for making you like this, blame your miserable self. And if that's not enough, blame your worthless parents who made me turn to a rich man!

Chi-yŏng, The Golden Bride

Women are represented as both a problem and solution for bachelors: Korean women dreaming of a better—empowered, mobile, and transnational—life are part of the problem while foreign women, primarily from less economically developed nations than Korea, are the solution for disabled masculinity. Reporting on the rural exodus of young women going to the city, one

Tonga ilbo journalist claims that “many villages have no young people left at all.” And to make matters worse, with the perception that to be a farmer’s wife, one must endure daily hardships and have no hopes for the future, rural families with daughters would rather have “city son-in-laws” (*tosi sawi*) over a son-in-law from a rural community, lest their daughter suffer the same dreary fate as her farmer husband.⁴⁸ This sentiment echoes with the skepticism voiced by the manager of the introduction service in Uzbekistan (cited in the previous section of this paper) over Man-t’aek’s ability to find a willing bride when also he has to offer is a life of hard manual labor. Nobue Suzuki, elaborating on the challenges of single farmers in Japan, highlights how single Japanese women are intimidating figures: “many rural heirs feel discouraged about proposing marriage to Japanese women because they are unsure whether as household ‘heads’ they can support their families.”⁴⁹ While bachelors in these narratives may continue to be single against their will, reports began circulating on the increasing number of women in a rapidly growing economy *choosing* to not marry. Although bachelor farmers may want to marry so much they are willing to kill themselves in protest for being unable to wed, one self-proclaimed and contented “single woman” (*toksin yösöng*) asserts that “single life, just like marriage, is a life choice.”⁵⁰ Whereas the figure of the rural bachelor is immobile, unable to leave his home or country, the women in these narratives are markedly mobile.

With reports on growing numbers of single women, these women are seen as defectors of social conventions, disabling men by choosing to not marry them and leaving behind pitiable

⁴⁸ (No author credited), “Nongch’on ch’onggak changga kagi himdülda sinbugam tosi ro ppachyönaga [Rural Bachelors Having Difficulty Finding Wives, Brides Go to City],” *Tonga ilbo*, July 22, 1980.

⁴⁹ Nobue Suzuki, “Of Love and the Marriage Market: Masculinity Politics and Filipina-Japanese Marriages in Japan,” in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, ed. James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 94.

⁵⁰ Sin Yönsuk, “Kajöng üi hae, kajöng üi tal pyönhwa hanün kajok hyönjang [A year of family, a month of family: the changing family scene],” *Hankyörye sinmun*, May 12, 1994.

rural bachelors in their self-interested quest for their own happiness. Karen Kelsky, regarding the marriage problem (*kekkonnan*) in Japan, argues that, “by turning away from (what they label) ‘traditional’ lifestyles, resisting the expectations of (what they label) ‘traditional’ Japanese men...more and more Japanese women are exploiting their position on the margins of corporate and family systems to engage in a form of ‘defection’ from expected life courses.”⁵¹ There are calls in newspapers for these women to give up their single life, to “please quit it,” with warnings that only a life of loneliness and misery will await them if they do not marry. Another self-proclaimed, yet less contented, “single woman,” who received a graduate degree in sociology from an American university, states that by choosing to remove themselves from the “normative” life path “[in] Korea, women who choose to lead a single life need four times as much energy” as married women to live their independent lives while coping with feelings of constant loneliness.⁵² Mike Donaldson argues that women are also “render[ing] themselves incomplete” because in choosing to forestall marriage, for some perhaps indefinitely, to pursue their own goals rather than conforming to social expectations and conventions, they “must ‘give up’ their femininity in their appropriation of male jobs and power.”⁵³ Departing from Donaldson, I contend that images of single Korean women are not un-feminine. Rather, by choosing to forgo conforming to their heteronormative path of domesticity, these bachelorettes—fashionable, career-driven, transnationally mobile—are glamorous embodiments of an empowered femininity. In their very non-conformity, however, these figure of empowered femininity so thoroughly disrupt the prevailing heteronormative order that they disable the men around them.

⁵¹ Karen Kelsky, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

⁵² (No author credited), “Toksŏn yŏsŏng chebal naebŏryŏ tuseyo [Single Women, Please Quit It],” *Segye ilbo*, September 22, 1997.

⁵³ Mike Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?,” *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (October 1993): 652.

Though not a member of the rural exodus or single woman herself, Ok Chi-yŏng, the femme fatale of *The Golden Bride*, warrants further analysis because of the disabling effect her choices as a self-interested woman have on the bachelor Chun-u. After learning her recently widowed mother lost her father's fortune from being conned by her boyfriend, the fiercely independent and stylish Chi-yŏng decides to proactively work to protect herself by putting herself and her career first above all else and securing her privileged lifestyle through marrying well. That she casts aside Chun-u to become part of the wealthy and powerful Kim family through marrying their eldest son, Yŏng-min, which leads to Chun-u spiraling in to a trauma-induced coma and living with a seemingly incurable debilitating social anxiety disorder, is initially of little concern for Chi-yŏng. The passage quoted at the beginning of this section of the paper is representative of Chi-yŏng's original attitude.

By the end of the series, her marriage and the career she has made for herself in her husband's company unravels as her husband realizes Chi-yŏng's unwillingness to live for anyone but herself and her career, along with the revelation of Chi-yŏng's primary role in causing a debilitating disorder in the once confident and promising Chun-u. After signing her divorce papers with Yŏng-min less than a year after their wedding, she meets with Chun-u, the man she chose to scorn in favor of a more lucrative relationship, repentant of her self-interested behavior:

CHI-YŎNG: I think I know now. It's childish to say, but if you don't have love in your heart, you can't ever be happy. I believed it was love all this time, but I think I loved myself too much to love anyone else. I'm sorry. Forgive me for all the awful things I have done to you. When I look back, I think it's embarrassing and it's something I'd like to erase. I'm sorry.

