Antti Leppänen

Neighborhood Shopkeepers in Contemporary South Korea: Household, Work, and Locality

Research Series in Anthropology
University of Helsinki
사랑하는 의선에게

For Euisun
## Contents

Acknowledgements vii

**1. The Lived World of South Korean Neighborhood Shopkeepers** 1
   The Culture of Korean Neighborhood Capitalism 2
   Contemporary Setting:
   - South Korea in the Aftermath of the Economic Crisis 5
   - Shopkeepers and the Self-employed in Scholarship of Korea 11
   - The Contours of This Research 16

**2. The Shopkeepers and their Businesses in the Neighborhood** 23
   The Fieldwork Neighborhood 23
   Entering the Neighborhood and the Shops 26
   Urbanization and the Growth of Seoul 34
   Social Stratifications in Seoul: Housing and Neighborhoods 38
   “Ordinary People’s Ward” 43
   The Concept of Neighborhood in Korea: Tongne 47
   Neighborhood Business, Neighborhood Shop 51

**3. Intersecting Trajectories: Four Portraits of Shopkeepers** 55
   Grandfather Kwôn: an Entrepreneurial Life in Modern Korea 56
   Mr Park: Neighborhood Reciprocity 65
   Mr and Mrs Chông:
   - Leaving the Neighborhood in Pursuit of Wealth and Status 71
   Mr Kim and Mrs Kang: Middle-Age Self-Employment after Wage Work 80
   Conclusion: Divergent Routes to Neighborhood Shopkeeping 86

**4. Neighborhood Shopkeeping: Family Business without Succession** 88
   Comparative Issues of Family Work and Succession in Small Businesses 89
   Contributions by Family Members in Korean Small Businesses 95
   Family Labor: Compensated Assistance and Pocket Money 99
   Gender Divisions of Labor in Small Businesses:
   - Individual Skills, Social Roles, and Cultural Expectations 102
   Personal Skills and Shop Proprietorship 108
   Male Responsibilities and Prerogatives: Individual Mobility 112
   Women’s Responsibilities: Tending the Shop 118
   Women as Co-Proprietors: Longing to Be Back Home 120
   Conclusions 123
Contents

   Women’s Economic Capability and
   Household Maintaining Ability: Saenghwallyŏk 127
   Women’s Work in Korea 129
   Women as Businesskeepers in Contemporary Korea 134
   A Women’s Small Business and a Female Occupation: Hairdressing 135
   The Hairdressers: Mrs Chŏng and Mrs Hong 137
   The Husbands: Women’s Gendered Characterizations 146
   Yumin’s Mother and Her Garment Mending Shop 148
   Household Work and Women’s Work Outside of Home 152
   Conclusions: Work, Earning and “Life Energy”
   of Businesskeeping Women 154

6. Fingering of Cash, Meanings of Money 156
   Perspectives of Money and Cash in Korea 156
   Changing Notions of Money: From Villages to Cities 160
   Small Businesskeepers and Korean Money 163
   “Making Money is Hard”: the Laboriousness of Earning 168
   Money in Korean Households 171
   Money in Shopkeeper Households 175
   Conclusions 182

7. Leisure: Distinguishing Non-Work from Work 184
   The Concept of Nolda 185
   Korean Ideas of Leisure and Idleness 188
   Neighborhood Shops as Sites of Leisure 193
   Leisure within the Neighborhood: Visiting 201
   Leisure outside the Neighborhood: Travel 203
   Conclusions 206

8. Categories of Identification: Shopkeepers in Korean Society 208
   Beyond Class: Categories and Concepts of the Lived World 208
   Korean Notions of Class and Stratum 211
   Sŏmin as a Social Category, Shopkeepers as Ordinary People 213
   Categories of Social Stratification: Money and Wealth 222
   Categories of Shopkeeper Livelihood 228
   Stratified Terms for Men and Women 232
   Conclusions 238

9. Conclusion: Social and Cultural Ambivalence amidst Economic Uncertainty 240
   Glossary of Korean Terms 247
   References 251
   Index 265
List of Illustrations

Figure 1: The fieldwork area and the shops of the main informants 25
Photograph 1: Big Street 27
Photograph 2: Kolmok Street 33
Photograph 3: Grandfather Kwŏn’s laundry 56
Photographs 4 and 5: Mr Pak at work in his pangakan, rice cake bakery and mill 67
Photograph 6: The order and delivery book in Mr and Mrs Chŏng’s restaurant 75
Photograph 7: Husband and wife tending flowers of the wife’s shop 103
Photograph 8: The husband is tending the supermarket, and the wife is coming in to start her shift 105
Photograph 9: A restaurant proprietor leaving to make a delivery 113
Photograph 10: Hairdresser’s husband is visiting his wife’s salon 142
Photograph 11: Yumin’s mother in her garment mending shop 150
Photograph 12: Mr Pak playing changgi with an acquaintance in a neighborhood backyard 197
Photograph 13: Women gathered at a grocery store to clean vegetables 202

All photographs by Antti Leppänen.
Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this thesis has been a solitary process that many persons and institutions have graciously supported throughout the years.

Several sources have provided financial support for this research. The fieldwork was made possible by a 12-month Republic of Korea Government Scholarship in 1999. During the course of writing funding has been provided by the Sasakawa Young Leaders' Fellowship Fund in 2000 and by the Finnish Cultural Foundation in 2002 and 2003. The grant for finishing a dissertation from the University of Helsinki supported the finishing stage.

My main advisor Professor Karen Armstrong has offered her gracious and insightful help whenever I have requested it, steering my work to an anthropologically more valid direction and guiding me to perceive what is anthropologically valuable in my research. My second advisor Professor Clifford Sather and Louise Sather provided assistance at crucial moments for the progress of this research. Professor Sather’s advice helped to reorganize the work, and Mrs Sather’s remarks greatly contributed to ensure that this study kept human beings at its center and focused on the shopkeepers instead of their shops.

Professor Jukka Siikala’s encouragingly sharp and insightful comments in departmental seminars have been helpful; the same applies also to Dr. Timo Kaartinen’s focused and perceptive commentary. Among visiting scholars to our department, my appreciation goes especially to Dr. Alberto Gomes. I also thank the rest of the teachers, researchers, and graduate students whose contributions in scholarly contexts as well as their collegial friendship have been supportive. Dr. Marie-Louise Karttunen, who in addition to her emotionally and mentally refreshing and straightforwardly cheerful friendship, proofread the manuscript and corrected the English language of my thesis. For all deficiencies, linguistic, grammatical, or scholarly, I am responsible alone. Arto Sarla, being the embodiment of the distinctive institutional identity of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki as the department secretary, deserves my most heartfelt thanks for the institutional support I have received.

Dr. Kauko Laitinen, the chair of East Asian Studies at the time I commenced minor studies in that subject, has been a wonderfully supportive teacher and colleague ever since, also giving me a chance to teach several courses in Korean Studies in the Asia Pacific Studies program at the Renvall Institute of the University of Helsinki. My first teacher of Korean language, Merja Forest, provided me with excellent basics between 1993 and 1995 on which to build more comprehensive language skills that have been indispen-
sable for this research. She is my foremost ūnsanim. I also appreciate Professor Song Hyang-Keun for his appreciative encouragement.

Before, during, and after the field research period many scholars in South Korea have provided me with assistance, advice, and encouragement. Of them, I would like to mention especially Professors Lee Mun-woong, Chun Kyung-soo, Kim Kwang-ok, and Oh Myung-seok. The graduate students of the Department of Anthropology at Seoul National University provided a lively and friendly community of companionship and support both during my initial stay at the university in 1997 and during the research period in 1999. The Department of Anthropology at Seoul National University also provided me with institutional affiliation during the field research.

Professor Roger L. Janelli has given support and advice from the very first stages of this project, and I have also been able to turn to Professor Nancy Abelmann from the time I drafted the research plan. I have also been lucky to have two appropriate persons as preliminary examiners of the dissertation manuscript: professor Abelmann as an anthropologist of Korea and Professor Norbert Dannhaeuser as a scholar of small-scale urban commerce. I wish to be able to incorporate more of their knowledgeable and meticulous commentaries and criticisms in a future reworking of this study.

My wife Euisun Joung has supported me with her unconditional love and care throughout the long years of writing and finishing this thesis. She has also provided me with unique views and details of her native country and culture. She deserves to have this thesis dedicated to her. 이 논문은 나의 아내인 의견에 바친다. I wish to give heartfelt thanks also to my parents Seppo and Anna-Liisa Leppänen. My father has taken a keen interest in this study, followed its progress, read drafts, offered comments and discussed it with me and encouraged me about its worth. Koreans, when asking what brought me to study their culture and society, understand the humorous tone in my half-joking answer that it happened because I am a filial son (hyoja). It was my father who originally suggested that I undertake the study of Korea for my master’s degree.

To the neighborhood shopkeepers in Seoul who so warmheartedly accepted my presence amidst their daily livelihoods and allowed me to gain insights into their lives, I owe the most special thanks. They would deserve to be mentioned by name, but here the reasonable anthropological convention of using pseudonyms intervenes with the proper conveyance of gratitude to Mr Pak of the rice cake bakery, hairdressing salon keepers Mrs Chŏng and Mrs Hong, Grandfather Kwŏn, Mr and Mrs Chŏng of the pork cutlet restaurant, the restaurateurs Mr Kim and Mrs Kang, Yumin’s mother, Mr and Mrs Kim of the bookshop, the laundry keeper Mr Yu, and numerous others. Expressions of indebtedness in English would not reach those to whom they are dedicated:
Acknowledgements

동네에서 저의 연구를 도와 주시고 협조해 주신 분들에게 깊은 감사를 드립니다. 무엇보다도 방앗간의 사장님께서 안 계셨으면 한국에서의 현지연구가 이만큼 성공하지 못 했을 것이고 박사학위를 취득하지 못 했을지도 모릅니다.

Antti Leppänen
Helsinki, April 2007
In the Rice Mill of Mr Pak, Seoul, South Korea

Mr Pak and his wife are present after midday in their rice cake bakery and mill (pangakan), and the wife of the owner of the neighboring boiler maintenance shop is keeping company with them. There is yet another woman (Ms Im), whom I at first mistake for a customer; she is about to leave, but she returns later to keep company. As work in a pangakan usually begins early in the morning for the fresh orders to be delivered in time, this day's work is almost done, and Mr Pak and his wife are readying the last order for delivery. All the rice cakes (ttok) manufactured today have been delivered or eaten except for the small portion that Mr Pak has saved for me and one as yet undelivered order. The atmosphere in the mill is jovial, and Mr Pak exchanges words with visitors in a lighthearted manner. During the brief moments when the couple is alone, with only me present, they concentrate on finishing the work and do not talk much.

The wife of the boiler shop doesn't stay long, and she goes back and forth between this place and the hairdressing salon on the opposite side of the street crossing. Mr Pak's daughter drops in with her friend. The keeper of another hairdressing salon further up the street comes in and exchanges some jokes with Mr Pak. She says to me, in a joking manner, that Mr Pak must think very lowly of her because of her distinctive clothes.

The miller tells me to come tomorrow because there will be maeunt'ang (a kind of a fish stew) and drinks available. He prepares three condolence money envelopes to be presented at his sister's mother-in-law's funeral, which they will attend later today. He leaves to deliver today's last order of ttok but returns soon because he cannot find the place, makes a phone call to the customer, and leaves again. After returning he shows me a water-filled basin with about thirty fish caught by the proprietor of the boiler maintenance shop, whose wife was socializing with the miller couple a moment earlier. The catch was big, and much of it was given away to neighborhood people. Two of Mr Pak’s male acquaintances drop in, jokingly demanding rice cakes to eat and feigning displeasure when they learn that there are none left. Mr Pak asks me to look after the shop while he and his wife go to their home nearby to have lunch. During the time of my shop stewardship, there are two phone calls (I do not dare to receive orders, but ask the callers to contact Mr Pak at home), and an older woman comes to ask if any rice cakes will be made tomorrow.
The keeper couple and the boiler shop woman return, and Ms Im, who was here at 12 o’clock comes back later. Only now I learn that she is not a customer. She keeps a cosmetics shop in the street. The women tease Mr Pak for not doing housework well, and he defends himself by maintaining that he is good in cleaning. The cosmetics shop woman recounts her first visit to this area in the late 60s, when she was very surprised to see thatched houses, and the creek flowing free without embankments. Mr Pak says that he came here at the same time. After that, the women start talking about the pressure from women’s in-laws to give birth to a son.

Mr Pak and his wife were keepers of a small business in a neighborhood in Seoul, South Korea. Mr Pak’s shop, a rice mill, was the setting of frequent social interaction amidst intensive spells of work, with other shopkeepers and neighborhood residents paying visits to exchange a word or two, to play rounds of some board game with the proprietor, or to join the company of other neighborhood acquaintances in a drink and snack gathering. The passage, constructed from my research fieldnotes, is a description of events in the mill on one afternoon. It is an introductory ethnographic glimpse to the daily life of a neighborhood shopkeeper and to the circumstances and occurrences of my fieldwork. It illustrates, besides Mr Pak’s personality and the central position he and his shop occupied not only in my research but also in the social life of the fieldwork neighborhood, most of the main issues of this study: the lived world of neighborhood shopkeepers; small business proprietorship by members of households; conceptualizations of work and leisure; and reciprocal local interaction.

The Culture of Korean Neighborhood Capitalism

This is an ethnographic study of cultural concepts, categories, and classifications of capitalism among keepers of small business establishments in a neighborhood in Seoul, capital of South Korea. It delineates and analyses the concepts and categories as they appear in the lived worlds of the neighborhood shopkeepers: in their conversational talk and their daily practices. Through the shopkeepers’ uses and delineations of those concepts and categories, it seeks to explore how the shopkeepers see their position in that particular neighborhood and in South Korean society. This is, in short, an ethnography of cultural categories in South Korean capitalism, as lived at the neighborhood-shopkeeping level, and applied to households, neighborhoods, and Korean society. “Lived world,” while not appearing frequently in the pages of this work, is the main organizing concept of the study. At the heart of the “lived worlds” are social practices and people’s understandings and conceptualizations of their experience.
HABITUS, AND CATEGORIES AND PRACTICES OF SOUTH KOREAN NEIGHBORHOOD CAPITALISM

As so often in anthropological approaches to ethnographical data, a very useful way to approach the conceptualization of experience and practice is Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. It refers to mental structures through which people conceptualize, make sense of, and generate practice out of their encounter with the social world, or, in the words of Bourdieu, a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures (1977: 76) or a durable principle of the production of practices (Bourdieu 1994: 99–100). Habitus consists of socially acquired dispositions, which are acquired via personal conditions of existence, and which work as “matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu 1977: 82–3) Accordingly, habitus produces (and, I should add, reproduces) practices by functioning as a set of mental (and cultural) dispositions between social structure and practice, making knowledge of those practices common-sense (Bourdieu 1994: 101–2) and the practices themselves “sensible” and “reasonable” without specific reason or purpose (Bourdieu 1977: 79).

What particularly connects the notion of habitus to examination of categories of South Korean society and capitalism in the lived worlds of neighborhood shopkeepers is that habitus is not only the structure for the production of classifiable practices (or judgments) but also the system of classification of these practices (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Social agents produce not only classifiable acts but also acts of classification that themselves are classified. “To speak of habitus,” Bourdieu notes in conclusion, “is to include in the object the knowledge which the agents, who are part of the object, have of the object, and the contribution that this knowledge makes to the reality of the object” (ibid: 467). Thus, in the lived worlds of the neighborhood shopkeepers, habitus, circulating in the social field of not just a single neighborhood but the whole South Korean society, works to attach significance to a classifications such as, for example, sŏmin (“ordinary people”) through making a meaningful connection between practice and social structure.

HOUSEHOLDS AND CULTURES OF CAPITALISM

As the household is the domestic group within which the reproduction of the individual and the family mainly takes place, it warrants specific attention as a facet of social structure in the lived worlds of Korean shopkeepers, and their application of classifications and categories of South Korean society and capitalism.

In an introduction to a volume on households in the world-economy, Immanuel Wallerstein and Joan Smith define household as a unit that pools in-
come for purposes of reproduction (1992: 15); this and their function as units of livelihood have informed my view of household and family and their significance for shopkeepers’ lives and livelihoods. Wallerstein and Smith call for a reconceptualization of the ways in which the fundamental institutional spheres of family, workplace, and state relate to each other the modern world (ibid: 6–7), and suggest that attention be given to households as the basic entity responsible for reproductive needs. Wallerstein and Smith argue that the image of family (nuclearizing, increasingly dependent on wage employment, and increasingly detached from economic activities) “as perpetrated by world social sciences” and based on developmentalist notions of unilineal progress, has been an obstacle to the understanding of how households have been constructed in economies.

Significantly, Wallerstein and Smith point out, in remarking on the increased importance of the appreciation of livelihoods outside the wage labor framework, that household income is rarely a result of only one (male) breadwinner’s work, or comes from wage work, but from various sources through the work of several household members. Their discussion of the importance of households also draws attention to the significance of the convergences of cultural understandings and social structures and perceived economic realities and necessities, of which the complexities and contradictions between operating a small business and reproducing a household are one reflection.

While my appropriation of Wallerstein’s and Smith’s views of household leaves aside their notion of world-economy, which for them is the framework for the examination of households, and while their use of the concept does not suggest that worldwide consequences of capitalism would lead to unilinearity and similarity of cultural forms, it is still useful to draw from Marshall Sahlins’ views on cultures (or “cosmologies”) of capitalism (Sahlins 1994) to emphasize that it is specifically local appreciations and categorizations of Korean cultural understandings of capitalism with which I am concerned in this study. Sahlins calls for the discovery of culture – appropriations of capitalism informed and mediated by the logics of local cultures – amidst the seemingly overwhelming productive, coercive, and transformative (ibid.: 413) forces of Western capitalism. (Here I only need to refer to the East Asian and Southeast Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s with its devastating consequences for many Koreans, which I will discuss below.) Capitalism is in its widest sense universal, having the “capacity to reduce social properties into market values,” which for Sahlins is how capitalism is able to master the cultural order

---

1 Sahlins’ article is a critique of the World System theory, of which Wallerstein has been the most prominent proponent.
Yet, what is called for is the examination of the consequences of this very capacity, which leads, conversely, to the production of different market values and outcomes of capitalism as a result of different local (indigenous, non-Western, and Western) social properties and cultural logics.

**Contemporary Setting: South Korea in the Aftermath of the Economic Crisis**

The long period of almost continuous economic growth, increase of the gross national product and improvement in the standard of living in South Korea ended abruptly in the late 1990s when the nation plunged into a deep economic crisis, which was part of the larger chain of economic crisis in Southeast and East Asia (Haggard 2000). The last two years of the decade and the turn of the millennium were the time of the crisis, first perceived as collapse, disintegration, enforced social and economic transformation, and later, as the crisis begun to wane, as a slow and inadequate recovery and permanent instability. The “IMF crisis” or the “IMF era”, as it was commonly called, was the time during which I conducted the main part of my fieldwork, which in one sense became ethnography of keepers of small businesses during a recession and slow economic recovery. The crisis formed the frame through which many of my informants recounted and interpreted their experiences. Commenting on the situation and seeing one’s own predicament within the era was the major discourse of that period.

The crisis had begun one year before I started my fieldwork. South Korea had plunged into a severe currency and debt crisis, and the government needed to apply for emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a condition for the bailout funds, the government had to accept measures to open the economy to foreign investment and acquisition and make the labor market more flexible. The crisis soon became known as the “IMF era” or simply “The IMF.” The abbreviation of the International Monetary Fund became synonymous with the consequences of the economic downfall – rapidly increased unemployment, sense of loss of national sovereignty, and widening gaps of wealth and income – notwithstanding the actual relation of the individual or national hardships to the policy and austerity measures conditioned by the bailout funds.

Koreans, accustomed to measure the development of Korean economy with the gross national production per capita in US dollars, saw the GNP figure drop from more than 10 000 to less than 7000 dollars in 1998 as a result of both diminished production and fallen exchange rates. For Koreans, the figure of GNP per capita is also a measure of international comparison, and it was commonly one of the first things that the people I met during the re-
search wanted to know about my country. The steep fall of the figure in US dollars also accentuated the sense of crisis and national collapse in regards with Korea’s international standing. The drop in the GNP per capita became a more significant marker in describing and contextualizing individual hardships and the decline of Korean economy than the much smaller figure of actual decrease of domestic production, as in the remark by Mr Hwang, a keeper of a wallpapering and flooring shop: “My income has gone down about as much as the Korean GNP since the IMF.”

As for most of the occupational groups and income strata, “The IMF” was a time of crisis also for keepers of small business, with plummeting sales and income, and increased competition from new large-scale retail establishments, franchise chains, and new entrants to self-employment from the ranks of salaried employees after layoffs, driven by economic necessity and encouraged by government employment policies (Nara Kyŏngje, July 1997: 34). For example, laundry prices had dropped to half due to increased competition from large-scale chains and the need to encourage sales by cutting prices. The fall of real estate prices, which drove many real estate owners into severe difficulties, was perhaps one of the few aspects of the crisis which could be counted as positive the keepers of small businesses. The cheaper rents, guarantees, key monies (chŏnse)² and premiums made entry into shopkeeping easier and reduced the burden of those who renewed their lease contracts.

In general terms, the economic crisis brought about the downsizing of small businesses: the proportion of non-employing proprietors increased, as many continued operating their establishments on their own and with family labor, and the numerous new entrants to self-employment were mainly small in scale (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 137). Informal, non-documented small-scale trading increased, as many took to peddling on street and marketplace corners, residential areas, and subway cars (Yi Ho 1998: 164-5). The increased peddling, compared to street sceneries one and a half year earlier, also caught my attention when I arrived in Seoul and in my research neighborhood. The proportion of self-employment, which had decreased slightly in the Korean occupational structure throughout the 1980s and 1990s, had increased back to the level of the early 1980s (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 114). The economic crisis was a period in which self-employment was actualized as an option for employment and as a social and economic fact when instability, insecurity, and even temporary decrease in status began to affect salaried employment.

² Chŏnse, most often rendered as “key money”, is a system in which the leaseholder hands over a lump sum as a deposit to the property owner at the beginning of the lease term and gets it back in full at the end of the term, and the property owner keeps the interest or any other profit collected from the key money during the lease term.
There was a sense of gloominess of hard times but not of defeat among the shopkeepers at the time of my research. “I just have to live diligently (yŏl-simhi)” was a phrase which summarizes the sensibilities of that period. The people whom I met during the course of research had mostly managed to cope through the initial hardships of the crisis. There were also a few who had opened their business as a consequence of the economic situation; “IMF business opening” (IMF ch’angŏp) and “IMF business” (IMF changsa) were common colloquial designation for such cases small business proprietorship that had been commenced due to the crisis.

The social consequences of the “IMF era” that were most often under discussion and received the most attention concerned the salaried middle class: the crisis of the family due to unemployment or otherwise diminished earning power of the customary and legal household head, the husband (Yoon 1999); or downfall in terms of wealth, status, and stability of the whole middle class as such (Kim and Finch 2002). As will be evident throughout this work, the economic crisis did not leave the self-employed unaffected, and the working class was in a more difficult predicament than the salaried middle class. The increased “flexibility” of the labor market, a consequence of the bailout loan conditions, demanded significant sacrifices from the working class (Koo 2002: 202), and led to a rapid increase in the proportion of non-permanent workers (Jang 2003: 56), which has since remained high. The working class was in general in a worse position than the middle class to enjoy the fruits of the economic recovery at the turn of the century (Kim and Finch 2002: 136).

The consequences of the crisis for the middle class and for the salaried middle-class male were perceived as more severe for the nation than the consequences to workers and keepers of small businesses. The alleged collapse of the middle class was a direct blow at established ideas of development and modernity in Korea, while the effects of the crisis on the self-employed, small shopkeepers, lower-income strata or people with lower educational credentials was more consistent with the already existing discourse of “poor getting poorer and rich getting richer” (pinikpin puikpu) (see Janelli 1993: 198; Nelson 2000: 159; Abelmann 2003: 126). My own research period was temporally too tied to the sensibilities of the “IMF era” to include comparative data of non-crisis periods, but from my reading of other, non-scholarly material I gather the impression that my informants’ accounts of poor business due to the “IMF crisis” did not fundamentally differ from the usual manner of self-representation of shopkeepers. Corresponding to the association of modernization-derived “adults’ diseases” (sŏnginbyŏng) with salaried middle-class men since the early 1990s (Lee 1998: 116-7, 128; 2002: 62-5), the breach in Korean modernity and the failure of Korean development brought by the “IMF era” was presented as a crisis of the salaried middle class and its representative,
the company man. Facing work instability and the danger of layoffs and unemployment, it was the salaried middle-class husbands’ *ki* (energy, spirits) that wives needed to nurture (Yoon 1999, Kim and Finch 2002: 129), not that of the small entrepreneurs or shopkeepers facing and coping with decreased incomes or losses of business.

The recession was often a topic of talk and discussion in terms of “before the IMF” or “after the IMF,” illustrating that the outbreak of the recession was a major divide in time. “Now that we have the IMF” and “because of the IMF” were other common ways of using the sense of a particular time to characterize and make sense of one’s own circumstances. A good example of the “IMF discourse” is what Mr Pak described about the contemporary circumstances on one of the first occasions I met him, without my taking up the topic: “Because of the IMF times are very difficult. The politicians have ruined everything. Choosing a thief like that for a president.” (He referred to the president whose term ended after the crisis began.) I asked further about the reported economic recovery. “No, it’s almost getting worse all the time. Good news is spread only to get the real estate prices to go up.” Mr Pak’s word echoed the sentiments that were common at the time: the sense of separateness from the export-driven economy of recovery, of which the effects were not reaching “our kind of people” or the “ordinary people” (*somin*) in the neighborhood level.

The crisis evoked many discourses on social and political issues that had existed before but were now more visible and tangible than before. It incited reflection on the classes and strata and status hierarchies (Abelmann 2003: 100, 274), as the older hierarchies were challenged and endangered – even if, with a few years’ hindsight, not fundamentally altered from the point of view of keepers of small neighborhood businesses. Besides the perception of the downfall of the middle class, the above-mentioned notion of “poor getting poorer, rich getting richer” received wide exposure in the media with concrete statistical evidence of the increasing income gaps. This phenomenon also appeared as awareness of the increasingly manifest distinction between the non-privileged “ordinary people” – most often conceptualized as *somin* – and the wealthy.

---

3 In macroeconomic terms South Korea indeed recovered quickly; the economic growth in 1999 was 10.9 percent after a minus growth of 6.7 percent in 1998 (Chang and Chae 2004: 437).

4 During the year of the recession, household income diminished in all income strata except the wealthiest 20 percent, which was able to increase its income by a few percent thanks to high interest rates. The income of the poorest 20 percent diminished by 15 percent (*Donga Ilbo*, Nov 9, 1998). Before the crisis, the income of the poorest 10 percent had been one seventh of that of the richest, but one ninth after the onset of the crisis (Pak Chang-gyu 2002). During the same period unemployment increased from less than three percent to more than seven (*Donga Ilbo*, Nov 6, 1998).
An important part in the discourses and manifestations of social divides was the notion of the extravagance of the rich, which was not a new topic but which was now given a sharper and a more critical tone. Perhaps the most significant episode contributing to the acuteness this topic was the so-called clothing lobby scandal in the summer of 1999, in which wives of high officials and politicians were suspected of receiving expensive clothing as bribes from the side of an industrialist in legal trouble. The case was widely covered in the media, and many of my informants, having televisions turned on for the most of the day, watched the broadcasted parliamentary hearings of the suspects and witnesses while tending their shops. On August 25 1999 I jotted down the following note: “On the bigger street, the predominant sound is the sound of parliamentary clothing lobby scandal hearings [from television], four women testifying whether high-priced clothes were given or demanded in exchange for expected favors for husbands.”

The clothing lobby affair had both a gender and a class dimension, which came together in the characters of the elite women who were the protagonists of the case: women as extravagant consumers (see also Nelson 2000: 145-9) as well as managers of household finances and other family concerns, and the rich as lavish and irresponsible spenders, especially at a time when most other Koreans were tightening their belts because of the recession. Yet another characteristic that made the clothing lobby affair highly acute during the “IMF crisis” and representative of the sociopolitical and economic ills perceived to have led to the predicament, was that it worked to highlight the close linkages between big businesses and the government (chŏnggyŏng yuch’ak), which according to one study was most often pointed out as one of the main culprits behind the crisis (Hayo and Shinn 2002:92).

With the onset of the crisis, Korea’s relation to the outer world had to be reexamined. Economic relations with other countries could no more be perceived as consisting mainly of industrial exports that brought in foreign currency, attained national export targets and built the wealth of the nation. Foreign money now entered Korea, first as the IMF bailout loan, the conditions of which for many in Korea were nothing short of a breach of the national sovereignty, and soon as directly invested foreign capital, taking over bankruptcy-threatened companies. An illustrative example of sensibilities towards the menace of foreign-controlled capital was a caricature in a weekly magazine: a huge intimidating figure with Caucasian features, wearing an earring with a text “IMF”, holds a sombrero-wearing skeleton depicting suppressed Mexico under his palm, and has his eyes set upon a Korean figure, which is clad in the peasant’s traditional white garb and appears to be in midst of a brawl with a suit-clad figure, apparently representing a domestic capitalist (Hankyoreh 21, Dec 11, 1997).
For the kind of small businesskeepers that are the subject of this study, the economic crisis, while causing serious economic troubles for most and bringing down many, was perhaps not as severe a breakup point as it was for the industrial workers and not the kind of a threat for identity as it was for the salaried middle class. Still, the often decent but risky and sometimes financially rewarding existence of a shopkeeper did become more precarious, despite the generally sympathetic attention in public and political discourses as conveyed in media, and despite supportive policy measures by the government. Another outcome of the authorities’ attention was that a substantial body of scholarship appeared in particular in economics.5

After the onset of the crisis and in its aftermath, government authorities adopted policies to support the establishment of both small-scale non-professional businesses and enterprises based on high education and technology as a means to alleviate unemployment and rebuild the economy. The businesses that were designated as targets of support were defined as consisting of two varieties: the “livelihood type” (saenggyehyang) of small-scale self-employment, in which the shopkeepers of this study were engaged, and those established by people with skills in new technologies. The establishment of livelihood-type small businesses was supported from a budget-financed credit assurance fund (Nara Kyōngje, June 1999: 34), as loans for business opening were difficult to obtain due to lack of guarantees and due to banking policies unfavorable to small businesses. The other kind of enterprising was entirely different from self-employment in scale and expectations, and it resulted in the formation of Korean venture (pench’o in the Korean pronunciation) capitalism and in the so-called venture boom (pench’öbum) at the turn and in the beginning of the new decade. As venture businesses were based on newly developed technologies, professional specialization, university research and high education, they formed a new social category distinct from small-scale self-employment, also reproducing the distinction between professional occupations and non-professional self-employment. At the time of my main research period, pench’o was not yet a very tangible concept, even less so in the research neighborhood, but later, as the closeness of a university enticed several pench’o companies to start in the vicinity of the research area, one restaurant keeper couple was able to enjoy the benefits of the clientele provided by a venture company nearby.

Almost two years after the onset of the crisis, at the time when the national economy indicators were showing upsurge, Mrs Chŏng, a keeper of a hairdressing salon sighed that “it feels as if the IMF is starting now,” when

---

her business had been unusually quiet. Characteristic of the post-crisis usage of the concept was also a description of the continuing polarization of society: “The ordinary people (sŏmin) are having it more difficult than during the IMF” (Hankyoreh, March 12, 2003). The term “IMF” and the time of the economic crisis have remained in use as concepts and markers for an era that in the new decade works as a point of comparison for economic conditions in the national economy as well as among the neighborhood businesskeepers. For this study, the crisis and its aftermath were the framework of the contemporary political economy that, paradoxically, created favorable circumstances to delve into the neighborhood shopkeepers’ categories of Korean capitalism; for the businesskeepers, it commonly entailed slow or poor business, in many cases hardships, and for some, disasters.

**Shopkeepers and the Self-employed in Scholarship of Korea**

Regardless of discipline, researchers of Korea have pointed out the dearth of research into small-scale businesskeepers or self-employment as an occupation. An anthropologist, Laurel Kendall, notes that the small entrepreneurs, while a significant segment of the South Korean population, are an ill-defined group which has been rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature (1996: 514). Depicting sociology of Korea, Ch’oe T’aeryong says that despite the significant proportion of the self-employed stratum in Korean occupational structure, it received attention only in the 1980s as a part of class structure research (1991: 1–2). More recently, economists Ryu Chae-u and Ch’oe Ho-yŏng (1999: 10) go as far as to say that “Despite the great importance of the self-employment sector in Korean economy and its enormous socioeconomic significance, research on the sector is still almost non-existent” (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 110).

Ch’oe T’aeryong’s remark (1991: 1–2) that sociologists’ neglect of the self-employed has stemmed form the theoretical constraints of the discipline itself is reflected, for example, in the decision of the sociologist Hagen Koo to cease researching small entrepreneurship (see Koo 1976) after the beginning of his scholarly career, and turn his attention to class formation. According to Ch’oe, Korean sociologists, in the same vein as the modernization theory of international scholarship, regarded the self-employed as a vanishing stratum amidst the increasing importance of the bourgeois and the workers in developing capitalism. Hagen Koo, encountering the concepts of center and periphery in the world-system theory in the 1970s’ sociology, found that it was difficult to apply them to the informal or self-employed sector despite treating the topic successfully in his doctoral research. As a result, he turned his scholarly interest from the structure of urban social strata (kyech’ŭng kujo,
literally “stratum structure”) to the change of Korean class structure (kyeugp kuyo) caused by industrialization (Koo 2000: 74–5) and to the formation of the Korean working class (see Koo 2001).

For anthropology of Korea, the scholarly interest that the self-employed have received has depended on the turning of anthropologists’ ethnographic gaze on urban society, which has taken place relatively recently, somewhat belatedly following the migration of the Korean population from villages to cities. The body of work in the anthropology and sociology of urban Korea is growing, but for anthropology, villages are still significant in providing clearly definable field sites, and the most important and most referred Korean-language and English-language anthropological studies on Korean shall for some time remain ones that are based on research conducted in village settings. The most prominent work is perhaps Vincent Brandt’s study of a mid-1960s coastal village, “Korean Village Between Land and Sea,” which continues to provide inspiration and conceptual frameworks for research on contemporary Korea. Roger Janelli (1993: 44) noted in his work on the cultural practices of a Korean conglomerate at the end of the 1980s, that “The ethnography of schools, the military, and urban life, especially among the middle classes, has yet to be written.” Since then, some important works in Korean and English have appeared, with keepers of small businesses occasionally figuring in them (Cho Eun and Cho Oakla 1992, Moon Okpyo et al 1992, Chun 1995c, Kendall 1996, Moon 1997, Kim Seung-kyung 1999, Lett 1998, Kim Kyŏng-ae 1999, Nelson 2000, Abelmann 2003).

The article that particularly directed my attention to the keepers of small businesses in South Korea in the first place was Laurel Kendall’s study (1996) of shamanism in Seoul in the 1990s, in which she discusses the phenomenon that the majority of the patrons of shaman rituals she encountered were shop owners, restaurateurs, and proprietors of small companies. She suggests that the apparent ease with which the shamanistic rituals, earlier practiced mainly to cure illnesses, have now turned to ensuring entrepreneurial success and providing wealth, lies in a “calibration” of those practices to meet the contemporary arbitrariness of the market and the political economy (ibid: 521–2). Kendall makes the remark that the small entrepreneurs are a “new urban class” (ibid: 514). Similarly, Nancy Abelmann, another prominent anthropologist of Korea points out in her recent work (Abelmann 2003: 134) the necessity to consider the “dizzying increases in urban production and petty entrepreneurial work over the course of a single generation” when examining postwar Korea.

I suggest that the novelty of the small entrepreneurs is, however, more a product of the contemporary urbanization of ethnographic scholarship than of a recent increase in the proportion of this occupational category or social
1. The Lived World

Small entrepreneurial activity from peddling and streetside stalls to small workshops has been a constant and relatively large part of urban livelihoods in Korea throughout modern Korean history. The statistics from the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) indicate that the proportion of traders (sangin) in the economically active population in Seoul remained at approximately 25 percent throughout the Japanese era from 1911 to 1941 (Yi 2001: 233).

In terms of urban employment, even though the absolute number of the urban self-employed increased almost fourfold from 1970 to the late 1990s, its proportion of urban employment has remained fairly constant during the period, decreasing slightly (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 114). There are also studies of Korean class structure that interpret statistics to indicate a growth of the urban businesskeeping sector, defined either as non-agricultural self-employed stratum (Sŏ Kwan-mo 1987: 66) or as old middle class (Hong and Koo 1993: 199–200); in these conceptualizations of the social structure, part of the proportional growth of the sector is explained by the distinction made between the established self-employed and the “urban low class” (ibid.) or the “marginal proletariat” (Sŏ 1987: 66), which includes the smallest and most marginal forms of trading.

An early survey of businesskeepers in two downtown Seoul areas, Chongno and Chungmuro, was conducted by Yi Man-gap in 1949 (Yi Man-gap 1979). The former locale had been a Korean area during the colonial period, and the latter a place of Japanese residence and commerce, which was discernible in the characteristics of the respective localities. Hagen Koo’s research on small entrepreneurship in Korea at the turn of the 1970s pointed out the importance of small entrepreneurial activities in developing countries such as South Korea. At the time, only 14 percent of the work force was employed in industry and 37 percent in the commerce and service sector, in which employment had grown faster than in industries (Koo 1976: 777). Koo sees small entrepreneurship as a highly absorbent sphere that provides work opportunities for unskilled rural migrants and as a channel of upward social mobility for those lacking educational credentials.6

Chung Cha-whan’s doctoral dissertation of 1977, which focuses on the transformation of Korean family and kinship in a newly urbanized society, illustrates the importance of petty trading, from shopkeeping to occasional

---

6 Hagen Koo’s personal reminiscence of his early research on small businesskeepers is interesting: “The reason I paid attention to these aspects [see Koo 1976] was because it reflected the experience of our own family. My father had received no formal education, but he had a strong aspiration for upward social mobility, and his desire to educate his children was especially big. There were of course many people like my father in Korea at that time, and their only way to achieve a middle-class economic position was self-employment” (Koo 2000: 73–4).
subsistence peddling, for the livelihood of rural-urban migrant settlers in Seoul in the early 1970s. Chung characterizes the livelihood of a large segment of the settlement residents as “laborer-tradesman economy” (1977:75), in which unstable and irregular wage employment is supplemented by petty trade. Chung remarks that “A salaried man is what most people in Saemaul aspire to be,” but less than 30 percent of male adults were in a salaried occupation, and there was some kind of a shop in more than one third of the houses in Chung’s research area, and one third of persons surveyed were either shopkeepers, tradesmen, or a peddlers (1977: 66–67).

Two notable contributions to research of shopkeepers in Korea appeared at the turn of the 1990s. Pak Min-ja has discussed the class position and reproduction of the economically most modest stratum of shopkeepers, vegetable and fruit retailers, with a Marxist framework, paying attention in particular to the appropriation of wives’ labor and to the reproduction of social and economic inequality, to which, she argues, shopkeepers unwittingly contribute by their individualistic strategies and aspirations (Pak 1988; see also Pak 1990 and 1991). Ch’oe T’ae-ryong’s work has treated the class character and the class experience of the small businesskeepers, which he has designated alternatively as “self-employed stratum” (belonging to old middle stratum) (Ch’oe 1991) or “urban petty bourgeoisie” (Ch’oe 1988). Ch’oe sees the stratum as not marginal but as deeply integrated to South Korean capitalism, considering its consistently significant proportion of labor force. Applying Marxist concepts, he remarks that the old middle stratum lacks a particular class consciousness, but adds that the “petty bourgeoisie” opportunism and ambivalence is common by and large to all strata in Korea (Ch’oe 1991: 186–7).

Of the research on self-employment that appeared in connection with and as a consequence of the late 1990s economic crisis, Ryu Chae-u’s and Ch’oe Ho-yōng’s study is representative (1999). They notice that among the self-employed, the proportion of the “pure self-employed” without employees has grown at the expense of small employer entrepreneurs. After the onset of the crisis, the number of pure self-employed grew by more than 100,000, of which half were new entrants and half previous employers who had let their employees go (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 137). Other studies that were published in the aftermath of the crisis treated for example women’s motives in entering self-employment, and the remarkable differences in self-employment rates between men and women (Sŏng Chi-mi 2002, Kim U-yŏng 2001), labor mobility surrounding self-employment (Ryu and Ch’oe 2000), the influence of different variables of individual persons on the economic results of self-employment (Sŏng and An 2002), and the motives for the choice of self-employment among low-skilled and high-skilled persons (Kŭm and Cho 2000).
An exception to the erstwhile scholarly inattention to Korean small-scale business proprietorship is the research on Korean shopkeepers in the United States. The proprietorship of small enterprises by Korean immigrants has been a common topic of research since the 1970s (Bonacich, Light, and Wong 1977), as the number of Korean immigrants in the United States had increased due to the changes in US immigration laws in 1965 (ibid.). Korean small entrepreneurship in American cities became a noticeable phenomenon, and the segment of Korean-Americans in self-employment has been significantly higher than that of the general populace (Light and Bonacich 1988: 163, Yoon In-jin 1997: 20). Ivan Light’s and Edna Bonacich’s work (1988) is a detailed study of Korean immigrant businesskeepers, concentrating especially on Korean small businesses’ relationship to U.S. capitalism and world economy. They draw, somewhat surprisingly, rather negative conclusions on the effects of Korean and other immigrant entrepreneurship, presenting their predicament as a critique of world capitalism. Korean-American businesskeepers’ relations to other ethnic groups have received especially concentrated attention due to interracial tensions (Min, Pyong Gap 1996; Park, Kyeyoung 1996; Yoon 1997) and incidents, of which the most notorious were the Los Angeles riots of 1992 (Lie and Abelmann 1995).

Another primary topic to which researchers of Korean-American shopkeepers have paid attention are the class trajectories of Korean immigrants. Small businesskeeping has indicated downward social mobility for the immigrants who have mostly been from white-collar or professional families (Light and Bonacich 1988: 120), whose Korean educational credentials have not granted them access to those kinds of occupations in the United States (Yoon 1997; Park, Kyeyoung 1997:27–9, 203–5). This socioeconomic background of the Korean immigrant entrepreneurs, which for the most part differs from their peers in Korea in that they are more highly educated, might be one factor that has contributed to a greater scholarly interest than received by shopkeepers in Korea. While prominent compared to other ethnic groups and the national average, the proportion of self-employment among Korean-Americans is actually slightly lower than self-employment among Koreans in South Korea itself.

The circumstances of Korean-Americans remind of the increased scholarly interest in self-employment in Korea after the late 1990s’ economic crisis, when shopkeeping and other kinds of self-employment became an involuntary option for many salaried middle-class people after layoffs from companies. This invites the unsubstantiable reflection that perhaps, in addition to

---

7 According to the United States census in 1990, Koreans’ self-employment rate was almost 25 percent, the highest figure among ancestry groups. The U.S. national average was 10 percent (Yoon In-jin 1997: 20).
the constraints inherent in scholarly theories referred to above, the inferior position of trade among the professions in the official statecraft and Confucian state philosophy of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) may have played a role in influencing scholarship as well as social discourses even in contemporary South Korea so that the small-scale businesskeeping has not been duly recognized as a part of Korean cultural and social fabric, drawing specific attention only when those engaged in it have unconventional social and class backgrounds. In contrast, in popular discourses and understandings of Korean society and workings of the economy, small-scale trading and self-employment have figured, while lacking the prestige of education-based occupations, as feasible, reasonable, and worthwhile alternatives.

The Contours of This Research

Why Shopkeepers?

My own interest in shopkeepers in Korean urban residential neighborhoods as a potential topic of research developed initially during my language study in Seoul both out of personal ethnographic curiosity about the ubiquity of small shops in Korean cities, and from a growing understanding that proprietors of small businesses would be a relevant and rewarding subject of study and contribute to the knowledge of contemporary South Korea.

My personal interest was in the first place aroused by the visible ethnographic difference between my native Finland and the Korea of neighborhoods and marketplaces with its multitude of shops and the colorfulness, restlessness, disorder, and shabbiness of the urban scenery marked by shop signboards, from which my interest moved to people behind the visual façade. The cursory observations I made during the months of language and study and university classes at an anthropology department added to the personal and scholarly appeal of shopkeepers as operators of small businesses, being engaged in a particular kind of a livelihood and a way of life, and as participants in the social life in a residential neighborhood.

In my earlier acquaintance with ethnographic and social science literature on Korea, I had rarely encountered keepers of small businesses or the self-employed as an occupational group or as a social category or stratum, and as I read and searched for references on the topic, I became increasingly assured of the significance of the topic. In anthropology of Korea, references to urban shopkeepers were usually at best cursory, and no ethnographic work which focused on the practitioners of that particular livelihood appeared to have been done. Exceptions could be found in works that treat urban migration and newly emerging forms or urban life, and some sociologists had focused on
the self-employed in studies of Korean class structure and social strata. The keepers of small businesses, usually classed in South Korean and general social science scholarship as “petty bourgeoisie” or “old middle class”, seemed to have been in a disadvantageous position both politically and academically to attract research interest in the manner of industrial workers, the urban poor, or the salaried and professional middle class. Nor have the keepers of small businesses conformed with either ideas of social and political progress or economic development and modernization.

Characteristics of Neighborhood Businesses and Types of Shops

The protagonists of this research were keepers of small individual business establishments, in which they traded with a stock of merchandise, a personal skill, small-scale manufacturing technology, or with some kind of a combination of these in a residential neighborhood. The location in a residential neighborhood invited the use of the colloquial term tongnechangsae, a compound of words for “neighborhood” and “business” or “trade,” and accordingly, it glosses fairly accurately as “neighborhood businesses.” This trait distinguishes the businesses of my informants from shops in more clearly commercially characterized settings such as marketplaces (sijang or chaerae sijang, “traditional marketplace”) or business arcades (sangga). In addition to denoting physical location, “neighborhood business” also conveys the notion of a limited business area and customer base, a small likelihood of growth, and restricted earnings, and on a more conceptual level, lack of specific education-related skills and sophistication, but also associations with certain positive characteristics of affective and warm-hearted Koreanness.

A characteristic common to small-scale commercial activity cross-culturally is utilization of, and reliance on, labor of household members. This is the case also in Korea, and especially so among the keepers of neighborhood businesses, which, by definition, are small in size and often do not need to resort to hired labor. Among my informants, the most common organization of work was joint operation by a married couple, division of labor and intensity of participation depending on the type of shop, personal skills, and cultural understandings of gender roles. As I will argue, the utilization of household labor – in particular that of children who attended schools or universities – was not unconditional but depended on considerations of family aspirations and trajectories, in which notions of the continuity of the family and household were not applied to shopkeeping. Although not formally salaried, household labor tended not to be unremunerated either but regarded as household reciprocity, of which transfers of “pocket money,” as the pay for shop assistance was conceptualized, were a part. In contrast, even substantial
work tasks performed by visiting acquaintances and neighbors in shops was considered leisure, and never remunerated.

Very typical examples of neighborhood businesses that retail a stock of merchandise were grocery stores or supermarkets, termed in Korean as syup’omak’et or syup’ǒ after the English-language word. They were characteristically operated by married couples, with only occasional help from household members or from close kin. Other kinds of retail establishments were vegetable and fruit shops, which often also had a limited selection of groceries. It was common for vegetable and fruit sellers to rent a space in front of a supermarket from its proprietor, to whom keeping such fresh produce might have been an excessive burden. Among the establishments operated by my informants, the bookshop and the flower shop were also businesses relying more on a stock of merchandise than on a specific skill of the proprietor.

A characteristic business of residential areas based on the skill of an individual person is hairdressing, which is also representative of women’s business proprietorship and of intense competition in a branch in which the supply of services is large. Similar to hairdressing salons in being typical for women and based on a specific skill was a garment mending shop. In the case of laundry keepers, two of whom became major informants, the proprietorship of laundering machinery also tended to be combined with a personal skill of making and repairing clothes, as laundries offered both these services. As with the female-operated garment mending shop, sewing skill was usually acquired in wage work, and utilized later in self-employment.

Restaurants are very common not only as neighborhood-level small businesses but also in Korean self-employment in general. A major segment – approximately one third – of the establishments kept by my informants were small restaurants classified either as ordinary restaurants (siktang) or as places specialized in flour-based dishes (punsik). Depending on the branch, acquiring the necessary skills is not a laborious process for prospective proprietors, and as I could see among my informants, a married couple could adequately operate a restaurant, and if occasional assistance from household members was not sufficient, hiring part-time (arūbait’ǔ) or full-time employees was not an insurmountable financial or bureaucratic burden.

Small-scale manufacturing of commodities also takes place in Korean neighborhoods both as capitalist industrialism in small factories and as petty commodity production in small shops. Keepers of the former, of which some were located in my fieldwork area, were not among my informants, but of the latter, Mr Pak’s rice mill and bakery (pangakan) introduced in the opening vi-

\[8\] In this study, my use of the word “supermarket” reflects the Korean connotations of the term.
The Lived World

gnette was a good example. It combined the keeper couple’s machinery and manual work, being viable also in industrialized South Korea due to the special characteristics of the demand and consumption of its product, the rice cakes. Across the street from the rice bakery was a similar establishment engaged in food processing: the shop was registered as a sesame oil press, it had the word “mill” on its signboard, but it received most of its sales from cigarettes.

The Field, the Methods, and the Data

The main part of the ethnographic fieldwork for this study was conducted during a 14-month period between November 1998 and December 1999. I gathered research material also during three subsequent visits to Korea, spending between ten days and two weeks in the research neighborhood each time.

The main data for this study was gathered in unstructured interviews and conversations, and through observations in the shops and streets of the research area. Most of the interviews and conversations with the shopkeepers took place in the shops, between and during spells of work, when the proprietors were not occupied with customers. Just as the shops were sites where most of the talk took place, the streets were mainly places for observation. However, encounters, exchanges of greetings, questions, jokes, and banter in streets and alleys provided occasionally useful and interesting pieces of information, and the business establishments were perhaps as important as locations of observation as locations of talk and conversation.

I gathered fieldwork data from a few more than thirty individual businesskeepers or business proprietor couples. The amount and the quality of data varies between informants: some individuals such as Mr Pak who appeared in the opening vignette became main informants essential for the success of fieldwork, and certain business establishments such as restaurants and hairdressing salons in which I was able to establish the best rapport became sites where I could engage in both conversations and observations. There were about twenty of these cases altogether. Besides successful formations of fruitful research relationships, there were also cases in which I did not succeed in presenting my research intentions in a manner that would have convinced business proprietors to cooperate with me.

Besides ethnographic data from fieldwork among the shopkeepers in the Seoul neighborhood, print and online media news, accounts, and reports have formed an important part of research material. I collected newspaper clippings of topics relevant to my study to the best of my ability while in Korea, but the huge availability of South Korean online media (of both print and non-print publications) has been more significant. For example, the search-
able database of newspaper articles of all nationally circulated dailies except one since 1990, KINDS (Korean Integrated News Database System), operated by Korea Press Foundation, has been an invaluable research tool and source. Through KINDS, for example, it has been possible to track down the emergence of certain discourses and concepts, and assess the use of concepts and categories in popular discourses in a way that would have been much more difficult relying only on printed media.

Many of the shopkeepers were curious about me as a foreigner who had taken the trouble to learn their language and become interested in their lives, so that they were able to converse at ease about their life, Korea, and foreign nations and especially learn about my own country. This ensured also that the exchange of information was not a one-way process. In addition, the often-felt and expressed sympathy aroused by my circumstances as a lone person in a foreign land, far away from my home and my parents, facilitated the establishment of rapport with many of the shopkeepers. While the shopkeepers’ curiosity about me and Finland often provided opportunities to inquire about the shopkeepers themselves and their views, facing talkative and inquisitive shop proprietors I occasionally needed to strain my abilities as a speaker of Korean and an ethnographer to achieve my goals, not always succeeding. So it happened for example with Grandfather Kwŏn, the laundry proprietor; he always welcomed me warmly to his cramped shop, but he did not pay much attention to my questions, and held long monologues on subjects of his own liking, which as such produced a peculiar body of data.

Getting to know the shopkeepers was greatly facilitated by the fact that as neighborhood business establishments, the shops had characteristics of public and commercial space as well as private and non-commercial space. In the case of most of the shops, I was able to enter as a customer, and introduce myself and tell the shopkeeper about my purpose in staying in Korea and in the research area and going around and asking questions and making inquiries and writing things down in a notebook. If I managed to establish rapport with the proprietor so that further research acquaintance seemed possible, I was able to utilize the non-commercial facet of neighborhood shop space to my advantage by using the practice of visiting as a framework for research conversations and observations.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS, TRANSLITERATIONS, AND KOREAN NAMES

In this study, all English-language renderings of my fieldwork material and translations from Korean-language literary references are mine. Actually,

---

9 KINDS can be accessed at http://www.kinds.or.kr.
most of my fieldwork data has undergone two translations, as the fieldwork and research process has been trilingual. It is perhaps not a rare circumstance for anthropologists to whom neither the fieldwork language nor the language of research writing is native. While knowing that the final thesis would be written in English, I jotted down all my notes on observations and conversations in the field site in my native language Finnish in order to be as quick and precise as possible, with recurrently appearing key concepts and many conversation passages in Korean, which was the fieldwork language. In the evenings in my boarding room, I typed the notes with a laptop computer in English so that my fieldwork data would be more accessible for the writing of the thesis.

Transliterations of Korean are made according to the McCune-Reischauer system, except for names of persons, companies, and institutions which are better known with a transliteration that follows their own choosing or a common usage. In some cases where the preferred personal usage differs considerably from the standard used elsewhere in the work, I have added a McCune-Reischauer transliteration of the name for the sake of clarity.

All the names appearing in this study are pseudonyms, even though changing family names works poorly to provide anonymity for my informants: they can be recognized better through their businesses than through their actual names. Therefore in the cases when I have wanted the individual to remain absolutely unidentified, I have left the shopkeeping details unspecified. The selection of surnames that I use to denote my informants does not reflect the actual distribution of names in Korea, but is more varied in order to distinguish the individuals more unambiguously. There are less than 300 family names in Korea, and the three most common surnames (Kim, Yi or Lee, and Pak or Park) cover almost half of the population, and two thirds of Koreans has one of the ten most common surnames (Korea National Statistics Office 2003: 8–9). There were more Kims among my informants than appear in these pages. Furthermore, for the sake of clarity and simplicity, and scarcity of Korean surnames, I gave some of the married couples only one surname, which is a rare phenomenon, since persons with a same family name and same place of lineage origin (tongsŏng tongbon) are legally not allowed to marry, and marriages between persons with only the same family name are not common, either.

In this study, the analysis will follow the concepts and classifications of South Korean capitalism, arising from and conceptualizing the lived worlds of small businesskeepers. Two chapters pay close attention to practices and conceptualizations of household, family, and gender; the first one delineates and analyses the specificities of practices and notions among proprietors of estab-
lishments that had both spouses participate in the operation, and the latter focuses on women as keepers of small businesses, analyzing the gendered conceptualizations that the protagonist women used to order and make sense of their experience. The chapters on money and cash, and practices and categories of leisure as distinguished from work analyze basic concepts of economic lives and capitalism, examining the appropriations of capitalism informed by Korean logics of culture. The thesis finishes with an examination of concepts that identify and position shopkeepers in South Korean society and political economy.
CHAPTER TWO

The Shopkeepers and their Businesses in the Neighborhood

This chapter delineates the significance and meanings of the concept neighborhood, tongne. It first introduces the area where I conducted fieldwork, taking the reader to an imagined tour through the streets where the shops of my informants were located and introducing both the proprietors and their businesses. The chapter continues by positioning the research area in the social map of Seoul and South Korea, paying attention to markers of social stratification which have been applied to the area I call “Ordinary People’s Ward.” Finally, I discuss the Korean concept tongne: its applications by the neighborhood shopkeepers and residents as a socio-spatial category and its uses in Korean society as a category of political economy.

The Fieldwork Neighborhood

The area where I conducted fieldwork in southern Seoul, close to a major university but far from downtown Seoul and from the affluent areas in the southwest of the city, was rather representative of similar areas with mainly detached and semi-detached houses and here and there increasing numbers of small apartment houses, called pilla or heich’ū after “villa” and “heights”. In Korean terms the locale was a chut’akka, small house area; the term chut’ak most commonly refers to detached or other kinds of small houses in distinction from apartment (ap’at’) blocks and commercial and business districts. In the administrative district of tong that my research area belonged to there was only one apartment block (ap’at’u tanji), and in general that part of Seoul did not have much apartment housing. It was an important characteristic in mapping the area in terms of social stratification of Seoul and South Korea, suggesting a relatively small number of middle-class and upper middle-class residents and giving it the flavor of an “ordinary people’s” locality.

The field research area consisted of several neighborhoods or tongnes as they were understood and conceptualized in the talk of my informants. In the common discourses of the shopkeepers and residents, “our neighborhood” (uri tongne) often consisted of no more than a single street or a part of a street and its vicinity as its geographical basis. The street names that I will use in this work do not originate from the local usage or existing street names but from my own practice of configuring the locality in my research and in my field notes. It differed from both the official Korean address system and the
practices of Koreans; I had been accustomed to orient and organize space
with help of street names, but in Korea at the time of the research only the
biggest streets and roads in Seoul had officially and colloquially used names.10
For example, what I shall call “Kolmok Street” was usually referred to as
“Pharmacy Alley” (yakkuk kolmok) after the pharmacy located in the corner of
the main local street.

The “Big Street”, which I have designated so for its size compared to other
neighborhood streets, went over a hill, connecting at the both ends to the
main road of the area. “Kolmok Street” and “Side Street” were both at the vi-
cinity of the Big Street; in the local parlance the two were called alleys (kol-
mok) for their narrowness and scarcity of vehicle traffic. These main routes of
people’s movement were lined with shops as in all South Korean urban small
house areas (chut’aekka), in which the majority of buildings are two to five
story constructions, and the economic activity takes place amidst social in-
teraction and neighborhood reciprocity. The area did not have the rush and
congestion of people as in marketplace alleys, but on a par with more com-
mercially characterized locales such as shopping malls (sangga) and tradi-
tional marketplaces (chaerae sijang), the shop signboards seemed to be in
competition with each other in visual noisiness for the attention of custom-
ers.

The number of shops in residential houses decreased with distance from
populous streets, especially as the area was geographically rugged: streets,
alleys, and houses climbing up the hills as in many places of Seoul. The area
did not give an impression of either wealth and high status or poverty. After
some time in the field, I was to realize that the categories that likely would
have been appropriate for the place in the Western European terms – lower
middle-class or working-class – were not easily applicable in the Korean con-
text. The people walking on the streets, their clothing and hairstyles, the type
of housing and commercial establishments indicated that according to Korean
conceptualizations of social stratification, it was an “ordinary people’s”
(sômin) area.

10 Since my research, the metropolitan Seoul administration has designed a new address
system in which every street is given a name to which the number of the house is at-
tached to form the address. This is to replace the old system, in which addresses are
given only as number combinations within the smallest administrative district of tong.
2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

Figure 1: The fieldwork area and the shops of the main informants

1. Mr Paek and Mrs Chang’s meat shop of
2. Supermarket
3. Mr Pak’s rice mill
4. Book lending shop
5. Ms and Mrs Ko’s supermarket
6. Mrs Hong’s hairdressing salon
7. Hairdressing salon
8. Mr Hwang’s interior shop
9. Mr and Mrs Han’s sesame oil press
10. Fruit and vegetable shop
11. Mr Kim’s jewelry shop
12. Flower shop
13. Mr Chin’s kitchenware shop
14. Harvest Restaurant
15. Mrs Ch’oe and Mr Cho’s restaurant
16. Mr Kim’s and his wife’s bookshop
17. Mrs Kang’s and Mr Kim’s restaurant
18. Mandu restaurant of Mr Mun
19. Mr Yun’s office
20. Mudfish stew restaurant
21. Mr and Mrs Ch’ông’s restaurant
22. Mr and Mrs Yi’s supermarket
23. Friendship Restaurant
24. Yumin’s mother’s shop
25. Fruit grocery
26. Mr Yu’s laundry

Mrs Ch’ông’s hairdressing salon, Grandfather Kwôn’s laundry, and some other establishments were located to the south of the area in the map.
Entering the Neighborhood and the Shops

Big Street

Walking down Big Street on my usual route from my boarding house, I left behind the areas closer to the university where some of my research informants had their businesses, like Grandfather Kwŏn, who is introduced in detail in the next chapter. Chŏng wŏnjang’s (Mrs Chŏng’s)11 hairdressing salon nearby had been operating in the location approximately as long as Grandfather Kwŏn’s laundry, close to 20 years, but unlike the run-down signboard of the laundry, its recently replaced illuminated signboard left no doubt of the name of the shop. (Chŏng wŏnjang, with two of her female shopkeeper colleagues, will figure prominently in Chapter 5.) The shop space of both of these establishments was on the street level of a very typical two-story house, in which the landlord lived on the second floor. In this part of the area this kind of arrangement was becoming increasingly less common, since many landlords were rebuilding their lots to get a better value from the demand for exam cramming dormitories (kosiwŏn)12 and studio apartments.

Further down opened the area where most of my informants’ shops were located. Mr Yu, a colleague of Grandfather Kwŏn in his mid-30s, had his laundry on the downhill road. The family of four lived in the back room of the laundry – an arrangement which used to be common but which had become rare and a marker of lack of means as shopkeepers and Koreans in general had been able to afford more comfortable and spacious domiciles. In the morning I could often see him sending his youngest child to a kindergarten, as his wife had already left for work in a small garment factory nearby. Going still further down the street, Yumin’s mother’s clothing repair shop was to the left on a street that crossed Big Street and connected with the local main road. She was one of the many who eventually lost her or his shop space because of rebuilding, but she was lucky to be able to continue her business in a container modified as a shop just across the street.

Side Street, a narrow alley but still busy enough to house dozens of shops, forked to the left and ended at the local main road. The street was not with-

---

11 Wŏnjang is an honorific term of reference and address used of hairdressing salon keepers. It consists of the last syllable of the older term for hairdressing salon (mijangwŏn) and the Chinese character used in the meaning of “head of” (chang/-jang). I will refer to the two hairdressing salon proprietors as “Chŏng wŏnjang” and “Hong wŏnjang” throughout this work.

12 It is common that those cramming for state examinations (kosi) in law or administration choose to reside in specific dormitories (kosiwŏn). The vicinity of the university, in itself not related to the examination system except that its graduates have a high passing rate, has been the main factor for the appearance of the so-called cramming dorm village (kosich’ŏn) of hundreds of such dormitories in the area.
out many of the usual kinds of neighborhood small businesses such as real estate agencies, hairdressing and barbershops, small restaurants and grocery stores. “House of Friendship” was a restaurant kept by a woman in her 50s, who was true to the name of her restaurant, always bringing me sliced fruits or other snacks when I dropped by her shop even without ordering a meal. The tiny pork cutlet restaurant of Mr and Mrs Chŏng, who will be introduced in the next chapter, was a bit further down the road after Mr and Mrs Yi’s supermarket. Mr Chŏng leaving to make a meal delivery and returning was a very common sight along the street until he and his wife left the neighborhood for the provincial town. Iksan Sanghoe, a vegetable and grocery store next to the pork cutlet restaurant, was kept by a couple in their 50s; the husband was rarely in sight, but the wife received frequent help from her friends, whom I often saw sitting on the ground in front of the shop cleaning leek and other vegetables for sale.

Photograph 1: Big Street (taken in 2006).