CHUN-U: At first I hated you, but as time passed, I felt sorry for you. Since you know now, you'll be able to live well.

The words of Chi-yŏng, the disabling figure in the tragic social crippling of Chun-u, echo the warnings of the lonely single woman quoted earlier. Chi-yŏng realizes that her choices have left

her alone. In acknowledging that her choices disabled Chun-u, she receives forgiveness from the victim of her self-interest, yet she remains fiercely loyal to her goal of self-advancement. Within four years of her apology to Chun-u, she has begun a new, more international life for herself with an American boyfriend on her arm and a prestigious job with the United Nations—what Karen Kelsky refers to as imagining the “international” as the direction for the trajectory of women’s “defection.”⁵⁴ Chi-yŏng utilizes her empowered femininity to move beyond the confines of Korean society to a jet-setting transnational life.

Whereas figures of disabled Korean masculinity are passively and negatively affected by their inability to marry, whether they may lead a life of loneliness or contentedness, these Korean women are actively choosing to defect from their expected life course of domesticity and sacrifice to pursue their own happiness. While these choices by Korean women are presented as disabling Korean men from marriage, the choices of another group of women, the so-called “marriage immigrants,” have the potential to enable these bachelors to heal through international matrimony.

The Solution of Foreign Brides: Healing Disabled Masculinity

Your grandmother spent her entire life working hard in the field to support the whole family. The land she worked on became so valuable that people called it the “Golden Land.” Because you have her blood, you’re going to become a good wife. A “Golden Bride,” coming from a “Golden Land.”

Leanne Pham, The Golden Bride

Importation of foreign brides from countries less economically developed and more remote than South Korea, be it through informal social networks, government-sponsored organizations, or professional matchmaking services, is depicted as an attractive avenue to solve the “bride shortage” for rural bachelors and path to restore heteronormative social order. While

⁵⁴ Kelsky, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams*, 3–11.

the majority of marriages between Korean husbands and foreign brides continue to be with (ethnic Korean) spouses from China, the percentage of Vietnamese brides is growing. Chin-chu is one such Vietnamese bride, who as a half-Korean and half-Vietnamese child raised in Vietnam was cruelly taunted for being a “*lai dai*,” a reference to the male, initially military, Korean presence in Vietnam beginning with the Vietnam War (1959-1975).⁵⁵ I argue that Chin-chu, the Vietnamese “golden bride,” is portrayed as proactively negotiating with those in her new community to adapt to her new life and enables her tragically disabled husband to recover his masculinity and lead a successful life by empowering him to take on the mantle of head of his household.⁵⁶

Though a small percentage of total South Korean wedded unions, the media present a great amount of anxiety over these international marriages, focusing much attention on the foreign brides. Anxiety over this figure of the cunning and swindling foreign bride who masterminds *wijang* (camouflage) or *sagi* (fraudulent) marriages for their own economic profit has a strong presence in the media, with reports on growing numbers of “runaway brides” and divorces and in broadcast programs such as the 1993 SBS *Runaway Brides: The Camouflage Marriage that Makes Peasant Men Weep*.⁵⁷ This representation of foreign women as the figure

⁵⁵ The term “*lai dai*” is short for the derogatory term *Lai Daihan* (*Lai*, meaning “mixed blood” and *Daihan* is the Vietnamese pronunciation of *Taehan*, referring to the Korean name for the Republic of Korea, *Taehan min’guk*) describing children of a union between Korean fathers and Vietnamese mothers. For more on the effects of the Korean military presence in Vietnam, see Kim Hyōna, “*Han’gukgun ūi Pet’ūnamjōn ch’amjōn kwa minganin haksal* [The Participation of the Korean Military in the Vietnam War and the Slaughter of Civilians],” in *20-segi Han’guk ūi yaman 2: p’yonghwa wa inkwōn ūi 21-segi rŭl wihayō* [Korea’s Barbarisms of the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: On Behalf of Peace and Human Rights of the Twenty-first Century], edited by Yi Pyōngch’ōn and Yi Kwangil (Seoul: Ilpit, 2001), 41–78.

⁵⁶ Chin-chu’s family background as the child of a Korean businessman and Vietnamese woman enables her to be accepted more easily to be able to assimilate into Korean society—both from characters and viewers alike—and capable of reproducing a Korean household.

⁵⁷ Hwang Ŭipong, “*Yōnbyōn ch’ōnyō e Han’guk namja kyōnggyeryōng* [The Limitations of Korean Men and Yōnbyōn (Yanbian) Young Women],” *Tonga ilbo*, March 25, 1996; Chōng Hŭijōng, “*MBC PD such’ōp ‘Monggol*

of a runaway bride taking advantage of her pitiable husband relegates both members of the marriage to be in an oppressor/victim binary. The foreign bride figure as an objectified victim of patriarchy engenders much anxiety, particularly in academic discourse. Heh-Rahn Park, in her analysis of the formation of *Chosŏnjok* (ethnic Korean) nationality in Yanbian (*Yŏnbyŏn*) located in the People's Republic of China, emphasizes the role of economic factors in the development of this so-called "global marriage market": "The Korean state's promotion of these marriages is a strategy responding to international pressures to open Korean markets to the global economic system" by importing ethnic Korean Chinese for low-skilled labor.⁵⁸ Statistics comparing the number of foreign marriages in South Korea between Korean husbands and Korean wives substantiate what has been termed the "feminization of migration" (*iju ūi yŏsŏnghwa*), in which women are increasingly migrating individually, without following or accompanying male migrants. Although attempting to avoid objectifying "imported brides," Young Hee Kwon argues that the international marriages of which these foreign brides are merely the result of "stifling familism and the traditional kinship system, as well as the conventional idea of marriage, finally overrid[ing] deeply entrenched xenophobia and the age-old aversion to interracial marriage."⁵⁹ Park deplors that "[these] women provide the means for solving an economic problem, yet then become a substitute object which all blame is placed for the unhappy outcomes of the state's contradictory politics."⁶⁰ L.H.M. Ling argues that marriage immigrants

yŏsŏng kwa sagi kyŏrhon' silsang ch'ujŏk [*MBC PD Diary* (such'ŏp) Pursues Actual 'Mongolian Women and Con-marriages']," *Munhwa ilbo*, March 27, 2000.

⁵⁸ Heh-Rahn Park, "Narratives of Migration: From the Formation of Korean Chinese Nationality in the PRC to the Emergence of Korean Chinese Migrants in South Korea" (University of Washington, 1996), 217.

⁵⁹ Young Hee Kwon, "Searching to Death for 'Home': A Filipina Immigrant Bride's Subaltern Rewriting," *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 81.

⁶⁰ Park, 222-3.

are but victimized objects of a global hypermasculinity “that not only [exploits] poor, desperate women who have little recourse to escape their circumstances except selling their conjugal ‘services’.”⁶¹ In these articulations of criticisms against a globalized marriage marketplace, the women taking part in these international marriages are objectified as simply powerless victims to forces beyond their control.

Approaching international marriages as merely a process of global hypergamy—foreign brides “marrying up,” sometimes through “illegitimate marriages”—or victimized by a process of “power geometry” of which they are “not in charge of” and structures of upward geographical mobility” overlooks women’s choices in their daily lives.⁶² Caren Freeman, in her critique of the global hypergamy framework formed by an application of the notion of “power geometry,” as articulated by Doreen Massey, to international marriages, highlights how “[if] the farmer bachelor had been a tragic figure in the popular imagination, the brokenhearted farmer deserted by his Chinese wife engendered even more compassion.”⁶³ Suzuki further elaborates on the paradoxes of global hypergamy, arguing that “[neither] one’s gender, generational or sibling rank, class, nationality, or geoeconomic location serves as a clear indicator of ‘up’ or ‘down’ within the context of transnationalization of family relations and in marriage across national borders.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Chōng Hyōnju asserts that viewing the negotiations within

⁶¹ L.M.H. Ling, “Sex Machine: Global Hypermasculinity and Images of the Asian Woman in Modernity,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 7, no. 2 (1999): 294.

⁶² Caren Freeman, “Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosōnjok Brides in South Korea,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 82.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁴ Nobue Suzuki, “Tripartite Desires: Filipina-Japanese Marriages and Fantasies of Transnational Traversal,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 144.

international marriages, of how women's ability to creatively adapt to their environments, will enable a better understanding of the "agency of female marriage immigrants."⁶⁵ For example, the character of Chin-chu from *The Golden Bride* chooses to migrate to Korea out of her own interests, but soon falls in love with her husband and strives to make their marriage a success. Chin-chu creatively negotiates with her surroundings to thrive as a member of her new family and community. Chin-chu very actively engages in the Korean community, removing signals of her foreign-ness: she becomes fluent in Korean and quickly loses her Vietnamese accent, enjoys eating and cooking Korean food on a daily basis, and is even trained by a conservative (and initially somewhat xenophobic) Korean *ttök* (rice cake) master and opens her own Korean rice cake shop (*ttökjip*). Chin-chu's training in traditional hand-made rice cakes also saves her father-in-law's floundering machine-made rice cake business, stabilizing the family economically. Her creative adaptability reflects how, through empowered femininity, Chin-chu actively chooses to be transnationally mobile.

Chin-chu's mobility and ability to choose, in relation to the ailing figure of Chun-u prior to their marriage, further complicates notions of global hypergamy. Whereas Chin-chu is able to immigrate from Vietnam to Korea with relative ease, Chun-u is not even able to board a plane to meet her in Vietnam due to his debilitating agoraphobic social anxiety disorder. In his stead, his mother travels from Korea to Vietnam to find his bride. In her analysis of Chosŏnjok brides, Freeman further elaborates on the relative mobility of these immigrant brides compared to men in their country of origin and Korean husbands, "Chosŏnjok women not only appear to have

⁶⁵ Chŏng Hyonju, "Kyŏnggye rŭl karojirŭ nŭn kyŏrhon kwa yŏsŏng ūi eijŏnsi: kukje kyŏrhon iju yŏn'gu esŏ eijŏnsi rŭl tullŏssan ironjŏk chaengjŏm e taehan pip'anjŏk koch'al [Marriages Traversing Boundaries and Women's Agency: Critical Inquiry of Theoretical Issues Surrounding Agency in Research on Cross-Border Marriage Immigration]," *Han'guk tosi chiri hakhoeji* [Journal of Korean Urban Geographic Studies Association] 12, no. 1 (2009): 110.

greater access to channels of transnational mobility, but the movement of Chosŏnjok women sometimes has immobilizing effects on the men they leave behind.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, whereas Chin-chu chooses to marry Chun-u, even against her mother’s will, Chun-u is forced to relent to his mother’s urges to marry Chin-chu as a means of recovering from his disability out of guilt for all the hardships he has put his family through. Whereas the bachelor Chun-u is immobile and coerced to accept the decisions of others, Chin-chu as a foreign bride is free to move as she pleases and choose her marriage partner on her own accord.