The stretch from the fork of Side Street to the local main road was the busiest part of Big Street, with the greatest number of business establishment. Mr Yun’s insurance agency was a place where many neighborhood men from their 50s up gathered to drink a cup of coffee, chat and play rounds of paduk
or East Asian chess *changgi*\(^{13}\). The foreign ethnographer who was one generation younger was always welcome to join their company, which for a Korean man in his early 30s would have been culturally uncomfortable.\(^{14}\) In the typical fashion of a Korean town house in an economically viable location, the two-story house owned by Mr Yun himself also housed three other shops besides his insurance office: a fried chicken place, a hardware store and a wallpapering and flooring store. The restaurant of Mrs Kang and Mr Kim, who are among the shopkeepers portrayed in the next chapter, was on the other side of the street in a four-story building along with a bathing house, another fried chicken restaurant, and a book lending shop.\(^{15}\) Besides Mr Yun’s office, Mrs Kang’s and Mr Kim’s place became one of my focal points in the Big Street, and while I often had meals there, my visits were much more frequent than that. It was an ordinary Korean-style restaurant, yet upscale compared to its competitors in the neighborhood; for example the director of the nearby bank frequented the place at lunchtime.

Mr Kim could often be seen in the area, frequently spending time in Mr Yun’s office and in a real estate agency when the business in the restaurant was slower. His wife who possessed the actual restaurant skills of couple was less visible outside, and she never ventured far from the place, showing the common pattern among the restaurant-keeping couples in Korean neighborhoods, which reflected the traditional and transformed notions of inside and outside, and female and male spheres. The middle-aged couple’s restaurant had several competitors in the neighborhood, one of them right across the street, specializing in *mandu* dumplings but also offering ordinary meals. That place was a *mandu* restaurant with simple noodle-based dishes also with its previous proprietor at the time I begun fieldwork. After the original keeper regained his salaried job in a newspaper company which he had lost at the outset of the economic crisis, Mr Mun, the new proprietor who took over the shop, extended the menu, which became a concern to Mrs Kang and Mr Kim. Visiting this place and also the other competitors of the couple’s restaurant required prudence and judgment, as the couple thought of me as their own regular customer and not just a foreigner doing some kind of a study. On the

---

\(^{13}\) *Paduk* is better known in the West with the Japanese name *go*. Although *go* is the established word in English for that game, I will use the Korean word in this work. *Changgi* is a chess-like board game played with round markers.

\(^{14}\) Age grading and avoidance between age groups in agricultural villages have been described by Vincent Brandt (1971: 93) and Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim (1982: 22–3). Examining his photographs from the fieldwork village, Brandt noted that “in an overwhelming majority the men included at random in any one picture were within a few years of each other” (1971: 93).

\(^{15}\) Book lending shops (*taeyǒjŏm*) lend out books for a small fee.
other hand, in the competitive situation they were keen to hear my impressions and judgments concerning the other restaurants.

As with the house and office of Mr Yun, the bookstore of Mr Kim and his wife was in one of the four shop spaces in the first floor of the house that they owned and inhabited. Operating the bookstore did not demand the continuous presence of Mr Kim, nominally the head (sajang) of the shop, and the visitor was more likely to meet his wife than him in the shop. He used to play badminton in the street with the young man from the restaurant across the street or with me, and he was also able to enjoy the company of his friends elsewhere. His usual badminton partner, referred to by many neighborhood people as the “restaurant bachelor”, who kept a restaurant with his mother, epitomized the significance of deliveries for a neighborhood restaurant. As with the pork cutlet restaurant kept by the Ch’ng couple in Side Street, delivered meals comprised the majority of their sales. The young man, rushing back and forth on his moped, often with one aluminum delivery box in hand and another on the back of his vehicle, was one of the typical sights in the neighborhood.

Across the street from the restaurant bachelor’s and his mother’s place was another restaurant, specializing in pork hocks (chokpal), which, cooked and sliced, are a Korean delicacy. The proprietors, Mrs Ch’oe and Mr Cho, were exception among my research informants in that they were both four-year university graduates. Also somewhat exceptional was the couple’s allotment of time between home, their two children in the early years of primary school, and the restaurant; it was Mr Cho who spent more time at home than Mrs Ch’oe, who did the most of the work in the shop.

Closer to the end of Big Street and the local main road, the proprietors of the flower shop exemplified people struggling to make a living by trying various trades, and the shop space in question epitomized the rapid turnover of businesskeepers who failed in their enterprises. The couple that took over the flower shop from a young woman after keeping a small punsik-type restaurant lasted in the premises for one year, after which another person took over from them until the following year. After that, the shop space was turned into a punsik restaurant, which had a new proprietor during my last visit in 2002.

**MEETING MR YUN**

On one of the first days when I was walking around the neighborhood, scribbling notes about the shops that lined Big Street, a man who seemed to be in his late 50s waved me towards him in the Korean palm-down fashion and asked me, not hesitating to use Korean, what I was writing about. At first I mistook the tone of his voice as showing irritation for the presence of a note-taking person who could not hide that he was both a stranger and a for-
eigner, but I quickly realized, as I sat down for a cup of coffee in his small insurance agency office, that he had only been interested in getting to know me, and that the bluntness of his speech hid a warm and friendly personality, ready to show concern for a person of his own sons’ age far away from home and his own parents. He invited me to call him “father” (aboji), for the reason that while in Korea, I was separated from my own father, who was close to Mr Yun’s age. During the first visits to Mr Yun’s office, another pattern concerning my own social position emerged. I was not accustomed to the Korean practice of avoiding age groups other than one’s own, which with my sometimes intentional ignorance facilitated my presence with the middle-aged men. Being a foreign person, my presence also did not cause the awkwardness among the neighborhood Koreans of different age and gender to my own that a Korean person would have evoked more easily.

Even during the first visit to Mr Yun’s insurance agency it became apparent that very few of his visitors were actually insurance customers – the pattern which I was to observe in many other shops during the following year. Several men of approximately Mr Yun’s age dropped in, were given a cup of coffee, sat for some time chatting and then left. Mr Yun told me to come again for coffee, an invitation which from that time on I willingly accepted and utilized as a chance to be in the company of neighborhood men of his generation. It turned out that Mr Yun was a man of considerable influence with a wide range of acquaintances in the neighborhood; he had served one term as the representative of the tong or ward in the city district (ku) assembly. Although I did not get to know any shopkeeper informants through Mr Yun’s office except for the husband of the restaurant couple across the street, Mr Yun and his office were essential in gaining entry to the neighborhood, getting my presence known there and gaining acknowledgement and credibility through to the prestige enjoyed by Mr Yun.

KOLMOK STREET

To get to Kolmok Street, I either walked down Big Street all the way to the main road, where the ends of these two neighborhood streets connected, or took one of the small alleys joining the two streets. It took some time from the beginning of my fieldwork before I came to realize that the narrow street, which I decided to call by the Korean word for alley (kolmok) after the local usage, was a site where I should spend more time and find people to talk with, as the characteristics of neighborhood businesskeepers’ activities that I wanted to observe appeared to be more concentrated there than among the shopkeepers in Big Street.

The physical setting in Kolmok Street did not differ from similar narrow streets with people passing by: low-story houses mostly with red brick clad-
ding and shop spaces on the first floor, with a colorful array of both protruding and wall-level shop signboards in red, green, white and yellow making the scenery at the same time exciting, restless and esthetically confusing. The alley itself proved to be more of a neighborhood in itself than any other locality in the fieldwork research area, and in that sense it was clearly separate from Big Street. The separation can be neatly illustrated by examining two persons who were socially very active in their respective environments. I saw Mr Yun, who was a very visible person in Big Street, only once in Kolmok Street. Likewise, the rice mill keeper Mr Pak, a central figure in the reciprocal relationships of the Kolmok Street shopkeepers, never ventured to Big Street except for visits to the bank or occasional deliveries.

The “alleyness” of Kolmok Street seemed to set it apart from Big Street, as if the physical closeness, small amount of vehicular traffic and smaller scale had facilitated the high frequency of personal contact, visiting, drink and snack gatherings and other forms of reciprocity. From my first endeavors to infiltrate the life of the alley, the everyday social interaction between these neighborhood people proved to be very frequent. What happened during the soccer World Cup in 2002 is illustrative of the difference between Kolmok and Big Streets. It was in the former that a spontaneous street party erupted after two spectacular and unexpected Korean victories, while Big Street remained quiet.

GETTING TO KNOW MR PAK

In retrospect, it is apparent that getting acquainted with Mr Pak was an inevitable consequence of my decision to enter Kolmok Street and try to find informants there. So much of the social interaction among the street shopkeepers centered on him and his shop, and he showed immediate interest in the foreigner who came to see what was going on in the street. “He likes people. That’s why he cared about you that way,” his wife told me much later.

Before venturing into Kolmok Street, I had met a woman with a hair salon there in Mr Kim’s bookshop in Big Street. She was Hong wŏnjang (Mrs Hong), one of the three women businesskeeper protagonists of Chapter 5, and she invited me to drop by her salon. Around the same time an advertisement for a supermarket reopening sale in the same street was delivered inside a newspaper. I took the shop opening as a good opportunity to start enquiring about the place and to approach shopkeepers, for lots of people would be gathering, and the other neighborhood shopkeepers would also be following the event.

In Kolmok Street, a large crowd of people had gathered to take advantage of the cheap opening sale prices, and many of the neighboring shopkeepers were looking on and commenting on the scene to their colleagues and
friends; a competing supermarket, operated by Mr and Mrs Ko, had put up a poster assuring customers that its prices were cheap as well. I sat down in the hairdressing salon of Hong wŏnjang, whom I had met a few days earlier. She was critical of the cutthroat competition that the opening sale indicated, giving the opinion that it wasn’t good for the neighborhood community. As I went to take a closer look at the opening sales, a man invited me into a wallpaper shop across the street from the supermarket and brought me a cup of coffee. I talked with him for a moment about the opening expenses of such a grocery store until he suddenly left. With that I found out that he was not the keeper of that place but of the rice mill and bakery (pangakan) on the other side of the street corner. That meeting was to be a crucial one, as the miller, Mr Pak, turned out to be a wonderfully social and open personality, always seeking and enjoying the company of other people. It was mostly through him that I gained the access to the company of his neighborhood friends. His shop, a mill as well as a rice pastry (ttŏk) bakery, was a place where neighborhood people, both other shopkeepers and residents, dropped in throughout the day, so that the actual customers were a tiny fraction of those who visited Mr Pak’s pangakan. Both the nature of Mr Pak’s and his wife’s shop as a public space and his open and easily approachable personality greatly facilitated my own presence in the Kolmok Street and helped getting acquainted with other shopkeepers in that street. I could always drop in at the pangakan, talk with Mr Pak, observe him and his wife at work, or just listen to the talk of the visitors and make observations of the comings and goings of people, or take part in a drink and snack gathering when the day’s work was done.

Kolmok Street Scenery

Entering Kolmok Street from the local main road, on opposite sides of the street there were Mr Paek’s and Mrs Chang’s meat shop and a vegetable shop kept by a couple in their 50s. The tiny vegetable shop, which lacked a signboard to indicate its name, was at times crammed with people as Mr Pak and his wife from the rice mill stopped there on their way home after the day’s work, with Mr Paek and his wife from the meat shop joining them to perhaps watch television, and have snacks and a glass of soju, vodka-like liquor with a low alcohol content. Ms Im, the keeper of the cosmetics shop who appeared in the fieldnote snippet from Mr Pak’s mill on pages 1 and 2, lived, uncharacteristically for present-day shopkeepers, in the tiny room adjoining the shop space. There were two real estate agencies; the proprietor of one of them was the neighborhood t’ongjang, local appointee for some small tasks at the low-level administrative unit of t’ong. Mr Pak’s and his wife’s rice mill was one block further, behind one of the two middle-sized supermarkets on the street. Looking from the door of Mr Pak’s place, a favorite site of neighborhood ob-
2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

The closest establishments in sight were a hairdressing salon, a wallpaper shop, and a sesame oil press, all housed in a two-story building owned by the hairdresser salon proprietor and her husband. If Mr Pak was not in his mill, he could be most likely found in one of these places. Mr Hwang’s wallpaper and flooring shop (chimulp’o) was one of the favorite places for evening drinks and snacks as its back room provided an appropriate site; it was also the place where I had my farewell drinks with the neighborhood men at the end of my fieldwork period.

Hong wŏnjang’s hairdressing salon was one block further on the other side of the street. The hairdresser had a kind of a joking relationship with Mr Pak; the miller was a humorous person and rarely missed a chance to crack a joke, and in assertive Hong wŏnjang he had a good partner for occasional banter. On one instance on Kolmok Street the interchange went as follows, beginning with the words of the miller feigning anger after the two had exchanged mock blows. “This woman is frightening. It’s not ok if a woman hits a man, but a man can always slap a woman a bit, right?” “See, this man is weaker than me,” Hong wŏnjang replied. Older women, who felt lonely and bored at home, often came to Hong wŏnjang’s place to spend time. She was prepared to adhere to the neighborhood ethos of receiving shop visitors to the degree of letting a neighborhood drunkard finish a bottle of makkŏlli (unrefined rice wine) in her shop when there were no customers present before showing him...
the door. Hong wŏnjang’s usual conversation companion was the keeper of
the book lending shop across the street, a woman of approximately her own
age.

One of the two middle-sized supermarkets on Kolmok Street was next to
Hong wŏnjang’s hairdressing salon, kept by Mr and Mrs Ko, a couple in their
late 40s and early 50s. Unlike the other people with whom I became ac-
quainted in Kolmok Street, I did not see them participate in any of the social
interaction that took place in the alley. This nevertheless did not make them
exceptional, since there were several shopkeepers who kept to themselves
and were not necessarily even on greeting terms with Mr Pak’s circle of
friends. For example, the proprietor of the laundry next door to Hong wŏn-
jang’s salon was the sister of Mrs Han who ran the sesame oil press, but unlike
her, she did not keep company with other neighborhood people.

In order to position the fieldwork locale, its people, and “Ordinary People’s
Ward” in the currents of contemporary Korean history and to the spatial dif-
ferentiation, social stratification, and notions of development and modernity
in Korea, I will turn from the minutiae of the people and the sceneries of the
research area to the city of Seoul and outline some of the major characteris-
tics and outcomes of its growth and development. Seoul is the place where
most of the neighborhood shopkeepers with whom I was in contact during
research had settled, having been born elsewhere in Korea. Seoul, and the
area in the southern part of the city where the shopkeeper informants kept
their businesses and where most of them also lived, was the common de-
nominator for these people besides their livelihood in small business. The in-
dividual life trajectories of the shopkeepers crossed in that neighborhood,
where the people had been brought by the developments in Korean economy
and society during the last decades as well as personal history: their choices,
adaptations, and aspiration, and setbacks. After delineating the contours of
Seoul, I will return to characterize “Ordinary People’s Ward” before discuss-
ing the term tongne as a Korean notion of neighborhood and further examina-
tion of the concept of neighborhood businesses.

**Urbanization and the Growth of Seoul**

Seoul, which at the turn of the millennium was a metropolis of more than
ten million people, was the capital of the kingdom of Chosŏn from the time of
its foundation in the late fourteenth century until its demise to the Japanese
colonialism in the early twentieth century. Seoul also became the capital of
the Republic of Korea after liberation from Japan at the end of the World War
II and the establishment of separate states in the peninsula in 1948. Seoul was
already growing during the Japanese colonial era, and the later industrialization, relative deterioration of living conditions in the rural areas, and economic development resulted in massive migration from the countryside to the capital. The population of the city expanded until the 1990s, when the regions around Seoul began to bear the majority of the burden of the continuing urban growth pressure. The importance of Seoul and its metropolitan region in economy, politics and education is immense and disproportionate, and considered as an unresolved political and social issue. It has remained the measure of Korean development and modernity; the old Chosŏn era proverb that it is best to send one’s horse to be bred on Cheju Island and one’s son to be educated in Seoul is even more valid in contemporary Korea than in the past.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century and Japanese colonial rule, Seoul remained the only city of considerable size in Korea. The population of Seoul is estimated to have been close to 200,000 at one time in the seventeenth century and settled around that figure in the eighteenth century (Ko 1998: 28), where it remained until the early 1900s. In a census taken in 1915 during the Japanese colonial administration, there were 241,000 inhabitants in Seoul. At that time the only other city with more than 50,000 people was Pusan on the southwestern coast. Of Korea’s population of 16 million at that time, these two cities made up 1.9 percent, which comprised the majority of the urban population (Yu 1982: 81–82). Other cities such as Pusan and Pyongyang started to grow rapidly after Japan annexed the country, and Seoul’s proportion of the urban population diminished from 80 percent in 1915 to 23 percent in 1940 (ibid: 84).

Industrial employment and other wage labor opportunities began to be available in Seoul as a consequence of Japanese colonial policy, as Korea was an important part of the Japanese empire not only for its agricultural resources but also in the later stage of the colonial period for industrial investments (Eckert 1991 Ch. 2, Park 1999). The policy of industrial investment by the Japanese administration did not begin in Korea until after the second decade of colonial power, but the dissolution and impoverishment of rural areas had begun earlier. The proportion of the urban workforce engaged in industrial labor was small in the 1920s, but it began to increase considerably in the early 1930s, drawing a large sector of surplus rural labor to the cities (Park Soon-Won 1999: 134–5). Interestingly, the proportion of Seoulites in trading occupations remained at approximately one quarter throughout the Japanese period while the city grew rapidly (Yi Hŏn-ch’ang 2001: 233).

The influx of people to urban areas also led to the expansion of urban administrative boundaries; the areas between the Chosŏn-era walled city and the Han River in the south were incorporated into Seoul soon after the Japa-
Japanese takeover, and in 1936 vast areas East and West of the old downtown were adjoined to the jurisdiction of the colonial capital, which at the time was officially known as Kyōngsŏng (Keijō in the Japanese pronunciation). In 1942 there were well over a million inhabitants in Seoul, and by the time of Korea’s liberation after the defeat of Japan in 1945 its proportion of the urban population was 13 percent (Park Soon-won 1999: 135). If the proportion of the places not defined as cities by the Japanese administratively but as “towns” or “townships” (myŏn or ἕp in the Korean pronunciation) is counted as urban population as Son Chŏng-mok (1996: 292) does, the urban population at the end of the colonial period adds up to 24 percent.

After the liberation and continuing to the 1970s, the population of Seoul almost doubled every ten years despite the devastation of the Korean War. For example during the five years between 1955 and 1960 the population increased by almost one million to 2,445,000, which constituted 94 percent of the urban net migration during that period. A visible sign of the scope and pace of Korean urbanization in the decades after the Korean War were the vast squatter settlements which at first arose in the areas close to downtown Seoul and later in the outskirts of the city. The squatter neighborhoods close to the city center, which were a result of the earlier migration of the 1950s, were cleared in downtown rebuilding projects in the 1960s. This led to the transfer of the problem of cheap housing away from the city center and the appearance of squatter neighborhoods on hillsides and other unused land in areas of which many had been incorporated administratively to Seoul (Yu 1982: 92, Chung Cha-whan 1977: 11, Cho and Cho 1992: 15-16), when the jurisdiction of Seoul more than doubled in 1963 to approximately its present borders. During the latter half of the 1960s the yearly average growth of population was as high as 9.4 percent, and in 1969 and 1970, after a severe drought hit the southwest, each year perhaps as many as 400 000 people migrated to Seoul (Brandt 1982: 19).

Poor people’s neighborhoods – known in earlier decades mainly as p’anjangch’ŏn (plank village) and later as sandongne (hill neighborhood) or tal-tongne (moon neighborhood), and in bureaucratic terms as areas of substandard housing – have received quite a lot of attention in scholarship.¹⁶ Media¹⁷

¹⁶ For a thorough study of a low-income hillside housing area facing redevelopment, see Cho Eun and Cho Oakla 1992. For a study of squatters in hillside neighborhoods during and after the height of the rural migration, see Brandt 1982. Chung Cha-whan’s research (1977) was also conducted in a resettlement area of squatters evicted from downtown areas, but in her research that did not figure prominently. See also Cho Oakla 1992 and Chun Kyung-soo 1995b.

¹⁷ A prominent example is a series of surveys and reports on social and economic conditions and the consequences of poverty in a large and well-known hillside settlement in Ordinary People’s Ward conducted and published by the daily newspaper Joongang Ilbo in April 2001. The area had already been designated for redevelopment in the 1970s, but
and civic organizations, but in governmental housing policies low-cost housing remained a low-priority issue (Nelson 2000: 47). On the other hand, authorities have usually indirectly addressed the problem of the demand for cheap housing by allowing the unauthorized dwellings to remain until redevelopment projects have been carried into effect, which in some cases may have taken decades (Cho and Cho 1992: 18). By the late 1990s, most of the areas that appeared during the years of growth had been cleared away and redeveloped, or the inhabitants themselves have been able to improve the quality of their housing on their own initiative (Brandt 1982). Urbanization at the outskirts of Seoul consisted not only of poor neighborhoods of low-quality housing on the hillsides, but also more conventional housing, and since the end of the 1970s, increasingly of apartment buildings.

Since the 1970s the geographical distribution of population in Seoul has changed drastically, as the state authorities started to develop and build on the southern side of the Han River, where most of the new residential areas began to appear. Movement to the southern side took place both within the city and from outside as migrants moved in from countryside and from provincial towns. At the turn of the millennium Seoulites were quite evenly divided between the two halves of the city separated by the river.

The population of Seoul was at its peak in the 1990s at close to 11 million. During that decade the burden of the population pressure in the metropolitan area was transferred to the adjacent areas in the Kyŏnggi province with the development of the so-called new towns (sintosi), and the number of inhabitants in Seoul actually diminished for almost a decade in a row, falling to just under 10 million in 2000 (Korea National Statistics Office 2000). The diminishing appeal of Seoul as a place of residence has been especially poignant in "Ordinary People’s Ward," the administrative district of my research area. In the course of the 1990s the population fell by 100,000 to below half a million at the turn of the century. During the second quarter of 1999, that ward had the largest number of outmoving people among all the 25 wards in Seoul (Donga Ilbo, Sept. 20, 1999).

---

the removal of the largely unauthorized housing and construction of an apartment block started only in 2002. When I visited the place in June 2002, the neighborhood was in part pulled down, and house owners had moved elsewhere. The people who remained were renters who had not been able to find housing with the all too small compensation sum or were refusing to vacate their homes as a protest against their inferior position in housing policy. At that time, before the beginning of the demolition of houses, the neighborhood was a target of incessant reporting: "Outsiders Crowding to Document the Traces of Hillside Neighborhood: Documentarists and Photographers Filming the Joys and Sorrows of the Last Evictees, Scholars Publishing Articles, Reports also in Foreign Press" (Taehan Maeil June 21, 2002).
Social Stratifications in Seoul: Housing and Neighborhoods

The issues of strata, class, occupations, popular perceptions of status and desirability have intermixed to produce a kind of a residential class map, ranging from the upper-class Kangnam apartment house areas to the hillside neighborhoods. The types of housing are important in creating social distinctions between people and between localities in Korea. The importance of real estate as a target for investment also underlines the importance of housing as a social marker.

Most of the reshaping of the urban structure of Seoul and the redistribution of the population started with the appearance of apartment blocks and construction projects on the southern side of the Han River during the 1970s (Son 2005: 287–304) and was completed by the end of 1980s (Nelson 2000: 51). Apartment houses had established their position as the standard type of middle-class housing, the northern and southern halves of the city had become social categories and concepts of not only geographical but also social division, and the spatial segregation of social strata had become more apparent with the appearance of clearly delineated apartment blocks.

The social stratification of residential areas in Seoul was not very noticeable except for the uppermost strata until the 1960s (Si et al 1993: 344). The beginning of spatial stratification since the late 1960s is related to construction of large apartment block areas, and since the early 1970s apartment blocks were built so that different strata became geographically separated (ibid). A prominent consequence of the construction of homogenous apartment blocks has been the spatial concentration of the middle class, which in turn has contributed to the formation of the identity and consciousness of the class (or stratum) itself (Hong 1991: 580–582).

Apartment blocks have been more suited for differentiation between social strata than the areas of detached and semidetached housing, since in the latter people of both higher and lower income strata have often been geographically close to each other, separated not by apartment block borders and fences but perhaps only by one street (Sø et al 1993: 346). The establishment of the distinctive apartment block areas in combination with the relocation of several of the nation’s most prestigious high schools to the south of the Han River has created the status of Kangnam as an area of the most sought-after school districts and most expensive housing prices. Ironically, citizens were at first reluctant to comply with the authorities’ development programs and settle across the river, but the school removals proved an irresistible incentive for educationally competitive Koreans (Lett 1998: 104).

Today, there is a strong distinction between areas north and south of Han River, Kangbuk and Kangnam, meaning respectively simply “north of river”
and “south of river.” One of Denise Lett’s informants in her study of the Korean new middle class went so far as to say that “a Kangnam woman cannot marry a Kangbuk man, because the woman is used to spending money and the man isn’t” (1998: 105–6). The social and political indicators of Kangnam and Kangbuk are frequently contrasted in the media, and the educational basis of Kangnam’s status is particularly evident in recurrent comparisons of entrance rates to prestigious universities, in which the southeastern districts of the city have fared considerably better than other parts of Seoul. A common manner of comparison between the two halves of the city, especially prominent at the time of my fieldwork when a lot of attention was being given to widening income gaps, was to contrast the recovering and once again thriving business of department stores in the South with the moribund marketplaces in the North, which evoked a distinction not only in economic conditions but in class and styles of life as well.\(^\text{18}\)

The characteristics associated with the lifestyle of the affluent areas of the southern side of the river include most of all conspicuous consumption, centering around boutiques, department stores and exclusive bars and night-clubs, “comfort, entertainment and consumer pleasure” (Nelson 2000: 44), and educational possibilities, including both public schooling and extracurricular tutoring. These phenomena attract both competitive envy and desire because of the social possibilities they represent, and social criticism for what is regarded as “over-consumption” (kwasobi), or a draining of national resources and hard-earned foreign currencies by using them on foreign products (Lett 1998: 101–8, Nelson 2000: 45–6, Cho 1994: 207–32). Despite the literal meaning of “Kangnam” pointing at the whole of the southern half of the city, the administrative unit of the same name is one of the Seoul wards and covers only a slice of southeastern Seoul. As a social concept it is wider than the ward itself, extending to define all the affluent areas of the southeastern part of the city. Other areas south of the river which also have been settled as a consequence of government policies, redirection of population pressures, and migration have not been getting the attention and prestige of Kangnam proper. One of these is Ordinary People’s Ward, a district with a substantial population which in the Korean conceptualization of social stratification is positioned below the middle class as “ordinary people” (somin), the location of several hillside squatter neighborhoods until recently, and lately also the site of extensive housing development programs which have had a significant effect on the character and the skyline of the ward.

\(^{18}\) A typical example is the newspaper article “Expensive brands in department stores sold out – still winter in traditional marketplaces: if customers would only come” (Donga Ilbo, April 19, 1999, p. B1), which contrasts the “recovered Kangnam consumption” with “frozen marketplaces” on the northern side of Han River.
SMALL HOUSE AREAS AND APARTMENT COMPLEXES

It is not particularly a South Korean trait that housing, different types of domicile and occupancy, and localities are markers of social distinction. Nor is the major distinction between types of housing – high-rise apartment houses (ap’at’i) and low-rise 1–3-story houses (chut’aek) – particularly specific to South Korea. What is distinctively Korean are the configurations of these distinctions: that the notions of status attach a higher cultural value to apartments than to small houses, which differs notably from, for example, Scandinavian perceptions of status and prestige concerning housing and neighborhoods. As there is a status distinction between living in privately owned high-rise apartment complexes and living in small house neighborhoods, as well as a difference in the general level of housing convenience, keeping a business in a largely residential small house neighborhood is different from locales where there are adjacent apartment complexes or office buildings. Differences in status between residential areas correspond to the income levels of residents, which has direct consequences for business keeping and for the formation of the character of the business area (sangkwôn), affecting questions such as whether it is possible to earn money and gather property or merely remain at the level of subsistence; what kind of merchandise will constitute a reasonable business item; what the eventual clientele is like, and on what level and scale business is to be operated.¹⁹

Except for certain luxurious areas of detached housing in some neighborhoods of the northern side of the river in Seoul where some influential politicians and business conglomerate owners have their residences, the quintessential symbol of housing status is a spacious condominium in an apartment house on the southern side of the river in a particular neighborhood. The emergence of apartment blocks as a form of housing, and life in them as a distinct cultural category, is a recent phenomenon in South Korea. Detached houses (tandok chut’aek) were the most common type of domicile until the 1990s, when the apartment houses surpassed all other forms of residence (Korea National Statistics Office 2000). Apartment blocks began to be built in a wider scale in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and during the latter decade apartments also started to become associated with the white-collar middle class. Apartments did not catch on immediately, since the early constructions lacked amenities that later came to distinguish apartment life from other forms of domicile, the initial “citizen’s apartments” (simin ap’at’i) built mainly on hillsides (cf. hillside squatter settlements) were not specifically aimed at the burgeoning new middle class, and there were also the notorious case of

---

¹⁹ In guidebooks as well as in any practical information concerning small businesses, sangkwôn (business area) is a key concept.
the collapse of Wau Apartment due to shoddy construction (Son 2005: 252–261). The turn of the 1970s was also the point of time when the governmental housing policy turned to target middle and upper classes (Ch’oe Chae-p’il 2001: 492–3).

In a study of urban life in Seoul conducted in the late 1960s, only one percent of the respondents favored owning an apartment house in the six-story buildings of that time. The most preferred housing was “Western style”, which at the time referred to the most recently built spacious 2–3 story detached houses (Lee 1971: 41). (Ironically, those houses are most typical of the present-day “outmoded” small house neighborhoods.) The apartments built in 1960s were different from the modern high-rise ones, and were not superior in conveniences compared to detached housing. Lee Hyo-jae related the lack of popularity of the apartments to their incompatibility with the Korean way of life and to real estate owning preferences: apartment investment does not include land ownership (ibid.). Ch’oe Chae-p’il (2001) has argued 30 years after Lee’s study that an important part of the success of the introduction of apartment housing and its social elevation took place precisely because contemporary Korean family practices – way of life – has become accustomed to apartment houses and blocks, in addition to the economic value of apartments as real estate.


The way social distinctions are manifested in housing is also manifested in the association of non-owned housing – high-rise apartments, small apartments (pilla), or small houses – with strata other than the white-collar middle class. House ownership, as illustrated in the case of Mr and Mrs Chôn in chapter 2, has been a sign of status and advancement, and owning a domicile has usually demanded a considerable economic effort since mortgages have not been readily available (Lett 1998: 110, Nelson 2000: 51–4).

Rental or other forms of non-owned apartment housing built for lower-income strata are often called “ordinary people’s apartments” (sŏmin ap’at’ûi), on a par with the common usage of the term sŏmin as distinguished from the
middle class. In some instances, as in redevelopment sites where older housing has been pulled down, owned and rented apartments can be constructed in the same complex.\textsuperscript{20} According to an article in the \textit{Donga Ilbo} daily (Nov. 23, 1998), antagonism between residents of these two kinds of housing occupancy was common, and in the particular case that the newspaper reported, a fence between the owned and rental apartments within the same complex that had been removed while occupants moved in had to be rebuilt in order to prevent the escalation of antipathies. Children’s playgrounds were accordingly separate.\textsuperscript{21} The article mentioned that construction companies were taking these sentiments into account, building apartment complexes in redevelopment areas so that there were planted trees or natural obstacles between the two kinds of housing. This is akin to the situation reported from an area in Seoul where parents living in apartment houses were reluctant to send their children to the school in the adjoining small house area because the level of the school and its students were deemed unsatisfactory, and consequently insisted on sending their children to the school within the apartment area despite overcrowded classes (\textit{Hankyoreh}, Jan. 26, 2001).

During the last decades the proportion of residents in detached houses has fallen rapidly in South Korea, which bespeaks the effectiveness and success of apartment policies as well as the profundity of the transformation of the character and forms of urban life. In 1970, at the time of the above-mentioned research conducted by Lee Hyo-jae, 94 percent of Koreans resided in detached houses and a mere one percent in apartments. As late as 1990, the proportion of apartments was no more than 23 percent, but in the next census conducted five years later the percentage was already 37, and in the 2000 census 48. Meanwhile, in 1990 detached houses commanded 65 percent of housing, but in the next two censuses the proportion fell to 47 and further to 37 percent. The total number of domiciles in detached houses decreased by almost ten percent during the 1990s, while the number of apartment houses more than tripled during between 1990 and 2000 (Korea National Statistics Office 2000).

The distinction between owned and rental apartments is comparable to that between apartments and small houses, and apartment blocks and small house areas; moreover, these concepts are also analogous with the social categories associated with them, that is professional and white-collar middle class and the “ordinary people” or \textit{šomin}. The detached houses built 30 years

\textsuperscript{20} A certain part of the newly built apartment housing is usually reserved for those whose homes were pulled down in redevelopment areas.

\textsuperscript{21} The article quotes the residents as follows: “The wealthy people often use our garbage facilities. We don’t say a word when they park their cars on our side, but if we park on their sides they make a fuss” and “Every night we hear fighting, and they relieve themselves on the streets at will. We haven’t discriminated against them because they are not well-off, but there’s still all that nervousness” (\textit{Donga Ilbo}, Nov. 23, 1998).
2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood have come to represent lack of modernity as well as lack of development. Small housing neighborhoods are usually not auspicious as business areas, as I heard often during my fieldwork, “one cannot make money”, mainly because of the lack of purchasing power.

Notwithstanding the huge decrease of the proportion in housing, despite the economic and commercial disadvantages and the image of backwardness, the small housing neighborhoods often enjoy a positive connotation of traditional Koreanness. This came up especially in the way the shopkeepers and residents in Kolmok Street talked about their neighborhood. I took up the subject of small house neighborhoods and apartment areas with a neighborhood woman and Mrs Chang in the latter’s meat shop. The visitor was a prominent woman in Kolmok Street, a former long-time keeper of the supermarket next to Mr Pak’s mill, and active in daily interaction and leisurely visiting. She presented the order of the types of housing as follows: those who have the most money live in “mansion” type detached houses (maensyón) with huge gardens; after that are the apartments, and then smaller houses (yöllip chut’aek). Those who are the most destitute and cannot afford even a rental apartment rent one room and live there. In her view apartment houses were the most comfortable to live in. When I asked her to compare a neighborhood like their own to apartment areas, the both women said that here people live better together; they have a community (kongdongch’e).

From these general contours of neighborhoods, housing, and social categories and distinctions, via the two women’s assessment of types of housing and their own neighborhood, I now return to the locality of the fieldwork, “Ordinary People’s Ward.”

“Ordinary People’s Ward”

When I asked Grandfather Kwŏn to characterize the research neighborhood, he told me that it used to be a place where many people were living a hard life. He referred to squatter evictions in central Seoul when he added that many people who had lived downtown and had nowhere to go came there. In passing he also mentioned that one reason he ended up in the place after the bankruptcy of his downtown tailoring business was that it was possible to live cheaply. I asked further how he would compare the neighborhood with other places in Seoul; he placed it somewhat surprisingly “in the middle (chung), close to the upper (sang) level”, using the Sino-Korean concepts that are also the basis of formal terms for social strata. “But earlier if you said that
you are from this tong or from the neighboring tong, people suspected that you might be a criminal.22

Grandfather Kwôn’s relatively high assessment of the present conditions of the neighborhood was not unanimously shared by those who gave their opinion on the “level” (sujun) – to use the common Korean expression – of the area, but few would object to his characterization of the past of Ordinary People’s Ward. In their reminiscences of the past of the neighborhood my informants mentioned the poor conditions of living, undeveloped urban facilities, and poverty in general. In the opening vignette from Mr Pak’s mill in the opening pages of Chapter 1, Ms Im of the cosmetics shop in Kolmok Street said how she was surprised to see thatched houses in the area when she first visited the place in the late 1960s. When I met her later, she mentioned the same recollection, adding that bus lines did not come that far, and that there was no electricity or running water. She herself had grown up in downtown Seoul in a house with running water.

Ms Im also introduced me to an old man aged almost 90, who according to her had been a huge landowner in the area and the head of the local dong district before it was divided into several districts due to population growth. Sitting in the cosmetics shop, the elder recounted that people started to move to the area around 1965–1966, largely as a consequence of squatter evictions from downtown. He depicted the place at that time as nanminch’on, “refugee camp.”23 People had virtually no income and they subsisted on relief wheat flour from United States and built their houses with clay bricks. Ms Im quickly commented that “This is still a poor neighborhood,” to which the elder disagreed: “No, this place lives well now.” Ms Im had lived in the area for almost ten years, but her opinion of the present-day neighborhood and its people remained unfavorable, and she was undoubtedly disassociating herself from the rest of the neighborhood when she told me that her nieces and nephews had been, or were studying, abroad. She described the neighborhood – referring mostly to Kolmok Street and its environs – as poor: “Looking from the intersection [1.5 kilometers away], this is a beggars’ village (kôjich’ön), a poor

---

22 Part of the perception that Grandfather Kwôn mentioned might stem from the fact that a considerable proportion of residents in Ordinary People’s Ward have been migrants from the southwestern Chôlla province. The province and residents of Chôlla were in an underprivileged position during the authoritarian governments when most of the political and economical power was in the hands of people from the southeastern Kyôngsang province, and organized crime and criminality in general have been associated with people from Chôlla. Gangsters speaking in the Chôlla dialect have been a common feature in Korean popular culture.

23 Nanminch’on can also be rendered as “shantytown”, but “refugee camp” is used here to follow the Korean distinction between nanminch’on which refers to recently arrived squatters often living in tents and sandongne (hill neighborhood) or taltongne (moon neighborhood) used for permanent hillside settlements.
neighborhood. There is no difference between the house owner (chuin) and
the guest (nagâne). When they come out they are all the same. Even if the
house is big, there are many families living in it.”

“Refugee camp” and people eating American relief wheat flour were
images of the neighborhood’s past used also by Mrs Han, who kept a restaurant
on Big Street close to Grandfather Kwôn’s laundry. She was one of the many
migrants to Ordinary People’s Ward from the province of Chôlla, indicated by
the signboard of her restaurant, which carried the name of her hometown on
the southwestern coast. She had left her native place after getting married at
the turn of the 1970s during the time of the great migration to Seoul. First she
resided with her husband outside of Seoul, and later moved to a squatter area
close to the research neighborhood within the same dong district. It was one
of the several squatter neighborhoods that had appeared as a consequence of
squatter evictions from north of the Han River. She and her husband acquired
clay bricks to build a hut (ummak), and carried drinking water from the creek
where they also washed themselves. “At that time these districts were the
poorest in Seoul.” She recounted that time as follows:

– At that time there was no drainage to take away the rain water like nowa-
days, and the water in the creek used to rise high. You couldn’t go anywhere
without rubber boots. As this was known as a poor area, there was a saying
that you couldn’t go out in this or the neighboring dong without rubber
shoes. The settlement started to grow from the present-day intersection.
There were a lot of people who were not able to build a house, but they lived
in tents or similar, so it was like a refugee camp (nanminch’on). The evictees
from Yongsan [close to downtown Seoul] were allotted a piece of land where
they could build legally, and the people who were their tenants in Yongsan
came along and built their own places around the same place.

– What building materials did they have?
– Building materials? There were bricks made of clay, and concrete started to
be available at that time. People built their houses at night and fought the
house demolition crews sent by city officials during the day.

– Real physical fighting?
– Yes. There were no jobs here, and no bus traffic. There was work in Taebang-
dong north from here, where we had to walk. It took about one hour, […] Peo-
ple lived mainly on wheat flour. Working and making a living one day at a
time.

– Were there businesskeepers (changsahanin saramdâl) like there are now?
– No, only very few, because hardly anyone bought their food, only some

24 Here in the sense of a person who lives in a house owned by someone else.
25 This is a variant of a saying about hillside neighborhoods that “You can live there with-
out a wife but not without rubber boots” (see for example Kang Hong-bin 1997).
places like a coal briquette shop, a rice shop, and hole-in-the-wall shops (kumôngkage) with cigarettes, chewing gum and drinks.

- For how long did people live mainly on wheat flour?
- It took about five or six years. It changed with the New Village Movement, the staple grain became rice, farming technology improved.

The transfer of the university from central Seoul to Ordinary People’s Ward was a remarkable improvement for the adjacent areas. Even if the presence of a prestigious university does not seem to have drastically changed the perception of the area in terms of social stratification, economically it helped a lot, or as Mrs Han put it, “When the university came the area changed 100 percent.” I mentioned to her that there still seem to be poor areas in the district. She disagreed, saying that they have electricity and running water, and they are living fairly well compared to the 1970s. She also added that those districts are almost rich compared to downtown, which reflected contemporary perceptions of the northern and southern halves of the city, even though Ordinary People’s Ward was not part of southeastern Kangnam.

The physical and residential characteristics of Ordinary People’s Ward have changed greatly since the 1990s. It has remained an area where small houses are the most common type of domicile, but the pace of apartment construction since the 1990s has been rapid. The peculiarity of the swift and compacted character of social and economic change in Korea is that a development project may transform a poor hillside neighborhood into an apartment complex with middle-class credentials. Since the beginning of settlement in the area, detached and other small houses have been a distinguishing trait for Ordinary People’s Ward, and until the extensive construction projects dating from the 1990s, the hillside neighborhoods have also been characteristic of the ward, so that such areas in the two tong districts of the ward have been described as typical in Seoul (Joongang Ilbo, Dec. 18, 1999).

While the main destination of middle class migration from the northern part of Seoul across the Han River was into the newly built apartment block areas in the southeast, a significant part of the voluntary and involuntary resettlement by the less well-off strata from the other side of the river was directed to the southwestern parts of Seoul, as my informants described above. This perception of Ordinary People’s Ward as a place of poor people’s (pinmin) hillside neighborhoods was also displayed in statistics. In 1990, 14 percent of what is designated in administrative terms as illegal (muhôga, “unauthorized”) or substandard (pullyang) housing in Seoul was located there, which was the highest among wards in Seoul (Sô 1993:337). By the end of the decade

---

26 New Village Movement (Saemul Undong), started in 1970 by president Park Chung-hee, was a development campaign to improve the conditions and modernize the agricultural village life styles and practices deemed as incompatible with the modern society.
the situation had not drastically changed; even though, for example, in 1999 almost half the removals of unauthorized houses in Seoul took place in Ordinary People’s Ward, the relative ratio to the whole of the city still remained high, at more than ten percent (Seoul Statistical Yearbook 2000: 248).

The small number of apartment houses was one of the attributes of Ordinary People’s Ward that a visitor to Chŏng wŏnjang’s hairdressing salon referred to when advising Chŏng wŏnjang and her husband about prospects of starting another kind of a business in the area. For the visitor, this characteristic was indicative of the income level of the inhabitants, and as he added, it also entailed that the tax revenue of the ward administration was not very substantial. In 1990 only four percent of domiciles in Ordinary Peoples’ Ward were in apartments and as much as 82 percent in detached houses, compared to 57 and 27 percent respectively in Kangnam-gu (Sŏ, Ko and Pak 1993: 345). The small houses were not only numerous but also old in comparison to other wards which were urbanized at the same period as settlement of the southern side of the river. In 1995 more than 10 percent of the residential buildings had been constructed before the 1970s, which was the second highest proportion among the eleven wards in the southern half of the city, and also slightly more than the average for the whole of Seoul (Seoul Statistical Yearbook 2000: 236).

The hilltop neighborhood close to my research area where Mrs Han and her husband had lived in the 1970s was designated as a redevelopment area and accordingly pulled down at the turn of the 1990s, and an apartment block complex was built on the site. This was a common but not the only pattern of apartment construction in the whole of Korea as well as in Ordinary People’s Ward, and it was later repeated in other locations in the ward. In 1999 the proportion of detached houses had declined to slightly over half, and one fifth of housing consisted of apartments (Seoul Statistical Yearbook 2000: 234). During the following years these figures changed further so that apartment houses became the most common type of domicile in Ordinary People’s Ward. Each time I returned to the area in my subsequent visits to Korea, newly erected high-rise blocks seemed to have further transformed the city landscape. Hilltops and hillsides where there had been trees or densely built small, gray, concrete-walled squatter houses were now covered by rows of high-rise apartments.

**The Concept of Neighborhood in Korea: Tongne**

Among my informants, the concept of tongne, corresponding closely to the English word “neighborhood,” was used widely and frequently to denote the geographical and social sphere of one’s daily activities, locale of residence or
2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

livelihood, and areas which were recognized and perceived to have a distinct character and circumstances. The definitions of tongne in recently revised online dictionaries emphasize the residential aspects of the term. According to one gloss, it is “an area which forms the vicinity (kūnch’ō) of one’s home (chip) and in which one lives communal (kongdōngūi) life with people of other households (chip).” The same entry points out the difference between neighborhood and village (maūl): the boundaries of tongne cannot be established as clearly as those of maūl, and the former can be used of urban regions while the latter only of rural areas. Another definition gives the meanings “vicinity of one’s home” and “place where there are several houses (chip).”

My informants referred to their places of birth in the countryside as tongne as well; in those contexts it was largely synonymous with “village” (maūl). A Korean-English dictionary published in 1980 actually gives only the meaning “village” for the term (Dong-A Publishers 1980), and a more recent Korean dictionary definition is also devoid of urban connotations, rendering it likewise as maūl (Kyoyuk Sŏgwăn 1994). Etymologically tongne is related to the concept of village, as it is a colloquial transformation of tongnae (“inside a village”). The Chinese character, which is the main component of the term, and is pronounced tong in Korean, has been uniquely used in Korea to denote “village” in some compound words; elsewhere in East Asia its most common meaning is “cave.” The revised dictionary definitions, including both the urban and rural connotations of tongne, largely correspond the usage of the term that I observed in everyday speech contexts in my research neighborhood.

As a subjective category based on and delineating one’s own daily activities, tongne tends to be geographically narrow. The idea of their own neighborhood in the talk of Kolmok Street people barely went farther than the side alleys of the street, whether they were living in the vicinity or keeping a shop in the street. Despite the proximity of Big Street, its people and businesses were not included in the notion of “our neighborhood” (uri tongne) in the Kolmok Street usage of the term as I observed it. Social interaction and reciprocal visiting between these two adjacent locations was not

---

27 The inclusiveness of the Korean word chip has led me to use three different glosses in my renderings of the dictionary entries. I am thankful to professor Song Hyang-Keun for helpful comments about the word tongne (personal communication, Jan. 8, 2002). The two online dictionaries were accessed at http://kr.kordic.yahoo.com/ and http://clid.yonsei.ac.kr:8000/dic/default.htm.

28 Interestingly, Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim noticed that whereas the use of uri (we, us, our) in designations such as “people of our village” (uri maūl saram) had been common in the 1970s in the village they studied, it could no more be heard in the late 1990s, when intensive industrialization in the village environs and subsequent large-scale migration to the village had taken place (Janelli and Yim 2004: 131–3).
absent, but the uncommonness of these practices was reflected in the delineation of "our neighborhood." In this regard a funeral feast given in one of the alleys between Big Street and Kolmok Street was illustrative. People from both streets gathered to enjoy food and drinks but sat mainly at separate tables laid out in the alley. Likewise, proprietors of a new shop handing out ttŏk rice cakes on opening day to other shopkeepers in the vicinity did not venture into the other street, but directed this practice of neighborhoodly cordiality and reciprocity to proprietor colleagues within the same street with whom daily interaction was to be expected. Regarding this, the Kolmok Street hairdresser Hong wŏnjang who handed out ttŏk to "everybody on this street, from this end to that end" remarked that "those who open in a big way give to the side alleys as well."

Mr Pak’s frequent use of the term tongne and talk about “neighborhood people” (tongne saramdŭl) and “our neighborhood” (uri tongne) referred to people with whom he was in daily interaction not so much in economic terms or in the terms of his livelihood but in non-commercial exchange and reciprocity. While being a prime example of a person continuously in contact with both residents and shopkeepers in the vicinity of his shop, and being in that sense a neighborhood businesskeeper, Mr Pak was not particularly dependent on the people from the immediate surroundings of his mill-bakery for patronage. He had customers from the vicinity, but only a small fraction of the “neighborhood people” who dropped in his place did so as customers. The manner in which most of his reciprocal contacts with the neighborhood people took place, and also the way he associated himself with the locale of his shop, was illustrated by his stated reason for buying fish from a marketplace on his way back from an unsuccessful fishing trip: “I had to make the neighborhood people (tongne saramdŭl) happy.” It is notable that in contrast with the dictionary definitions quoted above, Mr Pak’s neighborhoodly identity was connected to the location of his livelihood – his and his wife’s shop – and not the place of his residence, which was a short walk away from the mill across the creek, in a different neighborhood but administratively in the same tong district.

Tongne also shares the Chinese character tong with the urban municipal administrative unit of that name. In Seoul the tong districts have on the average approximately 20,000 inhabitants – the one in which my fieldwork took place had more than 25,000 persons in an area of one square kilometer – which leaves them considerably larger than what the people of my research area perceived as their own neighborhoods. When applied to localities in their widest sense outside one’s own life sphere and used as a level for social stratification and a unit of thinking about geographical and social distinctions, the concept of tongne broadened to correspond with administrative dis-
2. The Shopkeepers in the Neighborhood

tricts. Notions of social stratification and distinction are attached to tong districts, as in Grandfather Kwôn's account of the earlier dubious reputation of the residents of the two districts of Ordinary People's Ward. This was also illustrated in a chat that Mrs Chang had with two other neighborhood women late one night on Kolmok Street after she had the meat shop. They were discussing neighborhood matters, and as I entered their company, my presence there also became a topic. This led on to comparisons with other more prestigious neighborhoods and acknowledgement of difference: "Myông-dong has its own level (sujun), Apkujông-dong has its own level, and this dong has its own level," said one of the women. "But you are going around only here in Ordinary People's Ward, right?" asked Mrs Paek.

In the nominal administrative structure, each tong is divided into t'ongs, which are further divided into pans, and these units also have designated head persons. In apartment blocks where these units correspond with physical constructions and divisions and form the basis for apartment administration, they also have relevance as markers of social space, to which the compartmentalization via apartment size greatly contributes (Chun Kyung-soo 1995a: 45–6). In contrast, in small house neighborhoods the units of t'ong and pan did not have any formal functions of practical significance for the residents and shopkeepers, and neither were they relevant to people's social and geographical sense and orientation in the neighborhood space. Despite the all but vanished significance of these units, during my fieldwork some shopkeepers called me jokingly "t'ong chief" (t'ongjang) – "there comes the ward chief again" – because of my habit of going around, visiting shops, and inquiring about neighborhood matters. The actual head of the t'ong in which Kolmok Street was located was the keeper of a tiny realtor office across the street from Mr Paek's shop. I never saw him taking part in any of the neighborhood reciprocal practices, and I learned about his position only at the end of my fieldwork period.

An important characteristic of tongne as a stratified concept is that it is more commonly applied to small house neighborhoods than apartment areas. Rather than being called "neighborhoods," the term for the clearly delineated apartment blocks commonly named after the construction company is tanji, "block" or "housing area." The closer association of the term with small house areas which tend to have a lower status and are perceived to be at a lower level in terms of development and modernization than apartment areas

29 The functions of the t'ong and pan leaders (t'ongjang and panjang) are minuscule, and have lately been restricted mainly to informing residents about administration (Kungmin Ilbo, Jan. 24, 2002). Robert F. Spencer (1988: 47–8) noted already in the 1970s that t'ong and pan had become administratively insignificant for residents in small house neighborhoods.
distinguishes it from *tanji*. The association of *tongne* with areas of small housing rather than apartments, its use to denote both rural and urban areas, and its etymological origin in a term for “village” may give the impression of an analogy being made between villages and small house neighborhoods by the use of the concept. In certain contexts the analogy between rural villages and urban small house neighborhoods was indeed deliberately made, but not by using the term *tongne*. Despite its etymologically rural origins, the term has become detached from villages so that it does not imply the distinction between rural and urban or evoke rural village imagery.

When a conscious association with village-like practices and perceived similarities between rural areas and neighborhoods was made, terms such as “village” (*maül*) and “countryside” (*sigol*) were used. A visitor to a funeral feast lauded the atmosphere around the tables laid out in the alley as “like in the countryside,” and Mr Pak noted during a drink and snack gathering with shopkeeper colleagues that the practice was “like in the old times in the countryside” (*yennal sigolsik*); there are not many neighborhoods (*tongne*) like this in Seoul anymore.”

Even if *tongne* was not the concept which was applied to draw equivalences between rural and urban neighborhood practices, the notions of “Korean-ness” which were associated with the “neighborhood” and life in small house areas also hinted at perceived similarities between practices and sensibilities in rural and urban neighborhood Korea. A central notion was the concept of *chǒng*, which refers to warm-heartedness, affection, and ability to feel compassion for others. Neighborhood shopkeepers and residents pointed out to me several times that it was good for me to be in a place like that, as people there had a lot of *chǒng*. A small house *tongne*, unlike an apartment *tanji*, was perceived to have to some extent preserved aspects of traditional, positive Korean-ness such as the capacity to exercise *chǒng* and live a communal life.

**Neighborhood Business, Neighborhood Shop**

*Tongnechangs*, “neighborhood business” or “neighborhood shopkeeping,” is a colloquial Korean expression, which refers to small businesses operated in residential neighborhoods, and on a more conceptual level, to economic activities that are small in scale and operated in economically limited conditions. The term conveys the connotations of proximity to everyday life in the locale, operation of the establishment typically by family labor, and limited size of the business and limited prospects of growth. Attaching “neighborhood” as an attribute to the noun “business” thus entails characteristics that were presented above in the discussion of *tongne*: positive notions of humaneness and affection as in the concept *chǒng*, face-to-face relations, and
reciprocity beyond purely economic relationships, but also economic constraints, meager prospects, and the imagery of lack of development and progress.

Small-scale economic activity, shopkeeping and other retailing, and people in those livelihoods in urban areas have been frequent topics of anthropology ever since anthropological and ethnographical research has been conducted in cities. The topic of neighborhood shops and neighborhood businesskeeping has been treated relatively frequently in fields such as economics, studies on commerce and retail, urban planning, and public development, but in anthropology, distinguishing neighborhood shops or businesskeeping and their proprietors as a category and discussing them as a phenomenon separate from small-scale economic activities in marketplaces and other more commercially characterized locales has not been especially common. This appears to have been the case even though livelihoods which can be described as being conducted on a neighborhood level and which are comparable to the establishments of my informants have been common especially in newly developed and urbanized locations and among recently migrated populations which commonly have attracted anthropologists’ attention.

One of the few anthropologists who has discussed neighborhood shops and their keepers as a specific phenomenon and conceptualized them with that spatial attribute has been Norbert Dannhaeuser in his work on the Philippines (1977, 1980, 1989). Rüdiger Korff (1994) has also paid attention to the distinction between shopkeeping in commercial areas and in residential neighborhoods in Southeast Asia. Daniel Miller (1997) in his work on retail and shopping in Trinidad gives detailed attention to the “parlours” as the small shops in residential areas serving the immediate neighborhood are called, and discusses them especially from the perspective of local social relations.

Dannhaeuser has conducted research on small-scale retailing in the urban Philippines, where the so-called sari-sari stores were an indispensable distribution outlet for the non-affluent neighborhoods at the time of his research in the 1970s. These stores sell basic processed groceries, soft drinks, and other daily necessities from a small shop space usually adjacent to the keeper’s residence. His definition of a neighborhood store is narrower than the notion of neighborhood business that I employ in this study, but it actually is very similar to the Korean concept of kumŏngkage, “hole-in-the-wall store,” which remains in use in colloquial Korean as a general designation for a business of a very small scale. Despite the difference in focus, when related to the scale and continuum of Korean economic activities Dannhaeuser’s notions concerning the economic and social character of these establishments are valid for the case of Korean small businesses in residential areas.
In Dannhaeuser’s definition, neighborhood stores are small, stationery establishments often located adjacent to the residence of the keeper. Being members of the neighborhood, proprietors face pressures to sell on credit, and their customer reach is limited, but they have certain monopolistic advantages, as the physical mobility of the customers is usually limited. A significant percentage of the labor force in Third World cities is active in services and retail, and typically the number and array of neighborhood establishments is large, resulting mainly from the ease of opening and operating a shop and from the limited growth opportunities (Dannhaeuser 1989: 248–50).

Dannhaeuser approaches the neighborhood stores from the dual economy model, in which the small local establishments in the lower economic circuit (in other words, the informal sector) provide needed services for people with limited mobility, and link the local population with the upper circuit of the economy (or formal sector). He sees the neighborhood stores as being characteristic in conditions in which expanded commercialization has created a cash economy large enough for a demand for industrially manufactured goods (Dannhaeuser 1980: 160). The ubiquity and importance of the neighborhood store depends on the duality of the market situation; in the “intermediate stage” of market development, as in the 1970s’ Philippines, the neighborhood store thrives, but with the dissolution of the market duality the conditions for the survival of these establishments would also dwindle (Dannhaeuser 1980: 173–4).

Rüdiger Korff (Korff 1994) approaches residential area small-scale traders and shopkeepers in communal networks and in social relations of kinship and friendship from the point of view of power relations, which determine the allocation of economic resources. In the case of small-scale trading, this has consequences for trading opportunities and access to profitable spheres. As a result, within the market economy the biggest expansion and variation takes place in spheres which are the least profitable, as noted by Dannhaeuser above. Korff remarks that while lack of access to sources of power strictly limits possibilities for livelihood, personal relations and “social creativity” do provide opportunities and niches for trade, even if in the least profitable spheres. With regards to these opportunities, residential areas appear as significant for Korff, which resonates with, and is similar to, the notion of Korean neighborhoods as locales for small businesses.

Korean descriptions, which proliferate in the economy pages of newspapers, in articles offering advice on opening a business, and in small business guidebooks, depict neighborhood business or the sphere of neighborhood business in terms of proximity to the customer base, the importance of steady customers, and the low requirements of capital investment and the subsequently meager prospects for growth. Neighborhood business, tongnechangsya,
may also be used in a belittling sense, referring to unprofessionality, lack of modernity and development; “Realtor offices which used to be grandfathers’ neighborhood businesses are now getting connected to the wider world by computers” (Maeil Kyôngje, Dec. 12, 1995) or “Wallpapering and flooring shops which used to be nothing but thumb-rule operated neighborhood businesses need to develop management thinking and marketing strategies” (Sŏul Kyôngje, Jun 14, 1997).

*Tongnechangsasa* as a term is not exclusively confined for residential neighborhoods, as it also conveys the notions of a restricted business area and customer base and a small likelihood of growth, and it can be applied to marketplace shopkeepers as well: “Marketplace shopkeepers refuse to remain at the level of neighborhood business” (Joongang Ilbo Jun 11, 1999), which refers to the plans of extending marketing and operations beyond the customary business sphere. *Tongnechangsasa* is nevertheless, as the word tongne in the term points out, first and foremost a designation for business establishments in sites and spaces that are not mainly commercial in character in the way marketplaces (*sijang* or *charae sijang*) or business arcades (*sanga*) are. Even though categories and concepts are always blurred, and small business establishments share common characteristics in commercial and residential locations, the distinction between these is meaningful and valid. To put it in terms of business keeping, they are different business spheres (*sangkwôn*).

The positioning of the fieldwork area – the location of the neighborhoods (tongne) of my informants – in the social stratification of Seoul and Korea has been a consequence of social and political developments, which were largely a result of political and administrative choices. The stratifications have been informed by lately developed cultural understandings concerning especially the form of housing, which, in the social and economic preference of apartment block domiciles over small houses, had relegated the fieldwork area to a socially rather marginal position. The small-house character of the area was reflected in the shopkeepers’ and residents’ use of the concept tongne, which tends to be associated with that kind of neighborhoods, and invested with meanings of traditionally admirable traits of Koreanness in distinction from modern and developed apartment house blocks. The dual character of tongne was manifest also in its applications as a classifying attribute for economic activities: “neighborhood business” could imply lack of development, geographically restricted clientele, and meager earning prospects, as well as positive qualities such as cordial everyday reciprocity and exercise of humanness and affection for others.
This chapter presents portraits and life histories of four individuals or married couples, who were major figures among my shopkeeper informants. They were significant for their accessibility and for the value and amount of information they provided. In that sense they became representative of my informants, of shopkeepers in my research neighborhood, of neighborhood shopkeepers in general and of the categories and values on the level of neighborhoods and keepers of small businesses in contemporary South Korean capitalism. The narratives of personal experience by this nucleus of informants thus will help to illustrate the major topics of this research.

The worth of an informant in ethnographic research lies not only in the access given for the researcher’s observing gaze and attentive ears, and the informative response to questions and dialogues, but also in providing a solitary anthropologist, crossing over from the research relationship, with personal companionship unconstrained by differences in age. The people who are presented in this chapter and who will figure strongly in the whole work, in addition to the women shopkeepers who will be discussed in a separate chapter, not only facilitated significantly the progress of research but also provided me with a sense of personally pleasing humane friendliness.

The aged laundry proprietor Grandfather Kwŏn was a peculiar person who kept an ordinary shop. In addition to informing me about the contemporary realities of self-employment, his incessant storytelling during my visits to his cramped and shabby shop presented me with a picture of an individual’s life in the twentieth century Korea. Mr Pak, keeper of the rice mill, epitomized a neighborhood shopkeeper who was committed to reciprocal relations with his shop neighbors and neighborhood acquaintances. Mrs and Mrs Chŏng, who kept a small restaurant in the neighborhood when I commenced fieldwork but later moved to a provincial town, were entrepreneurial in their pursuit of wealth, success in business and social status. Mr Kim and Mrs Kang, a middle-aged couple who kept the beef restaurant, were typical in their entry to self-employment after their careers in wage employment ended due to health problems and pressures related to age and gender. These are dissimilar life trajectories that intersected in a particular kind of livelihood – small businesskeeping – at a specific location, the neighborhood in southern Seoul.
3. Four Portraits of Shopkeepers

Grandfather Kwŏn: an Entrepreneurial Life in Modern Korea

One of the most intriguing persons whom I came to know during fieldwork was a laundry keeper in his early 70s, whom I shall call Mr Kwŏn or Grandfather Kwŏn. His small laundry and clothes mending shop was on the first floor of an ordinary two-story house, of which the street level was allotted to shops, while the family of the landlord lived on the second floor. So many letters had fallen off of the signboard of Grandfather Kwŏn’s shop, that for the duration of my main fieldwork period I remained in error about the correct name of the place. Uncollected laundry and repaired and refitted clothing filled the ceiling of the small shop, and stacks of clothing were heaped up on the walls to leave only a narrow space for Mr Kwŏn to stand at the ironing board or crouch at his old foot treadle sewing machine. The ironing board was layered with worn-out canvas covers, as a new cover had always been attached on top of the old one, and many of the small objects in the shop spoke of little change during the 20 years that Grandfather Kwŏn had been keeping it.

Photograph 3: Grandfather Kwŏn’s laundry.

The laundry was close to the hairdressing salon of Chŏng wŏnjang, on the other end of Big Road from the place where most of the business establishments figuring in my study were located. The students of the nearby univer-
sity and residents in the numerous exam cramming dormitories were an important part of his clientele. He humorously said that this characteristic of his clientele was one reason why so many clothes were uncollected: when a man passed the state examination in law or administration and secured a good societal position, he was too ashamed to collect used or repaired garments from a laundry but bought new ones in order to present himself better for women.

Mr Kwŏn, or Grandfather Kwŏn (Kwŏn harabŏji) – the kinship term I used to address him was both intimate and respectful – always welcomed me into his tiny place, and genuinely seemed to enjoy the fact that I was present to listen to his talk; in retrospect I cannot think of anyone in the neighborhood who could have allotted the time to listen to him in the way an anthropologist could.

A Talkative Neighborhood Personality

Grandfather Kwŏn kept the laundry only half of the day from the morning until 2 pm, when his oldest son who was unemployed at the time took charge. Being talkative almost to the point of being a nuisance for those who were in his vicinity was one of his well-known characteristics; the other was his womanizing, about which he did not hesitate to tell stories to me, often displacing topics which I considered more relevant to my research.

Once when I was in Chŏng wŏnjang’s hairdressing salon along with the keeper and her neighborhood acquaintance, Grandfather Kwŏn dropped in to hand over a pair of pants he had repaired for the hairdresser’s husband. After he left, the visiting woman commented that “he is not an ordinary man”. “And he has had a lot of women,” added Chŏng wŏnjang. Grandfather Kwŏn had at one time been a head of the t'ong (t'ongjang30), the second smallest formal administrative unit in South Korean cities, of his shop location. (A t'ongjang has some small administrative duties, which have been significantly reduced since Mr Kwŏn’s time in the post, and is paid a small remuneration.) Besides this position, I am not aware that he had held any particular position of renown in the area. His shop had been the only laundry in the neighborhood, but the competition had later become intense, and laundry prices had plunged due to the late 1990s economic crisis and competition from laundry chains. Grandfather Kwŏn was still not a loner in any sense, even though his talkativeness seemed to indicate that he constantly missed companionship. He was well acquainted with other laundry keepers in the area – I first met him in a younger colleague’s laundry where he had dropped in for a chat. He moved around actively in his off hours and went almost daily to a park close

30 T'ongjang was also the term that some of my informants used to banter me for my practice of going around the neighborhood and visiting shops.
to a recreation area some one and a half kilometers away where old people used to gather. He also managed to find space in his cramped shop for the local mailman to store mailbags during the delivery route.

Grandfather Kwŏn’s posture and his often stylish attire, which was in contrast with the manner that other people, especially shopkeepers, generally dressed in the area, did not quite match the small size and the shabbiness of his laundry. Behind the plainness of his present life was a complicated and colorful personal history of familial and extrafamilial relationships and entrepreneurial occupations. These he narrated to me without my having to present many questions or direct the discussion; in fact he often would not go in the directions I tried to suggest, but preferred to choose his topics by himself. Answers he gave to my questions tended to be short and evasive compared to the length and depth of his monologues.

His stories of his own life reflected the developments and events of the modern history of Korea, but not always in expected ways, or in ways in which these events tend to be treated in scholarly accounts and interpretations. His topics of talk ranged from his experiences with women to reflections on the position of Korea among the nations of the world; from his childhood and youth in a wealthy household of premodern elite background to his service as a member of the military police during the Korean War and after the armistice in the 1950s; and from being a successful tailoring entrepreneur in downtown Seoul to finally end up in a small laundry at the outskirts of town.

His own experiences were not confined to the Korean peninsula, and he talked extensively especially about Japan, the colonial master of his childhood and the modernizing influence and source of profitable commodities of his adulthood. Japan as well as United States were both focal points of cultural and economical comparison and also targets of emigration by his kin. His manner of assessing Korea and Koreans in comparison with other countries is illustrated by the quote from the occasion when I met him for the first time in his young colleague’s shop: “The older generation [of Japanese] thinks of Koreans as lower than themselves, but the younger generation is different. Koreans themselves think of Western Europeans like they think of Americans, as being from a more advanced country. And it’s the same for Koreans; they also regard the people in Southeast Asia or Bangladesh as lower than themselves. Everywhere it’s the same.”
3. Four Portraits of Shopkeepers

LIFE STORY

The first time I went to see Mr Kwŏn in his laundry, he told me, even before I inquired about his background, that he was born into one of the three illustrious lineages originating in Andong, Northern Kyŏngsang province. As he mentioned, the founders of the three lineages were granted their surnames Kim, Kwŏn and Chang by the first king of the Koryŏ dynasty for their merits in the establishment of the new dynasty in the early 10th century.\footnote{The three lineages maintain a common shrine in the city of Andong to commemorate the three ancestors.} The lineage into which Mr Kwŏn was born in the late 1920s had produced the second highest number of successful candidates of the highest state examination munkwa after the royal Yi lineage of Chŏnju during the Chosŏn dynasty.\footnote{Personal communication from professor Milan Hejtmanek (May 7, 2004).}

After asserting his pedigree as a member of a yangban (scholar-official) household, the high status of his birth in premodern terms almost completely disappeared from his accounts, and from that point on, the wealth of his family, and money and wealth in general appeared as the most important and relevant motivations and as sources of influence over people.

The wealth of Grandfather Kwŏn’s natal home was based on enterprise: they operated a large-scale rice mill (chŏngmiso) and a wine brewery (yangjojang). He also mentioned in passing that his father had been a “wealthy farmer” (taenong), but mostly he referred to the entrepreneurial activity as the source of their wealth. The death of his father to an illness before he was even born left him an only child, and he grew up under the authority of his grandmother and mother. Despite his father’s death, the wealth of the household did not diminish, and the remaining members of the family were spared economic difficulties. Kwŏn was able to receive a good education by the standards of that time. He was sent away from home to attend school in Daegu, the main city of the province. He graduated from high school, and also gained elementary school teacher’s qualifications, which at the time made him in his own words an int’elli, an educated person. Combined with the wealth of the household, these attainments made him popular with girls and a desirable bridegroom candidate.

Grandfather Kwŏn’s childhood and youth were thus relatively carefree, and Japanese colonial rule and its era did not appear as exclusively oppressive and gloomy in his talk. Sometimes he referred to the repressive nature of Japanese policies (“we couldn’t eat what was ours, but it was taken by the Japanese and given back as rations, while the Japanese lived a free and developed life”), but growing up during the colonial era and having contacts with Japan and the Japanese even during the post-liberation and post-War decades...
had seemingly provided him with nuanced views and understandings of the country and allocated a significant position to Japan in his comparative perceptions of himself and Korea.

The Korean War that lasted from 1950 to 1953 figured surprisingly little in his narration of the 1950s when he served as a non-commissioned officer in the military police, considering the importance given to in the accounts and interpretations of modern Korean history. Rather than being a separate event, the war appeared merely as part of an amalgamation of his experience of the whole decade and the general disorder of the era, which he colloquially described as *kaep’an*, literally “dog scene.” For Kwŏn as a member of the military police, the aftermath of the war offered beneficial possibilities, and for him the lost position of the premodern elite did not matter much because he was in a position to utilize the available resources: the elevated standing of the military, connections to the US troops and to the former colonial power Japan.

In 1950s’ Korea, being part of the military police was a privileged position, and for Mr Kwŏn that gave access to money, which was a recurrent topic in his talk: “At that time a military policeman was able to secure a good income if the checkpoint was in a good location. Money was flowing in for me.” Money, the basis of livelihood in the non-agricultural sectors of the society, had in Mr Kwŏn’s experience an enormous power over people in the impoverished, war-ravaged nation. In his narration, access to money and the food and shelter it could provide also secured access to relations with women.

Amidst his “good life” as a military policeman, escapades with women and access to commodities that could be exchanged at a good profit, he also got married at the age of 25. Unlike his favorite topics of talk, he told me about his marriage only after I especially inquired about it. He received a telegram from his grandmother to the garrison where he was stationed as a military policeman, telling him to come home quickly. He got permission, and back at home his grandmother announced that he would get married in one week. “So there was nothing to be done.” Besides the account of his wedding, his wife appeared in his reminiscences only rarely, and he touched on his marriage only occasionally and in very general terms. When I asked him what his married life was like, he answered only that he did it out of responsibility. “Once you get married, you are not supposed to abandon your wife.” They had three sons and one daughter, the oldest being born in the late 1950s and the youngest in the late 1960s.

Grandfather Kwŏn’s career in the military police ended when he was discharged, by his own account, for a misdeed by some of his subordinates. They had stolen some materials from a warehouse, and he had to bear the responsibility for the case even though he, according to his own words, did not know
about it and was not involved. His dishonorable discharge did not leave him without means of livelihood, because his ten years as a military policeman had provided him with influential and useful relations: “The Military Police Headquarters (Hŏnbyŏng saryŏngbu) was nothing like it is today. It was very important, like the FBI in the USA.” With those connections, of which he used the common term ppaek (deriving from the English “back”), he was able to acquire vehicles for a taxi business in his home place Andong, and get Seoul license plates for the cars. “There were so few personal vehicles in Korea at the time. Then came the Korean car Sibal, and there were vehicles which originated from the US military.”

He kept the taxi firm in his home region for most of the 1960s. His accounts of its duration vary between five and seven years, the most exact figure being the years 1962-1969. Simultaneously he also had other entrepreneurial activities for shorter periods. He kept a movie theater in Andong for a few years, but gave that up because “business was not good anymore when television started to become popular.” He also mentioned having run an inn (yŏgwăn) for a short time, as well as a tearoom (tabang) and a pool hall. As with his life in the 1950s, the 1960s emerges as a period when the material advantages he enjoyed exerted influence over people. Typical was a story taking place during his taxi business, when he drove a bride and groom back to the home of the bride three days after the wedding for a customary visit, and used the temporary absence of the groom for a moment together with the bride. On top of his businesses, he also held an administrative post of township head (upchang): “When Park Chung-hee was the president, there were many soldiers in civilian posts, and I was a township head for nine months, but I had to quit because of my business (saŭp). I had the taxi firm at the time. Civil servants were forbidden to have businesses, so I had to leave the post.”

At the end of the 1960s he quit the other businesses and went to learn tailoring at a private school (haeŭg), where an acquaintance from his home region was already studying. He moved to Seoul at the turn of the 1970s, when migration from rural areas was at its peak. He founded a tailor shop (yangbokchŏm) in downtown Seoul, which was to become the basis for the most prosperous period of his life.

I made a lot of money at that time. I had a car and a driver, and I weighed 20 kilos more than now. The waist of my pants was 35 inches while it’s 28 now. My suits from that time are hanging back there [he points towards the back of the shop], but I can’t wear them anymore.

In one occasion he recounted that his tailoring had at its peak employed 50 people in two locations, and in another account the number of employees was 100 in four locations. To mark the significance of the business, he also once
mentioned in passing that several celebrities had been his customers, among them the singer Na Hun-a. When I specifically inquired he considered to have been the best time and best occupation of his life, he answered that it had been the tailor shop. (But as was typical of him, after giving this short answer he changed the topic to his relations with women, and recalled a story from the 1960s when “the taxi business was really profitable,” and taxis were often used to travel between the bride’s and groom’s homes after the wedding.)

The demise of the tailor shop business occurred when Mr Kwôn and his wife were swindled into giving a guarantee for a loan to a debtor, who then absconded to North America. He lost all his money and the business as well. He formulated the case as his wife having put a stamp in the wrong place (tojangūl chalmot tchikta), but he did not seem to blame her for the unfortunate outcome, which was in tune with the mostly unemotional tone of his talk about his wife. This incident recalls the common position of women as managers of the household economy, which is regarded as particularly a salaried middle-class practice, but which was not uncommon among my shopkeeper informants either. As women are in possession of bankbooks and also of personal stamps (tojang), which are used in official documents instead of signatures, the chances are that there will be unfortunate results as well as successful dealings.

After the loan fraud and the loss of family property, the family relocated from downtown Seoul to the outskirts of town in the neighborhood, where he set up a laundry. At first they all lived cramped in the small space of the laundry.

“Some slept there, some slept here, that’s how we spent one year. I earned money by keeping this place, and my wife (chipsaram) went to work. At that time there were not many buildings in the neighborhood besides this one, and when we moved in here this neighborhood began to be built. We got to know people, rooms [houses] were introduced to us and we were able to get a room.”

They lived in several locations before moving to a small apartment house (pilla, from the English “villa”) five or six years before I met grandfather Kwôn in 1999. It was also five years since his wife had passed away. It had been May 16 when his wife suffered a stroke, and December 12 when she died. He added that both dates are of historical meaning in Korea; the former was the date of Park Chung-hee’s “military revolution”33 (1961) and the latter the date of General Chun Doo-hwan’s takeover of the military after the assassination of Park in October 1979.

33 “Military revolution” was the word Grandfather Kwôn used, and the official term used during Park’s regime (1961-1979), but in practice it was a military coup d’état.
His mother, aged over 90 by the time I met Grandfather Kwŏn, was living with her son at the time of my fieldwork. During my subsequent visit to Korea, Grandfather Kwŏn’s mother became hospitalized, which became the occasion to close the laundry for good. I happened to visit him on the last day of the operation of the shop, and asked him whether he had any special feelings when closing the business. His answer reflected the sensibilities common among my shopkeeper informants, that the business is not the life’s work with continuity as a central value: “No, I don’t have any special feeling, I’m already old, and it’s time to quit. It’s a bit like after 10 years of military life.”

Two days later, all the machinery and uncollected clothes had been taken away, and the shop space was empty except for some garbage. After the closure, Grandfather Kwŏn took all the uncollected clothes – “There must have been at least hundred pieces of them” he said – to two locations in Seoul where old people gather, and gave them away.

**Grandfather Kwŏn and Women**

The most characteristic trait in Mr Kwŏn’s talk was his insistence on recounting his experiences with women both before and during his marriage. Contrasting to the stories of his womanizing were the scarce references to his wife, their marriage and the apparent lack of emotional attachment towards her. Even though he mostly showed no remorse in the accounts of his extramarital relations, remembering those times as “good” and using for the most a slightly humorous tone, he occasionally expressed some ambivalence and even repentance. “I have had my share of women, and I have had many extramarital relationships, but now all that is no use. […] One must make a good marriage. No matter how much money one earns one must have a good wife.”

On the first occasion I met Grandfather Kwŏn in his young colleague’s laundry, he also made a general remark which in the light of his later talk must have been about his own marriage: “Even if the wife has been a bad wife, a man will remember her as the one who raised his children and took care of him. One will be regretful and have a guilty conscience.”

He did not profess any romantic love towards his late wife, but confessed his loneliness and difficulties in returning to a normal life after her death. “After the death of my wife my life was a mess. I did not clean much in the house for five years, never even lifted the mattress, just swept the floor around it, but now I do everything, wash clothes, clean up. I’ve come to my senses.” Later he added that after the death of his wife, his life had been miserable. Even the account of his wife’s death turned into a recollection of a past relationship with a woman, whom he would have liked to marry but was not allowed by his grandmother, because the woman had been Christian. “That woman heard about the death of my wife, and she called me.”
Grandfather Kwŏn was distinct from all the other informants of my research in the way he presented himself. This was due not only to his personality but to the phase of the life cycle that he was living. He was at the end of his occupational career, about to finish the last phase of his economically active life. He was also a widower, whose wife had not been the kind of shopkeeping companion that was the case with the majority of my informants, and his marriage had not been central to businesskeeping as it was with many others. The sphere of Grandfather Kwŏn and that of his wife, in livelihood as well as personal household relations, appeared more separate than is common in families who are occupied in self-employment.

The background to a lot of his relations with women was the political and social disarray of the decades of his most vigorous manhood especially in the 1950s. As he once formulated it when narrating his escapades, during the time of war, disorder, and poverty women were not able to observe the requirements of chastity: “Women gave up their bodies rather than starve.” During and after the war the military police force was in an influential position and had access to money and valuable goods, and the notion of influential men’s promiscuity undoubtedly facilitated the exploitation of women’s vulnerability by men like Mr Kwŏn.

It is interesting to consider Grandfather Kwŏn’s accounts of his own practices and sense of the disordered era with scholarly interpretations of representations of men during the tumultuous decades of war and rapid change and economic development. In her recent book about making sense of these symptoms of modernization in South Korea through the talk of eight women, Nancy Abelmann (2003: 187-188) discusses how male loss and displacement has been a leading mode of representation in articulating the losses of the whole nation due to colonialism and the Korean War. Sheila Miyoshi Jager, treating this topic in her discussion of the meaning and image of women in late 20th century nationalistic dissident and unification discourses, defines the Chosŏn era mores that were reappraised in the 1980s discourses, as follows: “Female chastity and virtue were not so much a private issue between couples as a public one that involved the well-being of the state” (Jager 2003: 68). In contemporary discourses, the images that most frequently emerged in the context of the divided peninsula were those of the Korean woman despoiled, and the breakdown of the conjugal bond came to symbolize the nation in war with itself (Jager 2003: 68-69).

In Grandfather Kwŏn’s talk there was no pretension of Korean feminine virtue (except for his wife), and his accounts appeared as antithetical to the nationalist historiography narratives discussed by Jager, which have bearing on South Korean society in general as well. The vulnerability of women was a salient topic in Grandfather Kwŏn’s stories, but rather than any foreign
power, Japanese or American, it has been the Korean man who has misused and exploited that vulnerability.

**Mr Pak: Neighborhood Reciprocity**

The rice mill and bakery or **pangakan** run by Mr Park and his wife, situated in Kolmok Street close to many of the shops appearing in this study, was a quintessential neighborhood business due to the character of the establishment and the attitude and personality of its keeper and also due to the fact that it was operated by a married couple. Mr Pak’s good sense of humor, open personality, and dedication to cultivating reciprocal relationships in neighborhood had made his shop a central site in the neighborhood interaction. Mr Pak’s position among his peers was reflected in the position of his and his wife’s mill among the business establishments in Kolmok Street: it was open, accessible, and a site of not only work but of leisure as well. At all times, whether busy with work or hosting a drink and snack gathering, he was able and willing to maintain a jovial atmosphere in his shop. This also contributed to his becoming a crucial person for my research and his mill the nexus from which I could approach other people and business establishments in that street. Mr Pak not only allowed but also expected me to visit his place regularly, and only a few days’ absence prompted him to ask why I had not been around. He was also the person who facilitated my access and made me feel welcome to the drink and snack gatherings that he and his acquaintances frequently arranged.

Only a tiny fraction of visitors to Mr Pak’s mill were customers, who mostly approached the place by phone and to whom Mr Pak later delivered the orders by motorbike. Mr Pak, aged around 50, was a man of small but sinewy stature, brisk in his movements as well as in wit. He rarely missed an opportunity to sit down with his neighborhood friends for a round of a board game such as **paduk** or East Asian chess (**changgi**) between spells of work, and he enjoyed and eagerly arranged and took part in drink and snack gatherings with his companions after the shops had been closed for the day. It was Mr Pak who celebrated most fervently, generated most noise, and handed out most drinks during the soccer World Cup in the summer of 2002, when a neighborhood crowd had gathered in the backyard of a house to watch games on television, and spontaneous celebrations erupted in Kolmok Street after surprising Korean victories against Portugal and Italy.

**Personality and Occupation**

A major characteristic in Mr Pak’s personality was his sense of humor, which made an important contribution to the cheerful atmosphere of his
place and which also made him a much-liked person among the street shopkeepers and residents. A good example of his sense of humor and ability to create an air of warm companionship was the occasion when a person visiting his shop was talking about the idea of changing his profession and becoming a carpenter. Mr Pak commented jestingly that it is good to have many occupational qualifications. Others present responded to Pak’s jest by challenging him to state how many occupational skills he could boast. Rarely short of a witty answer and self-irony, Mr Pak started listing the different phases of rice cake production as his various skills. Another telling example occurred when the rice mill was being renovated. I willingly offered my assistance, and being much taller than Mr Pak he had me paint the ceilings. As I seemed to cope with the task satisfactorily, Mr Pak remarked that painting must be my main job (ponأسب) and research just a side job (puأسب).

His enthusiasm for maintaining neighborhood relations and willingness to spend leisurely moments in the company of his shopkeeper peers and other acquaintances was balanced by his diligence and vigor during the periods of intensive work. Mr Pak’s wife was an active partner with her husband in operating the mill-bakery despite her somewhat weak health and disability of movement, which prevented her from doing any heavy tasks.

The fact that rice cake manufacturing must commence early in the morning in order to be ready for delivery during the day meant that Mr Pak normally exercised restraint in drink and snack gatherings. This kind of leisure did not often last late, and each participant was always free to leave at his will, which is in marked contrast to accounts of after hours drinking related to white-collar company work, often characterized as involuntary and felt to be in conflict with personal family life (Janelli 1993). “I am the first to come [to the shop] in this neighborhood” he once said when I took a morning walk on Kolmok Street at eight o’clock, by which time he had already been at work for two hours. After the morning spell of work, Mr Pak went home to have breakfast, and returned to the shop often with his wife, who had meanwhile sent their daughter to school. They rarely worked late except for traditional festivities, during which they stay busy around the clock.

Pangakan means literally “a mill”. In agricultural villages its most important function has been to mill rice, other grains and chili. All this is done in contemporary urban pangakans as well, but monetarily the most important product is the manufacturing of rice cakes (ttאוק), which earlier used to be made at home. Making ttאוק without the machinery used in mill-bakeries is a laborious process, and with the use of rice cakes in rituals and festivities ranging from the opening of a new shop to commemorating the ancestors even in the modern settings, there is continuous demand for the product. Ttאוק is a fresh product that cannot be stored for a long time, which also contributes to
the viability of small family-operated rice mills. Nevertheless, Mr Pak lamented that business was slower compared to previous times. In the area where he delivered his products the number of apartment houses had increased, and he had noticed that ttōk was in less demand in apartment complexes than in neighborhoods of small houses. Steady customers were aging and dying, and young people did not eat much ttōk anymore, he sighed. The overall increase of small-scale shopkeeping in the aftermath of the economic crisis also had repercussions for Mr Pak; for example, earlier there used to be only two pangakans in the marketplace one and a half kilometers away, but in the last few years their number had increased to five. He also recounted how he used to order rice by the truckload directly from the countryside, but now a local supplier and the grocery stores in the neighborhood were sufficient for his use.

Photographs 4 and 5: Mr Pak at work in his pangakan, rice cake bakery and mill.

Simple non-sweet variants of ttōk are used in common plain meals such as soups throughout the year, but for the actual livelihood of rice cake bakeries, more important is the manufacturing of both elaborate and simple rice cakes for ritual consumption. The demand for rice cakes is seasonal: the days before the traditional festivities of Lunar New Year (sŏl) and the Harvest Moon Day (ch’usŏk) on the lunar August 15 are busiest, and during those seasons Mr Pak needed helping hands. Besides family and kinship events such as seasonal and death-day ancestral rituals, rice cakes are used in all kinds of commemorative events, and also on occasions such as the completion of a construction project.
or opening a shop. Buddhist temples and Christian churches, which present rice cakes in festive events, were also important customers for Mr Pak. One consequence of the seasonality of the demand for rice cakes was that Mr Pak and his wife had a lot of spare time, especially during the summer. Unlike small shopkeepers, who often keep the longest possible business hours to maximize the household income (Pak Min-ja 1988: 108-11, 1991b: 55-6), Mr Pak and his wife had opted not to have their mill open until late with ready-made products awaiting visiting customers but to manufacture rice cakes only on orders. Earlier they had had ready-made ttok for sale, but as Mr Pak’s wife expressed it, it had been too tiresome (himduda), and was for the socially minded Mr Pak only a waste of time. Besides the meager additional income to be expected in a neighborhood environment where visiting customers would have been few, it would also have reduced the time available for get-togethers and occasional fishing trips. Mr Pak and his wife milled grain and chili for occasionally visiting customers, but it was only a tiny fraction of their sales and income.

Poverty and Migration

Mr Pak was born in a coastal area in a province not far from the capital area as a third son in a family of five sons and two daughters. As he told me, his parents were poor, and they had passed away early, before any of the children had gotten married. The consequence of the parents’ early death was that all the children had been obliged to get married using only their own resources, which in Mr Pak’s account had been an underprivileged position. Getting married without the support of one’s parents is a major disadvantage, as in Korean marriages the families of both the bride and the groom are extensively involved in wedding preparations and matrimonial exchanges between the respective sides (Pak Min-ja 1991a and Kendall 1996a).

Another outcome of the parents’ early death was that none of the children could receive much education. Mr Pak, who had graduated from middle school, was the only one among the siblings who had any education above elementary school. He moved to Seoul before turning twenty in the late 1960s with help from his uncle, the younger brother of his father (chagun aboji) and his wife (chagun omoni), who were residing in the capital and extended an invitation to the young man: “He said there will be no prospects in the countryside, and helped me to come to Seoul.” That was the period when the migration from rural areas and the growth of Seoul was at its highest, and he,

34 The term for the younger brother of one’s father, chagun aboji, means literally “small father.” Likewise, the designation for the wife of one’s father’s younger brother, chagun omoni, means “small mother.” For the terms of the older brother of one’s father and his wife, “small” is replaced by “big” (kun).
just like Grandfather Kwŏn, was among the hundreds of thousands who left the deprived countryside and settled in Seoul.

His life stages are also typical for the urban self-employed of his generation in that he was one generation removed from agricultural work and had not himself been actively occupied in agriculture. Besides this intergenerational shift from agriculture to urban employment, a further characteristic route to self-employment has been an intragenerational shift from wage labor to small businesses (Ch’oe T’aeryong 1988). Here Mr Pak did not correspond to the most usual pattern, as he did not have experience of wage labor during the time he had been living in Seoul, but otherwise his numerous experiences in self-employment correspond to the common pattern of great variation and shifts in individual careers in small businesses. (A good example is the couple that kept a kitchenware shop in the neighborhood during the early phase of my research; their two previous businesses had been a shoe shop and an ice cream shop.)

In the decades after Mr Pak’s migration to Seoul, the most typical occupational origin of small shopkeepers has been in wage employment (Ch’oe T’aeryong 1988: 398; Ch’oe T’aeryong 1991: 110-111). It has also been noted that migration away from agriculture has taken the work force to wage labor rather than directly to self-employment (Kim Pyŏng-cho 1985). Nevertheless, in the early 1970s, a few years after Mr Pak’s migration to Seoul, no more than 14% of Korea’s labor force was in industrial employment, while 38% of the nonagricultural work force was classified as self-employed (Koo 1976: 777).

After arriving in Seoul, Mr Pak sold bread and pastry (ppang) from a pushcart (rišk’a, from the English “rear car”) for several years, until the wife of his uncle lent him money without interest and helped him to open a grocery shop (syup’ô) in a house that they owned. He kept the shop until his relatives sold the house, after which he moved within the same ward (ku) to another administrative unit tong, where he has been living since and where both his mill and home were located at the time of research. He had thus lived all of his time in Seoul in Ordinary People’s Ward, which started to urbanize at the time of his migration to Seoul.

Mr Pak got married in the late 1970s through an introduction by his future wife’s maternal aunt (imo). Their daughter was born in the early 1980s, and at the time of research she was in the final year of high school. The late 1970s was also the time when he became a pangakan keeper. Mr Pak went to practice rice cake making and milling at another establishment, but he was only made to clean floors, so he quit after just one week. “I wrote down everything in a notebook” he accounted, as if referring to my continuous note-making in his presence. He opened his own mill-bakery without being properly trained and prepared, and learned the trade by doing it by himself. He admitted having
been scared in the beginning when customers came. The first location of Mr Pak’s and his wife’s mill was not favorable, so they moved after nine years to the place where they have been since. “We were not busy there. We came here ten years ago, and only then we started to get busy.”

Throughout Mr Pak’s accounts of his life, he emphasized the poverty of his parents and also his own poor circumstances until things started to improve after starting the rice mill and especially after moving the shop to the present location. Even though Mr Pak had seen his business doing better than at the time of my research, the past for him was a time of poverty and need, and the present circumstances a time of prosperous life (chal salda).

Our parents were poor, and we were poor ourselves, sisters and brothers. I couldn’t buy a yogurt for my daughter when she wanted. When we lived in a two-room place over there [pointing at the direction], sisters and brother came from the countryside to live with us, when our parents were no more there. They died early, in their 50s.

On another occasion he talked about the indispensable help he had received from his paternal kin to get a foothold in the capital. It is worth noting that judging from his account, there were significant differences of wealth and education between his father’s siblings, as his paternal uncle, the younger brother of his father (chaqūn abōji) was an elementary school teacher, and he and his wife owned real estate in which their nephew could open his first shop.

Chaqūn ōmōni (father’s younger brother’s wife) invited me to Seoul. First I sold bread from a pushcart. Chaqūn ōmōni [father’s younger brother’s wife] got us a shop, lent one million won without interest to start a shop (super). I did that for a few years, and then chaqūn abōji [father’s younger brother] sold the place where the shop used to be, and thus I moved to this district. Oh, we were poor at the time, all the rice mill equipment was bought on credit. Chaqūn ōmōni helped us a lot, she made efforts to help us… Chaqūn abōji was an elementary school teacher, and he urged chaqūn ōmōni to help the nephews.

A contented neighborhood shopkeeper

After Mr Pak and his wife moved their mill-bakery to the present location at the turn of the 1990s, their business “became busy.” The location was better, and they have been able to acquire a steady clientele among individuals as well as local churches and Buddhist temples, which both were good customers, using rice cakes in ceremonial and ritual occasions. By all accounts, Mr Pak and his wife had been successful in keeping the rice mill. When recounting his earlier life, he told that he was rich now compared to the time when he sold pastry from a pushcart. At the time of research conditions were not as auspicious for his business as in the 1980s and in the 1990s, but he had
been able to save assets and invest in landed property and stocks. His earlier success and ability to save and acquire property was of course not unknown in the surrounding neighborhood, but perhaps due to Mr Pak’s sociable and friendly attitude to people around him, I was not aware of any ill feelings or jealousy towards him. A shopkeeper in the same street, who had a similar outgoing personality, often spoke of Mr Pak’s diligence and friendliness in very positive terms. That shopkeeper also hinted of the earlier success of the mill: “The pangakan has made a lot of money. They’ve bought a house and also land elsewhere. They are rich even if it doesn’t look like that.” This comment was not in the least condemnatory but approving of the fact that the mill couple was not conspicuous in the use of their wealth and accommodated themselves to the egalitarian atmosphere among the shopkeeper peers.

The comment also bespoke another trait which related Mr Pak and his business to most of the others in the neighborhood: the profits were not invested in the business beyond the necessary maintenance, renovation, and new machinery to replace old and broken items. Likewise, even if the business of rice cake manufacturing was slow at the time of research, it was profitable enough not to consider moving on to another trade, which is not untypical for Korean shopkeepers, whether in case of a failed business or ambitions for a larger business and greater wealth. As an example of ambitious entrepreneurialism that advanced beyond the neighborhood level of businesskeeping, I will present the couple Chŏng.

**Mr and Mrs Chŏng: Leaving the Neighborhood in Pursuit of Wealth and Status**

At the time I began fieldwork, a couple in their early 30s was keeping a small restaurant in Side Street, an alley close to Big Street. The restaurant specialized in pork cutlets or tonkkasā but also kept a variety of Korean dishes on the menu. There were only two tables in the tiny restaurant space, and most of the sales came from deliveries, which the man did at first alone with his scooter or moped, and later with the help of a part-time employee. The kitchen took up more than half of the shop space; very soon after I learned to know the couple they hired a woman (chubang ajumma, “kitchen auntie”) to work there, which indicated either that the business was not bad or that the proprietors were anticipating increasing sales. (Restaurants that get only a tiny fraction of sales from visiting customers are not uncommon, and especially among pork cutlet and chicken places there are establishments which
do only deliveries.) The couple, whom I shall call by the family name Chŏng³⁵, had a many-faceted work history, and the pork-cutlet restaurant, which they in the end operated only about one and a half years was just one among the businesses they had kept and were to keep.

Neither Mr Chŏng nor Mrs Chŏng had had a chance to go to a university after graduating from high school. His parents had died when he was eighteen, and all the schooling he was able to get was thanks to the support of his older sister. He left home after his parents passed away: “I didn’t listen to what others said, and wandered around a lot.” He worked for some time in a trading company, from where he went to work in a business his acquaintance had founded. That did not last more than six months before it went bankrupt. At that time he also took classes in the National Open University, but he couldn’t follow the courses because of the burden of work, so he quit that after three years. The lack of university education was a concern also for Mrs Chŏng: before they closed the shop in the Seoul neighborhood and moved to the provincial town, she was planning to study and learn during free time she expected the new expanded business to engender. When talking about her plans to study, she expressed her sense that those without university education are looked down upon, which clearly abetted her aspiration for learning: “Who hasn’t gone to a university in Korea? Everyone has to attend university.”

The couple’s livelihood in self-employment and the small business sector was an obvious consequence of their lack of educational credentials, and with their age and resources, achieving university education was not a reasonable option. The keenly felt sense of inferiority, lack of status, and aspiration for upward mobility motivated Mr Chŏng’s entrepreneurship and his striving for a bigger business and better monetary rewards. The last occasion I met the couple, three years after moving from Seoul and two years after they had finished with their restaurant business, with Mr Chŏng paying wages to more than a dozen employees in his newly expanded office, he told me that his dream was to make so much money that he would be able to establish a university. After inquiring of me what I want to do in the future, he told me that he would like to make a lot of money. I asked him why:

– Because what I want to do takes a lot of money.
– So what do you want to do?
– I want to establish a school (hakkyo), an endowment for a school.
– School, what kind of a school? Middle School (chunghakkyo)?

³⁵ Korean women do not adopt husband’s name at marriage, but unlike other couples that I have chosen to indicate by only one surname in this work, Mrs and Mr Chŏng actually had the same family name.
A university (taehakkyo). I want to make a public investment which will be noticed, but that takes a lot of money.

In the early 1990s he started his own clothing business, distributing merchandise from manufacturers to retailers, “going from retailer to retailer in shopping malls (sangga).” He earned well for a couple of years: “At the age of 26-27 I made good money for that age. And at 28 I went bankrupt.” Meanwhile he had also met his wife, to whom he had not been able to get legally married, as they had the same surname and the same legally defined place of origin attached to the surname. The latter corresponds to the Korean definition of clan or upper-level lineage, of which one example is the Kwŏn lineage of Andong (Andong Kwŏn-ssi), to which Grandfather Kwŏn belonged. The legal prohibition against marriages between persons of same family name and same place of lineage origin (tongsŏng tongbon) remained in effect at the time of research and also several years later despite efforts to abolish the law, so the two remained in legal terms a common-law couple.

After the bankruptcy of the man’s clothing distribution business the couple left for the countryside, or “escaped” as he expressed it. Pointing at an abandoned house along our walking route at the fringes of the provincial town, he told: “We moved to a house like that, renovated and painted it, and paid the debt in two years by raising dogs. (…) I experienced all kinds of things when I was young. At that time I could take a bankruptcy, but now it would be difficult. Perhaps I wouldn’t have the attitude to be able to get up again.”

When describing the opening of the pork cutlet restaurant after recovering from the bankruptcy of the clothing business, Mr Chŏng pointed at his wife and said that it had been she who had wanted to open a restaurant and insisted that it would be easy. He himself had not thought it was a good idea. “She held fast to her idea, and here we are now” the man said, on one of the last days before closing the pork cutlet place in Seoul for good. In the end they kept the restaurant in the Seoul neighborhood for one and a half years, which for them was a toilsome period, with little prospects of earning well or expanding the business, and virtually no chance for Mr Chŏng to stay at home. Even on the first occasions after I came to know the couple, he told that the place was only intended to be practice for the future, to get experience for a bigger place in a better location with better prospects for earning: “This is not a good place to do business.” Keeping the small restaurant in the Seoul neighborhood they could make a living (mŏkke salda) but not make money (tonül pŏlda)
In the summer of 1999 Mr and Mrs Chŏng were given a chance to open a
bigger restaurant in a provincial town of some 350,000 inhabitants close to
the birthplace of both. The shop space was in a five-story building owned by
the Mr Chŏng’s maternal aunt (imo), wealthy and influential person in the
town, as he expressed it. The better-off relative had thought that the couple
should be given a chance for something better after living a hard life (himdŭl-
ge salda), so the real estate expenses in opening the beef restaurant were one
tenth of the market price. The new place was going to be “in a downtown lo-
cation and not in a neighborhood (tongne) like this,” which meant that the
earning prospects were going to be markedly better. I asked Mrs Chŏng how
much time she was going to spend in the new restaurant; she said that she
would have more of her own time than in the pork cutlet place. “Keeping this
place I haven’t been able to think about anything except this. Being bound all
the time in the small kitchen one’s thoughts will be restricted. There are so
many things I haven’t been able to do.” The new restaurant was going to have
a hired chef (chubangjang) and an employee, and she was to take care only of
certain tasks such as seasoning the meat and making kimch’i, the pickle made
of Chinese cabbage, garlic, and chili as main ingredients. Since Mrs Chŏng had
no experience in managing a beef restaurant, she was going to go for one
month to the southeastern city of Pusan to train in the restaurant of their
family friend.

Fortunately I was able to maintain contact with the couple, and I went to
visit them a few months after they had opened the restaurant in the
provincial town. The place was getting established in the area, but despite
what they had planned and Mrs Chŏng had anticipated, they had been obliged
to cut the number of employees, and she was working long hours due to labor
costs. They still had three employees, which was more than any of my
informants in Seoul ever had: two women working in the kitchen and one
man making deliveries with Mr Chŏng. The restaurant was kept open for
almost 20 hours a day, reflecting the large number of nightlife establishments
in the area and the need to establish the new business. In the following
spring, when I had a chance to meet the couple during a subsequent visit to
Korea, the restaurant was operating as previously with the same number of
staff but with shorter opening hours, which indicated that the business had
improved. At that time Mr Chŏng was contemplating opening a coffee shop
(tabang, literally “tea room”), in which young women serve coffee and also
deliver it to customers. Tabang coffee shops differ from cafés by virtue of the
relationship of the waitresses to the customers, which in some cases extends
to prostitution. Mrs Chŏng was against the idea, and Mrs Chŏng also
remarked that he would have to keep it secret from his family members. Nev-
Nevertheless, his wife was pregnant with their first child, and he wanted to earn money. Due to circumstances in the town – the ratio of men to women was high due to industry – tabangs were a good business: “One can make more money [with a tabang] than with a restaurant like ours” he said. “In this town you need to earn money in the local way.”

Both Mr and Mrs Chǒng confessed that operating the new restaurant was demanding both physically and mentally. She said that she had been making an effort to do her best for their customers, to develop some new tastes, but the response had not been encouraging, and she felt she was not getting acknowledgement from the clientele despite her endeavors. Mr Chǒng asked me if there was a proverb like “Not even a dog touches trader’s money” (changsaton kaedo an murō kanda) in Finland as well. For him it meant that money earned in such a hard manner (hindalge) was not worth it, nor was having to show customers a friendly face against one’s true inclinations. Particularly distressing and denigrating for him was when making deliveries customers younger than he at times addressed him in blunt language, (panmal), which is the speech level used most commonly between intimate age mates, between and towards children, and by superiors towards subordinates. While disrespectful language towards deliverers is not rare, for the entrepreneurial Mr Chǒng, who was head of a business and in other settings commanded a
corresponding term of address and reference (*sajangnim*), and who strove for a bigger and higher-status enterprise, being subjected to address in blunt language by customers was especially humiliating. (In other settings between persons whose speech relations are not obvious and have not been established, being subjected to *panmal* may lead to heated arguments and physical confrontations.)

Mr Chŏng confessed that what he would really like to do would be a clothing business, and he was harboring ideas to re-enter the trade. Operating the beef restaurant was not meant to last longer than three years: “One year of getting established, two years to earn money.” He wanted to attain wealth and get onto stable ground before he was 40, but he had not been able to save money yet: “There we are living in the back room of the restaurant.” The room in which they slept was occasionally used to receive restaurant customers, who wanted to have a private space. He admitted that life was as strenuous as it had been in Seoul. They couldn’t sleep enough, and “the restaurant business is the most *nogada* of all: there’s the kitchen, the need to shop in the marketplace, deliveries.” To accentuate the toil he used the Japanese-derived word, which usually refers to physical labor and day laborers, especially in construction. Yet despite the physical strain and occasional denigrating treatment from customers, he still felt that his position in regard to the surroundings was higher than in the Seoul neighborhood.

**From Restaurant Keeper to Entrepreneur**

Mr and Mrs Chŏng operated the beef restaurant ultimately only for about one year, after which it was taken over by another keeper. The restaurant had been merely the first stepping-stone to get a foothold in the provincial town, just as they had operated the pork cutlet place in Seoul to practice for a bigger pursuit. The decisive momentum to give up the restaurant was the birth of the daughter, after which Mrs Chŏng stayed at home, and the couple moved away from downtown. Mr Chŏng opened an office for a private loan business in the same location right across the street. At the time of my visit in September 2001, one year after finishing with the restaurant, there were four people working under him.

They had moved from the back room of the restaurant to the outskirts of town to rent a small house in the courtyard of the landlord in a village-like environment. There was a mountain right behind their home, and vast rice paddies in the vicinity. The downtown area where the restaurant and the loan office were located was good for business but an unfavorable environment to raise a child because of the high concentration of entertainment businesses and the presence of organized crime or “shaven-heads” (*kkaktugi*) in Mr Chang’s colloquial expression.
The office was mainly for his private loan (taech’ul) business, as the big text mudambo mubojōng (“without security, without guarantee”) in the window indicated. He nevertheless told me that his main activity was distribution (yut’ong), or wholesale (tomae) as he added. He periodically bought clothes in the bulk, stored them in a rented warehouse and sold them when he could make a profitable deal. Even at the time of his restaurant proprietorship he had mentioned his lingering attachment to the clothing business, in which he once had initially succeeded and earned well before going bankrupt. He was harboring hopes of once again making an attempt in the garment business, and in the best case even owning his own clothing brand.

To my knowledge he never realized this ambition beyond the occasional trading in garments, and neither did he ever open the tabang coffee house he had been thinking of one year earlier. He operated the loan business or brokerage without any considerable capital, and he received his income mainly from commissions gained by introducing borrowers and lenders. If he himself did not have funds to make a loan, he introduced the person in need of money to someone willing to lend, and received a share of the loan interest as his “introduction fee” (sogaebi).

– For example, just recently one person came to apply for a seven million won (€5000) loan, but I didn’t have a penny.
– So what did you do?
– What did I do, introduced him to someone else.

On that occasion Mr Chŏng did not implicitly refer to the largely negative image of the private loan industry, which has been regarded as a social problem throughout Korea’s modern history and which was at the time often discussed in the media for its usurious practices directed especially towards the “ordinary people” or sŏmin, who were in a disadvantageous position in formal credit markets (see for example Chosun Ilbo, Apr 12, 2001). He also denied that there was any significant risk in being involved in circulating private loans, because the money was for the most not his own. The day of my visit was the first birthday (tol) of the couple’s daughter, and both Mr and Mrs Chŏng’s kin was visiting the couple’s home. I could overhear the wife of Mr Chŏng’s maternal uncle (oesungmo) express her concern about his businesses, strictly advising him not to waste his energies in diverse ventures but to concentrate on one thing in a solid manner.

36 For example, private loan profiteering was a recurrent topic in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the illustrated newspaper columns (munnun manhwa) studied by Sin Myŏng-jik (2003). After the military coup in 1961 led by Park Chung-hee, annulling usurious private loans was one measure that the new junta took to “restore order.”
The last occasion I had the chance to meet the couple was in my visit to Korea the following year after the daughter’s first birthday party. By that time, significant developments had taken place in Mr Chŏng’s entrepreneurial career and in the domestic circumstances of the family: he had enlarged his businesses and opened a new office, and the couple had become owners of an apartment house.

Mr Chŏng described his latest endeavors at the lunch table of an upscale beef restaurant with his wife and their daughter. I asked him how he titled himself on his business card. Before he could say anything, his wife answered “Hoejang.” Her short answer was in one sense an assertion of the social ascent of her husband, who had just explained that it had been easier to enlarge the businesses and become a bigger player and a better-known person in the provincial town that would have been possible in Seoul or Pusan. At the same time I could read irony and slight criticism of the ambitions of her husband in that single word: hoejang is a position used mainly of the owner-managers or chairmen of big conglomerates (Janelli 1993: 144). The actual title that her husband used was taep’yŏ, “representative,” which corresponds to the term sajang (“company president”)37, the common term of reference and address among the business proprietors of my fieldwork area and Korea in general. For the aspirations of Mr Chŏng, taep’yŏ was more appropriate as it conveyed the air of modernity and development, unlike sajang, which was applicable to him at the time of the pork cutlet restaurant in Seoul.

The new office with a staff of ten had been opened shortly before my visit. The old office that had been used since the closure of the restaurant functioned as a branch shop or agency (taerijŏm). The signboard informed the visitors that the company was engaged in financing, construction and communication. The office was spacious, with teller’s seats for visiting customers indicating that it is a financing business, employees’ desks behind the cashier as is common in Korean banks, and a separate director’s room. At the time of my visit there were empty rice wine (makkŏlli) bottles and other remains of a kosa ritual, which had been performed at the inauguration of the office. Kosa, a ritual performed for the household gods in order to secure the household prosperity (see Kendall 1985a: 114-117), can in modern settings also be offered at the completion of a new building or the installation of a new machine in a factory (Kim Choong Soon 1992: 200-204), to honor the spirits of a newly purchased car (Kendall 1996b: 515), at launchings of projects such as making a movie, or at inaugurations of business offices as in Mr Chŏng’s new place in

37 The Chinese characters hoe and sa in the managerial titles hoejang and sajang also form the most common form for a company, hoesa.
2002. There are also reports that kosa has been offered at inaugurations of venture businesses based on modern technologies and high professional education (Pak Yun-hŭi 2000), but in my research neighborhood I never witnessed nor heard of more elaborate commemorations at the occasion of a shop opening than offering rice cakes or having drinks and meat available for visitors. The offering of the kosa was clearly a marker and assertion of the status aspirations of Mr Chŏng’s new enterprise.

The Chŏng couple had finally become homeowners, and they also had a brand new car, which made a noticeable contrast to the old van Mr Chŏng had driven the year before. The new home was a 90m² apartment house; as we went to see it, wallpaperers were at work renovating the place, and the family was to move in a couple of weeks. “We too have our home now” (urido chigŭm urijip issŏyo) said Mrs Chŏng, indicating that one of their aspirations in life had now been achieved since moving away from Seoul and after living in the back room of the restaurant and renting a small house in the outskirts of the town. Mr Chŏng did not mention trading in clothes any more, and loan giving and brokering was now the main part of his business.

People’s opinion of financing industry (kŏmyung) is not good. But no one can find the most suitable house or the most suitable buyer for a house without help, and that’s why one turns to a realtor. It’s the same with us, we find the most suitable way of financing, based on the loan seeker’s paying ability and his need of money, and we take a commission from that. It’s normally five percent, but if it’s a difficult case it can be 10 or 20 percent, or in a very complicated case even 30%. (...) This is an interesting job, but it has its own worries. Many loans are not paid back, and I have to try to make [the borrowers] pay. At the moment I have unpaid loans worth of 100 million won (€ 67 000). The problem is that it’s money that others have invested in my company, and after all it’s me who’s responsible.

Mr Chŏng had also become involved in some construction projects, as was indicated on the company signboard at the office. He had taken over a project which an acquaintance had not been able to finish, and he was planning to continue in the construction business by building hotels. Construction would be advantageous when combined with his financing business: one can create funds in construction, and put it in circulation in financing. When we parted that time, Mr Chŏng was enthusiastic about his entrepreneurship and of the advances they had made since leaving Seoul: leaving the physically exhausting and socially demeaning restaurant business, building a business with a staff of ten, allowing Mrs Chŏng to stay at home, buying their own apartment home, and harboring aspirations as big as founding an endowment for a university.
3. Four Portraits of Shopkeepers

Epilogue

One and a half year after I had visited Mr and Mrs Chŏng for the last time, I tried to reestablish contact with them, but none of their phone numbers functioned. Considering the risks involved in the private loan markets, which operated partly outside of legal regulations and not unusually with connections to organized crime, it seemed plausible that the man had lost his business through bankruptcy, and I could imagine legal troubles as well. I sent a postcard to their apartment home address, requesting contact. Instead of any contact from Mr and Mrs Chŏng, a person who was residing in the apartment that the couple had moved into a year and a half earlier sent me an e-mail, saying that the couple’s home had been auctioned due to business failure and that the couple had left without leaving any contact information.

In contrast to Mr and Mrs Chŏng, for whom businesskeeping and entrepreneurial activity were providing new possibilities and increasing wealth in their aspirations for upward mobility and social status when educational credentials were lacking, the restaurant-keeping by Mr Kim and Mrs Kang, whom I shall introduce in the next section, was intended to provide a source of income in a situation where wage employment was no more a viable option due to age and health despite educational and occupational qualifications.

Mr Kim and Mrs Kang: Middle-Age Self-Employment after Wage Work

The restaurant that Mr Kim and Mrs Kang operated was small, with no more than five tables, but it was still typical in size in neighborhood and marketplace circumstances. Half of the shop space was taken up by an elevated platform or maru, on which customers sat at two of the tables. The kitchen space, wide enough for just one person to stand by the stove, occupied the back space of the shop. The couple had opened the restaurant only a few months before I got to know them at the beginning of my fieldwork. Mr Yun, whose insurance agency was located across the street, was on cordial terms with Mr Kim and Mrs Kang, and he had apparently been helpful in the couple’s settling into the area. My acquaintance with Mr Yun, in addition to becoming a regular customer in the restaurant, helped in forming a close relation with the couple, who soon developed into important informants. Becoming acquainted by having meals regularly was a good starting point in developing a research relationship, but the neighborhood practice of shop visiting without obligations of patronage also played an important role in the case of Mr Kim and Mrs Kang; I could drop in for a talk without feeling obliged to buy a meal.
Mr Kim was the formal head of the business; he was both addressed and referred to as *Kim sajang*, except for some of the most frequent neighborhood customers who addressed him with a honorific but more intimate term *hyǒngnim* (“older brother”). The woman was the skilled restaurateur of the business. She was solely in charge of preparing the food, even when one of their four daughters was giving a helping hand to their parents.

**The Time of Middle-Class Wage Work: Good and Leisured Life**

The restaurant was the first self-employment enterprise of the couple. In their working careers, both Mr Kim and Mrs Kang had worked for wages, he in a trading company and she in a kindergarten. The man, who was in his late 50s, had graduated from a university in Seoul in the 1960s, and was thus one of the few university graduates among the neighborhood shopkeepers with whom I was acquainted in the course of my research. He had worked for a long period in a trading company until he had to retire because of a severe illness, and he and his wife were put into a situation in which self-employment was virtually the only means by which they both could generate income.

When Mrs Kang recounted their life and the things they were able to do before their present occupation as restaurant proprietors when her husband was employed in the trading company, she often used the term “when we were living well” (*chal sarassi ttae*). White-collar employment provided them with a stable income and the means and leeway to enjoy leisure activities such as frequent domestic travel and even a vacation trip to Thailand. By the 1990s foreign travel had become common in Korea, but for the neighborhood shopkeepers it was rare; among the people with whom I conducted research only Grandfather Kwŏn and Mr Yun had been overseas in addition to the restaurant couple.

In contrast with the earlier “good life”, operating the restaurant was a time of physical strain, difficulty in getting established and learning the proper mindset for a businesskeeper, attaining customers, earning income and making the place profitable. It was also a time of lack of family leisure and days off. After opening the restaurant the couple worked without a break for more than a year except for one case of illness before they went for a weekend trip with Mr Kim’s friendship circle (*ch’inmokhoe*).

The case of Mr Kim and Mrs Kang illuminates the implications of entering shopkeeping self-employment for the salaried middle class. How the woman contrasted the time of the good life of her husband’s salaried employment with their present predicament compares interestingly with how Mr Pak of the rice mill presented his circumstances and his life story. For him, as for many with an impoverished background and lack of means such as education
or a technical skill, self-employment had provided a stellar livelihood and a point of reference to which the hardships of his earlier life could be contrasted, like when he recounted how he was rich now compared to the time of selling bread from a pushcart. Mr Pak also illustrated the hardships of his past by describing how he could not afford to buy even a yogurt for his child. Using a similar contrast to Mr Pak but in reversed circumstances, Mrs Kang remarked that she and her husband used to frequent a bakery when they were “living well” but were no longer able to do so.

Mrs Kang: Religious Life Now and in the Past

Mrs Kang, in her early 50s, was a qualified kindergarten teacher, and in her 40s she had worked in a kindergarten for eight years. She implied that she quit the job because of a tacit understanding that as her age advanced, she was no longer wanted in the work. She stayed at home for a couple of years before starting to take cookery classes in schools (hagwôn) and going to work for one year in a restaurant to prepare herself and learn the skills for the opening of their own place. Despite the fact that for women of her age high education is rare 38, her lack of university education had been a big concern for her during her working life, and she told me that she found embarrassing the situations in which schooling became a topic, “even though I had a lot of knowledge and had educated myself from books.” “I always tried to hide the fact that I hadn’t gone to a university. I kept quiet about it. It was awkward, when someone said that ‘I went to Yonsei University, where did you go?’”

The contrast that Mrs Kang made between the periods of the salaried employment and the keeping of the restaurant applied also to her practice of religion. She was a devout Catholic, and she pointed out to me that cardinal Kim Sou-hwan, who is perhaps the most noted cleric in Korea, had baptized her. She had been a very active member of her congregation, and went to the Myôngdong Cathedral in downtown Seoul every day. She drove a car for the priest, acted as a group leader, and made home visits to congregation members, advising and encouraging them to be more diligent in their faith and come to church and pray more often. With the end of the leeway provided by salaried employment, and the restraints of businesskeeping, the circumstances were reversed.

Now that I have this place the same people come to the restaurant and tell me the same things. But I have asked them not to come back for about three years until we have been able to achieve enough stability. I tell them that God has sent me here, and now it’s my time of hardship (kosaeng), and faith and God

38 In 1980, 3.6 percent of women more than 25 years of age had graduated from a university (Korea National Statistics Office 2004: 29).
must be second after making a living. When there’s no leeway (yōyu) there’s no room for God or religion. I cannot get up to go to an early morning mass.

The issue of religion also raised the issues of family, concerning both her natal and affinal ones. Mrs Kang’s natal family adhered to Confucian (yugyo-jök) traditions; they observed the ancestor rites and also consulted shamans (mudang), and she had found the Catholic religion by herself as an adult. She described her affinal family, in which her husband was the only son, as likewise “strictly Confucian, very traditional.” The household elders were strictly against anyone in the family becoming a “Jesus believer” (yesujaengi): there could not be someone who is a Jesus believer in a house that observed the ancestor rites. “I almost got driven out of the house.” On another occasion she used the same words about her affinal family in reference to having given birth only to girls: “If my mother-in-law had been alive, she would have driven me out of the house because I didn’t give birth to a son.” Only sons continue the family line according to the Confucian precepts and perform the ancestor rites; both the fact that she had not given birth to a son and her Catholic faith were violations of the order to which affinal family adhered. She went to ask for advice on her difficult predicament from the priest, who recommended that she give up church activities until her family circumstances change. As soon as her mother-in-law passed away she became active in church again. Eventually her husband was also baptized after her efforts to convert him.

**The Restaurant: Opening, Early Difficulties, Getting Established, and Closure**

The couple had opened the restaurant a few months before I met them, and they closed it for good at the end of their three-year lease term. The closure took place shortly after I had had a chance to meet them during my subsequent visit to Korea and discuss the end of the operation and their plans for the future after the restaurant. Due to the fortunate timing of the visit I was able to delineate the life cycle from the opening through early difficulties, stabilization and moderate success to physical exhaustion and closure of the place.

The restaurant was opened at the time when large numbers of small business, especially restaurants, were being established due to the economic crisis, “IMF era,” mainly as a consequence of reductions in wage employment and layoffs, leading to the pursuit of livelihood in self-employment. The deci-

---

39 The ending -jaengi, marking a doer of something or someone with a certain attribute, has a negative connotation in this context; in the contemporary use it usually refers to zealous Protestant Christians.
sion of the couple to open a restaurant did not originate in the economic crisis, but their circumstances were similar to the newly unemployed who resorted to “IMF-type business opening” (IMF-hyŏng ch’angŏp) as a result of getting pushed out of the wage labor market. Mrs Kang mentioned the need to earn money as their main motive, with the children’s university education as the main expense.

Of the four daughters, only the eldest had entered work life after finishing her university education, and the two youngest needed to be supported through the rest of their studies. The couple did not intend to operate the restaurant for more than was necessary for the family needs. One year after opening the place Mrs Kang contemplated that it would take four or five years before they could seek an easier job, after all of their children had finished school and they themselves had improved their life onto a firmer ground with some leeway.

For the first three quarters of a year, business was difficult, and the restaurant struggled to establish itself and secure customers. This was also noted in Mr Yun’s insurance office, where the talk at one stage was that the restaurant was having a hard time. As the shop signboard indicated, the original intention of the couple had been to operate a beef restaurant with ordinary meals playing a minor role, reflecting conceptions of the status of respective food items and anticipated profits. It was illustrative of the business conditions of the neighborhood that there was not enough demand for the more expensive beef dishes, so the couple had to rely on ordinary meals (siksa) which gave a smaller return and demanded more labor, and which also put the couple in a more competitive relationship with other restaurants in the neighborhood. Mr and Mrs Chŏng faced similar circumstances when they moved from Seoul to the provincial town in order to run a restaurant specializing in beef dishes; they had to adjust their aspirations for a higher-status establishment to the local demand and increase the proportion of rice-based meals at the expense of beef dishes.

After its initial difficulties the restaurant was able to establish itself and win a steady clientele, among them the managerial staff of the local bank office, who were distinctive in the neighborhood in their suits and white shirts, and whose patronage obviously added to the status and standing of the restaurant. (Interestingly, the guard of the bank also frequented the restaurant, but the teller staff who were all women always had their meals elsewhere.) Most of the time the couple managed the place alone, but all four daughters helped occasionally to some degree after work or classes or on days off. During the second year of the restaurant, they hired an employee, “an auntie” (ajumma), who worked for more than a year and quit before the place was closed. In the final year of the restaurant Mr Kim and Mrs Kang had been able
to indirectly benefit from some of the post-crisis economical developments. Many so-called venture companies (pench′ö in the Korean pronunciation), established at the turn of the millennium with the support of governmental policy for economic recovery, were located in the vicinity of the fieldwork neighborhood. In our last meetings before the closure the man recounted how the patronage of the staff of forty of one company in the proximity had been very profitable for them.

One of my subsequent visits to Korea after my fieldwork took place at a time when Mr Kim and Mrs Kang were about to close the restaurant. When I went to greet them, the restaurant was full of people, indicating good business. Mr Kim begun by saying that they were going to close the place in two weeks at the end of the lease term: “This is too tiresome (himdöldä).” To my inquiry about their future plans, he told me that they were going to rest for some time, not knowing for sure what to do next. Mrs Kang added that the proprietorship had taken a physical toll on her, emphasizing their health concerns as the reason to close the place: her body was aching, and she had lost a lot of weight. What she said was clearly visible from her fatigued appearance. The next day I managed to learn that they were after all thinking of opening another restaurant, in the province around Seoul, specializing in a single dish. It sounded different from what the woman had in mind two years earlier when she contemplated the time after the restaurant:

I should find an easier job than this [keeping a restaurant], something like counseling (sangdam). –Sangdam, isn’t that what for example old men do in realtor offices [my question made in half jest]? –That’s half fraud, I don’t want to have anything to do with that kind of thing. There are lots of things one can do, like in Japan old couples keep a lodging business or a hut in a mountain, which would sell simple meals and drinks to mountain hikers. Places like that have a good business. But before anything else we will have to get our life improved and achieve some leeway (yōyu) of life.

EPILOGUE

On my visit to Korea in the early summer of the following year I went to see the couple in their home in a small three-story apartment house some five kilometers away from the research neighborhood. The plans they had expressed for the time after the restaurant had not been realized. Mr Kim’s health did not allow any kind of work, and Mrs Kang was working for wages, “went to work” (chikchange tanida) in the food processing industry. Neither of

40 In my last visit to Korea before finishing this thesis at the end of 2006 I got to know that Mrs Kang and Mr Kim had ultimately carried out their initial plan: they had acquired a two-story house from the countryside one hour’s bus drive from Seoul, living in the upper floor and operating a restaurant specializing in one dish in the ground floor.
them expressed any affinity with the place where they had kept the restaurant for three years. I knew not to expect that, since at the time of the closure of the restaurant, Mr Kim answered to my query as to whether they would visit the neighborhood again that they don’t have any reason to come back; they don’t have any friends in the locale. During this visit the woman was straightforward: “We haven’t been back [to the neighborhood] ever since, because people there are like that. We’ve been only to the marketplace because it’s so cheap there.”

**Conclusion: Divergent Routes to Neighborhood Shopkeeping**

These four portraits have presented four divergent roads to self-employment in the same neighborhood in Ordinary People’s Ward. Each of the portraits and life stories reflects modern Korean history and the vicissitudes of South Korean capitalism, highlighting different aspects of the lived worlds of small shopkeepers and giving individual contexts for the depictions and analysis of the issues to follow.

The life stories are trajectories of individual lives crossing the historical and economic currents: Grandfather Kwôn’s life as a military policeman during the disorderly 1950s, his subsequent businesskeeping with the help of his old military ties, and survival by keeping a small laundry after losing a substantial business to a fraud; Mr Pak’s migration to Seoul during the most intensive years of massive urbanization in the late 1960s to avoid rural poverty, and achievement of economic security through shopkeeping despite poor family origins and initial hardships; the downfalls and rises of Mr and Mrs Chông’s risky entrepreneurial life, and their strive for social mobility and middle-class credentials of apartment house ownership and “housewifization” of Mrs Chông; the struggles of Mrs Kang and Mr Kim to establish their restaurant and become accustomed to businesskeeping, after their salaried occupations were discontinued before the education of all of their children was finished.

The portraits illustrate how small businesskeeping has offered feasible opportunities and alternatives to wage employment; in this regard, the constraints and considerations of education, health, age, and anticipated monetary and social rewards have been relevant. Mr Pak and Mr Chông talked about their underprivileged family origins in a way which indicated that it had been both a motive and a factor for their present occupation and circumstances. For Mr Pak, self-employment had been a more sensible means to escape the privation of his childhood and young adulthood than unskilled wage work, and Mr Chông, with his high school degree, had also opted for various enterprises in his ambitions to achieve status through successful enterprise.
In contrast to these two, Grandfather Kwŏn’s childhood and adolescence during the Japanese colonial era had been affluent even despite his father’s early death, and he had been provided with a relatively good education, which would perhaps in conditions other than war, poverty, and instability sufficed for a salaried occupation, as he was – in his own words – an int’eli, “an intellectual,” an educated person.

Modern transformations of Korea are reflected in particular in the life story and in character of Grandfather Kwŏn, whose accounts of his life depicted a society that was vastly transformed from the premodern circumstances on which the illustriousness of his kin group was based. To those modern transformations, Grandfather Kwŏn had responded relatively well; was a modern person himself. At times he made nostalgic recollections to geographically (countryside) and temporally (the past) distant places, but contemplated still, despite his business misfortunes and the meager circumstances of his laundry, that life in general had gotten better. Life had gotten better, personally, also for Mr Pak, whose fortunes were intriguingly reversed to those of Mrs Kang and Mr Kim. The former recalled things he had not been able to do and get because of hard life, while the latter talked about things that they had been able to enjoy during the time of salaried work, but were now unattainable. For the both, shopkeeping had offered a route to adjust and respond to changing individual, household, and social circumstances: a channel of social mobility to compensate the lack of assets and education, or a means to respond to exclusion from salaried labor markets and contain downward mobility (see Koo 1976).

These four portraits of shopkeeping individuals or married couples and their lived worlds have illustrated how small businesses and personal lives have been intertwined with the contours of modern South Korean society and capitalism. The persons adapted themselves to economic and social fluctuations but suffered also serious setbacks, after which small-scale self-employment provided a way to survive and continue. It is plausible to think that Mr and Mrs Chŏng, after their latest failure, are getting by somewhere in Korea with yet another kind of a small business.
[Keeping a restaurant] is different for sure [from husband’s salaried employment]. It’s difficult to be together for the whole day, there are differences in opinions, in habits, in character. We get easily irritated, and all the time we have quarrels, don’t you think so? There are spheres for man and for woman set by God, so that the man should go out and earn money (pakkūro nagago tonōl pōlda) for the family and work diligently, and the woman should take care of the home in the best possible way.