Chin-chu’s active process of negotiation as a foreign bride is what enables her husband to overcome his disability and become the head decision-maker for his family. After the initial euphoria over their socially impaired bachelor son actually completing the nuptial ceremony with a willing women wears off, the family members become aware that Chun-u is still resistant in accepting the marriage he was coerced to engage in is anything but in name only. They grow skeptical that Chin-chu will be able to heal their son and consider sending her back. Yet Chin-chu’s determination is unrelenting; while wearing a traditional Vietnamese *áo dài*, she convinces her in-laws of her ability with a powerful monologue that brings a tear to the eye of every listener of the family:

Vietnamese people, no, Vietnamese women, are like a house that on the day a hurricane blows its doors are all blown open. But even if its doors are opened, no matter how bad the hurricane, it will never collapse. It’s because the hurricane will just pass. I’m a Vietnamese woman. No matter how difficult the situation, I never give up. Till the end, I’ll stay by *ajŏssi*’s side with the same spirit that I have now. *Ajŏssi*, please let us live together.

At the same time that she convinces her in-laws of her determination, Chin-chu also empowers Chun-u—who she endearingly refers to as *ajŏssi* (mister) throughout their marriage—to make

⁶⁶ Freeman, “Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea,” 99.

the determining choice over the fate of their relationship. Although his family initially pressured him into the marriage, Chin-chu ensures that her husband Chun-u make the final decision of whether or not to annul their union. In empowering her husband to enthusiastically engage in the marriage and overcome his disability, Chin-chu effectively enables Chun-u to choose the future course for their family. While Chin-chu arrived in Korea wearing an *áo dài*, by the end of the series, Chin-chu opens her rice cake shop, aptly named “The Golden Bride,” wearing a traditional Korean *hanbok*, standing together with a now confident and enabled Chun-u and happily expecting the birth of their first child. Chin-chu, the very picture of the model foreign bride, is the successful enabler of her once disabled husband’s entry into heteronormative society.

Lara, the North Korean interpreter in *My Wedding Campaign*, similarly emboldens the socially disabled farmer bachelor Man-t’aek to overcome his crippling meekness. The character of Lara is atypical of conventional portrayals of North Korean women as dangerous figures that will demasculinize South Korean masculinity, such as the North Korean spy Yi Panghi in Kang Che-kyu’s 1999 box office hit *Shiri (Swiri)*.⁶⁷ Rather, as a foreign woman with the potential to be his bride, Lara emboldens Man-t’aek to behave like a proper man and begin a process of masculine rejuvenation which Kyung Hyun Kim terms “remasculinization,” in which filmic “depictions of emasculated and humiliated male subjects” are replaced by “figures of fetishized and imagined dominant men and masculinity.”⁶⁸ In a comically tragic reversal of the notion of

⁶⁷ Another prominent example of North Korean refugees in South Korean public culture is cable Channel A’s weekly reality show *Now on My Way to Meet You (Ije mannarō kapsida)*, in which young female North Korean beauties share lighthearted tales of their challenges assimilating into South Korean urban society.

⁶⁸ Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

the domineering and pervasive “male gaze” in film, Lara prods Man-t’aek to look at her, a woman, in the eyes, which he has been unable to do for the past twenty-three years:

LARA: I said look at me!

As she draws closer to Man-t’aek, he backs in to a wall, avoiding looking at her face.

LARA: Is there something wrong with my face?

MAN-T’AEK: Well, it’s not that, uh...

She grabs his shoulder, yet he still will not look up.

LARA: Don’t look at me as a woman, but as your younger sister. Look at me straight.

(He chances a gaze.)

LARA: Good!

His eyes rapidly blink. His gaze is faltering.

MAN-T’AEK: ...but I don’t have a younger sister!

His gaze returns to the ground.

Although unsuccessful within this dialogue, this interaction stays with Man-t’aek, who later repeats to himself Lara’s encouraging words to gather courage before being introduced to more potential brides. Lara bolsters Man-t’aek’s self-esteem, enabling him to secure a date with an ethnic Korean Uzbekistan woman named Masha. Yet the degree of his recovery from his social anxiety is most clearly demonstrated in his interactions with Lara, which will be further elaborated upon in the following section of this subsection.

Belying the boundaries of the victim/oppressor roles defined for them in conceptions of international marriages as a form of global hypergamy, neither Lara nor Chin-chu are helpless victims nor cunning opportunists. Rather, they are portrayed as strong and determined women who, in *choosing* to engage in international relationships, heal the bachelors of their disabled masculinity and empower them to form a new enabled masculinity, through which they are capable of maintaining patriarchal social order. In her reading of the melodramas *Romanesŭ Ppappa* (*Romance Papa*, 1960), *Pak Sŏbang* (*Neighbor Pak*, 1960), and *Pŏng’ŏri Samnyong’i*

(*Deaf-mute Samnyong'i*, 1964), Nancy Abelmann concludes that “[women] are thus posed to operate both as masculinized enablers of male refuge...simultaneously as feminized cultural workers in the reproduction of patriarchy.”⁶⁹ Thus the foreign brides reach their restorative potential by turning the focus of their empowered femininity to their husbands, empowering them to recover from their disabled masculinity and reproduce the heteronormative Korean family.

The Result of Married Men: Enabled Masculinity

I...I need you by my side. That's enough reason for your existence. This will all pass by.

Chin-chu, like I always told you, you gave me a second life. Chin-chu, like your mother said, you are the golden bride that gave me a miracle. It's all in the past now. Only good things will happen for us from now on.

Chun-u, The Golden Bride

With these powerful words of consolation, the now happily married Chun-u expresses to his wife that she should not fret over the turmoil her presence in Korea has caused for her biological father, who abandoned her Vietnamese mother twenty years ago and created a new Korean household, of which Chi-yǒng's husband Yǒng-min is the eldest son. Chun-u asserts that Chi-yǒng's very being is justified by *his* need for her restorative potential. This man—who confidently articulates his need for his foreign bride—is transformed through international marriage from an immobile and pitiable bachelor who cannot ride a subway for fear of inducing a panic attack to a strong, supportive, and sensitive husband who not only receives a promotion in his corporate position and is eagerly anticipating the birth of his child with Chin-chu (a son, of course)—he attentively comforts his wife when she is distraught. In the case of international marriages between Japanese husbands and Filipina wives, Suzuki argues that “[by] marrying

⁶⁹ Nancy Abelmann, *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 202.

Filipina, these Japanese men are trying to affectively unleash themselves from Japan's gender yoking and enjoy denser spousal relationships," rather than reproducing a domineering hegemonic masculinity.⁷⁰ Though Chun-u may spend more time engaged in domestic duties than the heads of households depicted in *Romanesŭ Ppappa*, *Pak Sŏbang*, and *Pŏng'ŏri Samnyong'i*, with his disabled masculinity healed through his international marriage, Chun-u does not subvert patriarchy; rather, in the words of Donaldson, the figure of Chun-u, "the 'new man' that comes at us through the media, seems to reinforce the social order without challenging it."⁷¹ By engaging in international relationships, then, figures of socially disabled and marginalized bachelors in these narratives are enabled to re-suture themselves into normative Korean society as dominant heads of their households with the construction of a new masculinity.

In this manner, the once painfully shy Man-t'aek demonstrates the extreme degree to which his restorative international relationship with Lara, a North Korean defector in search of refugee status, transforms him into a new figure of enabled masculinity. Regarding the disabled figure of the rural Japanese bachelor, Suzuki argues that "resembling Japan's feudal *shi-nō-kō-shō* (samurai-farmers-artisans-merchants) hierarchy, they are demasculinized *nō-kō-shō* because they hold less economic and symbolic capital than urban 'corporate warriors' (*shi*), who are seldom found in representations of Filipina-Japanese marriages."⁷² Through performing acts of heroic bravery before Lara, Man-t'aek remasculinizes himself by demonstrating his metamorphosis from the coward who once was not able to hold his gaze on her. He does so by

⁷⁰ Suzuki, "Of Love and the Marriage Market: Masculinity Politics and Filipina-Japanese Marriages in Japan," 105.

⁷¹ Donaldson, "What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?," 652.

⁷² Suzuki, "Of Love and the Marriage Market: Masculinity Politics and Filipina-Japanese Marriages in Japan," 92.

performing a role of masculine protector over her. He first stands up to the hegemonic masculine figure of the manager, who has struck Lara, leaving a prominent bruise on her face and speaks to Man-t'aek in the impolite *pan-mal* form of speech, which is used only by a superior speaking to an inferior. Upon noticing Lara's bruised face, Man-t'aek decides to cut ties with the introduction service, firmly telling the manager: "This is in *my* authority. And stop talking down to me (using *pan-mal*).” Man-t'aek's second act of heroism is much more emboldened.

Lara gazes at Man-t'aek with a helpless look in her eyes, and an idea appears on his face and he quickly punches a police officer, knocking him to the ground.

MAN-T'AEK: Run, Miss Lara!

Man-t'aek takes the other police officer to the ground.

MAN-T'AEK: Miss Lara, run! Don't look back!

Beginning to be overpowered by the two officers, Man-t'aek begins biting them.

MAN-T'AEK: (*his mouth bloodied*) Shit, I told you to run! Run like hell, damn it! Run!
She runs off to safety.

By selflessly throwing himself into danger, Man-t'aek valiantly saves Lara, who is in Uzbekistan illegally, from being apprehended by the authorities and sent back to North Korea by creating a violent diversion for her escape. This act of virulent masculine role playing, empowered by Lara's encouragement to look her in the eyes and, in the above scene, role as a helpless damsel in distress, enables Man-t'aek to successfully complete his "wedding campaign." The film ends in Man-t'aek's idyllic rural community, one year after the above event, with a freeze-frame of Man-t'aek jubilantly running towards the camera to reunite with Lara and him narrating: "Though the beginning was humble, the end was prosperous," signaling that this international marriage thoroughly resolved Man-t'aek's disabled bachelorhood and restored the rural community's social order.

For these once impaired figures of disabled bachelorhood, international relationships provide an avenue to achieve social recognition for entering “normative” Korean society—yet the very non-normative means by which they do so, marrying a foreign bride in a predominately ethnically homogenous nation, complicates the process. By striving to build a household that upholds “conventional” gendered divisions within the household, these newly enabled figures of married masculinity attempt to overcome the marginalizing potential their foreign wives bring with them. Suzuki observes that Japanese farmers who marry Filipina brides “are often the heirs of *ie* (households) which demand the succession of gender-based roles within their residential premises.”⁷³ She argues that because “the legitimacy” that men achieve as “procreators of the nation and supporters of their families and state” collapses with non-“normative” international marriages, “[some] men seem to respond to this downgrading by trying to make their marriages appear as ‘conventional’ as possible.”⁷⁴ Thus, whereas Korean women may want a modern transnational lifestyle, the Korean men engaged in international marriages strive for a “traditional life” because “of the presumed values and qualities of foreign women versus local ones, who are believed too liberated, demanding, or independent in their outlook.”⁷⁵ In this manner, up until 1999, only children of international unions between non-Korean wives and Korean husbands received legal recognition by the state as being a legitimate member of the Korean nation. Children of these unions between non-Korean husbands and Korean wives, on the other hand, had no recourse to attain Korean citizenship for, in the words of Nancy Abelmann and Hyunhee Kim, “[these] marital unions have not been understood to secure the

⁷³ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁴ Suzuki, “Tripartite Desires: Filipina-Japanese Marriages and Fantasies of Transnational Traversal,” 137.