The quote is how Mrs Kang responded when I inquired her how keeping the restaurant together with her husband was different from the time of his employment in a trading company. Her words aptly illustrate one facet of the complicated relationship between the livelihood and the family of small business keepers, which is the topic of this chapter. I focus on shopkeepers – men and women – as members of families and households and as partners of their spouses in operating small business establishments. I first treat the issues of familial work and family succession in small business from the comparative perspective, and move then to discuss these topics and generational and gender divisions of labor among Korean neighborhood businesses on the basis of my own research material. I examine how cultural notions of gender roles and socially desirable notions of family trajectories influence organization of work in small businesses.

The shopkeepers who provided the primary data for this chapter were men and women working together with their spouses in neighborhood businesses with varying degrees of technical expertise and skill, intensity of labor, formal and actual responsibility and time invested, adapting to and utilizing shared cultural assumptions and understandings of men’s and women’s roles and spheres.

There were establishments like small grocery stores, other foodstuff retailers, and neighborhood supermarkets in which the difference between the husband and the wife in formal or actual skills or qualifications was not considerable, and in which the labor of either of the spouses was not indispensable compared to the other spouse. The businesses operated by married couples in which the husband was the proprietor in charge with the wife in an assisting role were often in a technical field in which the husband possessed a specific skill. Of this, common examples, also numerous in the research neighborhood, were flooring and wallpapering businesses and heating and
other household technical equipment shops. There were also couple-operated establishments which actually depended on the skill and work of the wife, even if the formal head of the business was the husband; small neighborhood restaurants were typical of these. While there were some exceptions such as a man possessing a special cooking skill like the making of mandu dumplings, it was not uncommon that women teamed as proprietors of neighborhood restaurants without men.

**Comparative Issues of Family Work and Succession in Small Businesses**

**Married Couples in Small Businesses**

A married couple jointly operating and working together in a small business in retail, services, or simple manufacturing is common not only in urban South Korea but in such establishments in general. While many kinds of small businesses can be operated by a single person – several of my informants kept their establishment alone – and while it is not rare that, for example, small restaurants are operated by two or more women, the use of family labor and especially that of a husband-wife team is so characteristic of small businesses and self-employment that “family business” is often used synonymously for that kind of livelihood.

Scholarly treatments of small businesses often emphasize the importance of the businesskeepers’ spouses for the existence and survival as well as for the character and identity of small businesses or self-employment. Whereas the husband of the business-operating couple is commonly in possession of the formal technical expertise or is at least the formal proprietor of the business, the contribution of the wife – either in a formal contractual relation or more typically as a non-remunerated family worker – is what in many cases makes a small business.

In their numerous works on keepers of small businesses based mainly on British data, Richard Scase and Robert Goffee (1980; 1982; see also Bechhofer and Elliott 1981a: 194) have discussed the indispensability of the wives’ contribution for the self-employed and for small employers. Wives’ unpaid labor in addition to household work was often the necessary condition for the self-employed career of the husband. If the scale of the business expanded, it was common that the wife withdrew from direct involvement and took a more representative and familially symbolic role (Scase and Goffee 1980: 93-95). The authors have remarked that “Despite some deliberate attempts to exclude their wives, it was clear from their interviews that the nature of self-employment demands their direct, albeit limited, involvement” (Scase and Goffee 1982: 82). The wives of small employers received a small remuneration...
usually below the taxable amount and the market rate for comparable services (ibid: 104, 124), and the wives of the self-employed were in practice unpaid, except that a formal salary was in many cases declared for taxation purposes. I am not aware of any such arrangements among my informants, and neither have I encountered that in literature and media sources on similar establishments in Korea.

Reminiscent of many of the establishments of my informants, small French bakeries are an illustrative case of a small business that is entirely dependent on the labor contribution of the both of the spouses (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981). In the 1970s only 10 percent of bread in France was industrial, the rest being produced primarily in small “artisanal” bakeries operated mainly by married couples and a small number of employees. In order to become self-employed, a bakery employer needed funds and a spouse:

> Finally, a baker cannot be a baker without a wife to act as a cashier. He has to get somebody behind the counter and it has to be his wife. A wife is a woman you can trust, and one you do not have to pay. [...] When a baker dies, his wife may hire a bakery worker to do his job; we have seen such cases. But if the wife dies, or if she leaves her husband, the baker has to close the shop immediately (to find another wife takes some time). [...] What happens usually, in this case, is that he becomes a bakery worker until he can bind another woman to him through the bonds of marriage (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981: 1963-4).

In the case of German family-operated firms, distinguished from one-person firms and corporate branches, the transformation of women from housekeepers to active business partners of their husbands since the 1950s has been important for the survival and for the continuously important position of small retail and services establishments (Dannhaeuser 1993). This change also concurred with the German cultural notion of *Familienegesellschaft*, family business, which gives commerce moral legitimacy and is also advantageous when seeking governmental favors (Dannhaeuser 1993: 311-2).

Korean small businesskeepers have been described in similar terms to those of French bakers: the labor and trustworthiness of the spouse are necessary assets for a small business operating with small capital and constant cash transactions (Pak Min-ja 1990: 116-7). In both cases, getting married was inescapably related to the form of livelihood, and marriages were finalized

---

41 The existence of written contracts between wives and husbands if both are owners and take part in management in Dannhaeuser’s German data is a characteristic which contrasts markedly with my own data and my knowledge of small businesses in general (Dannhaeuser 1993: 325, n. 26). Considering data that Scase and Goffee present (1982), the scale of business is most likely a factor in the degree formality of the wives’ position, in addition to benefits such arrangements may present in taxation and pensions.
after a short courtship. In the Korean case, marriage was not seen as a fulfillment of romantic desires but as a natural outcome of life at a certain age, a survival strategy, and work partnership (ibid). Pak Min-ja makes an important remark that what are regarded as responsibilities and expectations of women in small businesses are seen as inherent outcomes of her position as a wife and an extension of her chores in the domestic sphere (Pak 1991b: 64-5, 73). Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame’s (1981: 168) remark on the predicament of the wife and the husband of bakery-keeping couples that “Paradoxically, the family business here means not more ‘family life’ but less” has wide relevance concerning small businesses in general, and is illustrative of the “complex relationship” between the family and the small business operated with family labor.

THE ABSENCE OF FAMILY SUCESSION

In addition to the common nucleus of the married couple, other characteristics inviting the use of the designation “family business” for small businesses are labor contributions by other family members and the issue of inheritance of the establishment within the family. Among my businesskeeper informants, the former feature, family labor, could be observed frequently, but the latter was in practice completely absent from the prospects and future plans of any of the businesskeepers of whom I have information. Occasional, or at certain times regular, work contributions by family members who otherwise were not actively involved in the business were not rare among the business keepers in the neighborhood, but in none of the cases were there any expectations that the offspring of the proprietors would take over the establishment, and the idea of passing on even the occupational status was almost nonexistent.

In their concluding discussion of small business owners, whom they designate as “entrepreneurial middle class”, Scase and Goffee distinguish between an established sector which is firmly structured upon capital in the middle class and a marginal sector which lacks the structuration provided by capital and depends more on the direct labor of the entrepreneur-businesskeeper. The marginal sector is characterized by a relatively high rate of intergenera-

---

42 On a par with Marxism-influenced feminist scholarship, Pak Min-ja approaches women’s position in small businesses not only as subordinate but as oppressed in terms of both gender and class (Pak 1991b: 63-6), and sees that “Women’s labor [in self-employment] is allocated to a specific position in social relations of production through marriage,” which entails that women’s approach to and control of means of production is mediated by the husband (Pak 1990: 116-7). She argues that women do not recognize their position as discriminated against and oppressed but are merely satisfied with the decent income from the business and thus have no particular dissatisfaction with their occupation (Pak 1991b: 73).
tional and intragenerational mobility, as there are only a few assets to be transmitted to the next generation (1982: 186). Following the distinction proposed by Scase and Goffee, the keepers of German family-operated businesses with their stability and remarkable generational depth are firmly established in the middle class (German Mittelstand, which is to a large degree characterized by family firms) (Dannhaeuser 1993: 323), and the neighborhood businesses of my research in the marginal sector. In these terms, being marginal rather than established is what characterizes a large section of small businesses, be they designated as neighborhood, family or small businesses, petite bourgeoisie, or self-employment.

Literature on keepers of small businesses comparable to my shop proprietor informants shows that establishments for the most tend not to be transferred within the family to the following generation, and that as a stratum or occupational category the self-employed or petty bourgeoisie is largely transitional and not hereditary. The commonness of approaching small businesses from the point of view of social mobility in Korea (see for example Koo 1976, Ch’oe T’ae-ryong 1991) and elsewhere (Bland, Elliott and Bechhofer 1978; Scase and Goffee 1982: 22-4, 65-6, 186-91; Mayer 1987) is suggestive of that characteristic as well.

Frank Bechhofer and Brian Elliott, drawing on their own research as well as on authors of a volume they have edited, note that most entrants to small shopkeeping have not been sons or daughters of the retailer but former shop employees or people with very little prior relationship to shopkeeping. This is also in contrast with family-centered property transmission or urban landlords (Bechhofer and Elliott 1981a: 185), who were very few in number among my informants, and neither did I know many in the research area who owned the real estate in which their shop was located. These two authors have described the pattern of reproduction of the petite bourgeoisie as a “continuous process of replacement” (Bechhofer and Elliott 1976: 91). French bakeries, which historically had been handed down to sons almost without exception, were in the 1960s and 1970s transmitted to bakery workers who had gone through the apprentice system and for whom becoming a self-employed baker was a route of social mobility. Bakers would not have their own children continue the business but seek easier and less strenuous professions (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981: 164-7).

---

43 Scase and Goffee appear to assume that the entrepreneurial middle class in its business-keeping is growth-oriented: “In other words, until their establishments are firmly structured upon capital rather than labour, the position of proprietors within the middle class is tenuous” (1982: 186).

Research on Korean small businesskeepers suggests that the absence of familial succession is an even more prominent feature in Korea than in the examples cited above. For example, none of the proprietors of small retail businesses studied by Pak Min-ja (1990, 1991b) wanted their children to continue their own occupation, let alone expected to hand over the shop to them. This corresponds to sensibilities I encountered among the businesskeepers in my research, whose establishments were by and large similar to those of Pak’s informants. Ch’oe T’ae-ryong, whose research has focused on the formation and character as stratum and class of the petty bourgeoisie or the old middle stratum (he uses both terms), has pointed out that up to late 1980s the degree of class inheritance of the urban petty bourgeoisie had been low (Ch’oe 1988: 401) and that cases of succession in self-employment via direct transfer of property had been very few (Ch’oe T’ae-ryong 1991: 110). Ch’oe attributes this to the large social mobility correlating to the growth of Korean capitalism and the relation of labor to capital, which is reflected in the large movement from wage labor to self-employment but not in the opposite direction (Ch’oe 1991: 109-113).

The transitional character of keeping a small business has been especially manifest among immigrant Korean-American small shopkeepers. Korean-American keepers of small businesses, mainly with a salaried middle-class background, not only reflect the conditions of their peers in Korea with mainly different class origins, but also the common patterns of immigrant livelihoods and intergenerational social mobility via petty entrepreneurship, which before Koreans has been observed especially among Jews, Chinese, and Japanese (Yoon 1997: 11, 24). Nancy Abelmann and John Lie have defined it as “calculated intergenerational mobility” (Abelmann and Lie 1995: 129). What they notice about the aspirations and trajectories of Korean shopkeepers in USA is valid also with regards to shopkeepers in Korea: “Many Korean-American shopkeepers balk at the prospect of their children’s succeeding them in their businesses or opening small retail stores of their own; the first generation’s desire for the second generation is for them to achieve prestigious and remunerative careers” (ibid.). They further note, with a formulation that is valid for Korea as well, that “The entrepreneurial ethos is not designed to be heritable; the whole rationale of the enterprise is for the second genera-

---

43 It needs to be noted that Ch’oe does not compare the occurrence of inheritance between occupational categories.
46 For a classic sociological study on small entrepreneurship of Chinese immigrants in the United States, see Siu 1987, which is based on research conducted among laundry keepers in the 1930s.
4. Neighborhood Shopkeeping

tion to achieve mainstream success and therefore upward mobility” (ibid: 137).

While the issue of familial succession of small family businesses does not appear important or relevant among the proprietors in my research material or in literature on Korean small businesskeepers and many others as well, Japan provides intriguingly differing examples in this regard. Family succession has remained common even in small shopkeeping, and it is not rare for individual businesses to have generational depth similar to the German examples referred to above (Im Kyŏng-t’aek 1999). The characteristically Japanese trait is that primogeniture in the succession of the family (ie) has been legally stipulated, but the family business may have been handed over to any of the sons or to a son-in-law, who has been formally adopted into the family (ibid).

The passing references to shop succession within the family in Theodore Bestor’s work on shopkeepers in a Tokyo neighborhood suggest that children succeeding as proprietors after their parents is, if not a norm, at least a culturally approved common practice. In his more recent work on a large Tokyo fish market, Bestor discusses the succession of Japanese family businesses more extensively (Bestor 2004: Ch. 6). The wholesalers in the market are mainly small family businesses, which “often have more in common with the mom-and-pop stores that dot Tokyo’s streets [...] than with executives of the large trading companies and fisheries which dominate the auction houses (ibid: 219). The businesskeepers give considerable emphasis to the real or alleged continuities with premodern mercantile traditions (ibid: 24) and family succession of business, and even though the children’s reluctance to continue in their father’s business has grown, primogeniture is still the norm in the non-corporate form of business proprietorship (ibid: 228-9). “Their idealized entrepreneurial family not only embodies young and old working (and perhaps living) together; it also rests on notions of hierarchy, authority, and continuity” (ibid: 219). The characteristics listed by Bestor have all been commonly associated with descent in Korean families and lineages, but in Korean small businesses corresponding to those establishments that Bestor has researched (1990, 2004), their absence is conspicuous.

One example in Bestor’s work is Mr Tsunoda who had continued keeping the rice shop of his father-in-law as an adopted son-in-law (Bestor 1989: 168-9). In discussing the attitudes towards education, Bestor suggests that “in some ways families with businesses to pass on seemed to take more casual attitudes toward education than sarariiman (“salary man”, white-collar employee) households” (ibid: 314, n. 4). In another footnote, Bestor mentions the significance of the practice of adopted son-in-laws (mukoyōshi) for businesses which have an interest to maintain assets within the family intergenerationally. There were several of them among the neighborhood businesses Bestor researched (ibid: 299-300, n. 4).
These accounts suggest that the stratum or occupational category of small businesskeepers is mainly transitional. The prominent “family business” character of small businesses does not come from generational depth and family succession but from family labor, which is provided mostly by the proprietor couple, and which is reproduced not by familial success but by new entrants to the stratum.

Contributions by Family Members in Korean Small Businesses

While the individual keepers or keeper couples did the largest part of work in my informants’ businesses, it was not rare to see family members or close kin doing some tasks in many of the shops; this in part illustrates the characteristic of small establishments which has invited the use of the term family business.

I shall delineate some of the main cases of family work among my informants, ranging from frequently helping in a parents’ restaurant to occasionally giving a hand during busy business seasons and family events in a grocery store. When paying attention to the work of family members in small businesses and considering their character as family businesses, it is important to take into account that while not uncommon, it was very rarely regular and practically never full-time. Establishments where children of an appropriate age never turned up to give a hand were not many, but there were no businesses with a son or a daughter employed or otherwise working full-time for a long period.48

Neighborhood restaurants were business establishments in which assistance from family members other than the regular keepers was usual, and actually all restaurant proprietors among my informants, whose children were not too young, received some help from a family member in some instances. Children or a grandmother could be seen waiting tables, cleaning, doing the dishes, billing customers, and in some rare cases even preparing meals – that is the skilled work in a restaurant, and as I have remarked, the neighborhood shopkeepers did not intend to pass on their occupational skills or status.

Thanks to the family circumstances of having four daughters, Mrs Kang and Mr Kim received assistance from family members relatively often com-

48 One restaurant was operated by a widow in her early 60s who cooked and her unmarried son in his early 30s who delivered. This is a common division of labor between spouses, in this case performed by a mother and her son substituting for the father as the family head; I see this arrangement as equivalent to a married couple as joint proprietors and not as shop proprietor employing her son full-time.
pared to their peers in the neighborhood. All of the daughters helped their parents in the restaurant to some degree. They were either studying in a university or working for wages, and they all were unmarried and lived at home, which allowed them to adjust their use of time during days off from work or classes or during vacations for the benefit of their parents’ business in busy hours or when their father needed to visit somewhere or was in ill health. (As their mother was indispensable for operating the restaurant, the place had to be closed if she was not able to work.) Those still attending university helped the most, even spending whole days in the restaurant with their parents during vacations and being often around in the evenings and going home together with their parents, but also the permanently employed oldest daughter gave a hand during weekends. As was also typical in the accounts of the shopkeepers, the daughters received according to their mother not wages but pocket money (*yongdon*). The following is a snippet from my conversation with Mrs. Kang:

– Is your [3rd] daughter going to work here during the vacation?
– Yes.
– Is she going to get pocket money (*yongdon*) or a salary? (Mrs. Kang does not answer.) Is she going to get pocket money?
– Sure, we will have to give her that. She asks how much the sales have been, and we give her according to that.

Mrs. Kang’s and Mr. Kim’s decision concerning labor in the restaurant when the business improved to the point of needing full-time assistance was illustrative of the practices of the use of family members’ labor in Korean small businesses. Instead of any of the daughters putting aside her main activity to work full-time in the parents’ place, the couple hired an employee, “kitchen auntie” (*chubang ajumma*). The restaurant was not intended to be a long-term undertaking, not to mention an occupation or business establishment to be passed on, and having a family member, this time daughter, employed for a longer period would have severely hindered her studies, especially as there was no pressing financial necessity.

Chŏng wŏnjang and Hong wŏnjang, the two hairdressing salon proprietors, who are discussed at length in the next chapter, both received regular assistance in small tasks from their husbands. Mrs. Chŏng’s husband, a taxi driver with every third day off on the average, spent most of his free days in his wife’s shop, cleaning, ordering laundered towels, and occasionally even washing customers’ hair. The university-attending daughter was often present doing small chores like cleaning and cooking for pocket money. Mrs. Chŏng attributed her daughter’s chores in the shop to teaching her that one needs to work for money; neither the mother nor the daughter had self-employment in sight for her future occupation. The son, in contrast, was present only
rarely, as he was going to high school and was supposed to concentrate on his studies. On a subsequent visit to Korea I learned that as he had not shown interest in, or inclination towards, studies after high school, and it was apparent that he would not attain a solid basis for his life or a respectable salaried job through formal education, his mother was thinking of providing him with necessary funds for a shop to become self-employed (chayǒngɡop).

At the time of my later visit, Chǒng wǒnjān’s business had improved so that she was employing an assistant, who performed simple haircuts in addition to cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry. Even though hairdressing has special requirements as a skilled profession, employing an outsider was in accordance with the practice of preferring to employ outsiders rather than one’s own offspring.

The relationship of Chǒng wǒnjāng’s two children to their mother’s shopkeeping was becoming reversed as their education proceeded. For the daughter, to whom schooling was providing a wide array of opportunities, lending a hand in her mother’s shop was a temporary familial obligation, and for her mother, an occasion for family education, which was not directly related to her future career but which was not detrimental to her life chances. For the son, whose educational prospects did not look bright, small business involvement that had not been required of him as a family commitment during high school emerged as a feasible alternative, as envisioned by his mother.

Most often the contributions by family members other than the primary keepers of the shop were of an occasional nature, actualizing at times of seasonal need like in Mr Pak’s and his wife’s rice bakery during traditional festivities, or at a time of family emergency like in Mr Kim’s and his wife’s bookshop when Mr Kim was hospitalized for a long period and his wife was assisted by their son, who had spare time before starting regular wage work. (In a similar situation, a vegetable and fruit shop in Kolmok Street was entirely closed for a month while the wife tended her husband’s convalescence after an operation.)

Mr Pak’s and his wife’s only daughter was a high school student during my fieldwork. She sometimes dropped by her parents’ shop but I never saw her spend time there, and according to her mother she did not have time for that because of her school and extracurricular tutoring. There were nevertheless occasions when she helped in the shop, even though I failed to observe it despite the long hours I spent in the bakery and my presence during the busy pre-festivity toil. From Mr Pak’s conversation with a visitor about children’s pocket money I learned that he had paid his daughter 20,000 won (€17) for two hours’ work in the bakery. When talking of the earlier, more auspicious period of business Mr Pak recounted how “all the neighborhood people and relatives” came to help during the busy spells of work. Based on the instances
that I was able to observe, and what Mr Pak himself said about the present circumstances, they received help from close kin on both his and his wife’s side. When I inquired about the helpers’ pay, Mr Pak denied he gave any: “No, there’s no pay, they are helping. I give them some pocket money (yongdon) so that they won’t feel bad.”

Similar short-term assistance from family members or close kin was also used in Mr and Mrs Yi’s supermarket in Side Street. The couple was in their mid-30s and early 40s, and lived at a short walking distance with Mrs Yi’s mother and their two children who went to elementary school. As is normal for such a neighborhood supermarket competing with both its neighborhood peers and bigger outlets in nearby areas, its opening hours were very long, from eight o’clock in the morning until midnight, and it did not close for a single day in a year. Mr Yi’s younger brother tended the shop during the traditional holidays of Lunar New Year and Harvest Moon Day (ch’usŏk) of lunar August 15 when the proprietor couple was obliged to attend the ancestor commemorations (chesa) of the husband’s kin. The brother was also called in on other family occasions when, for instance, the couple had to go down to the countryside to help the man’s parents on their farm. Before the Harvest Moon Day, when the two were leaving for countryside the next day, I asked Mrs Yi who was going to tend the shop: “– My husband’s younger brother. – So you’ll be celebrating the commemoration ritual (chesa)? – I don’t celebrate, the men do.”

Mr and Mrs Yi’s supermarket provided one of the very rare cases among my informants of an elder member of the household assisting in the shop. In the beginning of my acquaintance with the couple I asked whether they had other people helping in the shop; the husband answered that “grandmother” (his mother-in-law) occasionally gave a hand. I never saw her do any actual shop work, only bring meals in on a few occasions. Grandmother’s work in the shop increased significantly when the couple started to supplement the dwindling sales of their supermarket by selling and delivering roasted chicken, as I learned on a later visit to Korea. Mr Yi had opened the shop early in the morning when I went to greet him and his wife, and his mother-in-law arrived to clean the chicken oven installed in front of the shop. Even though sales were far from the close to a hundred chickens daily as they had been after opening, Mr Yi was still delivering 20-30 chickens daily, so his mother-in-law’s assistance was needed, but there still had been occasions when he had had to close the supermarket to make a delivery, as neither his wife nor his mother-in-law could back him up full-time.
The tendency to define and conceptualize work by family members or close kin in Korean small businesses as help or assistance and not as wage work or even as part-time work was apparent both among my informants and in the interview material collected from small businesskeepers as a coursework assignment by sociology students in professor Ch’oi T’ae-ryong’s course in Gyeongnam National University. While occasional and non-permanent, family assistance by those not taking part in the shop operation on a regular basis was usually not unremunerated. In line with the notions and actual appearances of family work, this compensation was not termed wages (posu, kümnyo, taekka), but “pocket money” or “expense money” (yongdon), as was the case with Mr Kang’s and Mr Kim’s daughters or Mr Pak’s helpers in the rice mill during the hectic periods before traditional festivities.

This invites attention to the fact that the notion of unpaid family labor has often been applied to describe work relationships in small businesses (Bechhofer and Elliott 1981a: 194, Scase and Goffee 1982: 23-25, Pak Min-ja 1991b, Abelmann and Lie 1995: 131, Yoon 1997: 157, Curran 1990: 137). In the light of my material, the family work relationships between parents and offspring in small businesses are not unmonetized and unpaid, but neither do they become relations of employment. This actually posits these relations of labor in the realm of family relations, in which transfers of money are an integral part of family solidarity and reciprocity.

It should be noted that assisting work in a business is not a precondition for pocket money (even though for example Mrs Chong demanded it from her daughter), and even if no assisting work in the business takes place, the parents are under obligation to provide their children with pocket money as well as schooling expenses, let alone much vaster expenses such as housing at the time of marriage. Moreover, requiring tasks from children in their parents’ business in exchange for pocket money during the most critical period of the educational career, high school, would severely risk the child’s prospects in the final high school exam and in the university entrance competition. Such were the circumstances, for example, for Chong wonjang’s son in comparison to the university-attending daughter and for Mr Pak’s daughter.

An important facet of operating a “family business” for the sake of the household and for the attainment of family aspirations is that the operation should not obstruct generational family trajectories in which the business itself is not included in the long term. While the adolescent offspring of small

---

49 Professor Ch’oe kindly provided me with the material.
businesskeepers do have obligations towards their parents to some degree, including assistance in the shop from time to time, the parents in turn are obliged not to allow the business to stand in the way of their offspring. One of the main characters in Laurel Kendall’s study of contemporary Korean marriages, a female high school graduate without good prospects for wage employment, is a good example of family and kin work in a small business: not a regular relation of employment, but neither unpaid, and related to familial obligations and reciprocity. The young woman was given “ample pocket money and a liberal work schedule” (Kendall 1996a: 85-86) in return for working in her sister’s and brother-in-law’s restaurant, and there was also a tacit understanding that the proprietors would pay for most of their kinswoman’s wedding expenses in exchange for her labor.

Assistance provided by friends, acquaintances, and other neighborhood people as part of the visiting and socializing practices sometimes amounts to substantial inputs of work. This is interestingly distinguished from the monetarized assistance of family members. It was often expressed similarly as “giving help” (towa chuda), but in distinction from family assistance, neighborhood assistance was conceptualized as leisure, and to my knowledge, never remunerated. For example, when Mr Pak renovated his rice mill, the person who laid the new tile floor was paid for his services unlike the large number of Mr Pak’s acquaintances who came and went during the work and gave a hand in removing the old dilapidated concrete and in painting. When the work was finished and Mr Pak and two neighborhood acquaintances were sipping beer and puffing cigarettes in joyous relaxation, someone mentioned that shouldn’t I be given some compensation (sugobi) for my work in the renovation. Mr Pak only smiled and did not respond, and I of course rejected the idea of getting paid for helping out. Mr Pak did not suggest any payment even later.

The cases of contributions by family members are illustrative of the latent importance and even indispensability of family assistance to the operation of small neighborhood businesses. While noticing the existence of the option of family labor and the actual use of it, it is also important to consider that the occurrences of resorting to this resource either during busy periods or family misfortune were after all not common but sparse and occasional. Moreover, for the issues of family work in small businesses and the characteristics of small retail and service establishments as family businesses, the relative ab-

---

*A man with an eventful life recounted in an article about him in the monthly magazine Woman Sense (October 1999) that when he kept a shop in one of the big marketplaces in downtown Seoul, he changed to another occupation as soon as he found out that his little son had started to imitate the ssaguryo ssaguryo (cheap, cheap) marketing yells of marketplace shopkeepers.*
sence of family members from the establishments is as significant a trait as the actual contributions by family members other than the regular proprietors.

The keepers of neighborhood businesses utilized family labor it at times of necessity and urgency according to business needs and family considerations in which the operation of the shop was not necessarily the foremost priority. Permanent family employment, judging from the cases I could observe, was avoided, and readily available low-wage labor was used instead. Part-time or non-regular work, termed arūbait'ō when it is done by students or others who are not yet supposed to be making a living on their own, is not expensive. It is common especially in restaurants which need a lot of labor force and in convenience stores, but due to the small scale and the neighborhood location of their shops, very few of my informants ever needed to employ anyone in this way. The other kind of low-wage employment common in small businesses was that of women, in particular in restaurants. In my informants’ establishments that also was rare, reflecting the constraints of the neighborhood environment, an economically arduous period, and the kinds of businesses that the people were engaged in. As mentioned above, Mrs Kang and Mr Kim hired a “kitchen auntie” when they needed full-time help instead of having any of their daughters work in the shop. Another restaurant operated by a married couple, that of Mr Mun and his wife, also hired a woman to fill in for Mr Mun’s wife after she gave birth. The husband’s mother, who had occasionally been helping in the shop, was needed at home to take care of her daughter-in-law and the older child of the couple.

The size of the businesses of my informants was small, and the persons operating the establishments, an individual or a couple, managed for the most part without assistance. This kept the shopkeepers from facing the predicament of having to resort to family labor. The neighborhood businesses lacked long-scale prospects, and the likelihood of family succession was virtually non-existent, which further discouraged introducing children to shop management.

Korean neighborhood shopkeepers do not have the kind of ideal of an entrepreneurial family that Theodore C. Bestor referred to in his discussion of Japanese fish market traders, embodying young and old working together and applying the notions of the continuity of the family and household to busi-

---

91 Arūbait’ō comes from the German word arbeit, “work”, and was adopted in Korea via Japan, where the term is pronounced arubaito. The term used for part-time employees, arūbait’ūsaeng, is indicative of the association of arūbait’ō with high school or university students (haeksueng), and also of the perception that it is not necessary to pay them living wages as they have not yet “entered the society” and become “society persons” (sahoein) making a living by themselves.
ness as well. Bestor also remarks that the “traders are sometimes almost smug in their feelings of superiority over the white-collar, salaried middle class” and that they feel quiet pride in belonging to working families (2004: 219). The Korean neighborhood shopkeepers of my research are not without their own sources of pride, but it does not stem from the notion of long-term family business but rather from patterns of reciprocity and expressions of mutual humanity and amicability that can be represented as epitomizing more genuine Koreanness than the life worlds of the apartment-dwelling salaried middle class.

The Korean context in which the notions of close attachment between family and business and the continuity of the family or household (chip) are applied and given ideological weight are the big business conglomerates, but it has not taken place under the same kind of widely shared cultural understanding that Bestor describes of the Japanese traders. The conglomerates have continuously faced criticism because of practices favoring familial succession, ownership and control (see especially Janelli 1993, also Eckert 1993).

The situation in small neighborhood businesses in Korea corresponds to what Yoon In-jin discovered among Korean small businesskeepers in the United States (Yoon 1997: 157-158). According to his survey in Chicago, approximately 10 percent of the respondents had either children or siblings working in the business, and a parent was working in only a few percent of the cases. While the participation of the other family members was limited, in the majority of the business establishments that Yoon surveyed – half of the respondents in Los Angeles and 70 percent in Chicago – the spouse was working with the shop proprietor. From these figures Yoon makes the remark, appropriate also to small shopkeeping in South Korea, that “husband and wife comprise the basic unit of the Korean immigrant business” (ibid.).

Gender Divisions of Labor in Small Businesses: Individual Skills, Social Roles, and Cultural Expectations

Yoon In-jin’s characterization of the immigrant Korean businesskeepers and the limited family dimension of Korean neighborhood businesses delineated above bring me back to persons I started this chapter with, the women and the men of married couples. For the rest of this chapter I will discuss this nexus of small neighborhood business proprietorship in Korea. Management of a small business establishment by a married couple is a situation which

---

52 Yoon In-jin says that “[u]npaid family members, if available, provided between 40 and 45 hours of labor per week” (1997: 157). In the light of my own data, it would seem unlikely that offspring or siblings would agree to such working hours in Korean neighborhood business environment without compensation in normal circumstances.
brings the ideologies, norms, and dynamics of the household and family into the shop space which becomes an extension of the domestic household, giving the shop characteristics of domestic households and rendering the shop as only partially a public space.

The woman leaves the household and enters the public space of a shop; in Korean terms she is “working outside”, but due to the nature of the small business establishment not as outside as a wage employee is perceived to be. The man of a small business, working in a traditionally more ascribed sphere, is nevertheless not as entirely out of the bounds of the household as a company-employed salary man (saellörimaen) would be.

Photograph 7: Husband and wife tending flowers of the wife’s shop. They have partitioned the shop space into a flower shop and the husband’s shoe and bag repair shop.

The distinction of the domestic and the public in the business establishments often becomes blurred: “inside things” are done in the outside sphere, and the “outside person” may be active in what appears as an “inside” setting of a neighborhood shop with domestic characteristics. This issue was expressed intriguingly by Mr Yu, the laundry keeper in his late 30s, whose shop was attached to the living quarters and whose wife had during better times worked alongside him as a seamstress but was now employed in a small garment factory down the road in the vicinity of Big Street. With a sardonic smile he talked about their circumstances in which he spent time at home working in the laundry while his wife worked outside of home in the factory.
He was sorry for his children that the situation in their family was reversed in that way. (In his two separate accounts about the reasons for his wife seeking employment elsewhere, he first attributed it to the worsened economy, as work in the laundry became insufficient for the two, while on the later occasion he said that working together did not suit his character, as they had frequent quarrels, and he decided he should continue alone.)

The gender-related cultural ideas and social practices in South Korea have specific implications for the keepers of small businesses as well as any other occupational category or a social strata or class. The businesskeepers in turn create their own interpretations and applications of these ideas, concepts, and discourses, which then manifest in specific ways among the women and men of neighborhood shops. Ōjanikka, “because [she is] a woman” and namjanikka, “because [he is] a man” are two expressions that exemplify the notion that certain practices are rooted in the distinction of gender and are inherent in what is deemed as feminine and masculine, or appropriate and innate for women and men.

A particular characteristic in the formation of interpretations and practices of the neighborhood businesskeepers is that they are not in a culturally and socially hegemonic position; their occupation, while decent and acceptable, does not create the kind of social status that may result from a profession based on educational credentials, and the kind of a neighborhood in which my informants operated lacked the status of middle-class and upper middle-class apartment block areas.

Small restaurants and neighborhood supermarkets are most typical of Korean neighborhood businesses operated by married couples. The cultural understandings of the household-keeping role of the wife and the outward mobility of the husband as well as women’s householding experience and men’s labor power were reflected in and applied to the operation of these establishments. Before delving into the implications of the social roles and cultural expectations for the men and women of Korean neighborhood businesses, I will present ethnographically relevant and illustrative examples of the contours of the work arrangements and divisions of labor of keeper couples in some establishments.

**Mr and Mrs Ko’s Supermarket**

All the neighborhood supermarkets of which I have data were operated by a married couple, some using occasional help from other household members or close kin. Mr and Mrs Ko’s store in Kolmok Street adhered to this organization. He was in his late forties, and she in her early forties, and they lived on the third floor of the building in which their shop was located. Their daughter was in high school and the son in elementary school. Telling for a high-school
student, I never saw the daughter even visit her parents’ shop; the young son usually dropped in to see his parents on his way home from school. The shop was open every day of the year without any help from either an employee or from family or kin. To the inquiry of whether they have anyone helping in the shop, Mr Ko responded that “It’d be impossible to have an employee.” I remarked that there are family members or relatives occasionally working in other stores, but for him, even that was not a solution for personnel expenses: “Yes there are those, but they don’t work for free either” he answered.

There were supermarkets in which the wife spent more time tending the shop than the husband, but in Mr and Mrs Ko’s shop, Mr Ko was the principal proprietor who worked the longest hours. As in other neighborhood supermarkets as well as in businesses in which a wife worked alongside her husband but was not required to be present throughout the whole day, Mrs Ko’s hours were adjusted to the needs of household keeping, which mostly depended on the school schedule of their children. The following vignette is an edited passage from my fieldnotes:

Mr Ko is keeping the shop before 3 o’clock, chatting with a customer. When I raise the issue of the big number of supermarkets in the area, he asks my opinion on how good the others’ business is. He also asks if I’ve been to the big supermarket in the nearby marketplace. He maintains that the recent reopening of the other Kolmok Street supermarket with new proprietors has not in-
fluenced their sales. Mrs Ko comes in a little after 3 pm, and her husband leaves immediately without saying a word. I talk with her about their working shifts in the shop. She tells me that she prepares the breakfast and sends the children to school, while Mr Ko opens the place. After the children leave, she goes down to the shop.

- So you are not able to eat any meals together?
- Yes, and not even at the proper time.
- You have meals in turns?
- Yes, but he eats first, husband is the king, isn’t he? [Her tone is sarcastic.]

She tells me that she and her husband go back and forth (between home and the shop) during its opening hours [from 7 am to 1 am]. Mr Ko comes back to the shop, and his wife leaves and goes home. (This is the time when the children are returning from school.) A salesman comes in to promote a makkolli (rice wine) product, and leaves a bottle for a sample. Neither Mr Ko nor the deliveryman of a yogurt company who drops in think that the taste is particularly good. The son of the couple comes in after school and greets his father, who tells him to go home: “Mother is there”.

**FOUR RESTAURANTS**

Mr and Mrs Chŏng’s proprietorship of the pork cutlet restaurant exemplified the characteristic division of labor – the preparation of food and delivering it – between husband and wife in such small businesses. The following edited passage from my fieldnotes illuminates the roles and tasks of the two keepers and the female employee, who at that period worked alongside Mrs Chŏng in preparing the meals. At the time, Mr Chŏng made the deliveries alone.

The wife [Mrs Chŏng] is crumbing on raw pork cutlets, using the elevated platform (maru) on which the two low customer tables are placed. The husband [Mr Chŏng] is mostly sitting on a stool, waiting for orders to be delivered, occasionally giving a helping hand to his wife in moving loads of bread-crumbed steaks back to the kitchen space. The “kitchen auntie” (chubang ajumma) is working in the kitchen. The man receives an order [by phone], and passes it on to the employee, telling her to make it tasty. As the female employee is considerably older than the couple, he addresses her in a higher speech form instead of the low-style panmal. I talk about the restaurant with Mr Chŏng, who tells me that the business improved a lot after he started making meal deliveries. “One has to be physically strong in order to make deliveries,” he says.

Mrs Chŏng goes somewhere, and Mr Chŏng starts opening a huge can of some pickle, but he doesn’t know how use the opener properly. The employee takes the opener from him, opens the can, and says, “Each must do one’s own tasks”
I talk with Mr Chŏng about his earlier life, the present restaurant keeping, and his plans to move the business away from the neighborhood. Mrs Chŏng returns with shopping bags and goes home, and the employee stays working in the kitchen. During a period of one and a half hours, Mr Chŏng makes only one delivery.

Mr Kang and Mr Kim’s restaurant and another similarly small place across the street kept by Mr and Mrs Mun, a couple in their 30s, were competitors during the less than two years that they operated facing each other. In the former, the keeping of the restaurant depended on the work and skills of the woman. Before the couple hired a kitchen assistant, Mrs Kang was the only person who cooked the meals, which made her indispensable for the operation of the place. When she was sick, the place was closed, but when her husband needed to visit the countryside or was ill, the couple could rely on the help of their daughters. Besides the housewifely cooking skills Mrs Kang possessed, she had been learning the trade by working in a restaurant after the couple had made the decision to open a place of their own. In this case, the wife was the skilled worker, and while she possessed a number of cooking-related formal qualifications (chagyŏkch’ŏng), she was not referred to or addressed with appropriate terms, and nor was she the formal proprietor of the place. It was her husband to whom the sajangnim, “company president,” was applied as a term of address and reference. This did not inhibit Mrs Kang once mentioning that she was keeping the place alone, by which she referred to the fact that she alone was responsible for cooking.

Mr and Mrs Mun on the opposite side of the street had a slightly but interestingly different arrangement, reflecting the array of dishes, social roles of men and women, individual skills, and gender-related notions of professionalism. It was technically a punsik (flour food) restaurant, which meant that it was supposed to serve mainly dishes based on noodles, dumplings, and rice cakes (ttŏk), but in practice rice-based meals were a significant part of its menu, which made it a competitor to Mrs Kang’s and Mr Kim’s restaurant. Mr Mun was a skilled mandu dumpling maker. He had been a restaurant employee, and had now opened his own place. He was solely responsible for baking the mandus, but he never cooked the ordinary meals on which the restaurant largely depended. Cooking was the responsibility of his wife. Unlike her counterpart across the street, she could be replaced by a hired kitchen employee after she had given birth. Besides exercising his skills as a mandu maker, Mr Mun also delivered meals on a motorbike. Delivery, which I will discuss in more detail below, is an essential task in neighborhood businesses, which need to expand the restricted local customer base, and it is also a feature of shopkeeping which illustratively reflects the ideas behind the gender division of labor.
A third small restaurant kept by Mr and Mrs Kil, a few hundred meters away from the other two up Big Street, presented yet another arrangement in which both the wife and the husband emerged as skilled persons. It was also a punsik-type restaurant, and it did not have, nor claimed to have, any specialty, but offered both rice-based and flour-based meals and dishes to a mainly student clientele. Both wife and husband participated in cooking on almost equal terms, which did not happen in other places about which I have information. Here the two children in their late teens were also more involved in business-keeping than the offspring of proprietors elsewhere, as the daughter and the son both prepared meals and waited tables. This place did not deliver meals except on foot to some locations in the vicinity, which further reduced the distinction and the division of labor between the couple.

**Personal Skills and Shop Proprietorship**

Among neighborhood businesses in which both spouses of a married couple took part in the operation, there were certain kinds of businesses in which the possession of a technical or a commercial skill was a clearly defining issue in distinguishing the roles and tasks between the couple. Small neighborhood restaurants, as illustrated in the examples above, were most typical of these, but as I insinuated above, possession of skills had different implications for men and for women in eating businesses, the skill not raising women to the position of a shop proprietor instead of their husbands. Instead, especially in technical spheres it was common that the husband’s skill designated him the main proprietor and relegated the wife to the role of assistant to her husband. Still, more characteristic of neighborhood businesses were the kinds of establishments in which the operation did not require such a distinctive technological or commercial skill and in which the division of labor was based on more intangible culturally defined attributes. These kinds of businesses were more numerous, more varied in kind, and more visible; among these, retail establishments such as local supermarkets, grocery stores, and fruit and vegetable shops were especially common.

Neighborhood restaurants provided an interesting projection of the familial roles of male professional expertise and income-generating ability and the generalized all-around family-making and housekeeping female role. Whereas women who were restaurant co-proprietors with their husbands and responsible for cooking, tended not to be accredited with the status and definition of a skilled professional, restaurateur men with specific food-preparing expertise could command the status of a skilled person even in a neighborhood environment.
Furthermore, circumstances in which the woman is the de facto skilled keeper and the husband an assistant to her despite being the formal head of the business were most common among the keepers of small restaurants. If not particularly common among my informants in general, among restaurateurs the cases were not exceptional, being illustrative about ideas and outcomes of gender roles and individual skills in Korean small businesses.

In the cases that I observed during my fieldwork and in the accounts of small businesses in media it was obvious that if there was a person with a formally or socially recognized skill (kisul) in a restaurant operated by a married couple it was likely to be the husband, while the wives of restaurateur couples tended to be seen as general food-preparers even in the crucial position of being the sole cook. Lack of formal or social designation as a skilled person (kisulcha), however, did not mean that the person’s cooking or other businesskeeping skills would not be appreciated and given credit, or that the person could not be recognized as the de facto primus motor of the establishment. The role and position was nevertheless conceptualized with socially appropriate terms corresponding to the cultural notions of men’s and women’s roles.

Proprietorship of a neighborhood restaurant, especially when the establishment does not specialize on a specific dish requiring a particular skill (such as making mandu dumplings), centers around preparation of ordinary meals, which in household settings is a very gender-specific, being normatively a woman’s task. The restaurant division of labor largely follows this, and as a consequence, the actual business-keeping proficiency is the responsibility of the woman. The occupation of cook (yorisa) is distinguished from being a restaurateur in a neighborhood restaurant even though also the latter may be practiced with formal qualifications (chagyŏk-ch'ŏng). Yorisa is a skilled profession, exercised outside of home and household relations in an environment of professionalism, and the notions of household and gender are not applied to it.

I never heard any woman who cooked in a restaurant in the neighborhood referred to as yorisa; instead, on some occasions chubangjang (“kitchen head” was used of women who operated a restaurant with their husband. This term associates women not with their skill or occupation but with their position vis-à-vis the sajang (“company head”) husband.53 For example, a man who kept a restaurant with his wife in a setting similar to Mrs Kang and Mr Kim once offered the excuse that the chubangjang was not present when he was

---

53 It should be noted that chubangjang can be used to refer also to skilled “kitchen chiefs”: Mr and Mrs Chŏng employed one after opening the beef restaurant in the provincial town, but had to lay him off due to excessive personnel costs, and Mrs Chŏng took over as the chubangjang.
temporarily alone in the place and a group of customers ordered a dish he did not know how to prepare. (He immediately sent his son for his wife who was in a bathing house; she hurried back, and the man sat down for a smoke, seemingly relieved.)

The characteristics of men’s professionalism and women’s generalism were discernible both in Mr Mun’s and his wife’s mandu dumpling restaurant introduced above, and its predecessor in the same shop space, which was also a punsik place specializing in dumplings. In both cases, making the mandu dumplings was the husband’s specialty, while the wife was responsible for diverse cooking and cleaning tasks. Both establishments were reproducing the spatial division of labor of the household between men and women in the shop space: the woman in the back of the tiny shop space closest to the cooking space, and the man closest to the window and door visible to the street at the mandu baking table.

The condition shown in occupational statistics that very few women proprietors have their husband working alongside as a formal employee or as an unpaid family worker was apparent also among my informants. In the year 2000 one percent of economically active men were recorded as “unpaid family workers”, whereas 14 percent of economically active women fell into that category (Mun et al 2002: 12). In the 1980s and 1990s nine out of ten unpaid family workers were women, and more than four out of ten women occupied in self-employment were such non-remunerated workers in small businesses (Mun et al 2002: 20; Ryu and Ch’oe 1999: 116). Among the shopkeepers in my research, I am not aware that any of the women who were active in keeping a business with their husbands was formally employed by her husband or was a formal co-proprietor with him. Formal proprietorship does not necessarily reflect the actual work arrangements and responsibilities of operation, as was the case for some of my informants. As the writers of an extensive research report on women in self-employment note, it is obvious that for the purpose of statistical categories women tend to be categorized as unpaid family workers notwithstanding their actual role and work tasks in the business (Mun et al 2002: 86, 113).

The cultural inconsistency and uneasiness of the potential gender role reversal, especially in small neighborhood restaurants, due to a woman’s skill and indispensability and her husband’s lack of skill and latent dispensability was illustrated in the following case of a small restaurant. During fieldwork I made occasional excursions from my main research area to a small marketplace about one kilometer away from the neighborhood. Once on such a visit when having dinner in a small eatery I had a discussion with a man whose talk and bearing gave me the impression that he was the proprietor of the
place with his wife and a younger woman employee. The place was closing, and soon the female proprietor of the neighboring clothing shop and her husband joined us for some drinks and snacks.

I left that evening thinking that husband and wife kept the eatery in a manner that was familiar to me from several other places. However, the fact that it was the female proprietor of the shop next door rather than the husband who gave a hand in attending to the last customers and cleaning up the place before closing should have given me a hint about the actual arrangement of work in the eatery.

I returned the next day hoping to meet the husband again and to find out whether I could become acquainted with any of these persons for the purposes of my research. I could not realize these expectations, but in a brief and helpful discussion with the clothing shop proprietress I learned, besides the detail that her husband was “resting at home” after he had to close his own shop as a consequence of the economic crisis, that the man I had met the previous day did not actually work in the restaurant. He did shop for food in marketplaces for the restaurant, but spent the rest of his time mainly at leisure. His wife, her younger sister, and an employee operated the restaurant; the clothing shop owner reflected on the lack of the husband’s participation by commenting that “Men don’t really want to do that kind of work” (namjadürün kärön irül chal an haeyo). In most of the other places, men did not have the option of staying home – Mr Cho’s case discussed below suggests sentiments similar to the husband of this case – but worked full days alongside their spouses.

Besides men who were unambiguously in charge of the shop or otherwise actively participating in the operation so as to warrant the position and status of a sajang, there were also men with a low level of involvement in their wives’ businesses, spending occasionally, or even regularly, time assisting in the shop. The husband of the hairdresser Chŏng wŏnjang was one example, and a number of restaurant-keeping women also received help from their husbands who were regularly employed elsewhere. For example the keeper of a small punsik-type restaurant named her taxi driver husband along with her daughter and mother as persons who helped her in the shop. These cases were clearly distinguishable from actual business operations, as the contributions of the spouses remained on the level of “giving help” (towa chuda).

The kind of businesses in the neighborhood in which a technical skill most clearly distinguished the male role from that of the female and defined the male as the main proprietor of the establishment were the small service businesses mostly related to housing, like heating equipment and wallpapering
and flooring shops.\footnote{The most common term for wallpapering and flooring businesses used to be chimulp’o ("paper goods store"). It has been increasingly replaced by the English word “interior” (int’eri) in shop signboards. Heating equipment refers mainly to gas boilers, which are common in houses, and which are installed and maintained by individual entrepreneurs such as the neighbor of Mr Pak’s mill.} In these businesses the male proprietor was the skilled technician who spent time in the shop and its vicinity as well as working in the jobsites, while their wives, occasionally or regularly, tended the shop, received visitors and most importantly, took phone calls. The business of the heating equipment repair and installation shop next door to Mr Pak’s rice mill was typical of these. The husband was away for the most of the day visiting customers from his office, which was essentially a garage with little equipment besides a telephone and a desk, and his wife spent long periods of time in the company of Mr Pak’s wife, often assisting her in tasks such as peeling chestnuts and packing rice cakes, and in other neighboring shops where women were present. To take calls from customers, she carried a cordless telephone, and should she have to leave the vicinity of the shop, Mr Pak or his wife took care of the telephone; one detail that drew my attention when first meeting Mr Pak was that he was carrying two cordless phones.

**Male Responsibilities and Prerogatives: Individual Mobility**

In small neighborhood restaurants the preparation of meals and delivering them is a major distinction in the division of labor, and it is also the most observable one. During lunchtime, motorbike traffic to the nearby university campus was intense, and that was also the time when restaurant deliveries in the research neighborhood – whether made by proprietors or employees – were most frequent. Delivering products and merchandise directly to customers is characteristic of small businesskeeping in Korea in general, but for neighborhood businesses dependent on local clientele and situated in an unfavorable location it is practically the only means to try to reach beyond local patronage and overcome the limits of residential neighborhoods as business areas. Nevertheless, my informants stated that delivering meals was not very profitable in neighborhoods with mainly small houses compared to areas with offices and apartment complexes.

Mr Pak of the rice mill, who was very locally oriented in his daily interactions, delivered virtually all of his produce with a motorbike. His most distant deliveries went outside the Ordinary People’s Ward. Mr and Mrs Chǒng’s sales in their pork cutlet restaurant improved dramatically when they started a delivery service and promoted it intensely so that at the time of my research only a fraction of the meals was sold in the tiny restaurant itself. The same
investment in deliveries also continued in their new larger restaurant in the provincial town. Delivering meals was more profitable there than in Seoul due to the proximity of offices, which ordered more meals per delivery than private households. When still in Seoul, the Chŏng couple even hired a delivery employee in an eventually unsuccessful attempt to expand their business. The bigger scale and better delivery markets of the restaurant in the provincial town was also evident in their employment of a full-time delivery person.

As with Mr and Mrs Chŏng, even though the labor of the husband of the proprietor couple is sufficient to handle delivery in neighborhood businesses, enterprising zeal or conditions of competition sometimes necessitated additional hired labor. Competition was what Mr and Mrs Ko from Kolmok Street
faced when they opened a new grocery store a few kilometers away in a recently built apartment block. Unlike in the previous small house neighborhood (chut’ae’kkak) where they did not need to deliver groceries, they now had to employ a delivery person working from afternoon till midnight due to the specific consumer demands of the apartment residents and competition. (When I went to meet the couple in the new location, Mrs Ko who was tending the shop alone at the time, was sighing over one can of milk powder which needed to be delivered. The man who kept a vegetable stall in front of the supermarket made the delivery.)

In the research neighborhood, delivering goods was quite consistently carried out by men, especially when it involved motor vehicles. The only instance of women driving a delivery scooter or a motorbike was in a fried chicken restaurant operated by two women. Nevertheless, women do deliver meals and merchandise, but mostly on foot. In marketplaces like Tongdaemun and Namdaemun in downtown Seoul, those who carry meal trays from restaurants to shopkeepers’ stalls are most often middle-aged women, and in the research neighborhood many restaurant women took meals to nearby locations on foot. The most noticeable delivery woman in the neighborhood – due to her company uniform – was the so-called yogurt auntie (yagult’ū ajumma), who pushed her cart around and sold and delivered small bottles of drinkable yogurt. There were also young women working as waitresses in the few coffee shops (tabang, literally “tea room”) in the neighborhood who delivered coffee in the vicinity.

During a visit to the provincial town to see Mr and Mrs Chŏng and their new restaurant, I was able to gain an insight into gender issues, men’s and women’s roles and social status from the notable difference in delivery practices between the town and the research neighborhood. The incessant traffic of young women driving around on scooters with hot water, instant coffee and cups wrapped in a cloth posed a striking difference to what I had seen in the Seoul neighborhood, where coffee shop waitresses and women in general were a small minority among the deliverers. Ordering coffee from tabangs in Seoul did not appear common but it was not shunned either; Mr Yun, a visible person in Big Street, often ordered coffee from a nearby place for visitors to his office. Nevertheless, working in a tabang was not an honorable occupation; delivering coffee is known in some cases to be a half-disguised form of prosti-

The next year, Mr and Mrs Ko had given up the shop. According to Hong wŏnjăng, their former shopkeeping neighbor from Kolmok Street, they were temporarily “resting” from work.

tution, and when coffee was delivered in my presence, the women always refused to be photographed, which was in stark contrast with neighborhood people’s attitude towards photographing. As Mr Chŏng explained about the circumstances behind the prolific delivery activity in the provincial town, there were many entertainment and lodging establishments in the area where they operated the restaurant, and the town also had a lot of industry with a mainly male workforce.\footnote{When Mr Chŏng was considering opening a \textit{tabang} coffee shop in the provincial town, he told me: “Yes, there are a lot of \textit{tabangs} in [this town], too many. There have been a lot of men, it’s an industrial town without many women. Like in the countryside where there are very few women, and the \textit{tabang} girl might be the only flower around. Where do the men go? To meet a professional woman (\textit{chigung yŏsŏng}) or a tabang girl. There are a lot of professional women [here].”}

Coffee shop waitresses delivering coffee by motorbikes in the provincial town helped to see the division of labor in small businesses as an issue of appropriateness defined by culturally assigned notions of men’s and women’s spheres and social gender roles, and not as a result of men’s and women’s physical or innate abilities. The notion of a scooter-driving coffee-delivering \textit{tabang} waitress potentially engaged in prostitution is part of the cultural imagery contributing to the perceptions of women’s and men’s tasks and the division of labor in small businesses. What in one sense appeared as male delivery duties performed in consequence of physical strength, depended also on the greater freedom of mobility bestowed on men. As will be discussed in Chapter 7 with regards to practices of non-work leisure, men were freer than women to leave the business establishment for their personal enjoyment, whereas women were much more bound to the premises while tending the shop. Compared to men, women in small businesses in the research neighborhood were not mobile, but they were not immobile either: they delivered meals and merchandise on a small scale and visited their peers and friends. They were women of families and households, and they were businesses co-proprietors with their husbands. The mobile women of the provincial town were neither of these.

Similar to the delivery role in its masculine mobility and temporary detachment from the physical sphere of the shop was the visiting of wholesalers and marketplaces for supplies for restaurants, retail and grocery shops, and supermarkets.\footnote{For examples of the delivery of supplies as men’s task, see also the cases of shopkeepers in Pak Min-ja 1991.} Grocery stores and supermarkets relied in great part on supplies by manufacturers, their representatives and wholesalers, and they could have done that to an even bigger degree, but as Mr Ko remarked, it was more expensive to have everything supplied. The need to find better prices and

115

4. Neighborhood Shopkeeping
cheaper merchandise drove male grocery store and supermarket proprietors out to wholesale marketplaces like those in Yeongdeungpo and Garak-dong.

The shop that Mr and Mrs Ko opened in the new location belonged to a supermarket chain, with the consequence that they only ordered alcohol by themselves, and the chain “took care of the rest.” Despite that, Mr Ko still made regular early morning visits to a wholesale market. During the time in Kolmok Street he went to a marketplace for supplies every two or three days. Securing supplies at advantageous prices was a commercial skill that a supermarket keeper needed to exercise for successful operation, as the small and fiercely competed profit margin was where the shopkeepers made their livelihood. Mr Pak, the husband of another supermarket-keeping couple, was appreciated by his wife Mrs Pak for this kind of shopkeeping savvy, something I heard her express on a few occasions to visitors in the shop. He had lost his salaried office work due to the economic crisis, and the family had moved to Seoul from a nearby city to keep a grocery store. Opening a shop had been his wife’s idea, to which Mr Pak was opposed at first, appealing to his lack of experience. As Mrs Pak said, opening the shop meant also a loss of status for him, a university graduate: “That’s why this [shopkeeping] isn’t such a good thing. People don’t have a high opinion of this.” They did not harbor hopes of him ever returning to a salaried job, though for her as a woman and mother, shopkeeping was still preferable to salaried work, considering the meager employment options available to her and the circumstances of their two daughters in middle and elementary school, to whom she could now be close.

At the time I got to know Mr and Mrs Pak, their grocery store was in an unfavorable location, as the number of people passing by was small, but they were able to open a new shop in a more auspicious position nearby, where their business improved considerably even though the shop space was slightly smaller. Despite her homemaking, Mrs Pak spent longer hours in the shop behind the counter than Mr Pak, whose position was that of the mobile shopkeeper like his colleagues, making purchases for supplies at marketplaces and wholesalers. Notwithstanding the husband’s initial doubts about his abilities, he had become a capable supermarket proprietor, as, for example, when he was able to secure a supply of soju liquor when it was difficult to come by due to forthcoming changes in taxation. The World Trade Organization had ruled against the preferential alcohol tax treatment of the cheap domestic soju over more expensive imported products in South Korea after the complaint by European alcohol manufacturers (Chosun Ilbo, Jan. 19, 1999). Anticipating the price hike of soju due to the impending tax rise, wholesalers and big retailers started hoarding the product, which resulted in supply problems for small retailers and restaurants (Chosun Ilbo, Oct 9, 1999). Facing these
difficulties, Mr Pak managed to acquire a huge load of soju from a department store for a cheap price, and he shared the precious acquisition with some restaurants and even with a less fortunate shopkeeper competitor nearby.

The prerogative of men to leave the shop premises and move around in matters unrelated to work was also related to the spatial gender division of labor. In some of the businesses in the neighborhood in which a special skill of the husbands was not required or in which their labor or skill was not needed continuously, they often left the shop in leisurely pursuits to join the company of their friends, acquaintances, and shopkeeper peers. That was particularly noticeable in establishments like Mr Paek’s and Mrs Chang’s meat shop in Kolmok Street and Mr and Mrs Han’s sesame oil shop in the same street. When dropping in on those places, I was more likely to meet the wives than the husbands of the keeper couples not only because the latter were responsible for securing supplies or making deliveries but also because they at times left the shop for their wives to tend and went somewhere else in the neighborhood to play cards and other games or just to chat. The following is a passage from one of my first conversations with Mrs Han:

– Do you keep this just with your husband?
– Yes. [...] 
– Is your husband at home now?
– No, he went to spend time (nollō kassŏyo) somewhere, because the weather is like this and no customers come.
– Where has he gone?
– Probably to the heating equipment shop over there.

This was one of the several instances when Mrs Han gave me a similar answer concerning the whereabouts of her husband. The sesame oil shop like several other establishments was also a place of leisurely visiting, often distinguished by gender according to the work shifts of the keeper couple. In one such get-together, a proprietor of a Kolmok Street shop was one of the half a dozen neighborhood people gathered for drinks and snacks. His wife, responsible for tending their shop, also stopped by for a moment until a yogurt delivery woman alerted her that they had a customer. She soon returned, and demanded that her husband return to the shop, but he refused, insisting that he had come to have fun (nollŏ on kŏya). She protested, but had to return to the shop alone, and her husband went with a neighborhood acquaintance to the shop next door after everything had been eaten to continue his leisurely time.59

---

59 I have chosen not to name the proprietors in this and in the following instance.
A similar pattern of male prerogative was also discernible in one of the neighborhood restaurants in the early phase of the keeper couple’s proprietorship. As the wife was responsible for cooking, the husband was freer to move around, spending time in realtor and insurance offices during the period when the restaurant had not yet become established and the business was slower. Eventually he needed to change this practice mainly out of shopkeeping considerations. Not only did their business improve so that he had less time for leisure, but due to increased competition they needed to try to avoid giving the impression of not having enough customers, that the man’s leisurely visiting in the neighborhood might have caused. In a severe tone, being upset also because of another restaurant-related matter, the wife asked her husband to stay within the premises of the restaurant for their business' sake.

Women’s Responsibilities: Tending the Shop

Contrasting with and complementary to male shopkeepers’ obligations and prerogatives to be active and mobile outside the shop premises were women’s responsibilities to tend the business. In a conversation with Mrs Chang about having hobbies and meeting friends while operating the meat shop, her shop-tending duties emerged as a hindrance to social participation outside the shop and the household. Because of the shop she and her husband often ended up not going to any gatherings with acquaintances. When asking further about events or meetings that she herself would attend, her answer illustrated wives’ subordinate position with regards to husbands in operating small businesses: “I could ask my husband (uri ajössi, literally “our uncle”) to take care of the shop, but it can be so bothersome, so I often end up not going.”

The circumstances of Mrs Han of the sesame oil shop were similar, but I did not see her express dissatisfaction about her husband’s absence from the shop. It was not that she preferred to tend the place. She said that they did not have any other choice but to keep the shop, as there was no reasonable wage employment available for them, but it would have been better if her husband were the one working “outside.” Her husband’s nonattendance actually relieved her of one source of stress, which was also mentioned in the opening quotation of this chapter: having to be constantly together with one’s spouse. “It gives me stress, it’s uncomfortable. You get to pay more attention to the bad sides of the other.”
In the pork hock (chokpal)\textsuperscript{60} restaurant of Mrs Ch’oe and Mr Cho, a couple in their late 30s, the work arrangement between the wife and the husband at first seemed not to differ from places in which the woman had the main responsibility for cooking: Mrs Ch’oe spent longer hours in the restaurant than Mr Cho, who was responsible for the occasional deliveries by a scooter. What was nonetheless markedly distinct from their peers was that as a consequence of their household division of labor, the husband spent more hours at home with the two children than the wife. Mrs Ch’oe described their roles and division of labor at home:

He does all kinds of tasks at home, operating the washing machine, cleaning, doing the dishes. That was when we both worked outside home (matpōri)\textsuperscript{61}, we left home and came back around the same time, and we both had our own tasks to do after coming home. I prepared food, and he bathed the children and oversaw their homework. That has carried over to this time, and the children want their father to bath them because mother is inexperienced. My husband’s friends and their families are jealous about that, and they wonder how I have accustomed (kildārōttō) him to that, but that’s just a consequence of the time when we were both working.

The organization and division of work, in which Mr Cho was more responsible for home and children than Mrs Ch’oe who instead had more responsibility for tending the shop, would appear to be a consequence of family needs and preferences. Nevertheless, when I asked her about how keeping a restaurant compares to their previous salaried employment, she hinted that operating and being responsible for a restaurant was not pleasing for her husband as a man: “There are good and bad sides, Korean men are often a bit like that. There are unlikable things as well.” Moreover, while she implied that their children preferred that their father looked after them, she expressed displeasure over their present circumstances with regards to their offspring. The children did not like that their parents kept a business, and she described their situation as insecure (puranjōnhada) and her feelings as mother as unsatisfying (aswipta). She was distressed especially because she was not able to be more at home with her children, being worried that it would hurt them. She recounted this on Children’s Day when schools were closed, and the children had gone hiking in the mountains with their father, and she was tending the shop alone.