⁷⁵ Nicole Constable, “Introduction: Cross-Border Marriages, Gendered Mobility, and Global Hypergamy,” in *Cross Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 8.

continuity of Korean families; rather, it can be argued that their contours are off the Korean map entirely.”⁷⁶

Although Chin-chu’s restorative potential is in her initial enabling of Chun-u to become the primary decision-maker of his household, patriarchal order is only restored when *he* becomes the source of support and authority for his wife by the end of the series. A very pregnant Chin-chu is accompanied by her husband to seek the advice of her rice cake mentor, Madame Hō, in choosing a suitable prosperous name for her new store. Chin-chu hands Madame Hō slips of paper, each with a different potential name written on it. Madame Hō selects the name “Golden Bride” (黃金新婦) for the store:

CHIN-CHU: You really like this one the best?

MADAME HŌ: I’m sure. This is the best one because you do everything well and with so much eagerness, it reminds me of you.

(*Chin-chu laughs.*)

MADAME HŌ: Why do you laugh?

CHIN-CHU: This is the name that my *ajōssi* made. I liked this one best, too.

CHUN-U: I thought the same thing as you, grandmother, so I made this name.⁷⁷

MADAME HŌ: Really? It seems like you truly care for Chin-chu very much, don’t you? It shows in this precious name. Chin-chu, work hard like the name, be the bride that digs up gold, all right?

CHIN-CHU: Yes, grandmother.

Madame Hō’s authority reinforces the decision already made by Chun-u, the head of the international household, and reaffirmed by his dutiful wife. Chun-u’s bestowal on his wife and her shop of the auspicious title of “golden bride” that her mother had hoped that she would one

⁷⁶ Nancy Abelmann and Hyunhee Kim, “A Failed Attempt at Transnational Marriage: Maternal Citizenship in a Globalizing South Korea,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, ed. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 109.

⁷⁷ Although Madame Hō is not their actual grandmother, Chun-u and Chin-chu refer to her as grandmother (*halmōni*) to express their intimate relationship.

day become, is reaffirmed by the sage Madame Hō, who by selecting Chun-u's decision grants her blessing on him to be the decision-making patriarch. Four years later, with Chun-u as the enabled legitimate head of the household, the entire family, which has now grown to include extended relatives and their children, has moved into a new, spacious and luxurious multi-story Western-style house. With the confident Chun-u at the family's helm, all members of his household are content, healthy, and reaping the benefits of Chun-u and Chin-chu's prosperous wedded union.

Through their international marriages, these men need no more empowering from their foreign brides, for they are now capable of assuming the role as head of the heteronormative household through the restoration of an enabled masculinity. No longer meek, suffering from debilitating social anxiety disorders, or baring the shame of forced bachelorhood, these public culture representations—with the aid of their foreign brides—have the potential to transform into brave, strong, and supportive figures of masculinity able to guide their households to a prosperous future.

Figures of disabled masculinity and empowered femininity circulated in South Korean public culture, particularly in the drama *The Golden Bride*, are a useful mode through which to examine how bachelorhood is narrated as a disabled masculinity that cannot head a stable household and international marriages, primarily with foreign brides of ethnic Korean descent, are a potential avenue for and restoring heteronormative patriarchal order. Whereas the bachelor Chun-u is immobilized and impaired by his “modern” Korean girlfriend Chi-yōng, Chun-u as a husband is enabled by his foreign wife Chin-chu to overcome his disability and secure his place as head of his household. Yet while the crisis of disabled masculinity is neatly resolved in *The Golden Bride*, conflicts cannot be settled so easily in the realities of South Korean society. The

very non-normative means by which rural bachelors enter normative married society reconfigures the social landscape of the rural heartland. The following subsection will conclude the chapter by overviewing enduring social issues that are left unresolved in the triumphant depictions of *The Golden Bride* and *My Wedding Campaign* and potential strategies to overcome them.

Strategies for Confronting Rural Marginalization

In spite of a surge in state funding at the village level, social welfare in rural Korea focuses on addressing concerns over assimilating marriage migrants in Korean society rather than addressing fundamental issues of how domestic agriculture can remain viable in neoliberal Korea. Thus, the multicultural family support centers that proliferated throughout the countryside focus on teaching female marriage migrants how to raise “proper Korean children” by offering language classes and workshops on how to make *kimch'i* and cook Korean food. Even those employed in these centers remain skeptical of the effectiveness of these measures. A Korean language instructor who is employed at a center in a suburb southwest of Seoul suggested in an interview in winter 2013 that the sporadic attendance to her free classes by marriage migrants is due not only to difficulty accessing adequate childcare, but also because her students were not best served by a center curriculum more focused on teaching them about Korean grammar points than preparing them for life in the Korean countryside. More grass-roots mobilization may be an effective strategy for overcoming rural marginalization. Ha Sŭng-u asserts that while the UN may have labeled 2012 the beginning of an “era of cooperative associations” and the number of cooperative associations in Korea are on the rise, the success of

continued growth requires more broad based support of the Korean people nationwide.⁷⁸ Chang Chong-ik asserts that despite the challenges cooperatives face in breaking free from dependency on the national government to be more independent and effective in addressing their members' needs, establishing distance from government funding should be the primary priority for future reforms.⁷⁹

Michael Reinschmidt employs Antonio Gramsci's concept of "organic intellectuals" to the context of contemporary Korea to explore the potential to develop counterhegemonic strategies at the local level. Reinschmidt analyzes how rural communities can capitalize on the development of a *kwinong* (歸農) movement—a "back-to-the-land" movement in which urbanites relocate to the countryside to farm—to consider how "a 'forward thrust' to traditional concepts can be one of many potential alternatives by which to pass by and beyond" the challenges for rural society in contemporary Korea.⁸⁰ He highlights the potential for leaders of rural communities to adopt measures to address and resolve their communities' needs at a local level. This is certainly a potentially fruitful strategy. For example, one head of a village located outside of Sangju in North Kyōngsang province took matters in his own hands after determining that the local multicultural family center was not addressing the deep poverty of the area's multicultural families. In interviews from Autumn 2012 to Spring 2013, he outlined to me how, outside of his official duties as village head, he connected these families to resources to improve

⁷⁸ Ha Sūng-u, "Hyōpdong chohap undong ūi hūrūm kwa pip'anjōk chōmgōm [Critical appraisal of the currents of the cooperative movement]," *Ōsosieisyōn kwa munhwa charip* 73 (2013): 106.