\textsuperscript{60}Pork hocks (chokpal) are a special dish eaten mostly with the Korean liquor soju in drinking parties or had as a meal or snack on mountain outings. Chokpal places also serve a traditional Korean kukpap soup of rice and hock meat slices served in a broth.

\textsuperscript{61}Matpōri, “joint earning,” refers to situations when the both of the spouses work for wages.
Wife’s duty to take care of the business to complement the leisurely pursuits or other preferences and practices of her husband presents a contradiction with housekeeping tasks and tending and supervision of children, which are mostly relegated to women. Some women did feel and express that their shopkeeping tasks were in conflicted with what they felt were more appropriate separations and distinctions between men and women and the accordingly prescribed gendered spheres. To the extent of my research, women who oversaw small businesses in order to complement their husbands’ leisure, were not mothers of young children, and consequently had leeway from household work. Preparation of meals for children in high school or university and for other family members could be done at home off-duty, and the shop was often used also as domestic space: most of the shops had some kind of cooking facilities, and most women of shopkeeping couples who lived far from the shop also used them.

Women as Co-Proprietors: Longing to Be Back Home

I opened this chapter by quoting the words of Mrs Kang who kept a restaurant with her husband. She carried most of the burden of the restaurant work, rarely leaving the place during opening hours. She was seemingly proud that she had been able to make the place profitable, get praise for the taste of her cooking, and even drive some neighborhood competitors out of business according to her own estimate. She also had experience of employment as a qualified kindergarten teacher, which appeared important in her views and opinions. Her work experience had not, however, prompted her to disassociate herself from the gender roles and spatial and conceptual settings commonly defined as traditional or patriarchal, and she approved of the notion of woman as the housekeeper and man as the breadwinner, attributing it to the order set by God. Even though she felt satisfaction, pleasure, and even pride in the fruits of her labor in the restaurant, she was not satisfied with the family arrangement generated by restaurant operation. In her reasoning, stemming from her own experience, in a business operated by a married couple the spheres of man and woman were not separate, which resulted in irritation and quarreling.

The duty and necessity of tending the shop with one’s husband, contrasted with the feeling of attachment to the household and sense of unfulfilled familial duties especially towards children as expressed by several of the women shopkeepers was particularly illustrative of the complicated relationship between shopkeeping and family. This situation did not always present a problem for women in the shops or lead to arrangements reflecting the sensibilities described by Mrs Kang. The women who kept a business on their own,
discussed in depth in the next chapter, were by and large contented with staying outside of home, and they were actually proud and assertive of their earning capability.

Few women among my informants were in a position to consider staying at home instead of spending time in the shop, but those few who were and with whom I was able to talk at the time of closing or relocating the establishment expressed feelings akin to those of Mrs Kang. When Mr and Mrs Chŏng had decided to move from Seoul to the provincial town, the planned use of employees in the new restaurant was going to allow Mrs Chŏng freedom from the daily operation of the business. She envisaged only being responsible for a few key culinary tasks, and being able to use the rest of the time to do things such as studying that she had hitherto not been able to do. Besides gaining personal wealth and status, one motive in Mr Chŏng’s entrepreneurship was to better provide for his wife and release her from having to work outside of home in their businesses, as he related in the provincial town after giving up the restaurant to operate the office and engage himself with diverse commercial dealings. “In all [our] businesses until now my wife has had a lot of hardships (chipsarami yot’aekkaji changsahalttaemada kosaengŭl manhi haesŏyo). Because she has been at work since young, she wants to be at home with the child until she has grown up.” His wife staying at home was a marker of his expanded business with several employees as well as of his elevated status as an entrepreneur: not a sajang (company president) any more but hoejang (chairman), as she ironically put it.

Mrs Chin, a woman in her 40s who kept a kitchenware shop with her husband in Big Street during the first couple of months of my fieldwork expressed sentiments similar to those of Mrs Chŏng when they were having a clearance sale before closing the shop and opening a new one in another location. She was not going to tend the new shop in the way she had done in the research neighborhood, where she had been commuting daily with her husband. She had wanted to stay at home and take care of their teenage children but as a shopkeeper she had had to come to the shop every day. Like any Korean mother with school-aged children she was worried about the education opportunities they were able to provide to their sons as well as the high school expenses. With the opening of the new shop that Mr Chin would tend by himself alone, she was going to concentrate on homemaking – especially as the sons were about to enter high school – and on her church activities.

Women’s predicament vis-à-vis home, children, and shopkeeping, and preferences when given an opportunity to choose was displayed in the case of a couple in their early 30s who kept a small punsik restaurant for about one year in the location which was taken over by the mandu dumpling restaurateur Mr Mun. They had opened the place after the husband was laid off from
the advertisement department of a newspaper after the outbreak of the economic crisis. Contrary to statistical probabilities and common understandings, he was able to regain his old white-collar job. His wife, who had worked in a city district (tong) office before the birth of their son, had accompanied him in the shop even with their toddler who was not yet one year old. As soon as they gave up the restaurant and he returned to his salaried job, she stayed at home, being able to make the transition that the two other women, Mrs Chŏng and Mrs Chin, were hoping for.

For these women, changes in businesskeeping appeared to provide a chance to attain the role deemed more appropriate for a woman, wife, and mother. Intergenerational aspirations of families were not focused on the business, and generational succession was not deemed an option. While providing the necessary economic basis for children’s education, many aspects of shopkeeping in which both parents took part were contradictory to the aspirations from which shopkeeping was excluded. The opportunity competition in the South Korean schooling system places a huge responsibility on mothers and their capability to provide those opportunities and manage the children’s schoolwork. Nancy Abelmann (2003: 100) has summarized the enormous significance of education as follows: “There is little that is more vulnerable or more volatile in the South Korean social imagination than education. That is, as education has so long captured the aspirations and dreams of South Koreans, even slight changes in its meanings are felt in seismic proportions[].” Considering this, it is not surprising that schooling difficulties were the most prominent reason why the informants in Pak Min-ja’s research on shopkeepers unanimously considered the influence of shopkeeping on children as very negative. Mothers felt they were not able to supervise children’s schoolwork properly because they needed to spend such long hours in the shop (Pak Min-ja 1990: 120; 1991b: 72-73).

Pak Min-ja’s informants also deemed the environment of the shop and its surroundings in general as undesirable for children (1990: 120). Of my informants, similar sentiments were expressed once again by Mrs Kang, who relied on the authority of her qualification as a kindergarten teacher in her assessment. Once, looking out of the window across the street, she saw the proprietor of a shop on the other side of the street on a visit with his child to a neighboring fruit shop. She strongly disapproved of bringing children to a place like that:

It’s harmful for the child to spend time and be raised in a place like that, in a shop. The child can grow up to be an unstable individual, who doesn’t trust
4. Neighborhood Shopkeeping

people as a grown-up. He can become a problem child. A child should be raised at home in a safe environment, practicing skinship.62

Women active in small businesses with their husbands were often performing a balancing act between their usually indispensable and always significant work in the shop and their work in the household. The sensibilities of having to be, out of necessity, in a wrong place and being more worthwhile at home than in the business were not confined to these women in the shops. An apt comparison would be with working-class women who are married and have children but continue working or have returned to factories (Kim, Seung-kyung 1997); in those families as well as in families with small businesses the employment of the husband alone is insufficient to maintain the livelihood of the family, and in both cases women’s employment outside of home cannot be defined as “self-development” as has been described of middle-class families (Yi Eun-hee Kim 1993: Ch. 12). In comparison to working-class women employed in industry who have children, women in small businesses are in general in a better position to adjust to the familial (husband, children) and social (school) demands. This also is evident in the aspirations of married working-class women that Seung-kyung Kim (1997: 84, 91-92) has described: should financial necessity compel former factory worker women to return to work after getting married and having children, small businesses were preferred over factory work.

Conclusions

I have delineated the relationship between household and family and shopkeeping in generalizing terms as a “complex relationship,” a characterization that stems from the contradictions between aspirations and planned generational trajectories of the family and demands and burdens of the business. “Family business,” in the sense that family resources were centered around and concentrated towards the operation, maintenance and continuity of the business, and in the sense that notions of generational hierarchy, authority, and continuity of the family were applied also to the business, proves an inadequate designation for Korean neighborhood shopkeeping or Korean small businesses in general. It is not that nuclear family, household, or close kin were not important and at times essential resources in setting up and operating neighborhood shops, but the practices of appropriation of those resources indicate that the absence of the use of family labor and other resources is as indicative of the shopkeepers’ social practices and cultural

62 “Skinship” is a term originally coined in Japan to describe physical closeness between mother and child.
choices as the presence of the utilization of family members’ work force. It would be misleading to generalize and draw conclusions, for example, from the organization of work in Mrs Kang’s and Mr Kim’s restaurant; as an eating place it was the kind of establishment in which occasional assistance was needed, unlike in many other businesses where proprietors’ offspring were of appropriate age to contribute labor but did not do so. Had some of the restaurateur couple’s four daughters been attending high school instead of university, their labor would not have been available as it was now.

Drawing parallels from the East Asian sphere of Confucianism-influenced notions of family to which Korea can also be regarded as belonging, the accounts of family-based economic practices of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, in particular when juxtaposed to indigenous populations (Malays, Javanese, Filipinos), have pointed out the strong assertion of patriarchal authority of the family head over the labor power and earnings of working-age children, in particular daughters (Salaff 1976, Hefner 1998: 13, Li 1998: 156). Businesses are perceived as corporate household concerns, to which household members can be expected to contribute long hours of uncompensated labor (Li 1998) and become trained in, and accustomed to, family business from an early age on (Szanton 1998: 263).

In contrast to Chinese and overseas Chinese households, households among indigenous Southeast Asian populations do not form such corporate entities, which would be applied to the operation of a business establishment; neither spouses nor children are willing to contribute unpaid work, and it is also not expected (Li 1998: 156-7, Alexander 1998: 215-7). Production of small implements in Javanese households may be organized so that the husband and sons who are paid piece rates manufacture the product and sell it to the wife who keeps the margin from marketing it further. Lacking the hierarchy often manifest in Chinese families, “Javanese ‘family heads’ have little de facto authority over their wives or adult children” (Alexander 1998: 216). Alexander notes, before making a comparison to overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, that one reason why until recently Javanese have been “mired in petty commerce” was that “their [the Javanese] social organization lacked templates for hierarchical, extractive, economic relationships” (ibid: 215).

As a nation and culture which has practiced forms of social organization similar to those referred to by the writers on Chinese, overseas Chinese, and indigenous Southeast Asian, Korea does not lack those templates. Generational and gendered hierarchy, authority within families and kin groups, and ideology of genealogical continuity are notions that in Korea have been strongly influenced by the Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideologies that have shaped the same Chinese cultural ideas that are seen as relevant for practices in Chinese family-operated businesses. In Korea, these cultural ideas are ap-
plied to small neighborhood businesses only partially. Patriarchal authority, if exercised in the manner ascribed to Chinese populations as a claim over the labor of the offspring, would contradict the family aspirations and trajectories of Korean shopkeepers. The appropriation of family labor in Korea is accommodated to the fact that small business is a generationally and temporally limited strategy, and not a preferred option for the prospects of offspring. It was illustrative that only one of my informants regarded self-employment as a viable alternative for her offspring, and this only as a consequence of the child’s poor school performance and not as a preferred life course.

Korean neighborhood shopkeepers were often unwilling to require their children to perform economic tasks, and their application of notions and practices of family and kinship to livelihoods and economic activities in the formation of their own capitalist practices was conditional. These were not, however, shared cultural understandings and constructions in Korean political economy. Ownership and control practices in corporate forms of businesskeeping or entrepreneurship, in particular in big conglomerates (Janelli 1993, Kim Choong Soon 1992, Kim and Kim 1989, Suh 1989) in which family and kin figure strongly in ideological and practical terms, attest to a very different interpretation of the role of family and kin. In the light of my neighborhood shopkeeper informants, household members – other than spouses – and close kin are only a provisional resource for small Korean businesses. Reciprocal household obligations do play a role in the offspring’s participation, but the carrying out of these obligations – appropriation of children’s labor – is conditional, depending especially on the phase of schooling.

Labor contributions by household members or kin tended to be neither unpaid nor formally remunerated. That the payment – transfer of money – appears to be most often conceptualized as “pocket money” (yongdon, “use money”) illustrates the distinction between these work inputs and formal relations of employment, suggesting that they belong more to the sphere of generational household and family reciprocity than to economic exchange. Although one informant gave her university-attending child pocket money on condition that she occasionally help in the shop, parents are obliged to provide funds to their offspring even without such stipulations, and in that particular case it was used as a means of “family education,” and not as a way to introduce her to the parent’s business.

Whereas the use of family labor depended strongly on the circumstances of the family members as well as the establishment, the appropriation of husband’s and wife’s labor had few such conditions. Culturally positive values are not attached to husband’s and wife’s joint operation of a business establishment, and despite women’s increasing participation in labor markets,
women’s active seeking of employment outside of home even alongside one’s husband in a small shop did not appear as a commonly appreciated, shared notion from the point of view of neighborhood shopkeepers.

Unlike the assertiveness and self-confidence about their occupation and themselves vis-à-vis other household members conveyed by the two hairdressers who kept their salons alone and earned relatively well, the wives who were partners with their husbands – whether as actual skilled proprietors or as assistants – did not hold a positive outlook on their circumstances, and often expressed a desire to retire from shopkeeping in order to dedicate themselves to housework. This entailed not only subscribing to emulation of the culturally valued life-styles of the salaried middle class but also a clear awareness of the advantages that a houseworking mother can provide her children in the competitive South Korean education system. Nonetheless, compared to salaried work available for women, participating in business was preferable to wage labor as it offered some leeway to adjust to family schedules.

Just as the character of shopkeeping is temporal and intragenerational, with no intention of handing over the businesses, also the operation of the establishment tends to be generational, performed in essence only by the husband and wife. Reproduction of family and household through shopkeeping often necessitates the wife’s participation, which contradictorily removes her from home and from performing the tasks of childrearing, schoolchild parenting, and household management in general, that are also essential in the same reproduction process.
CHAPTER FIVE

Women as Shop Proprietors: Exercising “Life Energy”

This chapter focuses the topic of the previous chapter by discussing women proprietors of small neighborhood businesses: their views and perceptions of themselves as businesskeepers, as members of their households, and as wives, and of their family and kin relations, especially in regard to their husbands. The three main characters of this chapter are Chōng wǒnjāng and Hong wǒnjāng, keepers of hairdressing salons, and Yumin’s mother, who operated a garment mending shop; this chapter shows how they construct their identities as persons active in certain independent skill-based occupations in addition to their membership in families and households. I pay close attention to specific concepts that appeared in the talk of the protagonist women in significant contexts and to the gendered and stratified meanings attached to them.

Women’s Economic Capability and Household Maintaining Ability: Saenghwallyŏk

Women across the spectrum of social groups and strata in Korea take part in formal and informal employment or generate non-wage income through money management and investment, and bring in an often crucial proportion of the family income. Despite women’s participation in all types of work and earning, their business savvy and ability to contribute financially to the maintenance and reproduction of the family are usually associated with women in shopkeeping and other kinds of self-employment. Economic ability in this kind of livelihood is often conceptualized as saenghwallyŏk, which literally means “life energy”, and is defined in the online Standard Korean Dictionary as “capability needed to maintain social life, used especially of economic capability.” The concept of saenghwallyŏk did not appear as frequently in the talk of the women as, for example, the topics of money and relationship with their husbands, but its emergence in significant contexts – including money and husband – drew my attention to the term and I began to appreciate it as one of the key concepts in these women’s sense of themselves, their work, and their families.

As a term, saenghwallyŏk is both gendered and stratified. In the case of men, the lack of it is conceptualized in accordance with the notion that male economic capability is a “given” but the lack of it is not unthinkable. For women,
capability in economic terms provides a context for the use of the term, and it is usually applied to women who are major or sole contributors to the support and maintenance of the household. In circumstances of incapacity or lack of “life energy” in senior family males there is a strong inference that the capability is expected of women in order that the family be properly provided and reproduced. Conversely, woman’s saenghwallyŏk implies that the husband is either absent or unable to contribute or provide enough support for the family livelihood.

The stratified character of saenghwallyŏk is apparent in the above-mentioned application of the term, particularly to self-employed women. The term does not denote earning power and household maintenance capability irrespective of status and class. I have not encountered the term in association with women in professional or salaried middle-class occupations whose earning capability may easily exceed that of self-employed women. However, in such case where a middle-class woman needs to engage in an occupation which does not correlate to her class standing in order to secure the livelihood of her family, the concept would be applicable, and she could be described as having a strong saenghwallyŏk.

In her recent work on Korean women’s experiences of social change, class, and social mobility, Nancy Abelmann (2003: 85–88) draws attention to her women informants’ use of the notion of “being incapable” (munânghada), which was usually applied to men who were unable to support themselves and their families. One informant defined munânghada as “lack of saenghwallyŏk”, denoting a negligent attitude to family welfare which was as a consequence of upbringing and obsolete family values rather than lack of earning capability due to unfortunate family circumstances. Abelmann further amplifies the term as an inability or unwillingness to catch on or accommodate to life at the particular place and time of post-liberation South Korea (Abelmann 2003: 87). Both the two concepts, saenghwallyŏk and munânghada, which can be seen as mirroring each other, thus tend to have negative connotations when applied to men. The economic ability of women, conceptualized as saenghwallyŏk, does not presuppose their husbands’ complete incapability, as the cases of the three women in this chapter and their husbands demonstrate, but disparities in earning power between the spouses in the wives’ favor, in addition to the conventional notion of a bread-winning male household head evokes the notion of saenghwallyŏk, particularly with regards the two proprietors of hairdressing salons discussed in this chapter.
Women's Work in Korea

In the following I will draw some contours of Korean women’s work and employment in order to present a cultural and socioeconomic context for women’s shopkeeping and for the lives and life histories of the three protagonists of this chapter. I shall try to demonstrate the kind of social conditions and cultural patterns their lives as wives, mothers, daughters-in-law, wage workers and proprietors of small businesses reflect, and to accommodate the women into the large picture of women’s work and self-employment. Tracking the general outlines of women’s economic contribution to the household, and women’s economic participation and employment within and outside the household, requires consideration of Confucian gender ideology and folk practices, Korea’s industrialization and modernization both under the Japanese colonial power, and South Korea’s authoritarian development-oriented governments.

Several scholarly treatments of Korean women have emphasized the economic contribution of women’s labor as well as the importance of the role women in the maintenance of elite status in preindustrial Korea in order to counter and adjust the image of women in premodern, preindustrial Korea as invisible, powerless, and dependent in conformance with the Confucian ideology of the separation of men and women and male and female spheres. Laurel Kendall, discussing women’s economic contributions in her study on marriage in Korea, emphasizes the importance of women’s labor for household maintenance in preindustrial Korea. The restriction of women’s visibility in public places even among the yangban or scholar-official elite families did not mean that their labor within the confines of the household compound lacked significance. “A Korean wife’s abilities as a hard worker and frugal manager were recognized as a measure of the prosperity, harmony, and reputation of her household” (Kendall 1996a: 96). Women’s labor and cottage production conducted within the women’s realm could make a difference to the economic position of the household: the manufacture of clothing both to wear and to pay tax, other needlework or laundering were recourses available to women. Labor in the women’s realm, conceptualized in agricultural society commonly as annil or inside work, also included the growing of vegetables for daily use, storing of food, preparation of meals, and the raising of children (Kendall 1996a: 95, Sorensen 1988: 134). Cho Haejoang (1988) also emphasizes the importance of women’s economic contributions in the preindustrial era as well as during the twentieth century era of confusion and displacement. “In interviews with women who are proud of their yangban pedi-
Women as Shop Proprietors

grees, they describe how they had to be prepared to be married to an impoverished scholar (sŏnbū), and how they worked with blisters in their hands in patched-up clothes hiding their hunger throughout their lives” (Cho Haejoang 1988: 83).

In a study of a village on the east coast of Korea in the 1960s, Vincent Brandt conveys the villagers’ view that the role of women in maintaining the financial solvency of the household is important. The poverty of the village at the time and the lack of sources of income meant that besides the expectation that women should control their husbands’ propensity for social spending, they could also make a significant contribution to the household income through industrious gardening and shellfish gathering (Brandt 1971: 127). Clark Sorensen in his study of households in a remote farming village in the 1970s discusses women’s labor and their contribution to household maintenance. The gender division of labor into “inside work” and “outside work” was clearly distinguished both spatially and conceptually, but for the survival and reproduction of the household, the labor of both the wife and the husband was indispensable (Sorensen 1988: 140). For example, due to the remote location of the village and the large share subsistence agriculture played in local livelihood, all the vegetables had to be produced within the household. This being a woman’s task, a household without a woman was likely to be without vegetables (ibid: 138).

Industriallabor

During the 1920s and 1930s more than 90 percent of women’s statistically recorded employment was in agriculture. The overall participation of women in economic activity was 40 percent, before the figure diminished to one third as a consequence of the depression in the early 1930 (Ilda, Sept 19, 2004). The participation of women in economic activity was thus already relatively high during the colonial period, even when compared to employment figures of women during recent decades when formal wage employment in industry and services has been available and the female labor force at times in huge demand in some sectors. In 1970, when there was a demand for women’s labor due to the importance of light manufacturing industries (Koo 2001: 35), the formal rate of women’s economic participation was 40 percent and the proportion of female production workers close to half of the total – both figures correlating with the early 1930s.

Women have played an important part of in the industrial work force in Korea ever since industries begun to develop and the demand for cheap industrial labor grew, as the annexed Korea became an increasingly important part of the Japanese industrial structure in the late 1920s. In some sectors such as the textile industry women were an indispensable source of labor. For
example, in the Kyŏngbang textile factory – one of the significant Korean-owned companies among the mainly Japanese-owned industries – about 80 percent of workers were women, mainly poor and uneducated girls in their late teens recruited from rural areas around the country (Eckert 1991: 192–3). The proportion of women of the industrial work force was as high as 45 percent in 1932, but reflecting the changes in the industrial structure of the colonial Korea, it dropped to one third by the end of the 1930s with the growth of heavy industry employing male labor.

Another significant era of women’s industrial labor contribution began in the late 1960s with the development of the export industry, which increased demand for both a female and male labor force. Female workers in industry has consisted mainly of unmarried women; this has been a consequence of both employers’ regulations, the preferences of the women themselves and the attitudes of men towards the employment of their wives. Kim Kyŏng-ae points out in her study on labor participation of working-class women that taking part in industrial labor as productive work was not a new role for women, but its character as labor outside the household sphere was different from agricultural production (Kim Kyŏng-ae 1999: 65). The precise difference lies in being occupied outside the household, something to which husbands often object. Kim Kyŏng-ae shows that through the husbands’ attitude towards wives’ employment, marriage was a decisive factor for women’s employment, even more than childcare needs. Men were generally against their wives’ outside employment, in spite of the monetary needs of the family, but were obliged to allow it due to their own lack of earning capability (ibid: 298–9).

Kim Seung-Kyung argues in her study of women workers in export-zone factories at the end of 1980s and early 1990s that gender, age and class are the main constraining factors in the work choices of these women. Even though women were increasingly working after marriage, the women themselves and others still expected that the working careers of young women were going to be short. Working in a factory after marriage indicated that expectations of finding a good marriage partner had not been met. Moreover, married factory women were in an especially vulnerable and exploitable position since their employment indicated that their household couldn’t manage without their wages (Kim Seung-Kyung 1997: 173).

The three businesskeeping women of this chapter, Chŏng wŏnjang, Hŏng wŏnjang and Yumin’s mother, have all been in wage employment at some stage of their working histories, which reflects the pattern that unmarried women are most likely to be in wage employment but with marriage, children and increasing age the likelihood of wage work decreases and self-employment increases. For a young hairdresser with newly acquired qualifi-
cations, working for someone else before setting up one's own business is expected in order to gather experience, skills, and funds. The skills learned in a garment factory can also be turned to good use in a small business after the termination of wage employment. Women's re-employment on favorable terms after economic inactivity is not easy, and working conditions in industry are less favorable than in self-employment, to which may be added the greater flexibility in accommodating to the needs of the family.

**Small Businesses and Other Self-Employment**

While there has been considerable research interest in anthropology and other social sciences towards women's work in small-scale economic activity from peddling and marketplace trading to shopkeeping and family businesses in other cultures, such phenomena have not attracted much scholarly attention in Korea, and they have not left many traces in accounts of modern Korean social or economic history despite having been a significant undercurrent in modern Korean society. Women of small businesses (*changsa*) nevertheless do figure in the Korean understanding of ideas about gender and women's potential role in family livelihood, whether as independent earners or coworkers with their husbands. Stereotypes of women in small businesses are rife, many of which were also present in my research neighborhood: restaurant auntie (*ajumma*), marketplace auntie, flower shop girl, hairdressing salon keeper, a pharmacist – the last on the border between a professional occupation and a keeper of a small business in Koreans' social maps. Besides self-employed women firmly established in shopkeeping, there are old women selling vegetables, rice cakes, or other small items on the edges of marketplaces, street corners, and subway entrances, and women baking and selling fish-shaped pastry from a movable grill, often with a tacit understanding that there are dire family circumstances like unemployment or labor disability behind taking up the task.

Korean anthropologist Cho Haejoang (1988) has sketched in broad strokes some contours of Korean women's relation to public and private spheres and the scope of their activities as influenced by historical and social developments. She depicts the period beginning with Korea's opening in the late 19th century, continuing over the Japanese colonial era and the Korean War until the beginning of Korea's industrialization in the early 1960s as an era of disorder. As a consequence of the disorder the men's outer or public domain, regulated and defined on a par with women's “inner” or “private” domain during the preceding Chosón kingdom, was diminished and the male sphere of activity reduced. While the official sector contracted or outright collapsed, modernization and urbanization began under the Japanese influence and rule. The disarray of the male sphere of activity concomitantly broadened women's
realms, as they were increasingly called upon to take care of the family livelihood in the absence of men in the "outside sphere" for example in marketplaces or factories (Cho 1988: 91–102).

Laurel Kendall’s account of the life story of a shaman born into a family of marketplace fruit stall keepers in late colonial Korea provides a glimpse of women in such circumstances. The keeper of the fruit stall was the father, but in his disinterest and womanizing he contributed little to the household, so the mother needed to provide for the family by peddling wine and food (Kendall 1988: 34–44). Reflecting the fact that Korean shamans, who are mostly women, have attracted a lot of scholarly attention, an account of a shaman’s life story shows how women’s peddling and other kinds of small businesses provided for the family at the time of men’s absence in the 1950s (Wilson 1983: 118–119).

In an article based on research in squatter neighborhoods in Seoul at the turn of 1970s when rural migration to the capital was at its peak, Vincent Brandt emphasizes the important role of women in maintaining the family integrity in dire conditions of what appeared to be social disorganization and breakdown of traditional values, and an inability and unwillingness of men to provide for their families. Energetic and innovative activities of informal entrepreneurship were an important part of the livelihood of the squatter neighborhoods, as steady wage employment was scarce, and funds and a clientele for profitable shopkeeping were lacking. “Without access to most legitimate business opportunities, squatter capitalists engaged in such activities as usurious money lending, illegal manufacture of wine, illegal screening of pornographic movies, operation of clandestine dance-halls, and peddling of every conceivable kind of good including some that were stolen. Real estate brokers thrived, even though no one had legal tenure” (Brandt 1982: 22).

Where men fell short the women needed to step in, and take a crucial role in the emotional and material maintenance of families. Wage work was more widely available for young women than for young men, and questions of prestige did not weigh as heavily for women. “Middle-aged and older women engaged in all kinds of peddling and petty commerce as well as money lending and the organization of cooperative neighborhood financial groups.” [...] “When the man was unemployed, it was usually the woman who somehow managed to keep things going, and when the family achieved some measure of economic security, local gossip as a rule attributed most of the credit for wise financial management to the wife” (ibid.).
Women as Businesskeepers in Contemporary Korea

Small businesses are overwhelmingly a male domain in terms of number of proprietors, and disproportionally so in comparison with the rates of economic participation. Of the self-employed persons outside agriculture, approximately 70 percent are men and 30 percent are women, and 30 percent of economically active men and one fifth of economically active women are self-employed business proprietors. But when taking in to account the so-called unpaid family workers, who are occupied in family businesses without formally receiving wages, the proportion of the self-employment sector in women’s occupations slightly exceeds that of men (Mun et al 2002: 11).

When agriculture was the major livelihood in Korea, most of women’s formally documented economic activity was statistically defined as non-salaried family work, as women’s work in family agriculture fell into that category, corresponding to the work of married women in small businesses that are formally kept by their husbands. Non-paid family work was more common than wage employment until the 1980s, and women’s business proprietorship became more common than work in family businesses without wages around 1990 (Korea National Statistics Office 2004). Women’s non-paid family business work has been prominent in the urban sector as well. Its proportion was close to that of business proprietorship in the 1970s and 1980s, and at the turn of the 21st century more than one third of women’s work in self-employment sector was performed without receiving formal wages. It is likely that even that figure underrepresents women’s contribution, since as Pak Kyŏng-ae (1999: 81) notes, women themselves have often preferred to present themselves as non-working housewives rather than non-waged family workers or household pieceworkers.

The Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI) has conducted extensive research on women’s self-employment (Mun et al 2002), based on national statistics on labor and population and other literary sources. Self-employed women tend to be of an older age group and have less education than employed women in Korea on the average. Small businesses are also a sphere of married women. Unmarried women comprise one fourth of the total female work force, but only six percent of self-employed women (Mun et al 2002: 23–24). In the early 1990s, 90 percent of unmarried women’s employment but less than half of married women’s employment was wage work; the respective proportions of self-employment for unmarried and married women were 3 percent and 20 percent (Kim 1999: 80). In addition to married women’s prominence in self-employment, their increasing work force participation in the formal labor market has been a general trend in the last few decades. Married women have become a clear majority of female employment
in service industries, the proportion growing from 37 percent in 1970 to 85 percent in 1990. The development has been similar in industrial production (Kim Kyŏng-ae 1999: 76).

A woman’s husband and offspring are decisive factors influencing women’s entry into and choice of self-employment. Marriage decreases the likelihood of wage work and increases the likelihood of self-employment, but termination of marriage through divorce or death makes the probability of business-keeping even bigger. (Kim Kyŏng-ae also discusses the influence of the husband on woman’s work opportunities in the case of working class women’s choices between wage employment outside of the home and piecework or other kinds of subcontracting at home.)

Women’s income from business keeping is higher than from wage employment, but due to the long working hours, hourly earnings are not markedly different. The divide between employer-entrepreneurs and purely self-employed without employees is substantial, bigger than in the case of men, because women’s small businesses based on highly professional skills are growing fast. The poorer the household, the greater the self-employed woman’s contribution to the household budget is; this mainly reflects the fact that a disproportionate number of women who are household heads are engaged in self-employment (Mun et al. 2002: 38). This in turn is a consequence of the self-employment as the last resort after separation by death or by divorce. The KWDI survey points out that a meaningful distinction within women’s employment structure is not that between wage employment and self-employment but between regular and other kinds of employment, including self-employment and wage work on temporary or daily basis (Mun et al 2002: 136). Women’s self-employment is in the middle ground between economic inactivity and wage employment. Lack of education and skills and advancing age are common obstacles for women in accessing wage work, to which self-employment offers an alternative. Several women during my fieldwork echoed these statistics-based conclusions: in a small business, a Korean woman is able to work and earn money longer than in wage employment.

**A Women’s Small Business and a Female Occupation: Hairdressing**

Of the kinds of small businesses in residential neighborhoods which are typically associated with proprietorship by a woman – clothing, cosmetics, flower shops, hairdressers – the most representative and perhaps the most gender-bound are hairdressing salons. In Korea there are male hairdressers who provide for a wealthier and more exclusive clientele, but in less affluent neighborhood environments hairdressing salons (miyongsil or mijangwŏn) are
operated in practice only by women. The hairdressing salons that numbered close to ten in the streets where I was active during the research were all managed by women, and during the time of my main fieldwork period, only one of them had one or more hired employees. In the similar manner, the three or four barbershops (ibalso) in the area were operated by men.  

The gender division of patronage between barbershops and hairdressing salons has not only been a social norm but also a paragraph of law until the late 1970s. According to Chŏng wŏnjang who had been in hairdressing since 1970s, men started to show up in hairdressing salons in the mid-1980s, as legislation, societal norms, and governmental control concerning men’s hair relaxed, and some men started to have longer hair and get permanents. Nowadays hairdressing salons cater for women as well as for men, but barbershops have retained an exclusively male clientele and older men are unlikely to have haircuts in hairdressing salons. A laundry keeping man in his late 30s, who said that he always goes to a barbershop, told me that men should never go to a hairdressing salon for a haircut even if it was much cheaper. The idea of gender characteristics associated with types of businesses is illustrated in Chŏng wŏnjang’s account in a snippet from my fieldnotes:

I try to stir up a discussion based on a documentary on a famous Korean “hair designer” Pak Chun, which was aired yesterday on TV. I try to ask about the process of becoming a hairdresser and about men like Pak Chun as hairdressers. She says there are indeed men as hairdressers and not only as barbers. Chŏng wŏnjang got her hairdressing license in 1978. “Isn’t it a long time ago? Pak Chun didn’t have money to go to a hagwŏn (school), so he went straight to work in a hairdressing salon as a hair washer, shampoo man. If one has money one can open one’s own shop straight out of hagwon, provided one has the license. But Korean men cannot handle women’s hair gently like Western men...” She mentions this as a reason why in her mind men are not fit to be hairdressers.

I refer to the two hairdressers as wŏnjang,s in par with the use of sajang, which in the neighborhood environment is used only of male business keep-

63 There are so-called degenerated barbershops (t’œep’ye ibalso) in many parts of Seoul and elsewhere in Korea as well, in which female employees are engaged in prostitution. These have undoubtedly contributed to the inferior and non-modern image of barbershops, even though these establishments should be distinguished from conventional barbershops.

64 In 2003, the Korean Barbers’ Association (Han’guk Iyongsahoe) lobbied strongly for legislation to separate the clientele by gender between hairdressing salons and barbershops, which would have obliged men to use barbershops. The Association saw that barbershops had been unjustly losing male clients to hairdressers. The Ministry of Health and Welfare rejected the demands on the grounds that it would be impossible to instigate this kind of gender-separating legislation in addition to the present legal definitions separating hairdressing salons and barbershops (Seoul Sinmun, Oct. 25, 2003).
ers. Wônjang or wônjangnim is a formal term of address for proprietors of hairdressing salons, in which the syllable wôn derives from mijangwôn, the now antedated term for a hairdressing salon. It corresponds to sajang (sajangnim in a more elevating form of address), the common term of address and reference for businesskeepers, as it points to hairdressing salon proprietorship, but it is used in much fewer contexts. In the company of male shopkeepers, sajang added to the family name was a common and not particularly formal term of address and reference if the degree of intimacy did not warrant the use of the “older brother” kinship term or “someone’s father” teknonyme. I never heard wônjang being used by acquaintances of a hairdressing salon proprietor, but that was the usual form of address used by, for example, appliance suppliers and cosmetics representatives.

My use of wônjang here differs from my own practice during the fieldwork, as I did not use it to address my hairdresser informants, while for example in the case Mr Pak of the rice mill, I felt that Pak sajangnim was the most appropriate term. The manner in which wônjang is not a widely applicable term of address was evident at a restaurant dinner table, in which a long-time customer, a man in his 30s was also present with me and the hairdresser and her husband. He addressed the woman as ajumônì, using the honorific nominative particle kkesô, and the husband accordingly as ajôssi. (His choice of terms of address was perhaps prompted by the fact that no term corresponding to wônjang was applicable for the husband) An interesting notion is that sajang, even when being formally applicable, is rarely used of a woman proprietor of a neighborhood business; I have no references to it in my data. Despite its formal gender neutrality, sajang is a strongly gender-bound term. This is also the reason why I use the teknonymic term Yumin’s mother of the keeper of the garment mending shop; as a woman she was not granted the term sajang despite being a proprietor of a business, and as I got to know her better I started addressing her in the Korean manner as her daughter’s mother. Even though I was at least as closely acquainted with Mr Pak as with Yumin’s mother, addressing him with a teknonyme that his friends commonly used would not have been appropriate, which bespeaks not only of a bigger difference in age between me and Mr Pak but also of the gendered nature of sajang, and in the end, of gender statuses and hierarchies.

The Hairdressers: Mrs Chông and Mrs Hong

Both of the hairdressers with whom I had extensive contacts, Chông wônjang and Hong wônjang, exemplified the image of a self-esteemed female keeper of a small business, who is able to generate a steady income with her labor and skill and thus contribute considerably to the household economy.
The economic standing of a hairdresser in regard to her husband and the rest of the family is usually enhanced by the class position of the husband; the earning power of a hairdresser is often high in comparison to the status of the occupation and her educational level, and subsequently the economic potential of a hairdresser is high compared to prospective marriage partners. Both of my hairdresser informants earned more than their husbands.

CHÔNG WÔNJANG

Chông wônjang had always wanted to become a hairdresser.

It was my dream since I was a child. I used to pull acacia leaves and weave them into my hair. I went to practice [in a hairdressing salon] without pay when I was still going to school. After [high] school I went to work in a hairdresser shop and became a first-class hairdresser in just three years while it usually takes five to six years. But I didn’t have a hairdresser’s license, for which I had to study... first the written exam, studying in a technical high school, then the practical exam, hairdressing, face and body massage. I passed it on the first attempt.

She was born in Northern Kyôngsang province in the southeastern part of the country. The family later settled in a coastal town in Southern Kyôngsang, where she finished school, started her career as a hairdresser, was introduced to her husband and got married. That town is still the other nexus of the family, the native place (kohyang) of her husband and the place about which the decision whether to go or not needs to be made before traditional festivities. Some of her siblings live there, and she also has considerable real estate property in the town. Her husband was a graduate of a two-year college, and at the time he was working in an office of a shipyard and earning more than four times her salary from the hairdressing salon. People around her told that he had a good job and that she should marry him. “Now that I think of that it makes me laugh,” she said when she recollected the time when they got married, and how the tables had now turned.

As Chông wônjang put it, her husband wasn’t really suited for working under others, so his company employment turned into driving a taxi when the young family moved to Seoul soon after the marriage. I asked her if her husband had had anything against her work when they got married. “No, my husband knew that I was a hairdresser when we were getting married... A man has to have capability (nüngnyôk) if he is going to oppose [woman’s work]. Those who don’t have nüngnyôk usually aren’t opposed because in that case the woman also has to earn. My husband is of a helping and cooperating sort. He cleans here in the morning.” In the word nüngnyôk (capability) that Chông wônjang used, the syllable nüng is the same as in munünghada, which was discussed above. “Not having nüngnyôk” in Chông wônjang’s talk is ap-
proximately synonymous with that term, and becomes similarly a characteristic which requires earning capability (*saenghwallyöök*) in the woman. This was also the context of her self-characterization of having a lot of *saenghwallyöök* in comparison to her spouse, emanating from her ability to earn money.

They lived in one place in Seoul for a few years before she opened her own business in early 1980s in the location where the shop was at the time of fieldwork. She ended up staying in the same place for 20 years until she had to move one block down the street as the two-story house in which her shop was located was pulled down and an exam cramming dormitory was built on the site. She had kept the shop in the new place only for about one year, when she quit because of physical duress and health problems, and sold the shop premium to another hairdresser. In June 2002 when I was visiting Korea again she had opened a new salon close to a place where they had recently moved. They had lived in an apartment house, but rented that and moved to a detached house that they also owned because of the need to supervise tenants who were living in the first and second floors of the three-story house. Her stated reason for opening a new business was that she regarded her skill valuable and she did not want to waste it; this despite their income from several pieces of real estate. Her earning ability vis-à-vis her husband was also relevant for her choice in continuing to work: “I earn the same as my husband even if my business isn’t good. (...) I can earn this well even though I haven’t been to a university, so why would I not do this?”

Chŏng wŏnjang’s judgments and evaluations were often based on money, earning of money, and wealth, to a degree that perplexed and aroused the attention of a non-Korean field researcher with a salaried middle-class family background. Situating her attitudes in the context of the competitive and wealth-conscious and status-conscious Korean society, her focus on money and wealth becomes a sensible consequence of not only her own values but of the notions of status and prestige in Korean society. Her lack of educational credentials (“...even if I have graduated only from high school”) and the lack of status of her husband’s occupation as a taxi driver (“it’s not really a good job”) leave earning and wealth as the options for generating status and reproducing the family: to provide the opportunity for her daughter to study abroad for a graduate degree and a base for a small business for her son, who was not showing a great propensity for study, and to be assured that they are appropriately “treated as human beings” when they get old.

Chŏng wŏnjang talked of the troubles and worries that she had had with employees (*agassi*, “girl”) in her hairdressing business earlier working under her, since trusting the shop to others even for short times had been stressful. Nevertheless, in 2001 she again hired a female assistant, who did simple haircuts, washed customers’ hair and prepared meals and took care of the laundry
of the shop. (She did not need a skilled hairdresser because most of her clientele were men.) Becoming an employer again meant not only a smaller workload for Chŏng wŏnjang but also an elevation of her own status, as she could assign menial tasks to the assistant.

Chŏng wŏnjang also used references to money and earning to assess her own personal traits, as in her account of a small detail from her childhood. Her class was going on a school trip, and a child from a less well-off family had more pocket money than she. She went home and demanded that her father give her more pocket money. She insisted and begged until her father gave in. “I had so much pride (chajonsim).” She added that the same attitude has helped her in hairdressing and all other businesses.

Chŏng wŏnjang did not characterize her relationship to her agnatic family and her affines solely in terms of money and wealth, but they were nevertheless important markers. When I inquired what her siblings do for living, she started by asserting that “they all live well” before answering the question. On another occasion when the subject of conversation was money (as it was quite often), after saying that her husband was not interested in money but was content if there was just rice [food] on the table, she went on without further questioning to mention that her older sister is richer than she. The older sister lived quite close to the hairdressing salon and visited the place often; she and her husband had a real estate agency, and real estate was also the source of their wealth. She continued, still without my purposefully keeping the topic to money, by remarking that her affinal family (sijip) does not have money, and that they had turned to her for assistance in these matters. On another occasion she nevertheless described the conditions in which her husband grew up as quite wealthy and his mother as someone who took such good care of him that he never learned the struggles of the world and has never been in debt to anyone, adding that the credit for the latter belongs to herself, Chŏng wŏnjang. (The taxi that he was driving had been her purchase.) The relations between her own siblings she described as good: “When we need to buy hoe (a raw fish dish), this much money is needed,” she said, showing the size of the wad of notes with her fingers.

All the siblings contributed the same amount of money to the living allowance of their mother. This somewhat contradicted the Confucian notion of woman’s severance from her natal family at marriage, but did not run counter against the actual practice of kinship even in preindustrial Korea and still less in urban environments (see especially Chung Cha-whan 1977 for bilateral practice in a kinship system that is fundamentally patrilineal). Despite emphasizing the comfortable living of all of the siblings and their equal participation in joint expenses such as their mother’s allowance, Chŏng wŏnjang’s relations to her brothers and sisters were not totally free of the con-
spicuous use of money, which was shown in one brief reference to the con-
gratulation money to be given at her nephew’s (older brother’s son) wedding.
Her contribution was going to be 500,000 Won (€400), to which she added,
“But I could give less if I wanted.”

Hong Wŏnjang

Being the proprietor of one of the four hairdressing and barbershop estab-
lishments in Kolmok Street, Hong wŏnjang faced a lot of competition. This
was one of the main reasons why the hairdressers mostly avoided talking to
each other. According to Hong wŏnjang, the proprietor of the most recently
opened salon in the street did not even bring rice cakes (ttŏk) to her on its
opening day when distributing them in the neighborhood, which she consid-
ered a severe breach of good manners. (It is customary for an opening shop to
distribute rice cakes to other business establishments in the neighborhood.)
Similarly with Chŏng wŏnjang, Hong wŏnjang possessed qualities associated
with hairdressing salon keepers such as resilience, self-esteem, and conversa-
tionality. She was a humorous person and a good talker, and even Mr Pak,
who often exchanged jokes and banter with her, found his match in her. Her
work history was more varied than that of her colleague, and her personal
history included factory labor as well as social and political activism arising
from unfortunate family circumstances.

Hong wŏnjang was born in Southern Chŏlla province, but the family
moved to Seoul to support the studies of her older brother, who had moved to
the capital in advance of the others for schooling. She described her father as
lacking in economic capability (saenghwallyŏk): “He did pot planting, but he
was not good in business, gave away everything too cheaply. Our mother had
to take charge,” she said, raising her fists to display the energy of her mother.
When young she had contacts with Western missionaries and even had their
children as playmates. This, she said, influenced her and made her unlike a
typical Korean. One of the first things she disclosed to me about her family
background was that her brother had graduated from the most prestigious
university in Korea and received a graduate degree in the USA. He achieved
all this with scholarships, as he had been a very good student, in contrast to
how Hong wŏnjang described herself: “I was not a good student. I’m good
only at this,” she said, making scissors movements with her hands. Hong
wŏnjang always portrayed herself as different from the neighborhood envi-
ronment and also different from her husband, with whom she apparently got
along well despite occasional quarrels, which she was not shy to relate. In the
neighborhood she kept quiet on the subject of the political activism in her
past, but her childhood acquaintance with foreigners was known, and
when an American-born doctor at a Seoul hospital, who had lived most of his
life in Korea and was somewhat known in public, came to have a haircut in the salon of his childhood friend, it became a topic of some neighborhood talk.

Photograph 10: Hong wŏnjang’s husband visiting his wife’s hairdressing salon.

Hong wŏnjang had opened the hairdressing salon two years before I got to know her. As usual with shopkeeping hairdressers, she had worked several years before that as an employee. “When I was an apprentice (sida) in the beginning, some 10 years ago, I was just sweeping the floor, cooking food, washing customer’s hair, washing towels.” Before that she already had a long history of wage labor. Her husband’s family was not wealthy, they didn’t have any property, and they tended to live beyond their means. In addition, her husband’s earning and family maintenance capability (saenghwalloyŏk) was not good and he had no special skills, so her opinion was that she should also go out and earn. She met opposition from many directions about her resolution of working outside the family: not only her mother-in-law and husband but also her own mother and brother opposed the idea. At first she worked in a factory:

There are a lot of men at work [in factories], as you know. At home they were firmly against it. I cried a lot, argued with my husband, threatened him with divorce... I could earn well for a woman in the factory, because the work was dangerous, using kind of a big iron pipe cutter. I almost lost a finger, when the cotton glove got stuck, but only the finger of the glove was cut off and I got only a small cut in my finger. It was like a miracle... I got afraid of going to work there, and started planning something else as an occupation.
She had three alternatives in mind: hairdressing, wallpapering (often performed by women in South Korea), and sewing. The first one was less dependent on economic fluctuations than the others, so she decided to attend a hairdressing school. She did not get any assistance from her household members because everyone was against her plans, so she worked for four hours a day after the school. She had troubles passing the hairdressing license exam, which she described as very difficult. That she finally passed the exam on the eighth attempt was part of her account of her resilience to difficulties: “ch’iljŏn p’algi” (“falling seven times and getting up eight times”), she said, citing a saying consisting of four Chinese characters.

After recollecting the tribulations of dangerous industrial work and everyone’s opposition to her employment in her younger years, she sounded somewhat triumphant when she said that those who had opposed her employment and career as a hairdresser had changed their minds and were now in agreement that her occupation had been a good thing. The contended tone emanating from personal success and getting her own way was also evident in her description of the development of her relations to her mother-in-law from strain to harmony. The mother-in-law had ended up living with her third son, Hong wŏnjang’s husband, because she could not get along with her oldest daughter-in-law, the wife of her second son. (The first-born son had passed away earlier.) Both Hong wŏnjang and her mother-in-law were Protestant Christians, but the oldest daughter-in-law was not, which also facilitated the choice of the old woman’s residence.

First there were confrontations with mother-in-law. As you know I have a strong personality, but now we live in harmony like a mother and a daughter. My husband is the third son, but mother-in-law couldn’t get along with the oldest daughter-in-law. Now we have lived together for 16 years.

Most of the strain had arisen from disagreements over the management of household finances, of which Hong wŏnjang claimed to observe more responsible practices than those she ascribed to her mother-in-law. Nevertheless, Hong wŏnjang did not attribute the discord only to her mother-in-law’s wasteful habits but also to her own stubborn personality.

There were no special reasons why mother-in-law wanted to live as if she had been rich, she just wanted it, isn’t that normal? She would buy on credit (oesang) or take curb loans with a high interest, but one cannot live like that, it’s going to end in bankruptcy. In the beginning we had quarrels because of that, because I wanted to live within our income. I want to live so that if I earn five I use three and save two... And to be able to buy a house of our own so that we wouldn’t need to pay rent and worry ourselves over other people’s intentions (nunch’iral poda) and we could provide a stable environment for the children. Otherwise it could harm their development.
Hong wŏnjang continued that her husband was at first partisan towards his mother, and took sides with her rather than with his wife. As time passed, however, he began to listen more to the opinions of his wife, and as the hairdresser expressed it, “he started following me.” Similarly with their initial opposition to her choice of work, she said that both the husband and the mother-in-law were now grateful for that development. A small episode concerning attendance at the funeral of the hairdresser’s paternal uncle (chagūn abŏji, father’s younger brother) illustrates the delicate power relations within the family. When telling me about it, Hong wŏnjang mentioned first that earlier in her marriage her mother-in-law didn’t like her keeping in contact with her natal family. Her husband was at first against her attending the funeral, even though “it was not going to be a vacation trip,” as Hong wŏnjang expressed it. The mother-in-law took her side and said she should go, and the husband later came to her to admit that he had been wrong.

Hong wŏnjang’s accounts of her predicaments situate her within the pattern of Korean marital and affinal relations. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has been characterized as potentially strained and conflict-laden both in rural villages (Janelli and Yim 1982: 40–1, Kim Myung-hye 1996: 186–7, Cho Haejoang 1988: 76, Yi Kwang-gyu 1975:185–204) and in contemporary urban Korea as well (Cho 1988: 221–2, Kim Myung-hye 1996). Even though postmarital residence is nowadays mainly neolocal, the daughter-in-law is incorporated into the household and extended kin of the husband, and even if there is not the kind of direct coercion and authority over the daughter-in-law ascribed to premodern households, the daughter-in-law still faces the management of the relationship with her parents-in-law and their indirect authority based on notions of patrilineality and the filiality of a son towards his parents (Kim Myung-hye 1996). Hong wŏnjang’s account is reminiscent of a key issue in conflicts between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law: the affection and attention of the man – husband and son (Yi 1975: 194–8, Janelli and Yim 1982: 40).

Another point of strain mentioned by Hong wŏnjang that finds resonance in accounts of Korean kinship is an in-married daughter-in-law’s contact with her natal family. According to the Confucian notion of formally strict patrilineality, “outmarried daughter is a stranger” (ch’ulga œein), leaving the family of her birth and starting the long process of becoming a member of her husband’s lineage. Contacts with the natal family were considered to hinder the daughter-in-law’s adjustment to her new family, and too close geographical and emotional proximity between in-laws would also lead to conflicts (Janelli and Yim 1982: 40–1, Brandt 1971: 122–3; Yoon Hyungsook 1989: 84–6). Affinal relatives, towards whom the principles of solidarity and mutual obligations were also valid, were better to be kept at a distance compared to the
members of the patrilineage, as manifested in the common Korean proverb “the outhouse and in-laws should be far from the house” (ibid). It should be added that besides the structural possibility of conflict or a daughter-in-law’s hardships in a new family, affinal relations have also always been a potential resource. In terms of Confucian patrilineal kinship and its ritual manifestations, affinal relations lack the ideological authority of formal kinship groupings, but contacts in actual situations and the notions of solidarity and reciprocal obligations remarked by Brandt also endow affinal relations with potential. This had been the case with Chŏng wŏnjang and her in-laws.

Hong wŏnjang portrayed herself as different from others – her husband and people in the neighborhood – in many respects, of which one trait was her assertion that she is not very interested in money. The arrangement in which she gave all her earnings to her husband to be taken care of was indeed unusual, as it is usually the wife who is responsible for the management of household finances. Her sense of difference from others in the neighborhood in the width of her worldview and in her social consciousness may also have induced her to overemphasize the distinction in this characteristic as well, as she recalled that the neighborhood women had thought that she was not sensible for giving her money to her husband like that.

Despite her claim to monetary disinterest, there were occasions when she used money to express social distinctions, or to paraphrase Marshall Sahlins (1994: 416), to transform social properties into market value measured in money. She recounted an argument with her husband over wedding congratulation money to be given in two separate weddings, one in her own natal family and the other in that of her husband’s. Her husband wanted to give an equal sum to both parties, but she insisted that her affines be given less, “because the money given to my side will come back but the money given to his [the husband’s] older brother’s family will be lost, because the older brother’s wife will waste it all.” She credited the difference in opinion to the contrast between their occupations and ensuing worldviews, emphasizing the dissimilarity of their livelihoods by using colloquial terms that have a slightly disparaging tone: “I am a trader (changsakkun), and you are a monthly wage earner (wŏlgāpchaengi). There is no way I’ll make unprofitable business.”

Accounts of discord or confrontation and a subsequent settlement in her favor were central to Hong wŏnjang’s accounts. She usually presented herself as the one with the strongest will, whose opinion was eventually accepted by the others. She also described her attitudes towards family life as somewhat Western. She did not want to be ready at all times to serve other members of the family. “That’s why others say that I’m the bad person of the family. (…) My husband is more Korean in that sense, but he has been changing a lot. He does his own share [of family chores], he cleans up well after himself.” Even
in this example Hong wŏnjang asserted that her own character had played a significant or even decisive part in her husband’s change; she wanted to have it her own way, and others followed her in the end for their own good.

The character trait that has made Hong wŏnjang’s personal triumphs in the family possible has been her steadfastness, resoluteness, or persistence: kojip. She had been able to turn to her advantage the same feature of personality for which her mother had given her a spanking when she was young. The same term was used by Chŏng wŏnjang in her characterizations of herself: thanks to her kojip in building up her wealth, she could live well even if she had give up work immediately. In her account, the kojip of women with a skill is all about their being able to live by the skill of their own hands. People who do not have much education can make a fair living that way. Chŏng wŏnjang’s kojip was also manifest in her being able to compete against the other shops in the neighborhood.

The Husbands: Women’s Gendered Characterizations

It was very intriguing to hear both Chŏng wŏnjang and Hong wŏnjang describe themselves as being “like a man” in some respects, and talking of their husbands in terms which are not associated with masculinity or men in general, but with femininity. Chŏng wŏnjang said that her personality was a bit masculine: “I have a lot of boldness (paetchang), and I want to go out, outwards. I can’t live otherwise.” With “going out” she meant being outside the household and home. She told me this after her account of the nurturing her husband received from his mother when young, and his gentleness and disinterest in earning money. Hong wŏnjang described the differences between herself and her husband in a similar manner: “I am open to the world (spreading her arms to show it) and talkative, but he is more closed (closing her arms over her chest) and doesn’t speak much.” For Hong wŏnjang as well as Chŏng wŏnjang, the traits of femininity and masculinity were in the reversal of some gendered roles. When Hong wŏnjang remarked of the keeper of the barber-shop in the same street (after I had successfully responded to the banter of his wife in Hong wŏnjang’s shop) that he is gentle (yanjŏnhada), nice and soft-mannered, unlike the boisterous and loud-talking wife, she likened the barber’s characteristics to her own husband: “They have changed roles, a bit like in my own family.” Hong wŏnjang’s “masculinity” appeared, according to herself, in her treatment and rearing of her daughters; she did not want them to be too dependent on their mother, so they sometimes even asked, “Uri ŏmma majo?” (“Are you really our mother?”). “But their father is different, he is like ‘my children’” (showing an embracing gesture). Household money management, which was referred to above as a marker of distinction for Hong
5. Women as Shop Proprietors

wŏnjang, was another matter in which she saw a reversal of gender roles: “In our family my husband takes care of the financial matters... I am a bit man-like and my husband is a bit woman-like in this regard.”

Chŏng wŏnjang, when describing her personal characteristics as a bit man-like, said that there are hairdressers’ husbands who get angry if they hear their wife talking and joking with a customer. “They might rush from the back room to the salon and tell the customer to leave.” As mentioned above, hairdressing salons have been mainly a women’s domain until quite recently; situations like this, of which I have only Chŏng wŏnjang’s account, illustrate the position of hairdressers as independent shop keepers and their potentially precarious position vis-à-vis Korean gender roles. Chŏng wŏnjang had no such problems. She talked of her husband in terms which also appear among “key words” in Nancy Abelmann’s recent work as used by her female informants to conceptualize, order, and make sense of their lives and their own personalities: yamjŏnhada is about being gentle, modest, kind, and ch’akhada means similarly gentle, nice and proper – virtues of traditional femininity. Abelmann describes these terms, as used by her informants, as traits that have been ascribed to and expected of women in premodern Korea, and which women were obliged to endure (ch’amda); in contemporary Korea these characteristics make the female person appear behind the times and even stupid (Abelmann 2003: 63–85). The gentleness or kindness that Chŏng wŏnjang attributed to her husband was not about him opposing her occupation outside the home – “a man has to have [economic] capabilities if he is going to oppose” – but about his attitudes, manners and cooperativeness. His style when driving a car was yamjŏnhada, letting everybody cut in front of them. He was ch’akhada not only in his helpful attitude towards his wife, but also in his inexperience of the struggles of the world, how he had been nurtured (yeppŏhada) by his mother in childhood, and later being supported by the commercial abilities of his wife after his apparently unsuccessful salaried employment.

Chŏng wŏnjang’s husband had a lot of leisure time that he often spent at his wife’s salon thanks to the rotation system of private taxis in which two days of work are followed by one day off. Moreover, as they lived at several kilometers’ distance from the shop, he took her to the salon every morning, drove his shift, and in the evening when the day was done they drove home together. His help in the shop was also daily. For example one morning when I dropped in for a moment at the salon before the place had opened, the couple was having a breakfast in the back room. Chŏng wŏnjang sighed that she did not feel like working now that it was Tuesday. (She had originally kept every Tuesday off, but due to competition she closed only every second Tuesday.) She stayed in the back room resting, while her husband cleaned the sa-
lon and put things in order for the day. First he swept hair from the floor with a broom and mopped it, then arranged salon paraphernalia such as towels, and finally put on rubber gloves and washed some hairdressing equipment.

The “outgoing nature” and “boldness” of Chŏng wŏnjang and the almost belittling but appreciative manner in which she talked about her husband somewhat contrasted to her more deferential bearing in the presence of her husband, observable both in speech patterns and in bodily postures, thus superficially conforming to the notions of household gender hierarchy. This could also be observed in Hong wŏnjang’s shop, but in distinction from her colleague, her deference was not reflected in her linguistic practices, as she addressed her husband mostly in the blunt panmal style, while Chŏng wŏnjang applied more honorific or elevating verbal endings. Hong wŏnjang’s husband spent much less time in his wife’s salon than his counterpart in Chŏng wŏnjang’s place, but he too was an almost daily visitor. He would normally come to his wife’s place shortly before closing time at 10 pm, help to pull down the aluminum shutter covering the shop front and walk with her back home. Despite Hong wŏnjang’s assertive manner in her talk about her husband in her private conservations with me, if her husband and I happened to be in the shop at the same time (I often deliberately timed my visit so that we would be) she often slightly withdrew herself from the company as if to assume a wife’s domestic role. It was he who told her to bring something for us to drink from the neighboring grocery store, something to which she normally complied.

Yumin’s Mother and Her Garment Mending Shop

To extend the discussion of women as keepers of small businesses beyond the specificities of hairdressers, and the personalities and circumstances of Chŏng wŏnjang and Hong wŏnjang, I now turn to Yumin’s mother, the keeper of a garment mending shop. She worked alone at her sewing machine and ironing board, fitting and repairing customers’ clothes. Her shop, which had opened the year before I first brought my torn coat for repair, was in a small room on the street level of a typical three-story multi-household townhouse. Yumin’s mother was an unassuming woman in her late 40s. She always invited me to sit down in her small shop, and the only occasion I was asked to leave for a moment was when a customer needed to try on a piece of clothing. She was a pleasant person to talk with, offering honest answers to my questions and thoughtful opinions on the Korean society and culture.

Yumin’s mother was born in a village in the countryside, where her parents farmed and operated a small shop on the side, which sold items like biscuits, nougat candy, pop rice (ppŏngt’wigi), and cigarettes. Her father passed
away when she was eight, and they moved to her maternal aunt’s place in a
town on the east coast. They lived there for two years and then moved to
Seoul. Her mother also died quite early, when Yumin’s mother was twenty.
She had gone to work in a factory when she was 17 after finishing middle
school. It was a ski garment factory, part of the quickly growing export indus-
try, where women’s labor force was in demand. She took high school classes
in the evening school and received a high school diploma. That helped her
into a better-paying position in the factory, where she stayed until she got
married in the late 1970s at the age of 23. She stayed at home raising their two
children who were born around the turn of 1980s, and when they started go-
ing to school she resumed working little by little. Later she went back to a fac-
tory job, and was able to earn well, better than what she could earn later in
her own shop. She had thus a long working history in wage employment, al-
together 15 years, before opening the shop, and a solid skill to support her
self-employment. The momentum to open the garment mending shop was
the economic crisis. Work in the factory diminished, and she quit for good
and decided to use her sewing skill on her own. Startup expenses such as a
second-hand sewing machine, a few other pieces of equipment, the shop de-
posit, and a telephone line were low, no more than three times the average
monthly income she later earned from the business.

When I first got to know Yumin’s mother and started visiting her shop,
there was often another woman in her company at work. At that time she oc-
casionally had an unemployed friend, also a skilled seamstress, helping her
during busy periods because she preferred that to working very long hours
alone, and she also wanted to help her friend in time of need. During the so-
called IMF era people had their clothes mended more than previously, and
the poor state of the economy also kept the number of jobs in manufacturing
industries low. After the onset of the crisis, these kinds of garment mending
shops had increased in number due to greater demand, but layoffs and wors-
ening labor market conditions also had driven seamstresses into self-
employment. Seen from Yumin’s mother’s perspective, the situation changed
quite soon. In the spring of the same year she was doing all the work in the
shop by herself, as her workload did not require additional assistance, and
there was also new employment available in garment manufacturing for her
friends. On one occasion, when there happened to be more work at hand than
normally and she would have liked to have some help, she couldn’t get any of
her friends to come, and she needed to work until 8.30 or even 9 instead of
the usual 7 pm. She would not extend her working hours by coming to the
shop earlier than about 10.30, and kept her daily routine of getting up at 7.30,
sending her high-school son to school and doing some exercise in the small
mountain behind their house. The improved job situation of her friends re-
flected the conditions of Korean garment factories, which are mostly very small establishments of only a few employees, and very responsive and sensitive to market fluctuations, quickly adjusting to changes in demand (Kim Yang-hűi and Sin Yong-nam 2000).

Most of the customers in Yumin’s mother’s place were women. On one occasion I remarked about this after an older man had brought a pair of trousers to be repaired – he was the first man whom I had seen coming there alone – and she mentioned that some of her customers had also been younger men with their spouses. Some division of clientele by gender existed between Yumin’s mother’s shop and neighborhood laundries, which usually also do garment mending and alteration, but there is no such general division of gendered space as is notable between hairdressing salons and barbershops. From my observations in Yumin’s mother’s garment mending shop and in a couple of laundries in the area, in general men who had clothing to be mended or
altered frequented laundries, and women sought a repair shop, but this was more a consequence of the individual keepers than the social perception of the appropriateness of patronage. Laundries as well as garment mending shops are often kept by married couples. In 2001, a garment mending shop kept by a couple opened in Kolmok Street; and Mr Yu, the younger colleague of Grandfather Kwôn, had originally operated his laundry with his wife, until she had to seek wage employment in a small garment factory down the street due to lack of work in their own business.

Yumin’s mother compared her present self-employment favorably to her earlier work in a garment factory. When she told me that her friend who had assisted her occasionally had found employment in a garment factory, I asked whether she would think of returning to wage employment. She was not contemplating going back to a factory even though she would perhaps have been able to earn more by doing piecework, because for the better earnings she would have had to put in very long hours, and from her former experience she know that it would have been physically too demanding and exhausting.

In the factory I was paid by the number of clothes I sewed. Working diligently one could earn money, but it was just too tiring. The working hours were very long; I had to go there at 8 or 9 o’clock in the morning and work until 8, 9, or 10 o’clock in the evening to make the income. Tiresome, it was so tiresome. And I’m not so young anymore.

She considered self-employment very good as far as time was concerned so that her “mind was at peace.” Moreover, with her own shop she could adjust her schedule to suit herself and her household, while in the workplace she had had to ask the manager for permission to go somewhere.

Yumin’s mother’s account reminded me of the characteristic of women’s employment which some other shopkeeper informants had mentioned and with which I was familiar from the literature, namely that with advancing age women become increasingly disadvantaged in wage employment and are more likely to seek income opportunities in self-employment. After I had asked her if she would consider returning to factory piecework, she commented that when women get older they all want to have some kind of a small business (châyôngdop). “If the business is good one can make money, but it can turn out bad, too. Many are afraid of failing.” Wanting clarification of her notion of “all women,” I asked what kind of women were those who wished to have a business when they got older. She answered that “Professional (chŏnmunjik) women have no problem, but it is those who work in factories or in places like restaurants. They save money and try to open a business in the field in which they have been working.” In this sense her working career had been typical for a woman in Korea: wage employment before marriage; staying at home after marriage or birth of children; slow return into
working life beginning from a small side job based at home; employment outside of home and finally self-employment when things like personal and familial circumstances and future earning and working prospects were considered.

When asked, Yumin’s mother did not primarily mention economic necessity as a reason to start the business, but on many occasions she talked about the need to earn money, and it was evident that income from the shop was indispensable in their present situation. The educational expenses of the two children were going to be at their highest until both had graduated from a university, and to my question she answered that her husband’s income would not have been sufficient for the family’s expenses.

On another occasion she contemplated that she would like to continue keeping the shop only until the children’s university education was over. Yet, besides the monetary necessities, she also expressed personal satisfaction in having an opportunity to leave the confines of the household and in the social pleasure of meeting people outside home. When I inquired if she had thought of staying at home after the factory work finished, she said that she had given that a thought. “But what is there [at home] for me to do? To look on when my husband comes home and goes to sleep? That’s all he does there. I don’t make much money on this, but this work is enjoyable (chaemi itta), it’s not heavy, and I get to meet people. (…) I think women should also have a job.” On a later instance she mentioned that shopkeeping has exerted a positive influence on her personality, because meeting people has made her more open and talkative. However, despite her positive appraisal of shopkeeping, she was not unambiguous about it, and at time she expressed wishes to be able to quit the business as soon as circumstances allow: “I would like to have leisurely time, to go to the mountains, to learn something, to do things that I want to do. I wish I could finish with this soon.”

**Household Work and Women’s Work Outside of Home**

Yumin’s mother’s assertion that she had grown to dislike housework (chibanil) during the time she had been keeping shop appeared to be a personal commentary on the contradictions between women’s household work and the duties and demands of the shop, and on the consequences of women’s participation in employment and other “social life” (sahoe saenghwal). She remarked that wives who go to work outside the home (to do pakkani, “outside work”) all learn to dislike housework: “It happens to everybody.” Pakkani, “outside work”, is a literal and conceptual opposite of chibanil, household work, literally “house-inside work.” The latter is what her husband had been raised to avoid, according to her. “He thinks that the woman has to do all the
housework even if they both work outside the home (*matp'o riɾu hada*). He had been used to that ever since he was small.” On a later occasion, after asking me how things are in Finland, she again pointed out that her husband is of the generation which expects women to do all the work at home. She provided a cultural context to her account of her husband’s upbringing by citing two Korean proverbs on gender roles and men’s proper spheres: “If a man goes to the kitchen his ‘chili’ (penis) will fall off (*namjaga puok’e turogamy’on koch’uga tt’orjinda*), and “if a man enters the kitchen he cannot achieve big things” (*namjaga puok’e turogamy’on k’un il mot handa*).

When talking about the implications of both husband and wife of the family working outside home, Yumin’s mother quoted yet another proverb about gender relations and gender ideology to illustrate the kind of attitudes towards women’s work outside home that used to be common among men: “Women and plates will break if they are taken out.” Wryly she added that in fact men were mainly afraid that their wives might get involved in affairs with other men, which was a suspicion based on their own behavior. She further described that it (the old days) was the time when the most important criterion for a good wife was that she was able to take care of the household in a good womanly manner, *yamj’nhage* (from *yamj’nhada*, gentle, kind). (In distinction from Chöng w’onjang above, Yumin’s mother used the term *yamj’nhada* in its most common gender-associated meaning of feminine virtue.) “But nowadays the most important thing is the ability to earn money, and that’s why women in professional occupations are in the greatest demand,” referring to spousal choice. She added that in today’s Korea both husband and wife work in order to live better.

Yumin’s mother did not see her husband’s lack of contribution as a problem, but rather as a fact that could not be helped: he had been raised that way. Unlike many women who operated shops alone or with their husbands, she did not do any household chores such as preparing side dishes for consumption at home or meals to be eaten during workday while tending the shop. She had the leeway to do the tasks at home, and the garment mending business made it also possible that she could close the place and have lunch at home, which was close enough. Nor did she have unoccupied moments in the shop waiting for customers, as she was able to fill all the opening hours with work. Besides finding that her own inclinations correspond with the notion that all women working outside the home come to detest housework, the shop also offered her an opportunity to be away from home where she would have had to attend to her taxi-driving husband who worked from afternoon till night.
With his private taxicab, Yumin’s mother’s husband was a colleague of Chŏng wŏnjang’s husband. He had started driving a taxi “during the Chun Doo-hwan era,” referring to the president of South Korea from 1980 to 1987. This occupation, often associated with sŏmin or “ordinary people” for its lack of status and also for its frequent contacts and indiscriminate proximity to people, was common in the neighborhood, and there were a many taxis parked in front of houses – in itself a marker of status lower than middle class for the area. Even if the national economy was supposed to have recovered after the crisis, taxi driving remained economically difficult. Nevertheless, due to the increasing competition in examinations for access to secured public sector jobs, the demand for exam cramming dormitories (kosiwŏn) was high. In such a situation, Yumin’s mother’s husband sold his taxi vehicle and license in early 2000, and rented and started to operate an exam dormitory in another part of the city in hopes of a better and more secure income and alleviation of the stress from driving and from long hours behind the wheel.

**Conclusions: Work, Earning and “Life Energy” of Businesskeeping Women**

Despite scant recognition, the input of women’s economic activity has retained its importance and actually increased, as a growing proportion of women take part in wage labor, and self-employment remains and is reproduced as a viable alternative to salaried employment and as a source of income for women. This, I think, is an economic parallel to the “ongoing legacy of women’s symbolic contributions to the maintenance of premodern elite status” (Abelmann 2003: 149). What is apparent from the accounts of the three shopkeeping women is a remarkable amount of self-esteem and pride in their life choices, achievements and present life as self-employed shopkeepers, despite the relative lack of qualifications such as education from which individual and family status emanates.

The main concept which has emerged in the life stories and lives of these women, and is looming in the background if not made explicit, is “economic capability,” or saenghwallyŏk. That is not only relative to the earning and household support capability of the women but also to the work and economic abilities of their husbands, as this and many other gender-related terms are defined through the women’s relationships to the terms and through everyday household gender relationships. Related to the capability of the women as earners and family supporters was the concept of kojip, stubbornness or perseverance, which as a trait of personality enabled the women to exercise their saenghwallyŏk potential in businesskeeping and family lives.
5. Women as Shop Proprietors

Despite much of the women’s self-identification as capable earners and household supporters taking place in relation to their husbands, the men were not reduced to humorous stereotypes of the “shutter man,” someone who lives on the income of his shopkeeper wife with his only responsibility being to pull up the aluminum shutter of his wife’s shop in the morning and pull it down again in the evening. The shutter man character is mostly associated with shopkeeping women with good earning prospects such as pharmacists and hairdressers, and it evokes the image of another Korean male character subsisting in the shadow of an economically strong woman: a shaman’s husband, who only needs to bang the drum for his wife while she performs the ritual and earns the living. The husbands emerging in the women’s talk, even if falling short of the ideal of the breadwinning family head freeing his wife to manage the household and children’s education, were caring persons who understood – if not always initially at least as time passed – what was beneficial and necessary for the family.

It is still obvious from the talk of the women that the economic setting had influence on the way the women regarded and discussed their husbands. It was especially evident in the women’s characterizations of themselves as men-like in some respects and finding feminine traits in their husbands or applying to them terms which are mostly used for female-like aspects of personality. In actual daily interaction the gender norms were maintained in similar ways to those described by Chung Cha-whan in a Seoul migrant settlement in the 1970s: any reversals of the gender norms were kept disguised if possible (Chung 1977: 143–145). In cases of women tending a business with their husbands, I often encountered women expressing the desire to be able to stay at home, but from the women protagonists of this chapter I did not detect grievance or discontent towards their husbands in this regard. The women were appreciative of their husbands for not obstructing their career choices even if a lot of female determination may have been necessary along the route.
CHAPTER SIX

Fingering of Cash, Meanings of Money

This chapter treats the neighborhood shopkeepers’ relations, sentiments, and opinions concerning money and cash in Korean capitalism and Korean culture. I delineate and discuss money and cash in the lived worlds of the shopkeepers in relation to Korean cultural concepts and categories of money in historical, stratified, and gendered perspective as well as comparative anthropological views. Initially, I was not particularly prepared to investigate and discuss money and cash as a specific and separate topic, but they emerged as a significant issue in the everyday experience of my informants. The conceptual importance of money and cash became increasingly evident as the field research proceeded and references to money in conversations, observations, and other data mounted up. Money and cash were concepts and objects which were invested with certain qualities such as laboriousness of earning, and associated with notions about men and women as well as social stratification. Money appeared as a daily topic of talk, and cash was a concrete object not only in business transactions with customers and suppliers but also in many facets of the everyday lives of my informants as well as in ritual contexts. A brief episode from Chŏng wŏnjang’s hairdressing salon illustrates the characteristic of money as an organizing concept among the shopkeepers, the direct relationship of the shopkeepers’ livelihood to concrete cash, and their physical handling of it, colloquially expressed as tonul manjida (to touch, feel, or finger cash). The hairdresser first sighed that because of rain there were no customers, but when I asked if there really had not been any customers, she grabbed money out of the pocket of her apron and said “Oh no, I have made this much money today.”

Perspectives of Money and Cash in Korea

In his discussion of the lack of moral fallibility in the market realm of exchange in India, Jonathan Parry contrasts the Indian views on commerce with the morally condemning attitudes of medieval European philosophers-theologians towards trade and money (Parry 1989: 78, 84). These attitudes were part of one of the two prominent Western discourses of money and commerce stemming from Aristotle, being taken up by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century and culminating in Karl Marx (Bloch and Parry 1989: 2–3). While the self-sufficient household and production for use had been the ideals behind the Western notions of the moral perils of commerce and money, Parry suggests that in India there has never been an ideal of house-
hold, caste, or village self-sufficiency which would have supported moral vil-
ification of commerce and money like in this particular Western tradition, but
instead the premise has been a division of labor and interdependence be-
tween castes and groupings of other levels (Perry 1989: 85).

The Western tradition that sees moral fault in money and commerce – the
other one being a discourse about money as essentially suited to human pro-
pensities (Bloch and Parry 1989: 3) – finds its apparent equivalent in East
Asian Confucian thought and especially in how it was perceived and carried
out in policies in the premodern Korea. In the traditional East Asian classifica-
tion of four basic occupations, which were scholars, farmers, artisans, and
traders (sa-nong-kong-sang) in the order of moral completeness and worth,
commerce ranked the lowest. Agriculture was deemed the morally most le-
gitimate form of economic activity and the most acceptable method to create
wealth, and commerce was accepted as necessary in circulating goods, but
any excessive commercial activity and acquiring of excessive profit would
lead to reduction in production of agricultural necessities (Palais 1996: 1006–
7). The governmental policies of the Chosŏn dynasty unfavorable for ad-
vancement of commerce did not fundamentally change until the opening of
ports in 1876. The attempt of the yangban aristocracy with its monopoly of
government bureaucracy in premodern Korea to keep commerce and com-
mmercial agriculture as insignificant as possible was not unique among pre-
modern elites, but it was unique in how well it succeeded (Shin 1978).

Chinese currency had been circulating in Korea for more than a millen-
nium during the early state formations in the Korean peninsula as a conse-
quence of close cultural and economic relations with China, before official
state coinage was minted for the first time in Korean history at the end of the
10th century during the Koryŏ dynasty (Palais 1996: 51–52). Trade, commerce
and media of exchange such as money were more developed in Koryŏ and
even in the preceding Silla dynasty than during the early period of the subse-
quent Chosŏn dynasty, when Korean visitors to Japan and China remarked on
the wide use of cash in those countries compared to its limited circulation in
their own country (ibid: 56). Monetarization as well as commercialization of
the economy remained low; several coinages were issued, but other means of
exchange like grain and cloth remained widely in use. Ultimately, the restric-
tive economic policies of the government and the consequently limited com-
mmercial exchange could not maintain cash as a medium of exchange, and
population’s loss of trust in the value of paper and copper currencies led to a
virtual disappearance of cash from circulation from the beginning of 16th
century to the latter half of 17th century (ibid: 59), during which time grain
and cloth were used as medium of exchange. After initial attempts to revive
minting of coinage in the middle of the 17th century, minting was fully begun
at the end of the century, and cash became a permanent part of commercial exchange and economy (ibid: 875).

The growth of monetary and commodity economy contributed also to the growth of Seoul in the 18th century (Ko Tong-hwan 1998: 67), as the capital was the center of circulation of goods and the destination of the farmland rent shipments to absentee landlords residing in Seoul, and the location of government-licensed traders and the increasingly numerous unlicensed merchants. By the 19th century, all economic activity in Seoul was based on monetary economy (ibid: 75). In his study of the development of commerce in Seoul, Ko Tong-hwan cites the words of an arrested bogus inspector from a contemporary document to illustrate how the use and importance of money in Seoul at the time was sensed: “Seoul is different from the provinces. There is nothing that money cannot do.” Ko quotes also a contemporary writer who distinguished Seoul as follows: “Seoul lives on money, and the eight provinces live on grain” (ibid). This recalls in an intriguing manner the modern-day sensibilities concerning the association of Seoul with money and its influences, which among my informants were prominent especially in the talk of Grandfather Kwŏn, who uttered virtually identical words to the 18th-century quote in his assessment of the nature of Seoul and of the power of money compared to other regions.

Despite the expansion of monetary economy and the growth of commerce and wage labor during the late Chosŏn period, such developments should not hide the basic characteristic of a limited scale in the complexity and breadth of the monetarized and commercialized economy. The developments of the late 19th century and early 20th century with the opening of ports, and the entry of especially Japanese merchants and commercial capital impaired the modest commercial development that had taken place in pre-opening Korea, and the accumulated capital mainly vanished in that process (Kang Man-gil 1975: 202). Before that, since the most important kind of circulation from the point of view of the ruling class was tribute, and since legal foreign trade was limited to tribute relations with China and very restricted exchange with Japan, the monetary economy stayed within the small and underdeveloped commercial sphere (Palais 1996:1001)\footnote{Kang 1975 lists several forms of illegal trade during Chosŏn, for example that of ginseng.}

In addition to a hegemonic discourse based on Confucian thought which has deemed money and commerce as morally perilous, running the risk of enticing the peasantry to neglect their livelihood, it is also possible to deline-\footnote{By the figures of tax revenues collected in cash, monetary economy actually regressed in the 19th century: in 1820, 53% of taxes were collected in cash, but only 36% in 1876 (Palais 1996: 998).}
ate another thread of thought or attitude, which has been subordinate to the hegemonic Confucian ideology, and which has matter-of-factly acknowledged the importance and power of money under the disguise and restraint of Confucian ideology. The contemporary quotes from Ko Tong-hwan’s work concerning the significance of money in Seoul during the late Chosŏn period illustrate this facet. In the concluding epilogue to his grand work on Chosŏn dynasty statecraft, James Palais notes that the ruling strata – nobility, yangban, landlords, and the wealthy – compromised the ideals of Confucian frugality and restraint of profit and luxuries, and allowed themselves to enjoy the lifestyles of conspicuous consumption, while commoners, the land-tilling agricultural majority of the population, had to follow the ideals because of material circumstances rather than due to abstract morals (Palais 1996: 1006). Palais also conveys the views of the early 18th-century scholar Yu Su-wŏn, who sought cultural explanations for the undeveloped state of Korean commerce and recurrent shortages of cash: Koreans tended to honor appearance over reality, so that even profiteers acted publicly as if they disdained and avoided commerce, and they kept their cash savings and lending activities secret; public disdain of commerce also discouraged the spending of cash and prevented merchants earning, which inhibited the proper circulation of currency (Palais 1996: 968).

Notwithstanding ideologies defining commerce and circulation of money as morally perilous, elite position, political power, and cultural hegemony were not disassociated from possession of wealth. According to Laurel Kendall, old men in the village where she conducted fieldwork in the 1970s remarked sarcastically that “They used to call those who had money yangban” (Kendall 1985a: 42). A characteristic of this tradition of attitudes is that the sphere of moral neutrality of money appears larger than is common in Western cultures or that money appears as neutral in a wider array of contexts than is the case in the West (see Bloch 1989).

Commenting on the assumption common in literature that money gives rise to a particular worldview, Bloch and Parry (1989: 18–9) argue that money and capitalism did not subvert the sense of evil associated with money and profit-making in the West, but another discourse of money and commerce increasingly marginalized money-making from the devil’s domain, while not completely removing it from there. Here it is important also to note Bloch’s and Parry’s remark on Western history that urban growth, and the increase of market trade and the significance of money economy drew attention to the

67 Of the more than fifty proverbs and sayings beginning in the Korean alphabetical order with ton (money) in a compilation of Korean proverbs, most are forthright about the power and significance of money and its influence on people (Han’guk Kojŏn Sinsŏ P’yŏnch’anhoe 1991: 114–6).
moral peril of these phenomena and heightened the sense of evil innate in money (ibid: 18). The same argument can be applied to Korea as well: the economic and social developments since the end of the 19th century have given more ideological breathing space to ideas of earning and making money as advantageous for the individual and especially for the nation, but never suppressed or eliminated discourses of the potential baseness of money and disrespect of commerce, and have also contradictorily contributed to the heightened awareness of the inequalities of money.

Applying the formulations of Bloch and Perry further, it is possible to see these two traditions or attitudes towards money coexisting in contemporary Korea, even in such intertwining ways as to invite questions about the validity of the distinction itself. During fieldwork I encountered both attitudes. The moral dubiousness of money and its more firm footing in the mundane sphere of women than in the more exalted world of men was apparent for example in the statements by some shopkeeper men that they were not interested in money. The matter-of-fact attitude towards money, and money as an ordering concept of everyday life and livelihood was what I came across during the research perhaps the most often. Both tendencies attracted my attention not only because of the obvious importance of money as a concept but also because of the unexpectedness stemming from my own background as an offspring of a middle-class wage earner family.

**Changing Notions of Money: From Villages to Cities**

Research on Korean rural villages during the last decades shows changing attitudes and practices concerning money: reluctance to use money within transactions in the village except for big exchanges (Brandt 1971: 165–6); involvement in the national economy in addition to local reciprocal personalistic credit in monetary relations (Chun Kyung-soo 1984: 153–5); and family and personal relations transformed by monetary calculation and pursuit of economic profit (Kim Chin-myŏng 2001).

Vincent Brandt describes a remote coastal village in the mid-1960s. The village was beginning to experience the effects of the national economic changes (1971: 85–6), and it was increasingly drawn into non-agricultural commercial relations with the society outside the village, but which was still underprivileged in those dealings and prone to fall for outsiders’ schemes (ibid: 77–8). Agricultural or virtually any other work within the village was not remunerated with wages but compensated in tangible ways with goods such as food and drink, and the loan of agricultural or other appliances (ibid: 72). Despite the poverty of the village even by the standards of South Korea at the time and a dire need for cash, acceptance of money was shunned in favor
of collective responsibility and personal reciprocity, even to the degree that Brandt described as “contempt for hard cash.” Brandt nevertheless assumed that much of the unwillingness to receive money for work was pretended. Money was needed, it was borrowed and paid back commonly and most of the villagers were in debt (ibid: 73–4). On big ritual occasions guests donated money to alleviate costs, as is the common practice in contemporary Korea as well, and drinking shops were places of showy hospitality spending (ibid: 166). Fishing, which was the livelihood most closely connected to the South Korean monetary economy, was monetarized only in exchange relations with village outsiders except for one recent in-migrant. Brandt remarked that “When I wanted fish, they were either given to me or I was told there was none; no one would sell” (ibid: 167).

Chun Kyung-soo’s research on a similarly remote island location ten years after Brandt shows a village within the monetary economy but organized by principles of reciprocity, increasingly connected to the national economy via private traders and government agencies but inexperienced and dependent in those relations (1984: 156–67). Rotating credit associations (kye), originally organized mainly to share the burden of big family rituals such as marriages and funerals, were organized also to raise large sums of money (Chun 1984: 126–38). Still, rather than using cash in every purchase in the village shops, both the shopkeepers and the villagers were content to be in reciprocal credit (aesang) relationships, in which the shop proprietors could maintain custom and the customers overcome shortages of cash (ibid: 153–5).

Describing a village in the end of the 1980s in an undefined location, Kim Chin-myong (2001) depicts conditions in which monetarization and pursuit of economic gain had exerted profound changes on personal relations even within families. Kim quotes a village-born company employee, who accredited the changes to the villagers having acquired a “taste for money” (ton mat) (ibid: 234), using the common Korean expression for those who are considered to be excessively under the influence of money. Earning of money – economic capability – had transformed power structures so that for example mothers-in-law had for the most part become dependent on and dominated by their daughters-in-law, and an ability to earn money was valued in women instead of the traditional modesty and gentleness (yamjŏnhada) (Kim 2001: 254).

These references to ethnographic material and subsequent analysis suggest that the introduction of a monetary economy and money itself has initiated profound transformations in rural agricultural communities during the decades of rapid economic development. The sense of a breakup of traditional reciprocal communities in which commercial relations and exchanges in cash had not fettered personal intercommunity relations, and the notion of rural
difference from capitalistic and commercial modernity and from cities ruled by money is not absent from these accounts (see Appadurai 1986: 10–12), but they also reflect the general Korean sentiments about these distinctions, especially those between Seoul and the rest of the country.

Commerce, money, and monetarized human relations are not perceived to have made as profound an impact on Seoul and its residents as on residents of rural communities, for these phenomena have been understood as an original feature of Seoul. In this vein, Chǒng Sŭng-gyo and Kim Yŏng-mi (2001: 36–41) have suggested that the so-called yŏhangin, a category that consisted of non-yangban petty officials and chungin technical specialists who were often engaged also in commerce and who developed their own specific consumption and leisure practices, were more representative of premodern urban Seoul residents than the yangban officials, having also contributed the most to the contemporary perception of Seoulites. As remarked above by Ko Tong-hwan, the commercial developments during the late Chosŏn period emphasized the association of Seoul with money and its perceived influence on human relations, which was illustrated in the quote “In Seoul anything is possible with money.”

Among my informants, Grandfather Kwŏn expressed views on the influence of money on people and its association with cities and Seoul most distinctly. The topics of his talk covered a long period in time, and he had grown up as a member of an illustrious yangban lineage in a society much different from what my other informants had experienced in post-war Korea. Grandfather Kwŏn’s origins in an earlier, not fully monetarized Korea was evident in that despite his frequent references to meanings and practices of money, he often used sacks (kama) of rice as a measure and illustration of value: the number of sacks of rice that was equivalent to the salary of a master sergeant in the military police, or the price of a television set, or his entertainment expenses on a particular evening.

In his talk, money characterized cities, especially Seoul, and the changing human relations in the modernizing society. In accordance with the common discourses on temporal and spatial pasts in Korea, Grandfather Kwŏn lauded the goodness and generosity of people’s minds (insim) in the past and in the countryside compared to the present and to cities. A main characteristic was the relation to money: “Cities are so cold-hearted, and that’s why so many want to return to the countryside when they get old. Here [in Seoul] even a small cucumber costs money, but in the countryside vegetables are free, you just take what you need. People’s minds (insim) are so good.”

In Grandfather Kwŏn’s depictions of contemporary and urban Korea, money traverses status distinctions, notions of propriety and gender roles, and has an immense power to influence people and make things happen. As
he expressed it, people could become completely enslaved to money in order to earn it: “What is there that cannot be done to earn money?” (Ton pŏlgi wihae mot hanŭn ke muŏ issŏ?). The dominance of money was especially poignant during the disorder of the Korean War and its aftermath: “Girls rather surrendered their bodies than starved.” Even if human minds had been benevolent in the undefined past, the contemporary past of his manhood was characterized by the importance of money. His account of his time as a taxi entrepreneur in the 1960s illustrated his bleak view of the era: “At the time one had to have means (sudan) in order to live like that. Physical strength (ch’eryŏk) was the most important thing, and money (ton) was the most important thing. If one only had money, everything was possible.”

Geographically, Grandfather Kwŏn’s nexus of the modern urban importance of money was Seoul. “When I came to Seoul for the first time – people from countryside always admire Seoul you see – I learned to know the power of money. Even if one had killed one’s own friend one could get away with money. I got to know how great the power of money is.” The discourses of money that Grandfather Kwŏn portrayed correspond with the representations of the importance of money and its profound influence on society and human relationships and the association of these phenomena with the modernizing society and the South Korean capital in Jo Jung-rae’s (Cho Chŏng-nae) recent ten-volume novel Han’gang (Han River). It depicts South Korea of the 1960s and 1970s via the lives of numerous protagonists, most of whom are migrants to Seoul. The overwhelming significance of money characterized lives in Seoul and also defined “Seoul sentiments” (Sŏul insim). Money was needed for everything, and nothing was impossible with money: “They say everything is possible with money except raising the dead.” The novelist has the father of a poor migrant family bemoan his daughter’s delayed wages in a garment factory in the following way:

“What is money really? Just pictures on a piece of paper. If you just have it you can buy maiden’s testicles and pluck the eyelashes of a wild tiger. It’s not just an ordinary monster of a thing. But how come it sticks to those who already have it and runs away from those who are without? Such a cruel world” (Jo 2001: 124–5).

**Small Businesskeepers and Korean Money**

Maurice Bloch begins his article about the symbolism of money among the Merina of Madagascar with an account of his own embarrassment when his informants presented him with a considerable sum of money in cash at the end of his first fieldwork period in the location. At first thought, the discomfort of receiving the money stemmed from receiving it from people who were
much poorer than himself as well as from his position as an ethnographer who was going to benefit in scholarly ways from his relationship with the informants. In hindsight, Bloch noticed that his discomfort had less to do with the aforementioned explanations than with the different logics of symbolism attributed to money between the Merina and Bloch's own native culture. The issue was the money itself, and not the act of receiving something from people who had cooperated in his fieldwork (Bloch 1989: 165). For the Merina, money is not morally charged in regard to certain spheres of life and human and family relationships, and the transfer of money does not give the transaction or the relationship a special meaning (ibid: 165–6). Being outside the realm of the ancestral resources and belonging to the non-ancestral goods, money was not fundamentally different from other goods transacted in the latter domain (ibid: 178).

My own experience from the final days of my fieldwork reflects what Bloch sensed in the same situation. When I was going around the fieldwork area to make farewell greetings before leaving Korea, a keeper of a shop in Kolmok Street gave me a small sum of money, perhaps just the couple of notes she happened to have in her purse just then. Even though I had been paying attention to the use of money and cash in interaction and to transactions of cash in spheres and situations that would have been awkward in my own culture, I still felt unease at that moment on receiving cash in such a situation. The same also happened in another establishment on my subsequent visit to Seoul, when a restaurant proprietress gave me two bills worth 15 euros to "buy something to eat on your way home"; that time I was better prepared to receive the money.

My informants took it for granted, for example, that I was supported by my parents during my stay in Korea, and those with whom this issue was discussed expressed surprise that this was not the case. For Mr Pak, not living a lavish life abroad on one's parents' money was exemplary frugality, but being known as a frugal person in the neighborhood did not reflect on an individual only positively, for it gave the impression that the frugality extended also to one's relations with family and acquaintances. Mr Pak's suggestion made in his half-joking manner that I should ask my parents to send money for a new flashlight to replace the one that I had fixed with a band-aid indicated also that for him and for Koreans, monetary transactions and economic interdependence within the family are culturally expected and normal. On another occasion, when I answered his question of whether children meet their parents often in Finland by saying that children often like to profess independence and that they normally live apart from their parents even before marriage, he saw this to indicate a lack of proper affection (chǒng) between parents and children. Not being lavish abroad was appropriate thrift in not wast-
ing precious national wealth, but not accepting money from one’s parents and professing independence from them pointed to a lack of proper human relatedness and interdependence between family members.

A principal cultural characteristic in the moral neutrality of money among the Merina was that money was not an organizing concept for them (Bloch 1989: 176). Instead, Bloch, following Marx in his definition of money and trade as mysteriously creative forces in the West, notes that kinship and ancestral tombs are the Merina equivalent of trade in the West as the most important organizing concepts. While not directly maintaining it, Bloch appears to work under the assumption that the smaller market dominance of the economic setting of Merina compared to Europe was significant for the moral neutrality of money (ibid: 167). I suggest that money is an organizing concept in South Korea, especially so for small shopkeepers by virtue of their livelihood and of contemporary South Korean capitalism, illustrated by frequent references to the effects and influences of money and cash as well as the use of these phenomena in creating and organizing concepts. I also suggest that despite money being a significant organizing concept, it does not need to follow that money becomes symbolically and morally laden and non-neutral so that its use is considered awkward and avoided in contexts that Bloch suggests for Europe or the West.

Even though money is morally charged, symbolically powerful, and functions as an organizing concept in contemporary capitalist South Korea, these characteristics have not led to the confinement of money to commerce and monetary exchange, away from the domestic sphere, and these characteristics do not prevent the conversion of money from one sphere to another, from the sphere of market to that of domesticity and household. In Korea, money is not incompatible with family, household, and kin relations. Actually, conversion of money from one sphere to another – from the sphere of commerce to the sphere of household – can be said to be one main tenet in the life worlds of small businesskeepers, and a prerequisite for the reproduction of the family and household.

Money is presented and received as contributions in household rituals such as weddings and funerals – practices offered by Bloch (1989: 166) to illustrate the moral neutrality of money in Imerina. While ceremonious goods (furniture, household appliances, clothes, jewelry) form the major part of exchanges between the households of the bride and the groom in contemporary Korean matrimony (Pak Min-ja 1991a, Kendall 1996a: 166–7), money changes hands in several contexts. Accordingly, monetary contributions termed “congratulation money” (ch’ugūgūm) were also of concern to my shopkeeper informants who had weddings among their immediate kin. Congratulation money is commonly handed at weddings to the representatives of the parents.
of the bride and groom, are perceived and conceptualized not as gifts to the bride and the groom but as contributions to ritual expenses, and the sums and the contributors are recorded so that the bride’s and groom’s households can appropriately reciprocate them in the future.

Certain cash contributions in weddings are termed “price” or “charge” (kap): the cash that is given to the bride for bowing to her in-laws, starting with her parents-in-law, is termed “bowing price” (chölgap) (Kendall 1985b: 260–5), and the money or delivery fee that the bride’s parents give to the bearers (usually groom’s male friends) of the gift box sent by the groom’s family is “box price” (hamgap) (Kendall: 1996a: 166). This practice often includes serious haggling and demands for more money by the bearers (ibid: 197–201). It is possible also to present cash instead of clothes (yedan, “ritual silk”) that the bride’s family gives to the groom’s close kin to avoid the “troublesomeness” of needing to fit the clothes (Kendall 1996a: 189–9, Yoon Hyungsook 1991: 136) or to present clothing to the groom’s parents and siblings and money to the close kin (An Chông-nam 1991: 186). Funeral visitors also bring monetary contributions (pujogám), which, while having a character of an expression of condolence, are likewise with wedding contributions conceptualized as assistance or aid (pujo), and are considered to be a contribution to ritual expenses. Even though these contributions and exchanges of goods and cash are not actually termed “gifts” in Korean, it is the English-language

---

68 There was a court decision, which upheld the donation tax levied by tax authorities on congratulation money that a parliamentarian had received at his daughter’s wedding and later handed over to the newlywed couple. The tax authorities had opined that as congratulation monies are handed over to the parents or their representatives and in this particular case in consideration of the high position of the bride’s father, the money should be considered the father’s possession. The father’s side maintained that the money was given to the newlyweds, but the court decided that the tax had been appropriate, “because wedding congratulation money is an expression of sincerity intended to alleviate the economic burden of the arranger of the wedding, it must be considered as the possession of the wedding arranger except for the part that was given directly to the bride and the groom by their acquaintances” (Hankyoreh Oct 10, 1999; Munhwa ilbo Oct 10, 1999).

69 Kap (or alternatively gap in compounds) can be glossed as “price,” “fee” or “charge.” The first meaning is perhaps the most common, appearing colloquially in compound words such as kirúmkap (gasoline price).

70 One remarkable ritual context of conspicuous presence of cash are the shaman rituals, which are expensive to sponsor to begin with, and in contemporary South Korea, uninhibited in their appropriations of money and capitalism (Kendall 1996b, 2001). Offerings of cash alongside material goods are used in interactions between humans and spirits, and the gods, through the words and deeds of the shaman, can be avaricious, but the clients have monetary interests as well. "Cold cash is an important prop, as the Official [a god appearing through the shaman] extorts 10,000 won bills from the usually giggling client, decorating his cheeks, chin, forehead, and waistband with money. The gods’ demands are a measure of their power, the potentially dangerous energies that can also be turned to the benefit of their clients. “Give me more,” says the Supernatural Official. “First make me rich,” says the client (Kendall 2001: 8–9).
term that scholars prefer to use (Kendall 1996a; see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 71–3 about a similar practice in Japan), and gift-giving or gift-exchange is how they would also be designated in anthropological terms (Bloch 1989, Parry 1986).

In Korean ritual contexts the presence of cash and the exchange of money, whether termed contribution or assistance but defined as gift in English and in anthropology, suggests that money has not become conceptually distinguished from gift exchange and associated inseparably with commodity exchange. The kind of contrast between cash or money and ceremonial objects or gifts (or contrast between commercial exchange of commodities measured in money and exchange of gifts) that Bloch ascribes (see also Parry 1989: 64) to conventional anthropology does not receive support from the Korean use of cash in ritual exchanges. Further, unless it is maintained that monetary contributions in ritual contexts (weddings, funerals etc.) in Korea should not be defined as “gift”, the presence of money in Korea in spheres of gift as well as commodity exchange also challenges the notion of discontinuity or polarity between gift and commodity exchange (Gregory 1982) and the types of relations ascribed to the two principles of exchange, personal relations between people in gift exchange and objective relations between things in commodity exchange (Gregory 1982: 8).

There exists a certain degree of commodification of the exchange of goods and money in Korean rituals (see Kendall 1996a: 187–8); it is not pretended that the monetary “gift” is somehow pure or unreciprocated, and there is no ideological clout for claim of purity (Parry 1986: 466–9). This was illustrated by my informants’ accounts of ceremonious monies. Chöng wŏnjang somewhat proudly told me that she would be presenting 500 000 won (420€) as “assistance money” (pujogūm) at her nephew’s wedding even though as a paternal aunt she could have given less. (The money was approximately one fifth or one sixth of the monthly income she said she makes from the hairdressing salon.) Her colleague Hong wŏnjang was forthright about the calculative character of the monetary ritual exchanges in weddings, and she also ascribed her own calculative attitude to her occupation as a businesskeeper. She would have liked to present a smaller sum of money at her husband’s niece’s wedding than at her own niece’s wedding, because she did not expect any of the money to return from her affines unlike from her own agnatic family. (The two finally agreed to give an equal smaller sum at both weddings.) Mrs Chang corrected her husband that the proper sum to be presented to their daughter’s friend’s grieving family was not the basic 30 000 won (25€) that he suggested but 50 000 (42€), which better reciprocated that household’s earlier contributions. At the time of my fieldwork, those were regarded as the minimum basic sums to be taken to weddings and funerals, as recounted for ex-
ample by Mr Yu, who lamented the burden of such contributions when recounting his living expenses. He had just recently taken 100 000 won (€83) to his nephew’s wedding, and his wife 200 000 won to a funeral.

“Making Money is Hard”: the Laboriousness of Earning

Above I have referred to money as an organizing concept (Bloch 1989: 176) for Koreans in general and especially for the keepers of small businesses. Among the shopkeepers money is not only used to construct social categories and cultural classifications but constantly evoked as a topic of talk in consequence of its nature as an object of daily earning and something to be actively made due to the shopkeepers’ livelihood, which depends on profit from selling either one’s merchandise or personal service.

This calls attention to the Korean notion of earning or making money (tonül pölda) and the shopkeepers’ discourse of difficulty and struggle associated with it, which is commonly expressed with the verb himüläda (to be laborious, strenuous, difficult, or hard). Both these terms appear illustratively in the complaint uttered by Grandfather Kwon, “making money is hard,” quoted in the title of this section, in which he lamented the effort that he needed to put into the shop even in such an advantaged age for such a meager return—all this while recounting an adventurous experience from his teenage years. Even though I have recorded the exact wording of Grandfather Kwon in my notes on only a couple of occasions, the frequency of the allusions to the strenuousness of earning money and making a living by shopkeeping hints at a specific discourse on the issue.

Although the intensity of the talk about the arduousness of making money is particular to small businesskeepers, the notions of struggle and the hardship of working life are not. I first came up with the idea of using the title “Making money is hard” (Ton pölg i himüläda) in a presentation about my research that I gave during the fieldwork in a seminar. I asked in advance Yumin’s mother and Mrs Kang for their opinion about my chosen presentation title, and both agreed that it was representative of shopkeepers’ sensibilities. Yumin’s mother said, in accordance with the discourses of the economic crisis and the arduousness of shopkeeping, that “It seems to be all the time more and more difficult to make money.” Still, she did not regard shopkeepers as specific in this regard: to my question of whether she thought that there was a distinction between “making money” (tonül pölda) and “getting a (monthly) salary” (wölgübül patta), she answered that there was not much difference: “Both are hard” (tul ta himüröyo). For the perceived hardships of salaried work, the discourses of illnesses that have been associated with middle-aged and middle-class wage earners since the 1990s in South Korea are a good ex-
ample. The illnesses, termed sŏnginbyŏng ("adult diseases"), are said to plague these men as a consequence of their work life: the stress of office work, overwork, work-related drinking, and subsequent estrangement from their families that in the contemporary nuclearized form allegedly fail to give the family head the support that would have been available in the traditional extended family. As the notion of "adult diseases" addresses the consequences of modernity, it is deemed to plague the vanguard symbol of modernity and economic development, the salaried middle-class man, leaving women and other social strata unaffected (Lee, June J.H. 2002).

When I asked Mrs Chang about the reason for including the word “luck” in the name of her and her husband’s meat shop, she said that it is a thing that people think positively of in Korea. To my further question of what “luck” meant for her and her family, she answered that “living well (chal salda) and earning money.” I continued by asking whether they were having any luck at the moment, to which she said that “We don’t seem to have much of it now, it’s difficult (himdālda), and business is not good. It’d be good if we had more money.” I heard expressions of the arduousness of earning money and making a living most often from women. This might be related to the gender division of family tasks, common also among the self-employed, which relegates the daily management of family assets to women; another factor in evoking the use of the notion was that besides keeping a shop on their own or with their husbands, women normally also had obligations of household work that took both time and energy.

The strenuousness of earning money with a small business does not only entail physical toil due to long opening hours and worries and stress over economic currents, but also relations with customers and neighborhood residents, and issues of social stratification and status. This was especially obvious in the case of socially ambitious Mr Chŏng. When he described his feelings about keeping the restaurant in the provincial town with the proverb “not even a dog touches trader’s money,” he explained the saying to mean that money earned in that kind of a hard way (himdulge) is not worth it. “It is money earned by showing a friendly face to customers even if you would prefer not to. It’s a matter of self-respect.”

It is not a coincidence that Mr Chŏng was the person who used the verb pŏlda mostly in the meaning of making good money and increasing one’s wealth. The connotation of the word that I encountered most often was mak-

---

71 I find the association of the notion of “adult diseases” with the salaried middle class similar to the increased governmental and scholarly attention to self-employment after the economic crisis, as self-employment became an option for many laid-off persons of the salaried middle-class.

72 The concept is included for example in the customary New Year’s greetings.
ing a living and getting by so that one is at least able to send children to a university, but Mr Čhong’s ambitions added a nuance. For making a living but not being able to gather wealth he used the expression “to eat and live” (môkkoko salda) in distinction from making a good profit, as in his assessment of the income that he was getting from the pork cutlet restaurant: “You can make a living (môkkoko salda) with that but not make money (ton pôlda).” He described the first months in the provincial town in similar terms.

The alleviation of the laboriousness of making money could be found in the making of the money itself, as even temporary success in shopkeeping could bring satisfaction in monetary terms. Using the recurring notion of how arduous earning money by shopkeeping is, I once suggested to Mr Yu that shopkeepers seemed to have it mentally hard (himdûlda) when business is slow and physically hard when business is good and the pace of work hectic. His answer was illustrative of shopkeepers’ relations to money: he responded that one can endure it with the pleasure of making money (ton pûnûn chaemi).

Despite the commonness of the discourse on the topic among the shopkeepers, I am nevertheless reluctant to suggest that they have a particular ethos of the arduousness of earning money, which would attach a specific moral value to money earned that way in distinction from for example wage work. Some informants made remarks which hinted at the specific value of hard-earned money, which I will discuss below, but I am also reminded of Mr Čhong’s words that money for which one has to endure social disparagement at the cost of one’s self-respect is not worth the difficulties. For Grandfather Kwôn, whose life trajectory had been different from that of Mr Čhong and much longer, it was worth the contemporary toil. When he compared his youth and young adulthood to his present situation, he remarked that his present livelihood made the money that he earned and his relation to it different from what it had been.

If I had known money at that time I would have made a lot of it, but I didn’t know. I had enough money, and we had money at home. I didn’t have desire (yoksim) for money then, only for women. [...] If I had had desire for money I would have made heaps of it.

Contrasted with his past, at the moment he was having a hard time (kosâng) earning the money, but he was able to feel real affection (sarang) for it. In Grandfather Kwôn’s talk the moral character of his contemporary earnings contrasted especially with some of his earlier ways of acquiring money. I did not detect a specific morally loaded characterization of the money he obtained thanks to his position as a military policeman – with it he was able to live a “good life” at the time – but the money he made by trading in Japanese products which were not legally available in Korea he defined as “not real
money.” That was in fact barren money: “I could not use it for a good purpose. I drank a lot and did all kinds of things.” In the belief of Colombian peasants in areas of commercialized and monetarized agriculture, barren money is a result of alleged contracts with devil, which help the wage laborers to increase their earnings. The barrenness of such money means that it can be spent only on luxuries, and using it for productive ends will bring only destruction (Taussig 1980: 94–6). Taussig sees the belief in contracts with the devil and the ensuing barrenness of money earned that way as being a result of a fundamental conflict between the peasant mode of production and capitalism, or between the use-values of the former and exchange-values of the latter (ibid: 133–4).

In Korea, capitalism as such and capitalistic relations of labor and market are often judged in a moralistic tone, mainly due to the issues of social differentiation and inequality which are ascribed to and defined by money. The morally toned discourse on the effects of capitalism is at the strongest in regard to “unearned income,” which is mainly associated with real estate speculation and profits from drastically increased land and real estate prices since the 1970s. Nevertheless, I am not aware of any significantly challenging cultural responses to capitalistic relations equivalent to what Taussig described and interpreted of the Columbian belief in contracts with the devil, or to the idea that contemporary unearned income would be unusable for any long-term good. Money earned in a morally dubious or an illegal way may have characteristics of barren money, as in Yumin’s mother’s remark on the tendency of money earned in an easy way not to accumulate and be savable. I had inquired of her whether she knew anyone in the neighborhood who was using ilsu loans, which are paid back in daily installments with a very high interest. She was not aware of anyone, but said that that kind of credit is common especially among young women working in bars and other drinking places, who are not able to save money because they earn it in an easy way.

**Money in Korean Households**

Above I delineated contours of Korean attitudes towards money and suggested, following Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1989: 18–9), that money and money-making activities have gained moral legitimacy and have gotten recognition as legitimate and even innate characteristics of individuals and – especially in the case of South Korea – of nations. That said, the moral considerations that follow from the residual and transformed premodern ideas of the immoral consequences of commerce and unchecked pursuit of personal profit, and from the heightened awareness of the moral dangers of money due to the growth of capitalistic money economy are present in contempo-
rary Korea as well. I have also remarked that in addition to money as an intangible concept of talk and measure of value, businesskeepers also have a direct, tangible relation to money as concrete cash, which moves through their hands and pockets.

Now I will proceed to the issue of management of money and assets in households, in which the issues of cash and money coalesce with the Korean ideas of gender and contemporary urban divisions of labor between women and men, and social stratification and emulation of status-ascribed practices. Small businesskeepers are in an interestingly ambiguous position in this regard. The livelihood of both men and women brings them into immediate physical contact with money, which is commonly expressed with the verb *manjida* (to touch, to feel, to finger). They also belong to a culture and society which finds many of the culturally hegemonic and status-enhancing practices – those related to money as well – as being associated with and emanating from strata other than the shopkeepers themselves.

The common perception in Korea is that women are more suited to manage money than men, and consequently, that management of household money and assets are women’s rather than men’s responsibility. This perception as well as the ensuing practice is common across social strata, but most of all, women’s control of household budgets is a feature of the salaried urban middle class (Janelli and Yim 1999, Moon 1990). It is also common in low-income working-class households (Kim Kyŏng-ae 1999:253–7), and neither was it a rare practice among my neighborhood shopkeeper informants. Women’s control over the household money does not entail the power to make significant decisions alone let alone formal ownership, but rather the authority, and more importantly, responsibility to manage, perform, and be informed of matters that require monetary transactions and decisions, from daily necessities to children’s school and education fees, and housing costs and real estate markets.

Attention to the gendered nature of money and monetary practices and to the association of monetary or commercial activities with either gender has not been rare in anthropology or in the social sciences in general. In her research on domestication and other processes of differentiation of money in the late 19th and early 20th century United States, Viviane Zelizer has made the remark that designation of monetary forms and practices as either male

---

73 This expression has also found its way into scholarly presentations of small shopkeepers: "[...] and especially since this occupation is commercial activity in which one has to finger cash (*hyŏnggumel manjyo hanun*), being able to utilize a reliable wife without wages is seen as a considerable capital" (Pak Min-ja 1990: 116; see also Pak Min-ja 1991b: 55). In addition to concrete fingering of cash, the use of *manjida* in regard to money can also refer to intangible control or handling.
or female tends to take place in the universal processes of “multiplication” of money by social differentiation (Zelizer 1994: 204). In her work on woman traders and their marketplace trading in Java, Jennifer Alexander quotes a remark from an early 19th century work, which would be fitting to describe contemporary Korean perceptions: the Javanese women were universally considered superior to men in matters of money, and it was common “from the common labourer to the chief of the province” to trust the financial concerns to the wife: “It is proverbial to say the Javanese men are fools in money concerns” (quoted in Alexander 1987: 29).

As Alexander’s main concern is women’s marketplace trade, she does not delve deeper into the issue of household money management. She depicts the nuclear family as an economic unit, but despite the notions of men’s monetary incapability as compared to women, it appears that the incomes of the spouses are kept separate and not pooled to be managed by either of the spouses (the wife), as is commonly the case in Korea. Women control their own incomes and property and make decisions over their businesses, but their income is spent mostly on daily necessities so that ultimately men have more money at their disposal (ibid: 20–1, 30).

The Javanese notions of money are treated in more detail in Suzanne Brenner’s work on Javanese modernity as seen through a neighborhood and its batik traders. Not only marketplace trading but also money and its control are associated with women, and men are expected to hand over their income to their wives, but cases of separate ownership and management are not unheard of either (Brenner 1998: 136–9). One aspect of this gendered ascription of money is the ideology associated with the priyai class of aristocracy and bureaucratic elite, which has held trade and pursuit of wealth in contempt and contributed to men’s disassociation from marketplace activities, which also endanger the maintenance of linguistic propriety and ultimately male status (ibid: 140–3). The other aspect, contrary and subordinate to the aristocratic ideology, is based on the Javanese concept of desire, which is more difficult for men than for women to control in regard to money and sexual affairs. Men, succumbing to their desires, are prone to spend money on women, which necessitates wives’ control of the household purse (ibid: 149–55).

What Brenner depicts about ideologies and practices in Java is intriguingly parallel to Korea: a male-centered premodern elite ideology that has looked down on commerce and money and that continues to exert influence on the contemporary society, in which wealth is an important source of status; association of women with monetary skills and responsibilities; and perception of men as ignorant or disinterested, and in contrast with the premodern elite ideology, as inclined to uncontrolled communal and reciprocal spending. In Korea, management of household income and assets has been an important
part of salaried middle-class women’s household work, as it has a direct bearing on the creation and maintenance of family status and wealth, in particular in the acquisition of family housing (Moon 1990: 33–6). Moon Okpyo suggests that especially in the families of government officials and academic scholars the division of labor, which assigns dealings with monetary matters to women, reflects the ideology that designates such matters as unbecoming for “respectable gentlemen.” She sees this most likely stemming from Confucianism (ibid: 36), which compares with similar notions of elitehood in Java.

Among Kim Eunhee’s salaried middle-class informants, control over the family budget was considered a “woman’s most important prerogative” (Yi Eunhee Kim 1993: 373). She sees the husband’s entrusting of his salary to the wife as symbolic of his role as a provider and her role as a household manager, and she also emphasizes the critical importance of women’s management of money for the household, while pointing out the burdening and restrictive aspects of the task (ibid.: 374–80). Exploring the origins and development of the present-day practice of women’s control of family money in middle-class Korean families, Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim (1999) found diverse and partial precedents both in rural practices and in contemporary urban circumstances. They recognize the apparent continuity from women’s sometimes considerable economic contributions in rural agricultural conditions to the contemporary practices, but village practices alone do not suffice to explain women’s present-day monetary control. (Here preindustrial Korea departs from what has been described of prevalent circumstances in for example Java; such female pre-eminence in Korea is a contemporary phenomenon.) The societal changes that created circumstances apt for women’s role as money managers were urbanization, monetarization of the economy, social changes that further separated the female and male spheres and contributed to women’s “housewifization” (Cho Haejoang 1988: 104–7, 2002: 173–5), women’s meager employment opportunities, economic needs of households, and also the appropriation of traditional cultural images and ideologies (Janelli and Yim 1999).

Janelli’s and Yim’s impression is that women’s control of money is not as prevalent among working-class families as it is in the salaried middle-class, but Kim Kyŏng-ae’s research on women of low-income working-class households in a city near Seoul suggests that the practice is common also among

Kim Kwang-ok summarizes the views of the members of contemporary Confucian associations (yurim), who most acknowledgingly adhere to Confucian practices, as follows: “Commercial activities and menial work are looked down on. In the past anybody engaged in commercial activity was ostracized from his lineage and his name erased from the genealogical record. Nowadays a businessman is distinguished from a merchant in that a businessman is regarded as having a white-collar job while a merchant is regarded as carrying out menial work in pursuit of profit” (Kim 1996: 206).
them. Four out of five husbands among Kim’s interviewees who had income handed over their whole paycheck to their wives, who then gave spending money back to their husbands. A remarkable aspect is that in the low-income families, which have few assets to manage and little leeway to invest money beyond the necessary expenses, the husbands who handed over their wages to their wives were seen as devoted and committed to their families, whereas those who did not were characterized as either authoritarian or uncommitted (Kim 1999: 253–5).

Kim Kyŏng-ae’s findings and my own data from the neighborhood shopkeepers suggest that the ideological and cultural motives for the circumstance that women manage the household money are significant. The specific conditions of the salaried middle class have contributed to the formation of the practice, regarded as socially normative due to the perceived representativeness and culturally hegemonic position of that stratum. The presence of those practices even when middle-class conditions are absent, among low-income wage earners and small shopkeepers, raises the question of cultural appropriation and emulation of higher-status practices. It also calls for attention to the possibility that rather than women gaining control of husbands’ income or the income from a small business, men may also conform to the perception of the proper “Korean” practice of money management without evoking an impression of competition or contention over the control of money (see Janelli and Yim 1999: 314–6).

**Money in Shopkeeper Households**

Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim suggested that because business proprietor men in old middle-class families manage most of the money of their businesses by themselves and have flexibility in their working hours, women find it more difficult to gain control of the household money. On the basis of my own material, this is conceivable, and in some households of my informant shopkeepers the husband took care of the money. Mr Pak was one of the male partners of shopkeeping couples who was principally in charge of the household money, and he also remarked that among the shopkeepers this is often the practice. Interestingly, he added that because shopkeepers always have cash at hand in their pockets (he pointed at his own pocket), they use money easily and cannot plan the use of money, so they find it difficult when business is not good. With this, Mr Pak did not explicitly refer to men’s qualities as handlers of money, but what he said was commonly given as the explanation as to why men are not suitable and qualified to be in excessive possession of cash or to operate the household budget. Pak Min-ja’s research on keepers of fruit and vegetable shops shows practices similar to those Mr Pak talked
Among Pak Min-ja’s informants, men were in charge of money in the shop, while household expenses such as housekeeping and children’s pocket money were taken care of jointly (Pak 1988: 153–5).

Still, Mr Pak’s and Pak Min-ja’s informants’ words remain partial even if they refer mainly to the shop and not to the household, as many of my informants made answers and remarks which bespoke practices and attitudes similar to accounts about the salaried middle class and laborers. A common answer given by my informants to the question of management of money, concerning both one’s own household and one’s general perception of Korean practices, was that the woman is and should be the manager of household assets. This was also the case when the husband took care of most of the transactions in the shop: domestic transactions were the woman’s task. When asked if there is a difference between wage earners and shopkeepers, the common view was that among the latter, the personally better qualified spouse is more often in charge.

What appears to be an interesting difference between Janelli’s and Yim’s account and my own material from the shopkeepers was that I could not detect hints of the kind of competitive situation or contention between the wife and the husband that they convey, in which one gains control of the purse strings and the other yields. This does not mean that there were no disagreements over the use of money – in fact I have no reason to believe that family disagreements over money were less frequent among shopkeepers than wage earners. I would describe the shopkeeper’s circumstances as one person giving and the other receiving the responsibility to keep monetary matters in order. This is the case especially among those who participate in shopkeeping on a largely equal footing; it is necessary that both are well aware of the financial situation.

In a brief reference to the management of family finances among Korean-American shopkeepers in New York City, Park Kyeyoung remarks that the Korean immigrants in the United States continue the Korean practice in which the wife usually takes care of the family money (1997:85). The socio-economic background of the Korean small shopkeepers in Park’s study as well as in general is different from their counterparts in Korea: the educational level is much higher and a considerable proportion of them have been in white-collar occupations before emigrating (ibid: 28). Park does not develop the topic any further to consider the possible change that the different occupation may have brought, or whether the immigration experience, living in the United States and the change of kinship towards centering around women

Of Park Kyeyoung’s informants, 56% had been in white-collar occupations in Korea before immigrating, but only 17% after immigration in the U.S., majority (76%) being in small business either as employers or employees (Park 1997:28).
(Park 1997: Ch. 6) has had any effect on this particular part of household management.

When inquiring from my shopkeeper informants about the practices and perceptions of management of household money, I encountered the judgment that men are less capable, less responsible, or less interested than women in taking care of money, and that management of money depends on the character and ability of the person. This reflects both the above-mentioned perception of men in contrast to women from whom responsibility and skill can be expected and required, and the conditions of small businesses as economic activity that requires monetary ability.

Suzanne Brenner’s remark about the perception that Javanese men are less capable of handling money because of their desires calls attention to Korean ideas of men as not only reproducing a premodern Confucianism-based notion of baseness of money and its unbecomingness for men, but also to ideas of men as impulsive and reckless community-oriented spenders, whose inherent qualities make them more likely than women to use money for purposes contrary to the interest of the household. Chŏng wŏnjang, who was proud of her own monetary savvy and illustrated the perception of women as monetarily skilled and obligated both in her words and bearing, answered as follows to my question about why women are in control of household money:

The habits of Korean men are the main reason. They cannot be trusted with money. If they don’t have a restricted amount of money when they go out, they continue to the next place and then to the next place. And if they see a pretty girl they don’t think about saving money. You cannot trust them with money (ton mot matkyŏyo). The culture has gone wrong.

(Apparently without self-irony, she continued by talking about the time when she as a still unmarried hairdresser went out with her colleagues: “There was thiiis much money [marking the thickness of the wad of money with her hands] at the end of the day, and then we went to a nightclub, and I drank only Western liquor. Then we went to a hotel and a sauna, us three girls, and used up every penny. That’s what we did even without boyfriends!”) Hong wŏnjang offered similar thoughts and conveyed the popular perception of Korean men’s character and the ensuing gender division of labor despite the fact that her own household did not follow the practice.

76 “Western liquor” (yangju) is often associated with extravagant consumption and upper-class lifestyle, while the Korean soju is perceived as an “ordinary people’s” drink. In Chŏng wŏnjang’s account, drinking “only Western liquor” emphasizes the conspicuousness of the occasion.
Men are irresponsible and they tend to waste money. When they go out to have fun they usually demand to pay the whole bill: “Come on, let me pay it! No, I’ll pay it!” and so on. That kind of a thing becomes a burden, not doing so that each pays his own. Consuming habits have gone wrong. Because the woman will have to take care of the household, she has to take care of the money, too.

Hong wŏnjang herself, after deducting her personal expenses, children’s private education fees and some grocery money, gave the rest to her husband to be taken care of. She admitted that their own household practice went against the common understanding of how things should be done, and it was one of the contexts which evoked her deliberations on gender roles: “In our family the husband takes care of money. I’m a bit manly and my husband is a bit womanly in this regard.” On the same occasion she added, echoing the remarks made also by some shopkeeper men, that she is not interested in money.

Hong wŏnjang’s presentation of her personal monetary practices and attitudes was a part of how she distinguished herself from the neighborhood and its people (see Chapter 5). Her assertion that she wants to live comfortably without having to think of money resonates with what Kim Kyŏng-ae remarked about low-income families: women’s management of household money was more a consequence of husbands’ aversion of a bothersome task than a proof of women’s actual authority (Kim 1999: 255). In Hong’ wŏnjang’s case her professed aversion to monetary matters was in accordance with how she presented her position and authority in the household. As she had been able to convert the minds of her husband and mother-in-law to support and follow her household-keeping practices, she also had been able to avoid the management of money. She claimed ignorance of the workings of money, even though there were occasions when she asserted a strong identity of a businesskeeper and earner of money as in the above-cited case of disagreement over the amount of congratulation money to be given in the weddings of her husband’s and her own kin. In her account, her attitudes and household practices set her apart from the other women:

I give it all to my husband. I want to live comfortably so that I don’t need to have money in my possession and take responsibility for it. If I have money I feel like somebody would come and ask me to give it to him or her. Taking care of money means that one has to know where to put it, know the interest rates and calculate everything, and I do not know those things. The neighborhood women (tongne ajummadal) look at me and think that I’m strange, and they say: “How do you give away the money you have earned?”

Continuing with the views of the women protagonists of the previous chapter, Yumin’s mother’s opinions appeared more nuanced than those of
her peers, and corresponded to the way she presented herself as a shopkeeper and a member of her household, being without any big desire (yoksim) to make more money than what she was earning with the shop. She saw the contemporary Korean practices not as an increase of women’s control of money during the last decades but rather as a continuity of an older practice of women being in the possession of the keys to the granary and taking care of other household things, in which the husband was not supposed to take part. In her comments she did not conform to the most common perception of gender characteristics but remarked that there are increasingly more men taking care of family money, and that men can actually be more meticulous than women in these matters: “Aren’t the most famous cooks men?” Yet, in their own household Yumin’s mother and her husband followed the practice perceived as the most common and normative in Korea. She took care of money, gave pocket money to her husband for spending as he asked, and he reported his ATM withdrawals for the household account book (kagyebu) that she kept.

From women I now turn to a man, Mr Yu, who frequently brought up the topic of money in my meetings with him. Unlike the two hairdressers for whom the talk about money was a way of self-assertion, for Mr Yu it was a way to express his social and economic frustrations and lack of personal success and advancement, in addition to the specific daily concrete relationship to money which evoked it as an everyday ordering concept for the all three of them as keepers of small businesses. Mr Yu recounted that he had had personal experience of men’s unsuitability for handling family money, which he interpreted in the light of Korean cultural understanding of men’s characteristics and gender division of labor. I quote my conversation with him on the topic at length:

– In our case, I give everything to aegiŏmma (children’s mother) from the cashier at the end of the day. I only have an ATM card. In the beginning I tried to take care of the finances, but it didn’t work out. It’s not a man’s thing to take care of the family money. (He says that men are not able to handle the situation when the accounts go into the red.) Children’s school expenses, electricity bills and others, aegiŏmma takes care of them all. (He laughs as he shows me his emergency fund [pisanggǔn] of 30 000 won [25€] which is hidden under the ironing board.) I always feel sorry when I need to ask my wife for money when I want go out, and I don’t want to hear the nagging about going again to drink with friends… I put aside some 20–30 000 won [17–25€] a week so that I don’t always need to ask her. I only have an ATM card, and aegiŏmma can see when I’ve withdrawn money from the account, and I get to hear about

77 “Children’s mother” (aegiŏmma) is a common term of reference for one’s wife.
Men’s emergency fund, it’s because men often go out together to drink, and they have a habit of quarreling over who gets to pay the bill: “I pay, no, let me pay” and so on. And men like to have some extra [money] with them when they go out.

– And their wives don’t like their husbands going out to drink and don’t want to give them money for that?

– Yes... Because that money could be used for the family, for children’s clothes and other family needs. There’s one good thing about aegiömna, that she gives me money without saying anything when I go to meet one particular friend, my fishing buddy. That’s because he doesn’t drink and doesn’t go out much (nolda).78

Mr Yu did not appear to have qualms about acknowledging that he had not fared well as a manager of money. He situated his personal deficiency in the cultural context which assumes that in this regard men are less qualified than women and that men are by nature prone to communal use of money that conflicts with household needs.

Other informants offered both supporting and disagreeing views to those of Mr Yu and the two hairdressers. When I asked Mrs Kang about the management of money in their household and in general among shopkeepers, her opinion was that it depends on the persons’ character. At first she said that the man is usually in charge and that the woman needs to take the reins if the man is careless and there is a risk that he will waste money on games and drinking. As I told her about a shopkeeper who takes weekly a small sum from the shop income and hides it in the shop as an emergency fund, she did not see this as an understandable Korean cultural practice but as a “disgrace to a man.” Mrs Kang’s views were perhaps influenced by the practices in her own household: her husband had taken care of their money at the time of his salaried employment, and continued to do so also when they kept the restaurant. Mrs Kang, while being the skilled person on whom the operation of the place depended, did not handle money in the restaurant, and the husband or one of the daughters received payments and recorded them in a small notebook. (The simple fact that Mrs Kang was tied to the restaurant as the sole skilled person undoubtedly would not have allowed her the role of a household manager that many other women taking part in shopkeeping with more flexible hours had.)