⁷⁹ Chang Chong-ūi, "Hyōpdong chohap kibonbōp chejōng ihu Han'guk hyōpdong chohap ūi yōkhal kwa kwaje [The role and challenges of the Korean cooperatives sector in the era of the Framework Act on Cooperatives]," *Tonghyang kwa chōnmang* 86 (2012): 314.

⁸⁰ Michael Reinschmidt, "Rural Development: Lessons from the Liberalization of Korean Trade," *Korea Journal*, Winter 2009, 109.

their standard of living by giving them access to measure to grow more lucrative crops like organic grapes instead of labor-intensive grains.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that public anxiety over the viability of the Korean economy in its neoliberal turn transfers to anxiety over the rural bachelor and his marriage woes. While international marriages were promoted as a solution to this crisis by states, NGOs, and commercial marriage brokers, this is treating the symptom and not the cause of the problem. The triumphal celebration of Korea as a multicultural society in the 2000s, then, overlooks the enduring rural socio-economic marginalization in contemporary Korea detailed in earlier chapters.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation explores the central role of the rural space in Korea's rapid post-war transformation from an agrarian to industrialized economy. My dissertation also historicizes the advent of state support for international marriages as an attempted solution to resolve poor male farmers' inability to find Korean brides on their own. Through analysis of shifting public culture representations of rural society from the 1960s to the contemporary moment, my dissertation examines the figure of the rural bachelor that emerged in the late 1980s within a modern trope of rural nostalgia. This dissertation is a cultural history that considers how, in the context of Korea's post-1960 compressed shift from an agricultural to industrial economy, the rural heartland of the nation is narrated as left behind and emasculated by uneven development. Moreover, the very romanticization of the *nongmin* (peasant, farmer) and the countryside is marginalizing by way of fetishizing the rural space and its inhabitants as embodying Korean national identity. I contend that changing cultural representations from an idyllic and stable countryside, the manifestation of Korean national identity, to the disabled masculinity of the rural bachelor reflect a fundamental sense of dislocation that emerged from Korea's state-led transition from "tradition" to modern world capitalism. Throughout the dissertation, then, I approach the rural bachelor as a compelling figure through whom to investigate the relationship between state-led agricultural reforms and socio-cultural changes in rural society. This sheds light on how Korea's rapid economic growth is uneven and continues to overlook many significant segments of its population. Through discursive analysis of post-1960 film, television, and newspapers on the countryside, the dissertation argues that rural bachelors and their marriage woes embodied the anxiety of a nation in distress over how to preserve its "heartland" in the global turn to neoliberalism.

Within Korea's rapid post-1960 industrialization and exposure to neoliberal flows of global capital, the small-scale farming households associated with the rural bachelor struggle to remain viable in markets dominated by global agribusiness. Under the Park Chung Hee regime's (1961-1979) state-led economic development—including a move from the Syngman Rhee regime's (1948-1960) policy of import-substitution to export-oriented industrialization in 1964 and Heavy and Chemical Industries (HCI) Plan in 1972—Korea experienced dramatic rural depopulation and a growing urban-rural income divide as rural youth, particularly young women, flocked to work in factories concentrated in Seoul and Pusan. By the late 1980s, “due to being dragged behind by arduous farm work and life, rural bachelors are faced with cold shoulders as single women avoid them as marriage partners.”¹ While the rural bachelor's livelihood as a small-scale (rice) farmer is at once the embodiment of valorized notions of Korea's agrarian past, folk traditions, and values of egalitarianism and communalism, it is also the major obstacle to his bemoaned bachelorhood. Whereas the attention that has been (and continues to be) paid to non-Korean women in cross-border marriages poses challenges against essentializing foreign brides as either victims of patriarchy or cunning profit-seekers, Korean men engaged in the very same marriages remain one-dimensional in comparison. Relegated to the periphery, husbands and bachelors in these cross-border marriages are rendered static and immobile in contrast to Korean women eschewing the country life to pursue their own careers and mobile female marriage migrants.

By focusing on socio-economic developments in contemporary rural Korea, my dissertation addresses a topic hitherto overlooked in English language scholarship: the

¹ Sim Chunguk, “Han'guk nongch'on ch'onggak ū kyōrhon munje” [Korean rural bachelors' marriage problem], *Myōngdae* 17 (1988): 127.

contributions of the countryside and agricultural sector in Korea's rapid shift from an agrarian to post-industrialized economy. Furthermore, this research also engages in masculinity studies, an emerging subfield of gender history. My project addresses the understudied construction of marginalized masculinities in systems of patriarchy through analysis of media portrayals of the rural bachelor's masculinity. Moreover, this research complements the growing body of English and Korean language scholarship on cross-border marriages and multicultural families by situating analyses of the emergence of the figure of the rural bachelor within Korea's post-1960 economic industrialization.