Even if a shopkeeper, a man or a woman, said that the assignment of the control of household money depends on the individual qualities of the spouses in the cases when the both take part in operating the shop, in actual

78 Nolda is a verb that refers in general to pursuits which are distinguished from work and other productive activity: playing, having a good time, entertainment, visiting, not doing work, being idle or unemployed etc. It is treated extensively in Chapter 7.
household practices the monetary tasks were often allotted to women. It seems that the specific circumstances of keeping a business evoked this characteristic in the answers; shopkeeper men unavoidably handle money, and the notion of a disinterested and ignorant man is not consistent with being a capable businesskeeper. This notion was nevertheless not absent, as Mr Yu’s example shows. Mr Kim of the jewelry shop was one of those who at first answered that both ways were possible, but that in their own household his wife, “children’s mother” (aegiömma), is responsible. Moreover, he maintained that he was not interested in money, which apparently referred to small daily household transactions which were his wife’s responsibility. When I later asked about the same issue from his wife, she told me that he takes care of the really big sums. Mrs Chang’s account of her husband Mr Paek and their household was similar; in the meat shop they took care of things together, but the rest was her task:

– It’s me who does [the household purchases], but if it’s something big I ask my husband.
– What about school fees and other expenses?
– I take care of them. My husband does not have interest in them. He is not interested in using money. He just works diligently.

In the words of Mrs Chang, her husband compensated for his disinterest in household chores and management with his diligent work in the shop, but as illustrated by the following small scene in their shop to which I have already briefly referred above, the husband was involved in Mrs Chang’s management of household-related money as a consequence of being a shopkeeper. The couple was preparing the consolation money (pujogêm) to be presented as the mother of their daughter’s friend had passed away. He would have given 30 000 won which was the smallest basic sum on such occasions, but she insisted that 50 000 was the proper amount because of what the family of the deceased had contributed earlier. He complied, stamped the text puwii (consolatory contribution) on a white envelope, selected bills from a shop drawer and from the bundle of money that she handed him from her pocket, and gave his wife the envelope that she took to the place of mourning.

Mr Ko, who kept a supermarket with his wife, offered yet another explanation for the practice that household money is relegated to women: it would be too troublesome for men and they would not have time for that. Mr Ko took care of most of the shop transactions, as he visited the wholesalers and also usually received the deliveries, but for his personal expenses he received spending money from his wife. They both emphasized collaboration: she remarked on the importance of informing him of the household purchases, and he begun his answer on money management by saying that the shop was operated together, which apparently stemmed from the character of the super-
market as an establishment in which both the husband and the wife spent long hours by turns. As I was asking about the issue of money from Mr Ko, a female representative of a beverage company dropped in and joined our conversation, giving definite but humorously framed opinions. According to her, women should be in charge, since men could not be trusted with the household finances and would not be able handle them. She mentioned the sum that she gives her husband monthly, which surprised Mr Ko for its scantiness. After I said that my parents, after decades of marriage, keep their earnings separate, she professed astonishment for this objectionable practice and expressed her disapproval: “No, husband’s earnings should be mine, and my earnings should be mine. One should never get married to a Finnish man.”

Conclusions

While sharing the Korean ideas of money and cash – premodern residual notions of the unbecomingness of money for respectable persons, and the innate characteristics of women and men as handlers and managers of money and cash and the ensuing division of tasks in households – shopkeepers’ attitudes and relationships to money were also a consequence of the specific circumstances of their livelihood. I suggested that beyond the socially and culturally hegemonic Confucianism-influenced notions of commerce and money there has been an undercurrent that has frankly and straightforwardly recognized the influence and usability of money while not denying its unfavorable and even dehumanizing consequences. This undercurrent is reflected in the way money and cash appear as qualities and objects of everyday talk, social and cultural conceptualization, as well as in the incessant earning and money-making in the life worlds of the shopkeepers.

In the discourses of shopkeepers, the earning of money is conceptualized as arduous, along with and corresponding to similar ideas concerning their whole livelihood. These notions can be associated with both physical and mental arduousness; for Grandfather Kwôn, it was the physical toil in the laundry past his 70th birthday, and for Mr Chông it was the humiliating experiences with customers that made his earnings feel like the proverbial “trader’s money” that not even a dog would touch. The concept of the toilsomeness of earning money through keeping a small business thus derives in part from ideas of social stratification and perceptions of status.

Culturally mediated notions of and attitudes toward money also play an important role in the issue of household money management. The everydayness of money and cash among the shopkeepers for both men and women and the specific money-making circumstances in which often both men and women handle the business cash has not distanced the shopkeepers from Ko-
rean gender-related ideas of the suitability of women and men in managing money and cash. Compared to descriptions about wage-earning Korean families, my informants exhibited pragmatism in their views about whether the manager of household assets should be the wife or the husband; most admitted that control by the wife is the most common but were of the opinion that the more capable of the spouses should be given the task. Still, despite exceptions, opinions and practices indicated that neighborhood shopkeepers essentially shared the Korean cultural understandings of proper management of money, which assigned the task to women while regarding men as inclined to household-harming leisure and communal money use or, alternatively and even simultaneously, as too distinguished and gentlemanly for such a mundane and ordinary task as managing money. Yumin’s mother, who always had a sharply observant eye for the ideologies and practices in Korean society, was not convinced when I told her about the claim by some of the male shopkeepers that they were not interested in money; she responded that it is only what they say and not what they really think, because actually they are interested.

In contemporary South Korea, money is an organizing concept, particularly among shopkeepers but in the general society as well. Nevertheless, it has not followed that cash has become confined to a specific non-domestic, non-family sphere of commerce and monetary exchange of commodities either among wage earners or businesskeepers. Monetary transfers between household members are considered proper expressions of affection and reciprocity between members of nuclear and extended families and households, in which individual monetary and economic independence is not culturally valued unlike in Scandinavia for example. Similarly, the use of cash in ritual exchanges and contributions (“gifts”) is not inhibited by any moral considerations that would emanate from symbolical appropriation of money (see Bloch 1989). In this regard, the issue of the “moral neutrality” of money appears actually irrelevant for the topic of money and cash in regard to shopkeepers and the rest of Korean society. The wide sphere of the use of cash in Korea can not be said to be a consequence of the moral neutrality of money but of a different setting of moral considerations, in which money can be both a culturally organizing concept in Korean society and an appropriate medium of expression for familial relations and sentiments.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Leisure: Distinguishing Non-Work from Work

Once during my fieldwork, when I had been walking around the research neighborhood registering the comings and goings of the shopkeepers and had sat down in Mr Kim’s and Mrs Kang’s restaurant, one shopkeeper from Big Street told me in a banteringly admonishing style, common in the neighborhood interactions, that a good (ch’akhan) student should go home and finish his studies in time and not just fool around (nolda) in the streets. For him, an anthropologist’s fieldwork did not have the appearance of productive activity like working for a living or studying for a degree; instead, it came across as inactivity, a waste of time, or leisure – phenomena which are expressed colloquially most often with the verb nolda.

The opening hours of the businesses of my informants were mostly very long, and many of the shopkeepers spent a large majority of their waking hours in the shop or in its vicinity. To the observer, at first it appeared that the shopkeepers had very little chance for leisure. Indeed, that was the case for leisure removed from workplace and residence, but according to the shopkeepers’ distinction between work and leisure that became salient in my fieldwork, moments of leisurely time were constantly intertwined with, but distinguished from, what was defined as work of tending the business.

This chapter examines the distinctions between the notions of work (il; il-hada, “to work”) and the spending of free or leisurely time among the neighborhood shopkeepers. The emphasis is on the latter, represented in the colloquial Korean speech most often by the verb nolda. The seemingly indistinguishable character of the work and leisure of the keepers of small businesses stems mainly from the characteristics of the small business establishments, which are simultaneously sites of both income-generating labor and non-income leisure or idleness for the shop proprietors, and sites of monetary consumption and non-monetary leisure for the local populace and the shopkeeper colleagues.

In the best case of successful business most of the activities of the shopkeepers in their establishments during the opening hours can be classified as work, but lack of customers and the subsequent lack of work may turn the opening hours into unwanted leisure. A visit by a neighborhood person-cum-customer as a money-spending consumer is distinguished from a visit as an acquaintance dropping in for a chat, but even these need not be separate occasions. On the whole, due to the pressures of livelihood – the need to make
money – it is obvious that leisure or non-work as a consequence of quiet business is a situation no shopkeeper hopes for. Nevertheless, the forms of leisure sometimes but not always resulting from lack of customers leads to the forms of neighborhood living which are conceptualized as sign of positive Koreanness: living, talking and eating together without disruptive jealousy (sigi).

The predicament between work and leisure is an essential part of the experience of the keepers of small businesses in South Korea, and is one major characteristic in distinguishing the life-style of that occupational category and social stratum. It is clear that many of the patterns of spending free time and moments of leisure and of instances when non-livelihood tasks are performed do not differ markedly from those of other strata in Korea. I will touch upon those briefly before discussing the traits which are distinctive for the small shopkeepers.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the ways that leisure and other practices contrasting with work in Korea have been perceived and presented before drawing examples from my own material. A considerable part of my fieldnotes consists of data of activities which can be described with the verb nolda: persons visiting a shop and keeping company to the person or persons who operate the place; a group of men gathered in an insurance office to chat and drink coffee; a circle of neighborhood business keepers and friends having a drink and snack party in someone’s establishment or in a back yard; a shopkeeper spending a few free moments with a round of paduk or changgi board game with a friend or a neighboring colleague.

The Concept of Nolda

The entry for the verb nolda in Minjungseorim’s Essence Korean-English Dictionary gives eight main meanings: to play or amuse oneself; to make merry or have a spree; to relax, loaf, or be idle; to be out of work or unemployed; to stand idle; to totter or shake; to behave as one pleases; to sail or swim about. The formal Korean gloss for “leisure” is yōga, which appears for example in journalistic and scholarly writing, but rarely in the colloquial language. The English term leisure (rejō) is also visible in newspapers as well as in scholarship, denoting usually modern phenomena such as use of specific leisure facilities and consumption of leisure commodities. I never encountered either of these two concepts among the shopkeepers. The verb nolda with its derivatives does not fully correspond to these two terms, but encompasses the notions as a broad and inclusive word. In spoken language nolda is made into a noun either by adding the nominal ending ki to the verb stem (nolgi) or by us-

ing the present tense modifier form nonūn to modify the noun kōt, “thing” (nonūn kōt or “thing of idling”, etc.). For example, “day off” [from work] is usually expressed colloquially as nonūn nal, “idling day.”

Yi Sang-il, delineating the verb nolda in his discussion of its derivate noun nori, presents the following meanings for the word: spending time by not doing work; playing and having a good time; something fastened is shaking loose; throwing dice. He remarks that the meanings are contrasted with work in general (il) and productive work (chagōp), and produce the categories of passive leisure idleness, laziness, and leeway, and activeness of merrymaking, enthusiasm, and contests (Yi 1997: 61). The verb nolda and its derivative noun nori also refer to performative activity, and play as a ritual performance. Nori appears for example in the term for the musical style of samullori (samul-nori), a contemporary form of farmers’ music, as well as in many other kinds of folk plays and performances (ibid: 61–2). Moreover, the term nolda is also applied to the ritual performances (kut) of Korean shamanism, referring to their character not as entertainment but as performative plays. Fittingly, the Korean word for gambling, norūm, also stems from the same root (ibid), and is distinguished from another derivative noun norūm (merrymaking) in spelling but not in pronunciation (no-rūm vs. nor-ūm).

Due to the nature of my field research, the kind of leisurely visiting that I encountered most often was that of friends, acquaintances, shopkeeper peers and other neighborhood people spending time in the company of the shopkeepers, and most of the references to the term nolda refer to that kind of activity. This also included my own visits to the shopkeepers’ establishments. As I indicated in the opening vignette of this chapter, anthropological fieldwork did not have the appearance of work but of leisure, as it corresponded to the leisurely neighborhood visiting practices. Thus the greeting I commonly heard when leaving a shopkeeper’s company after a conversation or a more passive observational presence was tto nōllō oseyo81, “come again [as a visitor].” Another customary phrase I often heard from a visitor leaving the business establishment before I did was “nolda kaseyo,” telling me to enjoy the remainder of my visit. On some occasions when I entered a shop for the first time I could not recognize the proprietor among several people present any of whom might have been either shopkeeper or employee. After identifying himself or herself, the proprietor introduced the others to the perplexed re-

---

80 I am grateful to professor Chun Kyung-soo for pointing this out (personal communication, Sep. 11, 2001).

81 This could also be in an informal or blunt form tto nōllō wa, depending on the degree of intimacy and difference in age and also status. Most of the informants with whom I was in frequent contact and were more than approximately 15 years older addressed me in the blunt forms.
searcher as *nolló on saram* (“visitors”). Diverging notably from this but consistent with the connotations of the concept, Mrs Kang and Mr Kim of the beef restaurant and also other keepers of restaurants which I frequented both as a customer and as a leisurely visitor usually greeted me with the words *tto wa* or *tto oseyo*, implying that I was welcome especially as a customer.

Thus the term *nolda* distinguishes a visit for socializing from a visit as a customer to make purchases or to use services. A representative example took place in a small restaurant, when an acquaintance of the restaurateur stepped in and loudly announced “*Nolló wassóyo*” (“I came for a visit”), by which she made it known that she was not entering as a paying customer. A customer will be classified primarily as such as long as the act of purchasing is going on. After the payment the customer may stay behind for a chat, perhaps sitting down on the sofa with the keeper, during which time the status of the visitor is mainly that of an acquaintance, and the activity would be described with the verb *nolda*.

A part of the reciprocal visiting practices in the neighborhood shops were gatherings for socializing, having a chat and a cup of coffee or rounds of a card or board game during slack hours of day, and having snacks and drinks in the evenings after shops were closed. A frequent answer I received to a query about a husband’s whereabouts from women tending a shop alone was “*nolló kassóyo*” (“he has gone for a visit”). Most often this meant that the husband had gone to spend time unrelated to work with his acquaintances or colleagues in the neighborhood, but it could also indicate out-of-town visits to kin or friends.

Non-productive idleness from income-generating work or study was also a phenomenon commonly covered by the word *nolda*, and this use was frequent in the neighborhood – in part due to the time of the fieldwork in the aftermath of the economic crisis. A good example of this was when an affinal relative of Mr Pak of the rice mill had visited the place, and I asked Mr Pak what his brother-in-law did for living. His blunt, ironic answer was “*nora*” (“he’s idle”), to which he added that the brother-in-law was living on the interest from selling a piece of land in the vicinity of Seoul. Mr Pak’s wife used the same term in an illustrative way when she dropped into Mr and Mrs Kim’s jewelry store on her way home from the mill and sighed: “Now during the summer there isn’t much to do at the mill, and we can’t but be idle (*nol subakke obsóyo*), but during the winter we are so busy.” She stayed about half an hour chatting with Mr Kim and left by saying *nolda kaseyo* to me. When I went to see what was going on in Kolmok Street, her husband was indeed playing cards with three neighborhood acquaintances in the garage of the next-door boiler repair shop.
An intriguing aspect in the use of nolda for leisurely visiting was to apply it to activity which had the appearance of productive work. When walking around the research neighborhood or entering a shop, I often encountered people who unmistakably seemed to be doing tasks which were relevant to the business of the shop. When I asked or remarked, occasionally feigning misunderstanding of the nature of the person’s activity to induce comments, about what the person was doing by using the term “work” (il), a common answer was to deny doing any work by saying that she was just paying a visit (nollö wassöyo). The visitor thus clearly distinguished her activity from work and defined it in terms of non-work or leisure. (People helping out in the shops of their acquaintances in this manner were almost entirely women.)

Once during a busy spell of work in Mr Pak’s mill before Buddha’s birthday, two women were helping out the proprietor couple: the woman from the neighboring boiler installation shop who frequently spent time in the mill, and another woman whom I had not seen before. I later asked Mr Pak’s wife who the other woman had been, to which she answered that she had been just a friend who had come for a visit (nollö wassöyo). Thus the friend who had been packing rice pastry had not done actual work but what the shop proprietor defined, despite the undoubtedly considerable contribution of the friend, as visiting and socializing with the keeper couple and their friend.

**Korean Ideas of Leisure and Idleness**

Some of the shopkeepers in the neighborhood reiterated the notion of Koreans as people fond of enjoyment and leisure (nolgi chohahan ōn saram), a characteristic of Koreanness often encountered in media and other popular discourses, and not absent from scholarship either (Kim Mun-gyŏm 1993: 272–3). Mr Pak, the rice miller whose commitment to neighborhood reciprocity makes him a prominent figure in this chapter as well as in the whole dissertation, once expressed this with an ironic tone in his voice: “Koreans, having fun and feasting (nolchap’an mŏkchap’an) whenever there’s an opportunity.”

On another occasion in a drink and snack gathering of several men in a wallpapering shop across the street from Mr Pak’s mill, he approached this perceived characteristic of Koreans as an issue of personal relations and reciprocity, with subsequent personal enjoyment. Pouring me a small glass of soju, a commonly drunk distilled liquor with low alcohol content, he said: “Isn’t it good to be in Korea in this way? People in foreign countries do not

---

62 In the quoted phrase, the verbs nolda and mŏkta (to eat) are in a propositive form, meaning literally “let’s have fun” and “let’s eat”, with the word p’an (occasion, moment) added.
know how to have fun like this. I have a relative in the USA. People there don’t know how to have fun. Everyone drinks on one’s own.” With the last sentence Mr Pak referred to the perceived Western practice that people fill only their own glasses and do not pour for others.

The talk of many neighborhood shopkeepers – especially that of Mr Pak and his acquaintances – about their practices of and attitudes towards leisure was an essential part of the discourse of the humaneness and good-heartedness of neighborhood life as exemplified in the reciprocal practices of the shopkeepers and their acquaintances. Practices of and attitudes towards leisure that are comparable to and similar with those of the keepers of small businesses in urban neighborhoods in contemporary Korea can be found in accounts of agricultural villages, in which occasions of leisure and inactivity from work for livelihood occur amidst spells of intensive work.

Vincent Brandt uses the term “enforced leisure” for the slack periods between periods of agricultural labor and fishing expeditions (1971: 65–67) in his study of a remote farming and fishing village in the mid-1960s. Poorer farming households and fishermen in particular were subjected to idleness because of lack of farming land and bad weather hindering the fishing boats from leaving the shore. These conditions created constant opportunities for spontaneous gatherings, discussions and drinking parties. This was particularly notable in the lower-status hamlets where the poor farmers and fishermen resided, whereas in the part of the village where the residents had aristocratic yangban pedigrees, “quiet industriousness” was the norm. “So even though the ranks of the idlers are swelled by visitors from other neighborhoods, this most populous nucleus of the village has its own special air of impoverished leisure” (Brandt 1971: 47). The flip side of this sociable idleness and communal leisure to which positive values were attached was that industrious activity was a sign of affluence, and abundant occasions for leisure indicated lack of means. For some older and more conservative farmers, preferring not to join informal groupings of men was a question of status and reputation; fishing had been a despised occupation and enjoyed a low status compared to farming (Brandt 1971: 65). Brandt adds, importantly, that labor was nevertheless not valued for its own sake, and sums up the attitude of most villagers towards work that “the less there is the better.” Despite the similarities of leisure practices between 1960s’ coastal villagers and contemporary urban shopkeepers that I have presented here, the villagers at that time felt there was a deep divide between them and the self-employed of that time precisely on the basis of perceptions concerning work. “Storekeepers in towns and cities were widely envied and admired, because they sit all day earning a good living without doing any hard work” (Brandt 1971: 68).
While not defined as leisure with the concepts that my informants used, the informal visiting behavior that Chun Kyung-soo describes from a southwestern coast village in the 1970s is an apparent cultural precedent to the visiting practices that I observed among the neighborhood shopkeepers and residents. The kind of reciprocal visiting, called *masil-kagi* ("going to masil") took place among age mates in private homes and village shops, with snacks or drinks taken to the location of the gathering but not formally recognized as gifts as in formal visiting (Chun 1984: 120–1). The same term is used also of women’s reciprocal visiting in a study of a hillside neighborhood in 1980s Seoul (Cho and Cho 1992: 114). It is not clear whether the informants themselves used the term or whether the researchers applied it to a practice similar to rural villages. Cho and Cho remark that the practices of frequent reciprocity and the consciousness of similarity and the ensuing sense of relative emotional security cannot be explained only as continuation of a rural life style since they were most of all utilitarian means of livelihood for the shantytown residents (ibid: 142–3), but the notions of rural neighborhood and human relations still contributed considerably to the practices of frequent reciprocal interaction (ibid: 108–9).

It is self-evident to state that industrious activity is a sign of the success of a small business as well, but what makes the visibility of affluence and success different from agricultural society is the relation to capitalist society and to the need to earn money by selling merchandise or services to the customer under sometimes severe competition. In these kinds of circumstances idleness may convey an appearance of a product or service which is unwanted by customers. An illustrative example was the occasion when the woman of a restaurant-keeping couple scolded her husband for going around the neighborhood during the silent hours of the day and thus giving an impression that they have a lot of time on their hands because customers do not favor their food.

In sociologist Lee Hyo-jae’s brief characterization of social relations in Seoul neighborhoods at the turn of the 1970s when the urbanization of South Korea was at its height, leisure was one issue distinguishing cities and rural villages (Lee Hyo-jae 1971: 25–26). She noted that unlike in villages, leisure hours in Seoul were most frequently spent away from home, as most Seoul residents – Lee is here referring only to men in salaried employment – commuted to work outside their area of residence. Reciprocity based on geographical proximity was still present in that women had frequent contacts with their neighbors, but Lee describes these relations as not intensive, apparently implying this in relation to agricultural villages. Husbands, instead, had no personal relationships with their neighbors, and spent their after
hours in the company of their colleagues, going to movies, tea rooms, billiard houses, and bars (Lee 1971: 27).

Donald Earl Christie’s ethnography on employees of an industrial association, conducted in the same period as Lee Hyo-jae’s study, illustrates white-collar practices of leisure in more detail. Christie could not find any groups brought together by the workplace that were carried over into significant relationships outside of work (1971: 190), and in his judgment there was a lack of after hours socializing and little commitment to the workplace (ibid: 214). Christie could observe some occasional gatherings of employees after office hours, but these were an exception, and in general the employees preferred to spend time with people they regarded as “friends” instead of their colleagues.

Office relationships did not continue in any consistent manner once the men left the office. If they did not go directly home, more often, after a brief telephone call, they would leave the office alone to meet their “real” friends at a tea house – usually friends from high school, less often from college (Christie 1971: 194).

For Christie, the lack of after hour leisure was one characteristic indicative of the lack of “off-the-job” community. Kim Eun-hee’s description and analysis of white-collar employees in a study conducted in the early 1990s deviates from Christie’s work twenty years earlier, which most likely reflects solidification of company and white collar practices during the decades of intensive growth of the bureaucratic company sector and the salaried and professional middle class. Kim Eun-hee emphasizes salaried middle-class men’s communal relationships emanating from the workplace and extending beyond work hours, and she describes the after hours socializing with co-workers as intensive (Yi, Eun-hee Kim 1993: 248). Relations with friends, an important source of personal pleasure and relaxation for many, were hindered by and subordinate to workplace relations, but Kim nevertheless saw these two as complementary rather than conflicting (ibid: 266–71).

Roger Janelli’s account of after hours in a large conglomerate in the late 1980s is similar to that of Kim Eun-hee except that he perceived more critical attitudes and observed methods of avoidance amidst a general acceptance of after hours socializing, which was usually arranged in accordance with company organization. For example, section chiefs took their office workers out to drink and eat about once a week (Janelli 1993: 173–77). The practices in the industrial corporation also studied by Choong Soon Kim in the late 1980s diverged from those reported by Janelli in that both formal and informal after hours socializing was rare. Kim likened this to what are perceived as American or Western practices rather than what has been observed among the white-collar employees in Japanese companies (Kim 1992: 154–5).
Where the office practices of the late 1960s described in Christie’s work most deviate from later accounts of similar environments and where they most intriguingly resonate with the leisurely gatherings of neighborhood shopkeepers in my own research data is the leisure-like relaxation of the employees’ overtime hours in the office. Some of the employees were engaged in work-related tasks, but most read books or newspapers, chatted, or played games. There were regular groups of men who played paduk, a board game popular among the neighborhood shopkeepers, and some employees’ paduk games lasted long into the evening (Christie 1971: 142, 190). Christie’s description also departs from the notion that, among the salaried and professional middle class, work and leisure are spatially and temporally more demarcated (Vogel 1963: 35, Mills 1956) than for example among the self-employed.

Kim Kyeongmie’s (1996) account of practices of shopping, leisure, and operating a business in an exclusive clothing shop catering for upper middle class customers is interesting both in regard to leisure in Korea in general and to the similarities and differences with practices in small business in non-affluent areas such as Ordinary People’s Ward. For the customers, of whom more than 90% were regulars, shopping visits to the fashionable clothing shop in an area of expensive housing south of the Han River in Seoul were also occasions of leisure. In addition to marketing clothes, the ample shop space allowed the managers to keep credit associations (kye) and friendship circle meetings in the establishment (Kim Kyeongmie 1996: 47). The writer reproduces the nolda concept only once, quoting a customer recounting that she has a habit of dropping in without buying anything; this is the aspect of the term nolda which is defined in distinction to purchasing.

Most of the new customers were introduced by regulars, and the atmosphere discouraged anyone from coming in on their own without formal introduction. The leisure visits to the fashion shop were similar in outward appearance to the small business in the neighborhood in my study, but the similarities are rather superficial. Kim Kyeongmie notes that patronage of the boutique is used for creating distinction – a thing that is possible in a neighborhood environment such as my fieldwork locale only by not patronizing the neighborhood businesses. Even though the clothing boutique did have local customers, it is very sharply distinguished from the kind of estab-

---

83 Employees were paid for one or two hours of daily overtime regardless of their actual work, and chiefs were said to have been keen on giving the impression that their section or division worked the hardest.

84 A neighborhood woman, not a shopkeeper, told me that affluent people living in the area do not want to shop in the area but prefer to go to more distinguished places such as downtown department stores. A keeper of a flower shop said the same: “those who have” go elsewhere with their money.
lishments that are at the core of my study in that it did not even try to make business for locals, but catered for a geographically diverse and socially restricted group of people. Even if the pattern of leisurely visiting has similar characteristics with small-scale neighborhood retailing, the clothing shop is in essence the opposite of tongnechangsa, neighborhood business, in its resources, social standing, and clientele.

**Neighborhood Shops as Sites of Leisure**

Above I quoted Mr Pak’s wife complaining that they cannot but be idle in the summer, while there is a lot of work during winter. Besides directing attention to the seasonal character of their branch of business (there are few festivities during the summer and thus little demand for ttôk rice cakes) her concern speaks more generally of the possible irregularity and seasons of idleness following periods of absorption in work. Certain kinds of businesses such as rice mills are seasonal in nature, but those with less fortune (or capability) or less fortuitous conditions for their occupation have to adjust to continuously occurring periods of idleness. Being idle at work is not leisure in the common meaning of the English language term, but it falls under the concept of nolda. In this sense, notwithstanding the conceptual distinction between work as il and non-work leisureed activities as nolda, the division of time and most of all space between leisure and work becomes blurred.

The blurred division of time between work and leisure is one characteristic that also distinguishes the lifestyle of the Japanese small businesskeepers from the more ordered temporal space of the salaried middle classes (Bestor 1989: 261–265). In the case of business keepers in residential neighborhoods, the condition that customers are mostly residents of the same area and thus often in contact with the shopkeepers on other occasions than shopping and in other statuses than as a customer gives special emphasis to the particular relationship between work and leisure during opening hours, within the sphere of the business establishments themselves and inside the neighborhood. The neighborhood aspect of leisure is the most interesting aspect for the purposes of this study, even though leisure in the more Western or bourgeois sense, clearly detached in time and space from the occupation, is not out of reach for the business keepers, although the opportunities for many are more limited than for the salaried strata. The opening hours are usually

---

85 Working hours both in offices and in industry in South Korea are very long. In Kim Seung-kyung’s study of factory working women in an export zone in the late 1980s, the regular six-day workweek was 48 hours, but overtime could increase weekly hours to close to 80 (Kim, Seung-kyung 1997: 62). In the office environment of Roger Janelli’s study, the company workers portrayed the working hours as excessive and unreasonable. The main reason for complaints was that the long working hours took too much
very long, effectively hindering extra-neighborhood leisure activities, but not all are tied to the shop for almost all of their hours not spent sleeping, meaning that there are avenues for more purely leisure activities, outside the neighborhood and the shop opening hours.

Small businesses engaged in retail or personal services regardless of the cultural and social background are likely to be subjected to demands and pressures of sociability, especially in a residential neighborhood setting as in the case of my shopkeeper informants. Daniel Miller has presented an illustrative case of Trinidadian parlors, small shops selling basic daily goods over a counter attached to the keeper’s house (Miller 1997: 280–1). There are likely to be people hanging around in parlors, chatting with each other and with the keeper. Parlor proprietors will have to have a strategy of either discouraging or encouraging the development of the shop as a site of exchange of information and gossip. They do not necessarily choose to encourage sociability; Miller gives examples of a residence parlor in which the keeper opted to keep quiet, and of a streetside parlor in which the keeper promoted the communal character of the establishment, as he was also a local politician. The Trinidadian parlors are reminiscent of the Korean “hole-in-the-wall” shops (kumōngkage): tiny grocery stores with a small selection of manufactured merchandise, which have been common in residential areas, not dying out even with the appearance of bigger neighborhood supermarkets. Neither supermarkets such as kept by Mr and Mrs Ko and Mr and Mrs Yi nor the kumōngkages have become typical neighborhood hangouts, partly due to the physical shop environments which discourage socializing, and partly due to the reasons Miller presents for the gossip-discouraging parlor keepers in Trinidad: having the establishment identified as the source of neighborhood talk would be harmful for the business.

I have characterized the visiting practices between shopkeepers and neighborhood residents as frequent and integral to what is perceived as good neighborhood life, but the actual ability or willingness to host people who drop in as non-customers and to provide a site for leisure of visiting and spending time (nolda) varies a lot. Kolmok Street, where I made most of my observations about visiting practices, had favorable circumstances for intra-neighborhood business hour leisure activities. The street had fewer outsiders passing by and much less vehicle traffic than Big Street, which gave its businesses a stronger neighborhood character, but which also indicated a less fa-

---

7. Leisure

time away from familial obligations (Janelli 1993: 206–210). At the moment the legal standard for a work week in the Republic of Korea is 44 hours: 8 hours a day and fours hours on Saturday. (In August 2001, the government decided to push for legislation to institute a five-day working week beginning in 2003 and starting from governmental civil servants.)
vorable business location. The shopkeepers often had a lot of time on their hands, and the clientele was for the large part regular, which lowered the distinction between customers and a non-buying visitors.

Despite claims of the absence of jealousy between the neighborhood shopkeepers and the apparent presence of good will and attempts for cohabit amicably, people did not visit just any place, and leisure activities were not shared with just anyone. Participation in non-work leisure practices on Kolmok Street, while frequent and easily observable, was not all-encompassing, and several of the keepers of business establishments on the street never took part in the visiting and gatherings that are described here. This was also recognized in the circle of acquaintances among whom Mr Pak was often the leading figure in creating the atmosphere of conviviality; he once described one shopkeeper who always kept to himself as wangtta (“severely excluded person”), which as a term has origins in school ostracism. Still, I did not see anyone being actively encouraged to join the company of neighborhood shopkeeper acquaintances, except for the street celebrations that took place in Kolmok Street after the Korean victories in the soccer World Cup in 2002.

Since the ideals of good neighborhood living were often associated with leisure practices, those practices also set limits to the sphere of the implementation of those ideals, leaving out those with whom reciprocal leisure as defined by nolda was not exercised.

Mr Pak was a central figure in the circle of friends and acquaintances in the Kolmok Street neighborhood. His and his wife’s shop was a central hangout for his businesskeeping colleagues and neighborhood people, and I also found it a convenient and comfortable place in which to spend time. Several aspects favorable for intra-neighborhood leisure activity can be recognized in his case: a jovial personality, always ready to crack jokes and be in the company of others; an occupation which included daily moments of inactivity and seasonal idleness between times of busy work; a business which had been fairly profitable (but was no longer by the time of my fieldwork according to Mr Pak) allowing use of modest funds for purposes of socializing; the decision to manufacture their produce only to order and not for over-the-counter sale; and perhaps also the traditional character of mill-keeping as a locus of social activity.

---

86 As noted earlier, ttôk is ordered in large quantities especially for traditional festivities such as the Lunar New Year and the Harvest Moon Day on August 15 by the lunar calendar. Mr Pak had some ready-made items such as simple unsweetened ttôk for soups or flour made of roasted grains and beans for sale, but they were not put on display.

87 This was pointed out by professor Chun Kyung-soo in personal communication (Dec. 1, 1999).
Most of the visitors to Mr Pak’s mill were not customers but his friends (ch‘in’gu) and other neighborhood acquaintances, who dropped in for a chat or a round of paduk game during the day, or joined a drink and snack gathering when the day’s work in the mill had been done. His wife also often received visitors. The wife of the proprietor of the neighboring heating equipment repair and installation shop, who spent long hours during the day in the company of Mr Pak’s wife carrying a cordless phone and receiving calls, often assisted her shop neighbor in small tasks like packing the ttōk and peeling chestnuts. This kind of activity was representative of work-like tasks which were distinguished from work (il) as being non-work leisurely visiting, nolda.

There were occasionally other women helping out Mr Pak’s wife while keeping company with her. The mill-bakery couple kept the place together and shared all the tasks as far as her physical disability allowed, but the mill was, however, not a site of similar leisure for men and women. The visits of the men who frequented the place did not have the same task-performing appearance as women’s visits, even if they were classified with the same concept as “non-work.” The only exceptions of which I am aware of were some occasional machinery removals and the renovation of the mill, which was carried out over a period of four days.

The character of men’s and women’s leisurely visits to Mr Pak’s and his wife’s mill-bakery were different also in the sense that only men, with some rare exceptions, participated in the drinking and eating gatherings. This was also the case in other establishments on Kolmok Street. The wives of the men were not present whether in Pak’s mill or in other establishments where they used to gather, save for occasional visits to bring more things to eat or to look for one’s husband to come home or to return to his own shop. Women dropping in might be given a small glass of soju liquor, but they rarely sat down or stayed for long.

The place where some mixing took place was the backyard of a house on Kolmok Street, where drink and snack gatherings sometimes were held. That men and women gathered around the same bamboo mats on which food and drinks were placed was abetted by the lack of visibility from the street, and on those occasions that mixing took place, by the small number of people present. Division by gender appeared when the number of participants was bigger. Similar mixing, distinct from get-togethers in shop spaces, took also place on visits to a local noraebang (“singing room”), a karaoke place, in which entourages rent karaoke-equipped rooms for one or more hours. Still, the spatial separation of gender was yet again present when neighborhood people watched a soccer game in the above-mentioned backyard in 2002: men were sitting closest to the television set on bamboo mats on which food and drinks were placed, while women were behind the mats standing or sitting on chairs.
It is apparent that the public aspect of the partly private and partly public character of the shop spaces, which are mostly open to gaze from the street and more or less frequently visited by customers, inhibited the mixing of genders in leisure-like situations. Conversely, private spaces, such as the backyard or the rented karaoke room, created social circumstances which were conducive for the presence of both women and men.

Photograph 12: Mr Pak (right) playing *changgi* with an acquaintance in a neighborhood backyard.

*Paduk* and *changgi* were board games which often filled those idle hours of Mr Pak’s days when he had a playing partner. Both *paduk* and *changgi* are very popular in Korea in all social strata; there are endless entries in my notes of sessions of those games in Kolmok Street and elsewhere. The games were played during the day when time allowed, and in the case of Mr Pak the miller, one session could take hours. Mr Pak played *paduk* and *changgi* both in his own shop and in a few neighboring places, where the drink and snack sessions also took place. Women could be seen at the game board moving the black and white markers of *paduk* or the Chinese-character inscribed markers of *changgi* even less than participating in drinking sessions: I do not have a single note of any woman taking part in these games.

---

88 In terms of “active” fieldwork, these occasions felt frustrating, since it was as if nothing was happening. The players did not talk except for commenting on the game, and all that could be done was to take notes of who was playing and who was present.
As open-minded as the visiting customers appeared to be towards non-business-related activities in the business establishments, proprietors tried to avoid playing games in their commercial or public spaces. Mr Pak’s mill-bakery, where a lot of leisure activity took place, can be thought of as an only partly commercial locale, since rice cakes were manufactured to order, and the few ready-made items were not put on display. Mr Pak’s two other favorite game sites were similarly less public, and not sites of commercial exchange. This reluctance to present publicly one’s leisureed state is clearly linked to the predicament of these businesses as being situated in residential areas and being constantly under the eye of the residents. Constant game sessions in commercial or public places could have given the impression, as feared by the above-quoted restaurateur who scolded her husband for excessive visiting, that business was not good and the merchandise or services not worth purchasing.

Go-stop, a card game played with small plastic cards called hwat'ú, is a very popular entertainment pastime in Korea, even to the degree that it is perceived as the “premium game in the Korean society” (Kim Mun-gyŏm 1993: 262). Women and men play it alike, and Kolmok Street was no exception. It was played mostly in the evenings, and often in connection with drinks and snacks. Games could take hours, and they were played with intensity, occasionally arousing arguments about rules. Go-stop is normally played with money at stake, but in the neighborhood the sums were always small, usually a few thousand won, ten thousand (less than €10) at most. Even though go-stop is very popular in Korea, the attitude towards it is more ambivalent than towards the board games. A go-stop session creates pleasure and excitement, but even more than with board games, there was also a tendency to avoid too much public exposure, especially during the day. For example Mr Pak was himself an enthusiastic player, but he preferred not to play during the daytime. One afternoon when Mr Pak and a couple of other men were in the back room of Mr Hong’s interior shop, a plastic bag manufacturer and his acquaintance dropped in, talking about the previous evening of drinking, playing and visiting a karaoke (noraebang). He invited Mr Pak to a go-stop gathering in one of the Kolmok Street realtor offices. Pak refused, and remarked that playing games around the neighborhood does not give a good impression. After a while, the plastic bag manufacturer returned to entice Mr Pak to

---

89 The Go-stop game is also popular as a reflection of political and social currents (Kim Mun-gyŏm 1993: 261–4). During the unpopular and authoritarian president Chun Doo-hwan, a fictitious version of the game was that whoever got the card with a round figure (taken to represent Chun’s bald head) was allowed to pick any card at will from other players (Janelli 1993: 195). During my fieldwork one adaptation of this topic was “Teletubby Go-stop”, which reproduced sayings made popular by the children’s TV program “Teletubbies.”
join their game, but he still refused, even though the two often played to-
gether in the evenings. “People don’t think well of a person who plays cards
here and there,” he reasoned. (Typical of Mr Pak’s personality, he would not
let an occasion end on a serious note: he suggested that I go to play instead of
him.) He had originally decided not to play in his own shop, but there were
not always other places available.

In the light of Mr Pak’s remarks about the dubiousness of playing cards, it
was intriguing to observe the nonchalance he displayed on some occasions
towards customers who dropped in the rice mill in the evening when a go-
stop game was in full swing. On one occasion, two customers, apparently
regulars, appeared almost apologetic for interrupting the miller’s game. In
another instance, he had someone else play his hand while he served a cus-
tomer, keeping his attention constantly on the game. Sometimes he might
hardly raise his eyes from his cards when responding to a customer’s inquiry.

There was an exception to Mr Pak’s and also others’ go-stop restraint: a
funeral feast held in an alley and an open space between Kolmok Street and
Big Street, where guests and visitors were treated with food and drinks. Mr
Pak and his friends sat down for a card session. That the men played cards at
a funeral feast was not related to the fact that Mr Pak and most of the people
from Kolmok Street did not know the deceased; funerals are not different in
this regard from other instances in which family and kin rituals are per-
formed, and playing go-stop in particular is a customary part of ritual feast-
ing. Traditional seasonal festivities such as Lunar New Year and Harvest Moon
Day are occasions in which rounds of go-stop follow ancestor rituals. ⁹⁰

A few times I saw the landlord of Mr Pak’s mill express displeasure that
such a game was played on his property. Yet, both the landlord’s attitude and
Pak’s reluctance to go around playing cards had more to do with the unfavor-
able view of the neighborhood residents than with the fact that gambling is
formally illegal in South Korea. The players using small sums like the men in
Kolmok Street were not worried about control by the authorities; two police
officers, whose wives operated a business together, were often present during
the playing sessions in Mr Pak’s place.

In my fieldwork neighborhood, board games were entirely men’s domain;
it was almost similar with card games, and except for a few occasions, I did
not see women take part in go-stop sessions in the neighborhood. Wives of
those men who spent leisured time together were sometimes present in the
game site, but they did not participate in games in public sites. However, dur-
ing festivities or family and kin gatherings women have little inhibition about

⁹⁰ In a survey by Korean Gallup, 38% of the respondents gave Go-stop as the favorite game
(nori) during the Lunar New Year (Chosun Ilbo Jan. 22, 2001).
taking part in go-stop games in private spaces when it does not interfere with their housework burden, and women do indeed play on other occasions. Women’s card playing has been mentioned in the press when the authorities have exposed gambling rings (*Donga Ilbo* Jan. 19, 1999), depicting women’s gambling especially as a societal problem. Reports mention women’s gambling debts leading to broken marriages.\(^{91}\) This discourse of women as excessive consumers (Moon 1990, Nelson 2000) who in the worst case can put the household at risk is the flip side of the one that regards women as skillful and dedicated household managers. These two are not contradictory, but products of an ideology, at times leading to opposite outcomes and at times producing wealth as a consequence of skillful calculation. On the whole, activities that were classified as leisure were fewer among the women of small businesses than among their co-working husbands and other businesskeeping men. This predicament of women active in a business with their husbands or on their own clearly distinguishes them from the women working in or patronizing an upper middle class clothing store (Kim Kyeongmie 1996), or from women in almost any account of the salaried or professional middle class in Korea (Yi, Eun-hee Kim 1993; Lett 1998: 105, 154–155; Nelson 2000; Chun 1995: 32–33).

Watching television is the most common way of spending leisure (*yŏga*) in Korea according to statistics compiled by the Korea National Statistics Office (KNSO 2001: 73).\(^{92}\) In those statistics leisure is defined in relation to time, meaning weekends and days off; in the case my businesskeeper informants, TV was kept on during the business hours as well. There was hardly any shop without a television set, and the proprietors usually watched whatever program happened to be broadcast. Television watching by the shopkeeper did not seem to bother customers, and it was accepted in the same way as the presence of visitors spending time in a shop in the company of the proprietor.

Mr Pak and his wife spent less time in front of the TV set than shopkeepers in general. They were not tied to their shop waiting for the customers to come, they did not need to sit idle inside the shop if there was nothing to do, and they were able to find companionship during the day. The mill couple sometimes joined neighborhood colleagues to watch popular TV dramas. The following snippet from my fieldnotes depicts a typical evening scene from

---

\(^{91}\) One of Eunhee Kim Yi’s (1993: 434) informants had divorced his wife after she got involved in a gambling ring.

\(^{92}\) As workdays are excluded from the definition of leisure in the statistics in question (Korea National Statistics Office 2001: 31), the survey option of ‘household tasks’ (*kasa chabil*) is given as the second most frequent way of spending leisure after television watching. The concept of leisure is narrower in the survey than in my approach, and it includes activity such as household work, which would not be thought of as *nolda*. 
Kolmok Street, when customers were scarce, but many of the shopkeepers had not yet closed their places or were staying around before going home.

Kolmok Street. In the mill at 20:30, the miller and the former supermarket keeper play *paduk*. The vegetable and fruit shop is full of people. The keeper couple, Mrs Chang of the meat shop, sesame oil shop woman (Mrs Han), Mr Pak’s wife watching a TV drama series.

One some occasions some shopkeepers watched television so intensively that my attempts at discussion were thwarted; this may have indicated an unwillingness to talk to an anthropologist as much as overwhelming interest in the program. News and current affairs programs such as parliamentary hearings provided topics for talk, and popular or meaningful drama series occasionally brought people together as depicted in the fieldnote passage above. Despite the ubiquitous presence of the television set in shop interiors, the attitude toward it tended to be passive; its main utility was to fill the moments of involuntary leisure, similar to other workday intra-neighborhood practices conceptualized as leisure, *nolda*.

**Leisure within the Neighborhood: Visiting**

Shopkeepers spent considerable time visiting their colleagues’ establishments during the opening hours of their own shops, either having their spouse tending the space, keeping an eye on the place across the street, or carrying for example a portable telephone. Due to the specific circumstances of Mr Pak’s and his wife’s mill – manufacturing produce only to order – it was especially noticeable in the case of this couple. When Mr Pak had no orders to fill and nobody was hanging out in his place, he might go up and down the street to look for a place to drop in or someone with whom to have a round of *paduk* or *changgi*. Similarly, his wife could often be seen in the shops close to the mill in the company of women. This kind of momentarily leisure was also the most typically observable form of spending idle hours elsewhere in the neighborhood. In Big Street the site for such activity was Mr Yun’s insurance office, which functioned as a meeting place for middle-aged or older men of the neighborhood. The *paduk* board was brought out in Yun’s office every now and then, but most of the time was spent chatting, with men coming and going, observing the street and the people passing by.

The men of the neighborhood shops had a wider array of leisurely activities at their disposal than the women, and they were also freer to come and go in their leisurely pursuits. Depending on the technical expertise required for the operation of the business, the woman was often the one who took final responsibility for taking care of the shop in the case when the labor (physical power, technical skill etc.) was not necessary. This was evident both in famil-
ial obligations, when it was the husband of the shopkeeping couple who went to take part in ancestor rites, and in everyday neighborhood leisure, when it was the man who was able to leave the shop in order to join the company of his neighbors or acquaintances.

When a woman cleaning vegetables with others in front of a vegetable shop answered my question about how often she came to work (ilhada) there by saying, that “No, I’m not working here, I’m just doing this for fun (nolmyōnsō⁹³) because I’m a friend”, the distinction of doing work (ilhada) and spending leisure (nolda) was not defined by notions of unproductive and productive activity. It was a matter of getting paid or not; she did not, and thus her labor was not a commodity that was exchanged for something but a prestation based on a personal bond, conceptualized either as leisurely visiting (nolda) or as “helping” (towa chuda). (The services and the merchandise that the neighborhood shopkeepers, men and women, acquired from each other were seen as commodities belonging to the sphere of monetary exchange, and to the best of my knowledge, they were always paid for.)

This absence of the idea that one was working – especially as I rarely saw men in similar prestation circumstances – may be related to the similarity of these tasks with household chores or “inner work” (chibanil), which remain the woman’s domain. While tending the shop the shopkeeper women them-

⁹³ In nolmyōnsō, the verb stem nol- of nolda has the conjunctive ending -myōnsō, which means “while, at the same time.”
selves actually often did household tasks such as making food and preparing side dishes to be eaten either in the shop or at home. The household chores appear to be situated conceptually in an ambiguous space between work (il) defined through the concept of “outer work” (pakkamnil) and non-work (leisure); this is reflected also in leisure (yōga) statistics, which include the performance and gendered division of household chores (KNSO 2001: 31, 73). The household chores themselves would not be defined as leisure (nolda), but the term can be applied to women who are devoted to those chores full-time. Moon Okpyo notes that the critical view of middle-class housewives who are not engaged in formal work but are devoted to managing the household is based on the notion that these women make their living not by working but by being idle (ilhaji ank’o nolgo mōkta) (Moon 1992: 97).

Dropping in one’s friends shop and helping out was considered in a similar light to visiting someone’s home and giving a helping hand, for example, in the preparation of kimch’i, the Chinese cabbage pickle. This leisurely conceptualization of women’s task-performing visiting practices to business establishments also suggests that in certain context and in certain kinds of shops (such as the vegetable shop), women’s work in the shop was seen as an extension of household chores.

Leisure outside the Neighborhood: Travel

Mr Pak’s and his wife’s business allowed them leeway for occasional overnight fishing trips and other leisure activities outside the neighborhood and the city, which was out of reach for many other businesses which demanded constant attention by the keepers. The mill couple nevertheless never closed their place for more than two days, and even one-day closures were not frequent, at most once a month. For Pak and his friends the leisure trips were mostly fishing, even though the miller was not as enthusiastic a fisherman as the keeper of the neighboring heating maintenance shop.

The shopkeepers often mentioned traveling as a desired form of leisure, but the opportunities for leaving the business were scarce, and those few days that the keepers deemed appropriate to allow for any trips were used mostly for visits to their native places (kohyang) during the Lunar New Year and the Harvest Moon festival in autumn. These instances were for the most part the only occasions that the keepers closed their shops for more than one day in order to fulfill family and kin obligations by participating in the preparations and performance of ancestor rituals or other important family matters. For Mr Pak and some businesses, such as fruit shops, the traditional festivities were busy seasons, since their products and merchandise were in demand for use in the rites. Often they were not able to make any trip, or they delayed it
until the peak was over; Mr Pak stayed in Seoul during the festivities, but he
used to visit his parent’s gravesite a few weeks before the ritual to take part in
“grass cutting” (pŏlch’o), the tidying up of the grave mound.

Even though strictly differentiated from work, the trips made because of
family and kin obligations are not leisure travel. Lunar New Year and Harvest
Moon festivals are not leisure-free, and there are activities which are catego-
rized as nolda, but they are very unevenly distributed. The gendered division
of labor becomes especially emphasized in the traditional festivities during
which ancestor rites are performed, and women’s labor burden is heavy.

For example, a couple that kept a supermarket was going to spend one
night in the husband’s native place during the Harvest Moon, and his younger
brother was going to tend the shop during their absence. When I asked them
how they were going to spend the festivity once they were in the husband’s
natal home, the wife gave a critical answer: “The children have fun and the
men have fun, but the women have no fun at all. Can’t leave the kitchen for a
moment.” Her husband laughed and asked if there really weren’t anything
fun for women during Harvest Moon. She confirmed that was the case, and
added that not much work was left for her since she keeps this shop and
would arrive later than the others and that there were many brothers gather-
ing together and many daughter-in-laws to do the work.

As women do most of the work needed for the ancestor rites and other ac-
tivities during the traditional holidays, it was not surprising to hear the
women with whom I took up this matter saying that they did not enjoy hav-
ing to toil during the festivities. It was obvious that staying behind to take
care of the shop and letting the husband go and fulfill the familial obligations
was a relief. The non-leisure character of these toilsome festivities is apparent
in the way, for example, Chŏng wŏnjang handled the problem of having to
contribute to the ancestor rites of her husband’s kin and the necessity of not
keeping the shop closed for too long: she sent money to cover her part of the
expenses.94 This example presents another aspect of the problem that the
business keepers face when there is a need to go somewhere: the loss of in-
come and the fear of giving “discomfort” to customers and losing them to
competitors. This is usually the given reason why some keepers choose not to
have a day off – a condition that varies greatly between different types of
businesses.

Even if the occupation of shopkeeping restricts both obligatory travel and
leisure travel, partnership of married couple in a business may allow either

94 It fits the usual Korean pattern of household money management discussed in the pre-
vious chapter that it was Chŏng wŏnjang who took care of sending money to her affinal
kin and not her husband; in this case she had most likely also earned the contributed
funds, as her income was considerably higher than her taxi driver husband’s.
the man or the woman to make frequent trips even outside the two major holidays if only one person’s labor and skills are needed in the establishment at a time. This situation did not seem to be utilized for leisurely travel, however, but mainly for family and kin responsibilities. Mr Kim of the jewelry store related that he had visited his native place (kohyang) five times in the previous month, September, the latest having been for his maternal aunt’s (chاغن یمو) funeral. He lamented that the expenses are high: gasoline, toll-gates, consolation and congratulation monies, etc.95

Being bound to the business leaves even less space for leisure travel. It was rare, and happened mostly only during the few days taken off in late July or early August. According to statistics (Korea National Statistics Office 2001: 77), the difference in domestic traveling between the more educated and the less educated is huge, university degree holders traveling 3–4 times more often than those with six years or less education.96 This could also be noted among my informants: those few who had university degrees expressed a strong willingness to travel, and they also often recounted times during their salaried occupation, when they could travel more freely than at the moment. One item in the “Family Commandments” of Mrs Ch’oe and Mr Cho, the couple who kept the pork hock restaurant, was the intention to travel to historically important sites as often as possible.97 Mrs Ch’oe told me that they would like to travel at least once a month, but now with the restaurant it was not possible, which she greatly regretted. They used to travel a lot inside Korea when both spouses were employed in a company.

Mrs Kang often recalled her trip with her husband to Thailand, which was one of the few instances that any of my informants had ever been abroad. The trip had taken place before the opening of the restaurant, during the period when they were “living well” (chal sarassûl ttae). After the opening of their restaurant in early 1998 it took almost one and a half years before they closed

---

95 Mr Kim’s burden of kin responsibilities came up in a conversation about differences between Korea and Finland concerning family and kin. He advised me to get married soon, because one needs children to perform the chesa (ancestor rite), and one also wants to see grandchildren. I told him that there is no chesa in Finland; hearing that I visit my grandparents’ grave only when I happen to visit the town where they are buried for other reasons, he did not hesitate to admonish me: “You don’t have any chông (human affection). That’s not the right thing to do.” He continued with the account of how often he needed to visit his birth place and how much money that required.

96 According to the statistics of the National Statistics Office published in 2001, Koreans made on the average 2.6 domestic tourist trips a year. Of these, two thirds were one-day and one third overnight trips. The percentage of the population that made a domestic tourist trip in 2000 was 58.2 (KNSO 2001: 77)

97 The item in the Family Commandments refers to so-called cultural field trips to historically and culturally appropriated sites, which became popular in Korea in the 1990s after a thrust given by publication of a series of hugely popular cultural site travelogues (Kim Hyo-Jin 1999).
the place for a reason other than sickness, when they left for a short weekend vacation tour arranged by the husband’s friendship circle (ch’innokhoe). Mrs Kang said that they used to travel a lot when they were both salaried, “every weekend.” That is most likely an exaggeration, but it can be understood as expressing a contrast between the past and their current situation, in which leisure was almost always involuntary in the form of silent moments when customers did not come, and almost never voluntary in the form of tourism and travel. As shown by the statistics referred to above, education makes a huge difference in the opportunities for leisure travel.

The desire to travel was not only expressed among the few college-educated informants, but my perception is that the less aspiring tone among the others was related to their different life trajectories compared to the college-educated, who had experience of life with more free time and keenly sensed the difference between the opportunities of their previous occupations and the restrictions of their present shopkeeping livelihood. Nevertheless, among my informants the prospects of actualizing these aspirations were dim regardless of educational background. There is a popular image of middle-aged women, usually not of middle-class standing, taking a bus tour in a group and having fun without their husbands, perhaps meeting other men on their way or in the destination. I know of group trips taken by some neighborhood women, shopkeepers among them, but actualizations of that image were hard to find among the shopkeepers. Those who had regular days off were usually busy with household chores on those days or chose to rest or spend the time with children.

Conclusions

In distinction to the more voluntary and consumption-oriented leisure of the salaried and professional middle class, the leisure of the people of small businesses as conceptualized with the verb nolda is more work-like, temporally and spatially less removed from the work itself. The leisure that has the biggest distance from work both in time and space, traveling and tourism, is the least available for the shopkeepers. Among my informants, those who had had access to traveling in their previous salaried occupation felt the constraints of their present livelihood most strikingly, to the degree of maintaining that before their present occupation they used to travel “every weekend.”

---

98 Chung Cha-whan (1977: 92) provides an account of marketplace shopkeeper women from a migrant settlement arranging a five-day group trip by plane to Cheju Island in the early 1970s. According to Chung, the purpose of the trip was to foster extra-marital relations, as each of the participants was supposed to bring along a companion. It is interesting that Chung refers to the fashionable and modern character of tourist trips.
The kind of leisure that was accessible to the businesskeepers took place inside the neighborhood, inside the business establishments, in between work, with neighbors, friends and acquaintances. The appearance of work in some of the activities defined as leisure did not apply to men; the way they spent their idle hours was clearly recognizable as “non-work” in regard to operating small businesses. The separation of genders that in many cases was small in the work of a small business widened as soon as work became leisure. Men did not usually perform tasks that were defined as leisure but were related to keeping a shop, while many kinds of assistance given by women to their neighbor and acquaintance shopkeepers stayed in the domain of leisure, non-work.

A business keeper can be thought of as an object of small-scale everyday leisure, when it is mostly unwelcome and enforced. That leisure is not refreshment and rest but idleness during the time which would be better filled with income-generating work. Being a subject of leisure defined as nolda in a Korean neighborhood is on the other hand a valued situation in the context the ideal neighborhood living: being able to receive and entertain visitors and make visits oneself, sharing one’s time, talk, drinks and food with others without hindrance to the business but without any apparent concrete benefit either. That leisure practices barely had any seemingly utilitarian aspect related to shopkeeping but took mainly place among neighborhood colleagues and acquaintances was a characteristic of neighborhood-level shopkeeping. Being an “object” and “subject” of leisure are two facets of the same phenomenon, occasions of non-work, which can be both distressing and appreciated. Few would have shared Vincent Brandt’s summation of the coastal villagers’ attitude towards work in the mid 1960s, that the less there is the better, and even fewer would have agreed with the same villagers’ perception that shopkeepers in towns and cities are earning a good living without hard work (Brandt 1971: 68).

The less work there was for a shopkeeper the smaller their income, and the surplus time to enjoy neighborhood camaraderie, while for certain people individually gratifying, was for most a too meager reward. Shopkeepers wanted to be busy, and their livelihood did not allow them the luxury to enjoy or appreciate the blessings of an appropriate amount of idleness. There were cases such as Mr Pak or Mr Yun who were capable of enjoying esteem in the neighborhood thanks to their attitude towards, and position during, the occasions of non-productive leisure activities, but not even a relatively successful keeper of a small business like Mr Pak was able or willing to compromise work for idle leisure.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Categories of Identification: Shopkeepers in Korean Society

In this final chapter I examine the categories used by the shopkeepers to classify themselves and situate themselves in their immediate neighborhood surroundings and in wider Korean society. I also look at the concepts used to distinguish and identify shopkeepers and the self-employed in common discourses in the media, in politics, and in social commentary. My fieldwork experience directed my attention to notable differences between the scholarly, formal representations and abstractions of social stratification and categorization in Korean society and the concepts of society I encountered among my informants. Categories and designations familiar from scholarly or other literature were largely absent, and instead of terms such as minjung (masses) which have been commonly used in social and political activism and treated in scholarship on Korea, the people in the field site and elsewhere as well used terms such as somin (commoners, ordinary people) to conceptualize the neighborhood, shopkeepers, and Korean society.

Beyond Class: Categories and Concepts of the Lived World

In a discussion with a Korean professor of anthropology at the beginning of my fieldwork stay, he remarked that the area and the people of my intended fieldwork should be favorable to a researcher because “the somin have a lot of affection (chông),” meaning that the shopkeepers and neighborhood people would likely receive me well. Encountering the same term somewhat later in a wholly different tone, a shopkeeper on Big Street used it to refer to people in the neighborhood in a negative sense, as he was explaining to me the reasons why the location had not been good for his business. Further, Mrs Kim of the bookshop in Big Street, commenting on some photographs that I had taken in the neighborhood, used the term in a more general and neutral sense: “these show the life of somin as it is.”

Encounters like these were the occasions of fieldwork from which the local classifications and social categories of South Korean society started to emerge, showing that they need to be discussed also on their own terms and not necessarily associated with scholarly or bureaucratic categories. For example, in the neighborhood shopkeepers’ conceptualizations there was not much trace of a “middle class” or “middle stratum,” and even less of a “working class” or workers. However, it is also important to recognize that the
scholarly and bureaucratic levels of classification are not irrelevant for the meaning and significance of classifications at the local neighborhood level, and that these correlations need to be discussed in the appropriate contexts.

Instead of classes or strata, which nevertheless are not unknown concepts in Korea, there were “haves” (innūn saram) and “have-nots” (ōmnūn saram), those living well (chal súlda) and those not living well (mot súlda), people keeping a shop or a business (changsā, saōp) and people working in a company (hōesa), and ordinary people or commoners (sōmin) and rich people. It seemed as if either the depictions of South Korean social stratification did not correspond to the ethnographic reality or that locales such as the non-affluent neighborhood in Ordinary People’s Ward had been ignored in the social science literature on Korea.

In his study on the entrepreneurialism and morality of action of the popolino or Neapolitan “ordinary people”, Italo Pardo makes a compelling argument for the inadequacy of the concept of class for the study of the contemporary West (Pardo 1996: 186). He remarks that

“The study of the popolino (the so-called underclass) and the petty bourgeoisie (the ‘non-class’) poses the question whether the abstract categories of the class perspective help us to understand the relationship between citizens and their rulers and to recognize the important variables introduced into these market-oriented relations by the not strictly materialist value attributed to material goals” (Pardo 1996: 182–3).

Pardo states that a class approach remains too deterministic and abstract to account for the Neapolitan entrepreneurial negotiation of restrictions and inequality (ibid: 169). Pardo points out the influence on the structure “from below”, through individual redefinition of culture and exchange as people pursue fulfillment and security (ibid: 188).

Questioning the use of class as a tool of analysis when the social categories to be discussed are formulated in other terms than class or stratum is likely to look like an attempt to avoid a cumbersome analytical apparatus difficult to apply to the field data. Pardo argues against applying class analysis on the basis of its overt dichotomization and simplistic hierarchical model (1996: 186). This notion might not seem to be much help in trying to push aside the concept of class, since the Korean concepts of social stratification that I encountered in the field were expressed in a dichotomized manner (“the haves and have-nots”), with little likelihood attributed to potential relief of the socially and economically unjust situation (“the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer”). Similarly to what Pardo notes to the dismay of those who might wish that the Neapolitan popolino develop class consciousness and turn it into collective action, the “ordinary people” as defined by the Korean term
sŏmin have remained individualistic, without mass consciousness in their answers and adaptations to the drastic developments of modern South Korea.

How to approach the variety of social stratification encountered in the talk and acts of my neighborhood informants, other than channeling it into class categories and class motivations? Considering the problem of concepts and categories of society, it seems be fruitful to think of it as a problem of different levels of society. One level would be the conceptualization of the society from the neighborhood point of view. A scholarly level or sphere of developing and maintaining an array of concepts to describe and analyze society is not necessarily more abstract than the strongly dichotomous one presented in the neighborhood shops and streets. The conceptualization of social stratification at the bureaucratic level makes use of the development and utilization of categories in other spheres, as for example, a commonly used social category becomes popular in political rhetoric and gets bureaucratized through policy measures. I shall argue that these influences move in all directions, especially in a society with rapid communications and intense status competition on many levels like South Korea. For example, it only took a home appliance advertisement to create a term for a “young working wife” (misi), who is no longer a girl but far from being a middle-aged mother, with considerable consuming power and willingness to distinguish herself from older or less affluent and less modern peers (Lee So-Hee 2002: 149–151; Cho Haejoang 2002: 186–7).