The dissertation is divided into three chronologically and topically organized chapters. Chapter 2 situates the contemporary rural socioeconomic marginalization within long-term biases in state-driven policies to focus on maximizing food production efficiency and government control at the village level. This focus on maximizing productivity, then, leaves little room for projects that significantly improve the quality of life of villagers. During the colonial period and post-liberation period, agricultural advancement measures focused on maximizing the extraction of rice from the countryside with minimal investment from the state. Despite the potential for sustainable economic development of the countryside with comprehensive land reform in the 1950s, the authoritarian Park regime prioritized industrialization over inclusive economic development in its path of state-guided capitalism in the 1960s. Sustainable models for rural economic development were overlooked by the state agrobureaucracy for the sake of maximizing food production and growing markets for the light industry sector. Top-down measures including coerced membership in the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF, *Nonghyŏp*) were designed to modernize agriculture by granting villagers access to more efficient farming techniques, farmer-members nonetheless entered the

commodities market with limited access to resources and credit. The NACF is ostensibly an organization supported by the state in order to represent farmer member's interests in trading agricultural products. In reality, however, it is the major arm of the state agrobureaucracy to control villages, increase production, and spread commodification throughout the countryside. This chapter argues that the enduring marginalization of South Korea is rooted in economic development plans that overlook the countryside. As the rest of the nation transitioned away from an agrarian-based economy, farmers were bound to their land. While bearing the burden of feeding the growing industrial and urban population, this paper traces how rural residents grew increasingly stigmatized for their poverty and not keeping pace with the nation's rapid economic development.

Chapter 3 is divided into two parts to explore how the dynamics between the top-down industrialization and urbanization of Korea and the surge of anxiety over the inability of poor male farmers to find willing marriage partners. The first part of the chapter delineates how Korea transformed through policies of developmental authoritarianism to push for rapid industrialization funded by injections of foreign capital and fed by a more mechanized and efficient agricultural sector. The second part of the chapter argues that public anxiety over a disabled, unproductive rural bachelor reflects a fundamental sense of dislocation that emerges from Korea's state-led developmental transformation in late capitalism. I explore how Korea's economic development is a process built upon a trope of rural nostalgia in which the rural space and its inhabitants are narrated as a repository of national traditions that Raymond Williams describes as a "perpetual recession into history." In doing so, this chapter asserts that Korea's economic industrialization is a process built upon romanticization and marginalization of the rural space, that neoliberalization of the Korean economy is rooted in a fetishization of rural

nostalgia. The *Saemaül undong* (New Village Movement) exemplifies how as the Korean national economy grew less dependent on foreign aid, government policies turned inward to disperse the economic advantages of modernization nationwide. Nevertheless, the campaign did not effectively garner local support and fizzled out shortly after the state moved on to its next project. The chapter concludes by arguing that the anxiety over the stability of Korea in the global marketplace transfers to anxiety over the pitiable rural bachelor and his meager marriage prospects. In line with this logic, then, public culture anxiety erupts in the late 1980s with calls to resolve this rural marriage crisis for the stability of the heartland and for the sake of the entire nation.

Chapter 4 is also divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter argues that Korea's entry into neoliberalism and concomitant lowering of protective trade policies—through entry into the WTO, the economic growth bubble bursting and subsequent IMF-bailout-funded recovery, and series of free trade agreements—marks a sharp increase in anxiety over the viability of the national economy in the tumultuous global free market. In conjunction with rapidly falling fertility rates and decades of massive rural depopulation, this anxiety crystallizes in concern over the rural bachelor's viability in the marriage market. The second part of the chapter addresses the impact of the short-term solution of state support of international marriages to resolve the immediate problem of men's singlehood. This latter part of the chapter argues that in spite of an increase in state funding at the local level to establish multicultural family support centers—in line with the Roh administration's push to embrace multiculturalism as a symbol of late capitalism—the state is simply treating a symptom (men's singlehood) instead of the deeper root of the problem (institutionalized rural underdevelopment). Thus, public culture representations of international marriages like *My Wedding Campaign* and *The Golden Bride*

celebrate the restorative potential of foreign brides to heal a disabled masculinity.

Representations such as these, while under the state's banner of multiculturalism, nevertheless are dramatically optimistic and obfuscate strategies for developing applicable methods for overcoming rural socioeconomic marginalization. This recent surge in multicultural funding continues decades of the state overlooking the incorporation of local level input for sustainable rural reform measures and is instead another top-down imposition of ineffective reform at the village level.

What are some prospects, then, for more sustainable and inclusive rural development models? Albert Park highlights the deep-seated bias against rural development worldwide since economies first began industrializing. Park delineates three main types of development models: integrated rural development (IRD), participatory rural development (PRD), and state-guided top-down programs.² Whereas IRD and PRD programs have the potential to reach sustainable success in local communities through local input and participation in the process of the reforms, these two models of development have not yet been successfully deployed in Korea. The most prominent rural development program in Korea—the *Saemaül undong* of the 1970s—was a top-down state-driven movement that did not incorporate local level input and received coerced support that quickly dwindled when officials left. In his study of the farming village “Sangol,” Michael Reinschmidt argues that in lieu of direct state support, building a reputation as an eco-friendly farming region and promoting an “organic vision” is a “tactic” of a younger generation of village farmers working as a collective to “maximize[e] community benefits” while also

² Albert Park, “What We Need to Understand in Order to Design Inclusive Rural Development,” *Policy Context Briefs*, Pacific Basin Research Center, Soka University, September 2012, 1–25.

adapting to changes in the global marketplace.”³ For example, growing numbers of Korean consumers are interested in purchasing “well being” (organic) products advertised as healthier than non-organic products. This tactic by organic farmers of Sangol is an example of a creative response that works both within a universalizing rhetoric (of organic food as healthy living) and the particular situation of a Korean rural village. The success of the Sangol organic rice farming community is also connected to the national fetishization of rice and rural space, as organic rice is promoted as a purer form of rice that is less damaging to Korean farmland than non-organic agricultural products. Village-level measures to grow more lucrative crops can be developed at a local level, like in the village outside Sangju in North Kyōngsang Province mentioned in chapter 4, to address generational poverty. Regardless of the direction of future state plans, then, continued research into rural Korea across disciplines will hopefully grow into a fruitful dialogue for effective local level strategies in confronting and overcoming institutionalized marginalization.

³ Michael Reinschmidt, “Rural Development: Lessons from the Liberalization of Korean Trade,” *Korea Journal*, Winter 2009, 119.

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