In a recent publication, Bruce Kapferer (2002) discusses the bureaucratization of the social order. He remarks that the bureaucratic process in the colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka is manifest in the contemporary ethnic identity. The bureaucratic classifications wrought ethnic and religious identities, and established rigidity where fluidity of social relations and meaning prevailed, and subverted other social relations and identities founded in other principles of social formation (Kapferer 2002: 7–10). Kapferer emphasizes the influence of bureaucratic abstraction on the cultural and social processes, and his notions of the significant influence of state formation and state bureaucracy is useful in recognizing the same processes in the case of Korea.99 While the issues of Sri Lankan ethnicity and South Korean social stratification and categorization greatly differ from each other, the idea of the “culture of the state” helps in perceiving the bureaucratic in the categorization of everyday life and in the everyday categorizations of a society. Adding to that rea-

---

99 It would be even more so if the topic was colonial Korea under the Japanese rule; the question and problem of colonial modernity and colonial traces in contemporary Korea is a continuous one. As I will discuss later, the modern connotations of the concept of sŏmin or ordinary people, commoners, most probably derive from the Japanese colonial era.
soning, state processes in South Korea during the last two decades have also
brought about changes in the bureaucratization or statist process. There has
been a loosening of the authoritarian state, assertions of previously sup-
pressed identities, and the adoption of concepts “from below” into the bu-
reaucratic order. In short, I will think of the following conceptualizations of
social order as “categories of the lived world.”

Korean Notions of Class and Stratum

On a par with the Western usage of the terms, a formal distinction can be
made between class and stratum in the Korean language, respectively kyeg̃p
and kyech‘ʊ̂ng (or the ending -ch‘ʊ̂ng in compound words). A Korean-English
dictionary also gives the meaning “class” for the latter term, but when there
is a need to make a distinction between the two along the lines of English lan-
guage usage in the social sciences, kyeg̃p is used for “class” and kyech‘ʊ̂ng
(or -ch‘ʊng) for “stratum.” Nevertheless, these two terms are used inter-
changeably in South Korea, without paying great attention to their literal
meaning. Social scientists, being aware of the scholarly distinction of the two
but recognizing that the distinction is rarely made, also use the two terms as
a pair as kyeg̃p-kyech‘ʊ̂ng (Yang et al 2001: 3–4, Ch. 1).

In the linguistic usage observable outside academia, the Korean rendering
of class (kyeg̃p) is seldom used in non-scholarly depictions of social stratifica-
tion. It appears that “stratum” has been politically more convenient and suit-
able than “class” in public discourse in strictly anti-Marxist and anti-
communist South Korea, where the state has been constructed in opposition
to North Korea (Grinker 1998, Ch.2). In addition, the common term
chungsanch‘ʊ̂ng, which most often appears in contexts in which it could be
rendered as “middle class” in English, denotes literally a stratum (ch‘ʊ̂ng).
Compared to the frequency that it is used in Korean media and scholarship,
the lack of its use in the neighborhood talk of Korean society was striking, as
if the folk dichotomy did not have room for a mediating group between the
haves and have-nots.

Working class as a social and political category does not have an estab-
lished position in South Korea, and the use of “working class” as a social and
cultural concept is more limited in the Korean language than in the Western
use of English. Whereas “working class” would be used to describe, for exa-

---

100 It should be noted though that North Korea was not nominally created as just a work-
ers’ state. It was supposed to represent all the patriotic people, including workers,
peasants, clerical workers, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, unlike the South, which
was from North’s point of view ruled by landlords, capitalists and reactionaries (Arm-
strong 2002: 221).
ple, a residential area in Western Europe or North America, in a similar Korean context a common term is sŏmin, “ordinary people.” Hagen Koo, writing on the obstacles to the formation of working class identity remarks that the language of identity formation has been provided by the state, and “the political, ideological, and discursive environment in South Korea was even more unfriendly to the working class formation than the cultural factors” (Koo 2002: 11). Koo shows that there was no appropriate term for any collective identity until the end of 1970 and early 1980s, when the already existing term nodongja came to denote certain self-identity and worker consciousness instead of its earlier debasing image based on the low status of manual labor, and pejorative terms such as kongsuni (for women) and kongdori (for men) started to disappear from use (Koo 2002: 140–2).

“Worker” (nodongja) has gained ground as a category of self-identification, and the labor struggles of the 1980s demonstrated that unions are capable of wide and successful collective action, but the achievements in wage raises and other demands for better labor conditions were not successfully transformed into a policy-based political party that could have won seats in the parliament until 2004, when the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) managed to enter the parliament in the general elections. This also agrees with what I observed in the neighborhood: that “working class” and “worker” were not relevant categories used to talk about social stratification or social and economic injustice. In the few instances that I recorded the word nodong, it was used to denote physically hard labor. The vernacular Korean word for both physical and mental work, il, is free of political and status connotations, and can be used without burden, as was done in the neighborhood as well in the rest of society.

“Working class” is not a common attribute when contrasts and distinctions are based on wealth and ownership, neither in the more general South Korean discourse nor in the neighborhood people’s descriptions of Korean society that I have in my fieldwork data. Political and cultural activism said to represent mostly industrial workers during the authoritarian military governments from the 1960s to 1980 was performed in the name of the “conscious masses” (minjung) rather than the working class. Minjung is a parallel concept to sŏmin, likewise referring to “masses”, but from a different historical and political angle. The people as minjung are masses that are conscious of their historical, social, and political subjectivity, and with their mass consciousness, they are subjects of history and agents of its change. The people as sŏmin are conformist and acquiescent, busy making a living for themselves and their families, adapting to and making the best of current conditions, and not political or historical subjects but objects. These two definitions for “common people” or “masses” form an intriguing pair, and while actually be-
ing the two sides of the same coin, they are rarely, if ever, approached as such. Of the two terms, I now turn to the one that was socially relevant and culturally meaningful for my shopkeeper informants, sŏmin.

**Sŏmin as a Social Category, Shopkeepers as Ordinary People**

Sŏmin\(^{101}\) is one of the South Korean terms that can be glossed as “masses”, “commoners”, or “ordinary people.”\(^{102}\) It is a common social category in everyday speech, in media and in politics, and it has surfaced in the language of political and other public discourse especially during president Kim Dae-jung’s administration, which designated sŏmin along with the “middle stratum” (chungsanch’ung) as the main object of its social and economic policies after the onset of the economic crisis in the late 1990s. The term has mainly escaped scholarly interest unlike minjung, which was intensively discussed and written about especially in the 1980s, when it was used as a designation for political and cultural movements. Minjung as a concept has largely retreated from the role it had until the early 1990s as a rallying term for social and political change; sŏmin has remained a relevant social category, and it has even gained in popularity as a concept of people to which politicians appeal to gain political support and refer to in policy making.\(^{103}\)

It is important to add sŏmin to the mappings and discussions of the categories and classifications of Korean society. The uses of the word, the meanings attached to it at different levels of society and its popularity across the political map make sŏmin a significant concept in discussing how social categories are used and in which way meanings are attached to them. What makes it especially interesting for an anthropologist is its frequent use in ordinary everyday speech as well as in newspaper writing but almost complete absence from the attention of scholarship. Sŏmin is a term that has found its way from politicians’ rallies to implementations of policies; sŏmin has become a bureaucratic term, and its originally vague parameters have in some cases been

---

\(^{101}\) Because of the recurrent appearance of the term, I will not write “sŏmin” in italics in this section.

\(^{102}\) Sŏmin does not have an equivalent in established scholarly categories of society, and as in the case of minjung, there is no satisfactorily corresponding term in English. I follow the usage in the English-language writing on minjung, and leave the term for the most untranslated, and I do not italicize it either for the rest of this section. Jordan Sand (2001: 363) glosses the corresponding Japanese terms shomin and minjû as “ordinary people” and “masses”; these would be appropriate also in the Korean case, as the connotations of the terms are similar in Japan and in Korea.

\(^{103}\) Kim Dae-jung is said to have used minjung rhetoric earlier in his career (Kim Hyung-A 1995: 53–54). It makes an interesting comparison to the frequent use of sŏmin his later years.
reshaped to represent a certain income stratum between the poor and the middle strata.

THE CONCEPT OF SÔMIN IN CONTEMPORARY KOREA

One of the most prominent contemporary Korean painters, Park Soo-keun (Pak Su-gün), is often designated as a “painter of the ordinary people” (sôminûi hwaga). During his lifetime (1914-1965) he attained some fame as an artist but only little remuneration, yet his work has now come to represent the essence of Korean life during the poverty of the 1950s and the early 1960s, with not a little nostalgia. The subjects of his paintings are women and men in marketplaces, people of all ages sitting alone or in groups, girls tending their siblings, scenes of villages and urban shantytowns, and bare trees. The people, painted in a distinctive, plain style with a complex, layered technique, appear quiet and passive, as if accepting the hardships of life as given; for this and for the social milieu such as marketplace trading the “ordinary people” in Park’s paintings have been characterized as sômin.104 After seeing an exhibition of Park Soo-keun’s work in Seoul, I discussed his pictures with Yumin’s mother in her clothing repair shop. She had on some occasions defined herself as sômin, and I asked what kind of people she thinks Park Soo-keun would paint today. “People like me”, she replied. A depiction of the characters in Park Soo-keun’s pictures in an arts magazine makes an interesting comparison between Park and later works of art and poetry by making a rare juxtaposition of the two terms depicting two kinds of people: “Before the sômin in Park Soo-keun’s paintings could appear as awakened minjung, one had to wait ten years for Kim Chi-ha’s Yellow Earth, twenty years for O Yun’s woodprints, and thirty years for Pak No-hae’s The Dawn of Labor” (Munhwainmul 5wol: 37).105

In a volume by a research institute on urban problems and civic activity, exceptional in using the word sômin in its title, the meaning of the term is defined as “ordinary citizens concerned about shopping prices.” In the introductory chapter it is remarked that the term usually preferred by civic movements, minjung, is insufficient to cover the entire spectrum of people affected by the polarization of the society in the 1990s not only in production but also in consumption, housing and culture (Han’guk Tosiyôn’guso 1996: 18). This quotation introduces the main contexts in which the term sômin appears in South Korea: they are the common people or the masses that are “concerned about shopping prices” and are “busy making a living” as individual economic actors rather than political subjects, concerned with individual

104 For Park Soo-keun’s paintings, I have used the catalogue of an exhibition in 1999 (Sam-sung Museum of Modern Art 1999).
105 Kim Chi-ha and Pak No-hae are poets, and the deceased O Yun was a painter.
or familial economic survival or improvement rather than political or social causes.

The Chinese character pronounced sŏ in Korean was used to define commoners and those who were not eligible for civil service examinations in distinction from the yangban gentry and scholar-officials\textsuperscript{106} during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties (Hŏ 1981: 87–94; Song 1989: 209–11; Palais 1996: 726), and the term sŏmin existed during Chosŏn as one term for commoners (Palais 1996: 948). According to scholars who have done extensive research on the early modern period and the Japanese colonial era\textsuperscript{107}, the term does not appear or is very rear in the early Korean-language press, and it has neither been so common as to draw the attention of scholars conducting research on the era. However, the present-day connotations of the term sŏmin are most likely a result of the Japanese colonial period. It appears that the Japanese term shomin – the Japanese pronunciation of the same Chinese characters – has been more common than its Korean equivalent during the premodern times; it also seems to have more continuity from the premodern era to the twentieth century, and it is strongly associated with the image of the life of urban commoners in Edo, the premodern Tokyo (Sand 2001: 357, 363). Interestingly, entries in modern dictionaries for shomin and sŏmin are strikingly similar in Japan and Korea, both including references such as “sŏmin bank”, “sŏmin finance”, and “sŏmin class.”

The recent use of sŏmin as a political concept – not as political actors but as objects of policy – has generated discussion about the meaning of the term. The political contest over the concept, such as election campaigning in the last few years between candidates on the basis of proximity to the real sŏmin and whose policies are actually beneficial for sŏmin has produced interesting connotations. Sŏmin has remained a vague concept, useful for many purposes and competing political agendas.\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Song Chun-ho (1989: 211) remarks that during the Chosŏn dynasty, the character sŏ was contrasted especially with the character sa, which denotes scholar-officials.
  \item Personal communication from professors Kim Joong-seop (June 8, 2001), Clark Sorensen (May 21, 2001), and Michael Robinson (June 1, 2001).
  \item In the 2002 presidential election campaigns a representative of one political party accused the opposing party of presenting a “false sŏmin” as a support speaker for the presidential candidate: “Mrs Yi owns a big shop in Chagalch’i market, and holds a monopoly of angler fish in the market with her cousin, who is the chairman of the election committee of the local party chapter. Mrs Yi is wealthy, and cannot be regarded as sŏmin” (\textit{Munhwa Ilbo}, Dec. 9, 2002). Still, the same party was considering bringing out sŏmin speakers such as taxi drivers, street cleaners and shopkeepers, while the other party was going to present another sŏmin speaker in the form of a farmer or a worker (\textit{Hankyoreh}, Dec. 6, 2002).
\end{itemize}
8. Categories of Identification

Sŏmin as a Spatial Concept of Stratification

As housing is a clear marker of status and social stratification in South Korea (Chun 1995a, Lett 1998), it is also a common attribute in defining “sŏminness” and the uses and applications of the term. For example, instead of using “working class” as an attribute for housing or residential areas perceived as lower than middle class, the commonly applied term is sŏmin. Whereas a spacious condominium in an apartment house typically represents a salaried or professional middle class home, a typical sŏmin domicile would be in a small housing neighborhood or in a small apartment house with key money (chönse) or monthly rent. Characteristics of housing defined as sŏmin-like are instability, frequent removals and economic problems due to increasing rent, chönse, and real estate prices (Yi Un-yŏng et al 1991, Yi Sŏng-gwŏn 1999), and the people who are first affected by increasing housing expenses are conceptualized as sŏmin (Chosun Ilbo Dec. 9, 1999; Hankyoreh Mar. 20, 2001) Government housing policy for “middle and sŏmin strata” launched in 1999 depicted sŏmin mainly as those who do not own their domicile (mujut’ae kŏsŏmin, “houseless sŏmin”), and whose burden of housing expenses had increased despite lower prices during the economic downturn. The policy aimed at supporting the construction of large numbers of sŏmin dwellings, which means small and middle size homes and rented homes, and extending housing purchase funding for sŏmin and rental support for the low income stratum (chŏsŏdŏkch’’ung).  

Applied to living in small-scale housing, the term sŏmin was parallel to non-affluence, “not living well” (mot salda), which I found to be a more common term than sŏmin in characterizing the degree of affluence of urban areas. Interestingly, references to the sŏmin character of the neighborhood, which were often made from the perspective of an outsider, differed in tone from the use of sŏmin as a term of self-identification and as a term of explaining one’s position in Korean society. For a businesskeeper who regarded the neighborhood as a business site without identifying himself with the locale, “a place where there are many sŏmin” indicated that he or she would have to be content with meager business prospects. Unlike positive and nostalgic associations of sŏmin with characteristics attributed to tradi-

---

109 “Policy for middle and sŏmin strata housing stability” (Chungsanch’’ung mit sŏminch’’ung chuqdoanjŏng taech’ae) was one of the measures taken in 1999 by the Kim Dae-jung government, along with the “Policy for stabilizing the life of the middle stratum and sŏmin” (Chungsanch’’ung mit sŏminsænghwal anjŏng taech’ae) (Nara Kyŏngjie 1999: 7).

110 Construction of housing for the sŏmin was high on political agenda already during the heated election campaigning of 1987, when the candidate to be later elected, Roh Tae-woo, promised to build “two million units of housing in order to contribute to the solution of the sŏmin housing problems” (Son 2005: 313).
tional Koreanness such as affection (chŏng) and humane personality (insim), these statements depict sŏmin as lacking not only in purchasing power but also in development and modern sophistication.

During a later visit to Seoul, two persons I was acquainted with from the neighborhood as a consequence of my research attributed the untidiness of the area to the large number of sŏmin inhabitants. “There is more litter in the streets where there are many sŏmin,” said one woman who had kept a small supermarket in the neighborhood with her husband for a long time up until a few years back. However, she asked additionally “but haven’t you nonetheless experienced the good character of people here?” as was characteristic of the discourse of chŏng, depicting Koreans and especially neighborhood people as being in possession of that positive trait. These references to the lack of modern development and cultural refinement among the sŏmin are similar to occasional depictions of sŏmin as politically unenlightened, harboring a lingering nostalgia for the politically authoritarian, undemocratic, and ultimately dictatorial but economically successful era of President Park Chung-hee.\(^{111}\)

Compared to these characterizations of sŏmin as naïve and politically passive, unenlightened, conservative or even reactionary, the discourse relating to this concept and its application to people is in general sympathetic and well-meaning if somewhat patronizing in tone.

Sŏmin as an Economical and Political Concept

Sŏmin is essentially a concept of South Korean political economy, and it is often used in economic terms. On most of the occasions that I encountered the word during fieldwork and in subsequent visits to the neighborhood it was used to describe one’s own or others’ economic position in Korean society. The sŏmin are contrasted with affluent people, but they are not synonymous with the poor; the concept nevertheless denotes a lack of economical leeway (yŏyu), a need for daily toil for a livelihood, and a disadvantaged position in the society and economy. In the sense of economic alienation, the resemblance of sŏmin to minjung is close. The South Korean economy was supposedly recovering rapidly from the economic crisis at the time of my

fieldwork, but the general perception in the neighborhood was that the benefits of the new growth had not reached the somin; this sense of exclusion from the fruits of the recovery appeared as a characteristic of being somin. Hong Wonjang expressed these sensibilities as follows: “They say the economy has been improving, but it affects only the conglomerates (chaebol). Somin cannot feel it in any way yet.”

Another representative statement was made a few of years later by Mr Yu when he was talking about the bleak prospects of laundry keeping and about his own social and economic position: “The system in Korea is to rely on connections (ppaeck) for living. The rich (innun saramdul) should use their money for the somin, but nowadays the somin are living on each other’s back. Those who have connections use them, and the more they earn the less they pay in taxes.” The same topic of unfair and unequal taxation and the association of somin with disadvantage vis-à-vis the state and the rich appears in the words of the mid-30s man, who kept the restaurant with his mother in Big Street: “Things are better in the US; if you get caught of tax evasion, you are done, but here everyone is doing it. The rich bastards (innun nomdul) evade taxes, and as a consequence prices get higher, and the life of the somin gets more difficult.”

In the spring of 1999, the South Korean government enacted legislation that expanded the national pension system to cover the self-employed and small businesses in urban areas. The people I talked with met the system and especially the pension payments with great suspicion, being unwilling to trust the government with their money. “It’s only taking money from somin and giving it to those who already have money”, told the above-mentioned keeper of a flower shop, who was adamant about not paying a penny to the pension fund. The attitude towards the national pension is a typical example of the perception of the position of somin vis-à-vis government, as being an object of imposed and enforced policy measures. “The government doesn’t consider the somin at all. (...) Even though the welfare system should be improved, the somin have to tighten their belts while the wealthy are living as usual”, recounted Mr Yu in September 1999, some time after the government had announced the stabilization policy for the middle stratum and somin.

Parallel to the contrast between ordinary people and government is the contrast between somin and rich people, conceptualized usually as “people living well” (chal sanin saram) or “the haves” (innin saram), which I will discuss below. This is one facet of the sense of social and political injustice, which is often expressed in a cynical and at times in a bitter manner. Compared to Pardo’s description of the Neapolitan popolino or ordinary people and their resourcefulness, their Korean counterparts appear almost despaired in their occasional laments about societal wrongs, as if giving the impression of
being resourceless, and with no one to turn to but themselves and their immediate kin. From this kind of talk one can detect clear patterns of Korean “stratified discourse”, seen in newspapers, television dramas and since the turn of the 21st century, increasingly on the Internet.

“Only the sőmin follow the law, and the rich (innün nomdāl) do not”, said a hagwón institute keeper and a local politician in a critical discussion of Korean society and economy with Mr Hwang in the latter’s wallpaper and floorings shop. This conversation took place in the spring of 1999 before the clothing lobby scandal, which was a topic of talk in the neighborhood as well as in the whole nation throughout the summer of 1999. Reactions I gathered from shopkeepers watching the parliamentary hearings on television in August that year were mostly cynical and fatalistic. In the words of Mrs Pak of the neighborhood supermarket, “When they get to power they all become like that.” While the neighborhood people did not talk about the affair in terms of the sőmin versus the rich, that was the tone of reporting in newspapers at the time: “Price tags in the boutiques visited by wives of high officials and the rich (puyuch’ung) surpassed the imagination of the sőmin” (Joongang Ilbo, Aug. 24, 1999). The main figures of the scandal were wives of high government officials and industrialists, and as a consequence, divisions of status and class between women became a topic of public scrutiny. The distinctions and moral characterizations that surfaced reflected the distinction between the affluent and the ordinary people. The term that was used to address and refer to the high-status women of the affair, samonim, was juxtaposed with the term for “ordinary” married middle-aged women, ajumma, which was presented in favorable terms (Donga Ilbo, Nov. 20, 1999; Joongang Ilbo, Jan. 3, 2000). In this discourse sőmin and ajumma were analogous concepts, applied correspondingly to people devoid of power, wealth, and high social status, set against the power, wealth, status, and moral deficiencies of samonim, or the affluent people in general.

SőMIN AS A BUREAUCRATIC CATEGORY

During my fieldwork I never heard people relate the concepts of working class and sőmin to each other in the way it is sometimes done in economic and political usage; in the neighborhood setting among the small shopkeepers, “working class,” as mentioned above, is not a relevant concept or social category for classifying the social and economic environment. In politics and in media commentaries, workers (nodongja) are sometimes subsumed by sőmin, but there are also contexts in which these two are treated as separate categories. In the formulations of government policies described above, the term sőmin is regarded mechanically as an income stratum devoid of political and social characteristics, usually distinguished from the middle stratum.
As a result, categories of people that in other contexts could be conceptualized as the working class and the urban poor stratum (tosi pin’gonch’üng) end up being included in the category of sömin. The concept of sömin in government policies since the late 1990s has been inclusive, and it presupposes the inclusion of wage employees into the category. In an explanation of the government housing policy for the middle stratum and sömin, it is stated that wage earners (külloja) comprise the majority of both strata (Yi Sŏn-gwŏn 1999: 43). With the implementation of policies intended to improve the lot of the middle stratum and the sömin, the latter term has become a bureaucratic and even a statistical term with a clearly defined meaning. Thus in a research report on the growth of income differences by a government-endowed research institute, sömin is used as a term for a particular income stratum, designating people with incomes between the lowermost 20 percent and the uppermost 50 percent on the income scale. This kind of application of sömin as a rigid statistical category is exceptional, and differs even from government practice, though it is very likely that the use in this case has been influenced by government example.

When sömin as a category is associated with certain occupations and ways of life, there might be a need to treat workers as having a separate identity, and social and economic disadvantage and exclusion from political power do not necessary lead to categorization as sömin. When the working class is distinguished from sömin, the latter is usually taken to denote self-employment and small entrepreneurship, which reflects the idea of these as typical forms of sömin livelihood. For example, the Democratic Labor Party, which seeks its constituency from the laborers, farmers, and the self-employed, usually makes a distinction between workers and sömin in its political rhetoric, sometimes adding farmers as the third group. “Friend of workers and sömin” (Nodongja, söminiti ch’ìn’gu) was the slogan used by a candidate of the party in a local election in 2001 in a Seoul district, which included the vast Tongdaemun market (Ohmynews, Oct. 11, 2001) with tens of thousands of individual shopkeepers, to whom the candidate appealed with his use of the term.

Unlike in political usage, in which sömin is made to represent the whole spectrum below the middle class, the general parlance has a tendency to

---

112 The study by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs uses four principal social categories or strata (ch’ung) based on income levels: absolute poverty (ch’oltae pin’gon, the lowermost 10%), relative poverty (sangdae pin’gon, 10–20%), sömin (20–50%), and upper (chungsangwi, the uppermost 50%) (Pak et al 2000: 16). Elsewhere in the study there are five or even six income strata: extreme, absolute and relative poverty, low income, sömin and upper middle (ibid: 43; see also tables pp. 45–86).

113 In its party platform, DLP uses the term minjung as a term for people for whom its policies are for (http://www.kdlp.org), but in public rhetoric as presented by major newspapers that term is not used.
make a distinction between “the poor” (pinmin or pin’gonch’ũng) and “the ordinary people” in the manner of the income gap research cited above. Analogous to that is the distinction between small-scale chut’aeck housing and hillside shantytowns. From the latter perspective, this distinction is not necessarily welcome: a man who was addressed as reverend (moksanim) by people at the office of a renters’ organization in a hillside shantytown referred to the people living in the area as sŏmin, when he stated that “People living in big and good houses do not understand the life of these people.” He used the same contrast between sŏmin and affluent people as my informants in the fieldwork neighborhood on the other side of the hill, who in turn would distinguish themselves from the hillside area. In a study of a poor area in 1980s soon to be demolished (Cho and Cho 1992), the concept of sŏmin is absent, whereas a study of housing problems (Yi ŭn-yŏng et al 1991: 38), a topic often associated with sŏmin, defines the category as including both the workers and the poor.

Small Businesskeepers as Sŏmin

According to a view of a Korean scholar in the mid-1990s, the image of minjung as workers active in a struggle against capitalists and employers was retained in principle despite profound changes in Korea since the late 1980s (Kim Hyung-A 1995: 58). However, democratized political conditions have diminished the validity of the concept of minjung, but the circumstances concerning the concept of sŏmin have not changed similarly, and a typical image of a sŏmin as a self-employed person, the keeper of a small business trying to adjust to the changes of capitalism has outlasted the big changes in South Korean society and politics during the last decades.

My informants did not explicitly associate the concept of sŏmin with their own livelihood, but from the variety of references to the topic it is obvious that small-scale businesskeeping is regarded as the most representative kind of sŏmin livelihood. Even more than the neighborhood business sphere and neighborhood businesses, the so-called traditional marketplaces (chaerae sijang) are associated with sŏmin and “sŏmin economy,” that is, livelihood and consumption. The Namdaemun market in downtown Seoul with more than ten thousand establishments has been described as “the marketplace of the sŏmin” (Kang Hong-bin 1998: 193), and marketplaces in general have been depicted as “not only the basis of life for the urban sŏmin but the location where the identity of the urban sŏmin community is created and developed” (Chin 2001: 203). Aside from the few references in scholarly literature, this association is most commonly encountered in media, where remarks such as “base-level marketplace economy that symbolizes the sŏmin livelihood”
(Chosun Ilbo Jan. 25, 2002) and “traditional marketplaces and neighborhood supermarkets used by sômin” (Joongang Ilbo, June 7, 1999) are frequent.

When politicians want to meet the common people – sômin – for the purpose of election campaigning, they seek marketplaces and shopkeepers, not factories, as could be seen during the 2002 presidential campaign (Kim Hun 2000). Sômin-like qualities of self-employment and small business ownership were also behind much of the use of the term in my field material, whether as self-identification or as designation of others. The keepers of the shops are those who carry out most of the observable daily activities in the neighborhood and the interaction in public spaces, in which shops are included. They and their establishments play an essential part in the formation of the character of the neighborhood, which in turn sets the conditions for the scale and quality of businesses. As the shopkeeper quoted above said, the conditions were not favorable for business precisely because there were many sômin.

Categories of Social Stratification: Money and Wealth

The nature of money as an organizing concept not only among the small shopkeepers but also in Korean society in general is evident in the use of money and wealth to conceptualize social differences, distinctions, and inequality. In this regard, South Korea does not differ fundamentally from other cultures in capitalist countries, but the contexts, meanings, and sensibilities attached to these notions are illustrative of the shopkeepers’ culturally mediated views on the nature of South Korean capitalism and society and their own livelihood.

The Haves and Have-Not

No expression of social stratification commonly used by my informants was more intricately tied to ownership and wealth than the distinction between innun saram, “the haves,” and ömnun saram, “the have-nots,” closely corresponding to the English language glosses but with a more morally critical tint. These terms usually appear together as binary contrasts as with the English equivalents, and they are used to express criticism, discontent, or resentment of not only the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth but also of the unequal social, political, and legal consequences of that distribution. The law is different for innun saram and ömnun saram; the innun saram are getting richer while the ömnun saram are suffering; innun saram have the means to have their children avoid military service whereas ordinary people must send their sons to the army.

—

114 Innun and ömnun are adnominal forms of the verbs itta (to have, to be) and öpta (to not be, to not have).
The social criticism implicit in these terms also entails an implied critical assessment of the moral character of the rich, “the haves.” To emphasize the impression that wealth can be morally dubious and the rich inclined to act immorally and unfairly, and to express contempt towards the unjust liberties enjoyed by the wealthy, the neutral saram (person) may be replaced with the denigrating nom. A good example of the moralistic tone problematizing the character of the rich, and of the use of the denigrating term for person, lies in the remarks of one restaurateur woman, whose comments were inspired by a television program about the Korean upper class: “The have-nots (ŏmnŭn saramdŭl) have a lot of affection (chŏng), 90 percent of them have it, but among the haves (innŭn nomdŭl) not more than half have chŏng.”

Many of the essential concepts of social stratification, centering on the contrast between “having” and “not having”, appear in the following passage from Mr Yu, whose frequent allusions to the topic of money also included the social distinctions money was perceived to produce.

The haves (innŭn saramdŭl) are all like that. Nobody cares about people in need of a home. The gap between the rich and the poor (pinbu kyŏkcha) is severe. Down there someone built a studio apartment (wŏllum) building of 35 rooms on a 75 p’yŏng (250 m²) lot. The haves live by receiving rents. The haves build cheaply and sell for a high price, and small shops like us will have to close.

The background to Mr Yu’s morally charged words was that at the turn of the millennium a lot of construction took place in the neighborhood and its vicinity due to cheap loan interests, of which many land and real estate owners took advantage and responded to the specific housing and domicile demand of the area, which undoubtedly added to the perception of increasing social inequality for Mr Yu, who lived with his family in the single room adjoining the laundry. (Interestingly, in his assessment of the likeability of different kinds of customers, Mr Yu considered neither the haves nor the have-nots as unpleasant, while those in between were the most difficult to deal with, as they were the most likely to try to bargain.) In some commentaries the social differentiation also present within the neighborhood was expressed as one between the haves and have-nots, but characteristic of the discourse, it stayed at a generalizing level and did not indicate any specific persons: the former did not shop nor have their hair dressed in the local establishments but went to more prestigious places such as department stores.

Inequalities stemming from money, wealth, and the ensuing privileges of the rich are felt to be especially acute before the law. It is a topic that easily evokes the application of “the haves” and “the have-nots,” and the perception that the law is different for these two categories of people was common also among the neighborhood shopkeepers. An exemplary case of the intensity of this discourse are the consequences of an incident from the late 1980s,
when a group of convicts escaped during a prison transfer, took hostages, and
initiated a hostage drama which was enacted in the media for more than a
week. During the hostage situation one of the escapees shouted a phrase
which has since become a proverbial remark depicting the social ills of Korea:
*yujŏn mujŏe mujŏn yujŏe* ("not guilty if money, guilty if no money") (*Hankook Ilbo*, Feb 25, 2000).

On one occasion the issue of law and the disparity of wealth even
prompted one shopkeeper to proclaim that “I hate this country.” He had
worked as a technician for the local administration but had been fired be-
cause of an alcohol-related incident and had since been making an unsteady
living in diverse small businesses with his wife. He had had a few drinks with
a neighboring shopkeeper, and after asking me what I thought was the worst
thing in Korea, gave his opinion as follows:

“In Korea the law is different for the haves (*innün saramdŭl*) and the have-nots
(*ŏmnŭn saramdŭl*). The haves are released immediately [after being arrested or
imprisoned] but the have-nots are released after 20 years. *Innŭn saramdŭl*, they
have got the law [on their side] and *ŏmnŭn saramdŭl* do not have any law. I
hate this country.”  

Mr Yu’s conversation with a grandmother who had dropped in his laundry
to rest on her way up the road treated the topic of law with a similar tone.
The two concluded that there was no use reporting a certain incident to the
police, and the grandmother turned to me and asked if it was like that also in
my “neighborhood” (*tongne*). Mr Yu answered instead:

“It’s different in foreign countries. The law in Korea... There is no law in Ko-
rea. It’s different for the haves and for the have-nots. Let’s see what happens
to [the former president] Kim Young-sam’s son, I wonder if he will go to jail in
the end.”

At the time there were several high-profile legal cases such as the former
president’s son’s trial, conviction, and subsequent pardon which evoked these

---

115 His wife countered him, reminding him also of my presence: There are good and bad
things in every country. Why do you talk about Korea like that? He didn’t come to Ko-
rea to study that kind of things.” The husband’s reply was cynical and blunt: “You seem
to be a patriot.”

116 The case of the former president Kim Young-sam’s son generated heated opinions on
several occasions among my informants, and it seemed to be generally regarded as a
prime example of the unjust application of law. He had been already linked to irregu-
larities during his father’s presidency (1993-1998), and at the time of my research he
was convicted of tax evasion and other charges and given two years in prison after sev-
eral years of legal proceedings (*Hankyoreh*, Aug. 13, 1999). He was nonetheless soon par-
donated in the mass amnesty on the Independence Day of August 15 as a gesture of rec-
onciliation towards the former president and his supporters, which was still largely
seen as a political move to gain foothold in the former president’s territory in Kyŏng-
sang province, where the current governmental party’s support was weak.
sentiments. At the opposite end from the president’s son in the social spectrum, the fugitive thief Sin Ch’ang-wŏn and his capture after several years of hiding, was also receiving the neighborhood shopkeepers’ and Koreans’ attention. Sin had allegedly been stealing mainly from the rich, which in the socially and economically tense atmosphere of the aftermath of the economic crisis influenced public opinion of him. For one shopkeeper the stories of his stealing from the have-nots and contributing to the have-nots were nothing but exaggeration, but for another, the famous thief had done less harm than the former president’s son.

Ômnŭn saram, the have-nots, corresponds to the concept of sŏmin in regard to social and economic standing. More than indicating poverty, it implies relative deprivation compared to the innŭn saram, the haves, a lack of a means and prospects for attaining wealth. The correspondence between the two concepts is evident also in the occasions when sŏmin is used instead of have-nots as a contrast to the rich, the haves. Despite this correspondence and occasional interchangeability, the dialectic of have-nots and haves has not found its way into mainstream political rhetoric in the manner of sŏmin.

**Poor Getting Poorer and Rich Getting Richer**

Akin to the notion of the haves and the have-nots and not unrelated to understandings about the concept of sŏmin either, is the perception of an increasing gap in wealth and income, conceptualized as “the poor getting poorer and the rich getting richer.” In its most concise form the notion is expressed with a phrase consisting of six Chinese characters, pinikpin puikpu.\(^{117}\) It appears frequently in commentaries and discussions about society and economy, and even though I did not hear the Chinese character expression in the neighborhood, several of my informants expressed the same sentiments in more colloquial terms. At the time of the fieldwork, about two years after the outbreak of the economic crisis, the increased inequality and widening income gap was keenly sensed and intensively discussed both in media and in the neighborhood, and as a consequence of the crisis, the notion of poor getting poorer and rich getting richer was increasingly evoked to represent Koreans’ sensibilities about the intensified economic and social divides. Of the earlier use of the phrase, a good example is its application by newly recruited office workers of a conglomerate to criticize the unequal distribution of wealth epitomized by those very conglomerates (Janelli 1993: 198).

\(^{117}\) *Pinikpin puikpu* is linguistically Classical Chinese, but it is a part of the colloquial Korean lexicon.
Characteristic of the articulations of economic and social polarization were newspaper reports such as the one titled “Economy of Harvest Moon Day (ch’usŏk): poor getting poorer and rich getting richer – chilly in marketplaces, crowded department stores,” which at the moment of festivity consumption contrasted the increasingly poor economy of marketplaces frequented by the ordinary people (sŏmin) and the thriving department stores where staff and temporary workers were busy serving the wealthy Seoulites (Donga Ilbo Sep 17, 1999).\(^\text{118}\) One article, paying attention to the increasing consumption of the wealthy as a consequence of the growth of stock assets and the widening stratum of the poor, uses another common Korean idiom based on the compactness of Chinese character, pinbu kyŏkch’a, the gap between the poor and the rich (Chosun Ilbo July 19, 1999). The article, titled “Gap between low and high stratum deepens – downfall of the middle stratum after the IMF, polarization,” emphasizes the increasing economic disparities by discussing especially the deteriorated circumstances of the middle stratum (ch’ungsanch’ŏng), which was one of the main characteristics associated with the crisis.

According to the formal statistics, the distribution of income in South Korea has been relatively equal compared to countries with a similar level of gross national product (Hwang Sŏng-hyŏn 1998, Yu Kyŏng-jun 2003). Still, the general perception has been, increasingly so as a consequence of the crisis, that the disparity of not only income but especially of general wealth has been intolerably big; the general perceptions and the sentiments that the concepts treated here are used to express are also backed up by statistics. When not only income but also assets such as real estate, land, and stocks, and the income they generate are taken in to account in the calculations of the distribution of wealth, the picture comes to resemble the public perceptions of greater inequality (Hwang 1998). During the first year after the outbreak of the crisis, the average monthly income of the highest income quintile among urban wage earners increased by a few percent, while the income of the four other quintiles all diminished, most (15 percent) among the poorest 20 percent (Donga Ilbo Nov 9, 1998). In 1996, 5.9 percent of households belonged to the absolute poverty stratum, earning less than the minimum subsistence income of a four-person household, whereas in 2000 the percentage had risen to 11.5 (Yu Kyŏng-jun 2003). Likewise, the gini-coefficient, which measures income disparity, rose from 0.296 to 0.358 during the same period, indicating increased inequality.

For the shopkeepers in the neighborhood and elsewhere, the question of shop space acquisition – in addition to housing – is where the differences of

\(^{118}\)Marketplaces like Tongdaemun and Namdaemun in Seoul and department stores, associated respectively with the ordinary people and the wealthy, are commonly contrasted in depicting the social and economic gap between the two categories of people.
wealth are keenly felt. As mentioned, the actual wealth gap exists in property ownership, and real estate is where fortunes have been and are made in South Korea. It is fitting that in the neighborhood it was real estate ownership, owning a house or a building, which was mentioned as a basis for being one of the haves (innña saram) or a rich person (puja). It is rare that the shopkeeper owns the shop space in which the business is kept. Just getting hold of shop space is always a considerable investment, since the guarantee money (pojanggam) and the key money (chönse) are high compared to the price of the real estate, and until the early 2000s bank loans were not easy to come by for the ordinary people.

In the neighborhood the sentiments of increasing inequality were aptly expressed by a woman who had started to bake and sell fish-shaped pastries (pungoppang, “carp bread”) in front of her flower shop to augment the apparently ailing business of her shop. On that occasion, her husband, whom I quoted above about the inequality of the haves and the have-nots before the law, was taking a nap inside the shop, and his wife was outside at the pastry grill. Without my asking anything, she started to lament the circumstances, through which she was apparently referring to her and her husband’s situation: “The economy should be getting better, but it is not happening. The life of the sömin is getting harder and harder, and the have-nots are dying away (ömnnan saramdač hago itta). Only the haves (innña saramdül) are living a good life.”

The ideas of the moral dubiousness of the rich and increasing income and wealth gaps are nicely summed up in the common Korean proverb of which Yumin’s mother told me the following version, telling me to write it down: “The one who has ninety nine, wants to have one more to make it one hundred” (ahañahop kajin chaga hana kajigo paek kae ch’aeugo sip’handa), which according to her describes how the rich want to become even richer. Absent from Yumin’s mother’s version of the proverb was a part that emphasizes wealth differences and the greed of the rich: “The one who has ninety nine pieces asks the person who has only one piece to make it one hundred.” This was how the proverb was cited in a conversation between Mr Pak, his wife and two visitors to the mill about the Korean big conglomerates to illustrate...
that the conglomerates have expanded “like octopuses” in order to make money.\textsuperscript{120}

As in its increased application during the “IMF crisis”, the notion of poor getting poorer and rich getting richer is constituted on ideas about the consequences of contemporary capitalism in South Korea. Here it is useful to borrow from Nancy Abelmann who has outlined two contemporaneous and competing narratives of modern South Korea, the one seeing the society as having been relatively open for social mobility and the other as closed, less equal, and more structurally determined (Abelmann 2002: 29–32). Of the two, the idea of money and wealth amassing to certain people and escaping from the grip of the others is more akin to the latter, but also the former one helps to shed light on the idea of the structural and innate inequalities of money. The narrative of openness, as delineated by Abelmann, perceives a common, shared deprivation in the rural past when inequalities were less severe and not based on money. In this sense, \textit{pinikpin puikpu} – poor getting poorer and rich getting richer – was brought about by the increasingly monetarized economy and the entry of an increasing number of people into its sphere via urbanization, industrialization, and also monetarization of agriculture.

The passage from the novel \textit{Han’gang} by Jo Jung-rae (2001: 124–5) in which the poor rural migrant in the early 1960s’ Seoul laments the innate inequality of money is illustrative of this: it was in the monetarized cities that the rural-born person became aware that money accumulates where money already is and reduces where it was not abundant to begin with. The notion of poor getting poorer and rich getting richer is at the heart of the narrative of societal inequality and closed mobility. The sense of increasing fortunes of the rich and diminishing assets of the underprivileged and the impassability of that divide was enhanced with the appearance of the conspicuous lifestyles of the wealthy and the surge in real estate prices since the 1980s (Abelmann 2002: 31–2). This was further enhanced during the economic crisis of the late 1990s and its aftermath at the turn of the millennium.

\textbf{Categories of Shopkeeper Livelihood}

In the neighborhood shopkeepers’ talk and in popular discourses on Korean society and economy, certain terms for types of livelihood emerged as

\footnote{Roger Janelli (1993: 189–90) presents a use of the proverb by conglomerate managers, which is interestingly different from that of the neighborhood people, who applied it to their own society. The managers used it to depict not the greed of Korean conglomerates or rich Koreans but American businessmen whom they regarded as too rigid and lacking in compassion and understanding of the circumstances of business counterparts: “But we really don’t do that [ask for the other’s last item]. If we have 99, we let the other person keep one. Americans, on the other hand, go even after the last item.”}
central concepts. Popular non-scholarly literature, especially that about opening and operating a small business, makes use of these categories, and the same terms are observable also in the South Korean media. These terms show distinctions within self-employment or business keeping as well as between different kinds of livelihoods. The distinctions are fluid, and they allow and invite ironic commentaries on one’s own social position as well as social and economic criticism.

**BUSINESS AS CHANGSA**

*Changsa* is the most common term for small-scale businesses and economic enterprises in colloquial everyday speech. That was also the term I encountered the most and got accustomed to using in daily interaction such as asking how the business was going as a manner of greeting. Two Korean dictionaries define the word as “economic transaction aiming at monetary profit” and “buying and selling merchandise in order to gain profit,” and a Korean-English dictionary renders it as trade, business, commerce, and transaction. Compared to the similar concept of *sa*p that I will discuss below, *changsa* denotes especially the activity of keeping a business, whereas *sa*p refers more to the business as an establishment. *Changsa* (-jangsa) appears in various compounds, attached mainly to words of pure Korean origin. Keeping a rice shop can be defined as *ssalchangsa*, a drinking place *sulchangsa* (liquor-), an eating-place *umsikchangsa* (food-) or *môngnun changsa* (eating-). Due to the necessity of the proprietor to engage with the customers and also to talk to people paying a visit, keeping a hairdressing salon may be described as “talking business” (*malhanôn changsa*).

The colloquial nature of the term *changsa* can also be seen in the negatively tinted or outright derogatory terms that describe business keeping. (I am not aware of such expressions formed of the word *sa*p, the Sino-Korean equivalent of *changsa.*) *Paetchangchangsa* is an example of such a term; due to its negative connotation in relation to certain business practices, it was perhaps not surprising that I did not encounter it in fieldwork but learned it from a Korean acquaintance on a later occasion. As *paetchang* means self-confidence, boldness, audacity, or nerve, joined with changsa the term might be glossed as “audacity business.” *Paetchangjangsa* is when the shopkeeper or

---

121 Big bookshops list hundreds of titles under the topic *ch’angôp* (business opening), which refers almost solely to opening a small business establishment on one’s own or as a couple.

seller has a certain market edge over the customer for example in a monopoli-
listic situation, daring to be self-confident and put the customer in a take-it-
or-leave-it situation.

**CHANGSAKKUN**

The term *changsakkun*, in which the suffix *kkun* (“doer of something”) is at-
tached to the colloquial term for business, denotes nominally a trader or a
merchant, but as a term of reference it can have a demeaning tone depending
on the context, implying selfishness, greediness, and economic calculation.
These connotations appear illustratively in Mrs Chŏng’s talk when she was
describing her and her husband’s experience of keeping the restaurant in the
provincial city. I inquired about a sauce that I had not seen anywhere else,
and she explained that she had developed it herself.

“I wanted to develop a taste of my own, something that would not be
elsewhere, but the response from customers has not been so good. I want to
do my best for the customers, use the best materials. There is a
slaughterhouse not far from here, and we get the meat directly from there. I
don’t want to be just a *changsakkun* but to do this from my heart, but the
customers will not acknowledge it. And that is distressing.”

Notwithstanding the demeaning implications as in its use by Mrs Chŏng,*
changsakkun* can be used as a term of self-reference. In a conversation be-
tween neighborhood business keepers over a lunch about the untrustworthi-
ness of marketplace traders, a man noted that he is a *changsakkun* himself, so
he knows how not to get cheated. The assertiveness of his words indicates
that *changsakkun* refers not only to cunningness and a propensity to employ
unfair trade practices towards customers but also to resourcefulness and the
capacity to hold one’s own in transactions. This facet of the term appeared in
Hong wŏnjang’s account of a dispute with her husband over congratulation
monies to be given in weddings in her natal family and in his close kin; she
argued her position by asserting that she is a *changsakkun* while her husband
only works for wages and is accordingly less qualified to assess the worth of
such ritual monetary transfers.

An example of critical use of *changsakkun* is evidenced in a cynical com-
mentary by a neighborhood woman, who was visiting Mrs Han in her sesame
oil shop and watching a television program about the Hyundai Group honor-
ary chairman Chung Ju-yung (Chŏng Chu-yŏng) driving a huge herd of cattle
to North Korea through P’anmunjŏn truce village at the demilitarized zone,
which had taken place the year before. “That man is just a *changsakkun*” she
said, implying that the ulterior motive behind Chung’s apparently nationalis-
tic, unification-minded gesture of economic assistance was basically just to make money. (At that time, Hyundai was beginning its business ventures with North Korea, including ship tours to Kumkang Mountains on the northern side.) Applying changsa and changsakkun to Chung Ju-young, the de-facto head of the biggest of the South Korean conglomerates, which have been dominating the economic field and which have been given preferential treatment in state-driven economic growth projects, gave the terms a belittlingly critical tone: notwithstanding the claims of common good, unselfish national and even pan-Korean enterprise, the tycoons are changsakkun, seekers of personal and familial profit.

The affective character of the term changsakkun, especially in consideration with its potentially demeaning connotations, draws clear boundaries to those who are not engaged in small business when used as a term of self-reference. For Mrs Chông, who was waiting for an opportunity to give up restaurant keeping and stay at home with her children, changsakkun denoted cold-hearted and cynical profit-seeking; in the two other examples provided by my informants it indicated the possession of a special skill and knowledge of the world, in which nothing comes easily, and making one’s money requires skill.

BUSINESS AS SAÔP

Saôp as a term for business or enterprise is nominally more inclusive than changsa, but judging from the neighborhood usage, it is roughly interchangeable with changsa. As with many terms of Sino-Korean origin (based on Chinese characters and coined in China, Japan, or Korea) in comparison to words of pure Korean origin, saôp conveys an idea of higher respectability, credibility, and status than changsa. Saôp includes manufacturing and industry more unambiguously, whereas changsa is used for business primarily in the sense of shopkeeping, trade and transaction.

Saôp is still applicable to neighborhood businesses as well, and appears in expressions such as saôbîl hada (“to keep a business”) and saôbi itta (“to have a business”). Interestingly though, the personified noun derived from the term, saôpka, denotes only the keepers of large businesses. As “enterpriser” or “businessman” it could not be applied to neighborhood shopkeepers. In that sense saôpka is similar to kiôpka, except that the word for business or enterprise behind the latter term, kiôp, is not used of businesses of neighborhood scale. For example big conglomerates, instead of using the value-laded and

---

123 For the need of the heads of South Korean big business conglomerates to justify their business pursuits and wealth with claims of national, common good instead of profitable enterprising, see Carter 1991 and 1993.
critically toned chaebol (literally “finance clique”) prefer the term köp, often in the form taegöp, “big company” (Janelli 1993: 82). Saöp is also an administrative term: the enterprise income tax is saöp sodäkse, and the business keeper registration certificate, visible on the wall in small businesses, is saöpcha tüngnochung.

Whereas saöspa is not applied to small businesses of neighborhood and marketplace scale and saöpcha has remained a bureaucratic term, chayöngöpcha or “the self-employed” (literally “self-managed”) is a concept valid both in bureaucracy and scholarship and among the keepers of small businesses. In the statistics on the economically active population, the South Korea National Statistical Office uses a two-tiered category, in which the category “business keeper” (chayöngöpchu) is divided into “employers” (koyöngju) and “self-employed” (chayöngöpcha), the latter employing only themselves (Ryu and Ch’oe 1999). Chayöngöp and chayöngöpcha are neutral and polite terms, applicable also in the neighborhood environment, but not used very much. These concepts are favored in the scholarship on small businesses, whereas the extensive popular guidebook literature on business opening and shopkeeping uses the word changsa almost exclusively.

**Stratified Terms for Men and Women**

In addition to concepts such as sömin and changsa that refer to the sociocultural characteristics, lifestyles, habitus, and livelihood, neighborhood fieldwork among small businesskeepers also directed my attention to gender-related terms, the use of which is illustrative of the social status of the shopkeepers as well as distinctions based on livelihood, status, and gender. In the Korean language, in which levels of speech, honorifics and terms of reference and address are carefully distinguished according to the age, social status and degree of intimacy of the speaker, listener and the object of the speech, terms stemming from kinship terminology and from occupational categories are constantly used in daily interactions between household members, kin, acquaintances as well as strangers, disclosing and reproducing distinctions based on the aforementioned criteria.

A small occurrence in Mr Pak’s mill is a good example of the articulation of social distinctions in stratified as well as gendered terms. A visitor to the mill recounted what she had heard a neighborhood woman say about the noise that Mr Pak and his acquaintances had made the night before in their drink and snack gathering in a Kolmok Street backyard. The visitor said that the woman had talked about “boiler shop ajössi (“uncle”) and rice mill ajössi,” to which Mr Pak responded in a humorous tone as usual, feigning offence for being referred to with a plain term ajössi instead of the appropriate saijang
8. Categories of Identification

(“company head”): “How come she calls me the miller uncle? It should be Mr Pak (Pak sajang)” (Wae pangakan ajössiira pulló, Pak sajangira pullóya twae).

AJUMMA: WOMEN AS AUNTS AND LADIES

Ajumõni and its shortened and less formal form ajumma and ajössi are among the most common terms of reference and address in South Korea. They originate in Korean kinship terminology, and retain the inclusive meanings for “aunt” and “uncle” in certain kin contexts, which the online Standard Korean Dictionary defines as “kindred woman of one’s parents’ generation” and “kindred man of one’s parents’ generation except father’s brothers.”

In present-day Korea ajumõni or ajumma is most prevalently used as a general term for women and men of one’s parents’ generation or for persons considerably older than the speaker when the context does not require a more specific term or no other appropriate term of address or reference is known or available. In neighborhoods such as my fieldwork locale, ajössi and ajumma are mostly comfortable terms of reference and address, which convey the impression of humane affection and warmth, which as positive characteristics of Koreanness are associated with the characters of “neighborhood uncle” (tongne ajössi) and “neighborhood auntie” (tongne ajumma). When situated in the larger national context of Korean society, the image of conviviality and “good Koreanness” is countered with notions of social stratification, and the stratified dimension of these terms becomes apparent. This aspect of the terms was naturally present in the neighborhood as well, which, for example, for me as a researcher younger my informants meant that I mostly avoided ajössi as a term of address and used the more formal and elevating sajang added to the family name of the person.

A married woman, especially one who has children and is middle-aged or close to it, and who could be categorized as “ordinary people” (sõmin) in appropriate contexts is a person to whom ajumõni or ajumma is most likely to be applied. This pertains to ajössi as well in case of men. In her research based on fieldwork in a garment factory and on literary sources, Yi Sõn (1999) approaches the discourse and concept of ajumma mainly as a category for marginalized women, and remarks that its application depends as much on social relations as on the age and marital status of the individual. On the basis of socially recognized personal professionalism or position or on the basis of husband’s position, ajumma is contrasted with samonim or other appropriate

124 In a recent newspaper article serial on proper terms of address and reference, the following advice was given: “The standard terms of address for father’s unmarried brothers are samch’ôn and ajössi, but because nowadays ajössi gives a feeling of an unrelated person, samch’ôn is the most appropriate” (Donga Ilbo May 20, 2004).
term; “In a workplace, the wife of the manager is samonim, while the wife of
the guard at the gate is ajumma” (Yi Sŏn 1999: 25). Moreover, on the basis of
age and work ability, ajumma contrasts with agassi (maiden, girl, miss) (Yi
1999: 44). Yi emphasizes the negative connotations of the term, which un-
doubtedly were accentuated in a formal organization such as a garment fac-
tory, but in a locality such as my fieldwork neighborhood and in small busi-
nesses, ajumma (or ajumóni) and also ajossi seem to have more vagueness and
negotiability, as suggested in the case of Mr Pak pretending offence about be-
ing referred to as ajossi while still insinuating that sajang is a term of reference
and designation that he is entitled to.

Samonim, literally “teacher’s wife” with the honorific suffix nim attached, is
a designation which was bestowed to few people only in few contexts among
my neighborhood informants. The term sajang (sajangnim), “company presi-
dent,” when applied to a man, may grant his wife the designation of samonim
indicating high status. Even though the man as a keeper of a small business
was usually bestowed a formally honorific form of address sajang (sajangnim),
the status of a small business establishment kept by a married couple did not
qualify for the honorific designation for the wife except in some specific con-
texts. The influence of a husband’s occupational status on a wife’s designation
and the distinctions within businesskeeping were highlighted with the ap-
pearance of the venture companies, as is illustrated by this excerpt from a
newspaper article conveying the sentiments of the wife of a proprietor of a
newly established business: “Sure, thanks to my husband, in a matter of five
months I have turned from a wife of an ordinary conglomerate employee to a
samonim of a venture company sajang. Others tell me how great it is that I’ve
become a samonim, but I don’t know…” (Hankyoreh Mar. 6, 2000).

Despite these economic and social curtailments on the use of the high-
status term among the neighborhood shopkeepers, there were contexts in
which samonim was applied to women in the shops. For customers and for
neighborhood people who were not intimate with shopkeepers, ajumma and
ajossi were the customary terms of reference and address for the shopkeepers.
Between intimates, the use of teknonymes or kinship terms was common as
in Korea in general. The former was more intimate; Mr Pak was commonly
known as “Sumin’s father” (Sumin appa) in Kolmok Street, and that was also
how his wife usually addressed him. Mr Kim of the beef restaurant, on the
other hand, as he had not operated the place in Big Street for long and did not
appear eager to form intimate relations, was mostly addressed as Kim sajang;
yet there was at least one customer who addressed him as “older brother”
(hyŏngnim) and his wife, accordingly with the formal term for older brother’s
wife, as hyŏngsunim.
8. Categories of Identification

Samonim was used not in contexts of unequal social relations or to articulate a position of wealth or social authority but in relations of a certain degree of acquaintance in which the above-mentioned intimate terms were not appropriate but which facilitated the use terms such as samonim instead of the plain and common ajumŏni to express appreciation. For example, on some occasions Mr Yun addressed Mrs Kang as samonim in the presence of others. Even though Mr Yun’s use of the term stemmed also from her position as the spouse of Kim sajang, she lacked the commonly recognized social and economic attributes of samonim, and Mr Yun’s practice did not primarily implicate her husband’s status but Mr Yun’s regard for the couple that had received support from him.

In her discussion of the roles and subjectivities of women during the last decades in South Korea, Cho Haejoang portrays a development in which the culturally strong position of non-high-class middle-age ajumma yielded at the turn of the 1990s in favor of young unmarried women, agassi, or young housewives who would distinguish themselves from ajumma as misijok, deriving from the English “missy”. She connects these developments to the “new patriarchy of consumer capitalism and postmodern culture”, which puts ever-bigger demands on a woman as a consumer (Cho 2002: 185–6). Cho remarks that whereas agassi has taken the upper hand over ajumma, the same has not happened in the case of male categories; the unmarried ch’onggak (bachelor) is not moving past the married ajŏssi in status. I return to that small but meaningful difference in status connotations between ajumma and ajŏssi below.

In a short remark about the distinction between ajumma and samonim, Cho mentions the appropriation of the latter term by “realtors (mostly men) and other shrewd sales persons to distinguish the middle class woman, who has buying power, from the poor ajumma (an ordinary married woman)” (Cho 2002: 177). For my informants this distinction did not appear relevant as far as patronage is concerned, and I have no observations of such practice; as some neighborhood people said, those who were perceived as rich frequented more prestigious establishments. After my fieldwork I heard a description of the specific social circumstances of one town that takes the commercially motivated use of samonim portrayed by Cho much farther. A Southeastern coastal town where the headquarters of the navy of the Republic of Korea is located has consequently a huge contingent of naval officers and their wives. Although the income level of the officer families has not allowed the socioeconomic markers that warrant the high-status designation for the women, because of the husbands’ position as army officers the wives expected to be addressed as samonim when patronizing local businesses. As a consequence, local businesses such as restaurants have adopted the use of samonim in the case
of all customers, without making the distinction usual elsewhere. The person who conveyed me this recounted a conversation between a marketplace trader woman and an officer’s wife, which captures the stratified connotations of the terms:

– Ajumma, please buy some delicious apples.
– I might buy, but I don’t feel like because I didn’t hear you say samonim.

In the neighborhood shopkeeping environment, ajumma has not lost its cultural position as depicted by Cho, and the women designated as such in the neighborhood level are not in the same marginal position as the aunties in a small garment factory; that is a characteristic of a neighborhood which is perceived to be somin-like. The Korean characters of “neighborhood uncle” (tongne ajossi) and “neighborhood auntie” (tongne ajumma), associated with notions good human nature (insim) and ability to feel affection for others (chong), do not seem to be threatened by the encroachment of consumer capitalism or political appropriation of the category of ordinary people. Ironically, the prosperity of these stereotypes depends on definitions of Korean modernity, and on the perception of the unfavorable situation of these neighborhoods in the scale of development, since the ideals of good Korean-ness and humane life depend on the nostalgic view to a temporal past or an earlier stage of modern development.

**Ajossi: Husbands as “Uncles”**

One specific, socially stratified use of the term ajossi that I paid attention to from early on during fieldwork was its usage as a term of reference for one’s husband. Being at first unaware of that application, I was baffled when a restaurant-keeping woman told that “uncle,” in addition to her mother and daughter, occasionally helped her in running the place, which made me think of an unlikely situation that a male family friend gave them a hand. It soon became clear that she had been referring to her husband, who drove a taxi like the husbands of some other informants. This use of the term is socially stratified in an intriguing manner. In the way the use of ajossi in non-kinship contexts implies a certain lack of status or the absence of a more status-specific term, its use as a term of reference to one’s husband implies that he is likely to be distinguished as ajossi by others as well in terms of status. For example customers commonly address taxi drivers as ajossi, which the other wives of taxi drivers among my informants, Chong wonjang and Yumin’s mother, also used as a term of reference for their husbands. Besides implying the socioeconomic position of the husband, my sense of Chong wonjang’s and Yumin’s mother’s use of that term was that it also expressed intimacy and warmth towards him.
To refer to one’s husband as ajössi is a non-normative practice, and prescriptive descriptions of desirable and proper language discourage it. A guideline document on Korean language propriety prepared for the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism mentions that ajössi should not be used as a term of reference for one’s husband (Hô n.d.). A prescriptively inclined detailed scholarly description of Korean kinship terminology also does not include ajössi among the twenty words listed as terms of reference to one’s husband (Ch’oe Chae-sôk 1988: 86).

With regard to the female shopkeepers’ use of ajössi to refer to their husbands, the status and the position of the listener also needs to be taken into account, as it is one dimension in determining the use of appropriate terms and speech forms. In this case the foreign graduate student anthropologist as a listener may not have warranted a more formal and elevating term of reference than “uncle”; in a more formal context and towards a person of high status a more formal and neutral term like namp’yôn (husband) would have been used.

In interesting contrast to Yumin’s mother, Chông wônjang, and the others in the use of term ajössi was Hong wônjang, who also talked a lot about her husband. She used mostly the neutral term “husband” (namp’yôn); I paid close attention to terms of reference and address between married couples and between people in the neighborhood, and I do not have a single reference in my notes to Hong wônjang using ajössi. To me this seems to reflect her self-perception of being distinct from the other shopkeepers in having a broader and more progressive view of society, as her husband did not demonstrate any specific qualifications for deference or esteem concerning him that would have encouraged her to use a term other than “uncle.” Nevertheless, Mrs Ch’oe from Big Street who was one of the few informants who had gone to a four-year university also referred to her husband as ajössi, despite the fact that her sense of not being able to identify herself with the shopkeepers around her was even stronger than that of Hong wônjang. (She once expressed gratitude for having befriended another four-year university graduate, referring to her as samonim, with whom she could freely discuss things like society and not just shopkeeping, changsa.)

Contrasting with women’s linguistic usage, the female equivalents to ajössi (ajumma or ajumôni), despite being similar in the stratified character of the term and in the very common non-kin usage, were never used to refer to one’s wife. I assume that it is discouraged because of the non-kin contexts of the use of ajumma or ajumôni, which are more numerous for “auntie” than for “uncle” and denote in cases like “kitchen auntie” a low-status occupation.
Conclusions

The frequent political appropriation of the term sŏmin should not be taken to indicate the decrease of its actual relevance; on the contrary, it is a major category of social stratification among the neighborhood shopkeepers. It is usually articulated in colloquial and everyday talk and discourses on Korean economy and society, when distinctions in social status, political power, and monetary wealth need to be emphasized. This “neighborhood talk” about sŏmin can be read as antithetical to the politicians’ appealing to the same category in the name of support, but as a political term it does not possess the potential to develop beyond an expression of contradiction, inequality or injustice. As with many colloquial social categories, sŏmin is too vague and uncontrollable for that.

Compared to sŏmin, the distinction between the haves (innûn saram) and have-nots (ômûn saram) is much more uncomfortable. The dialectical character of this pair of concepts is the reason why “have-not” does not have the political usability of sŏmin, which has been willingly embraced by politicians from the leftists to the conservatives. Not even a small leftist party, which has the closest genealogical links to the earlier minjung movements uses that term, under which so much cultural and political struggle was generated in the 1980s, but makes policy mostly in the name of workers and “ordinary people”.

South Korean author Jo Jung-rae’s (Cho Chŏng-nae) very widely read epic novel T’aebaek Sanmaek (T’aebaek Mountains), depicting in ten volumes a leftist insurgency in the South Korean mountains before and during the Korean War, uses the minjung thematic and conceptualization, and the novel has also been cited as representative of the minjung discourse (Abelmann 1996: 23–4, Yea 2002: 80–1), which was socially and politically relevant at the time of the novel’s publication in the late 1980s. His latest novel of similar scale published between 2001 and 2002, Han’gang (Han River) gives a sweeping portrait of Korea’s urbanization, economic development, and political struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. It depicts a wide range of characters, from sons of a leftist home under constant police surveillance and harassment to politically inactive ordinary people trying to make a living. Despite the underlying theme of injustice and the suffering of the main characters originating in the national division of Korea, it is an epic of “ordinary people,” who are struggling to make the best of their circumstances. If the central theme of Jo Jung-rae’s earlier ten-volume novel was armed political struggle between 1948 and 1953, the later work is largely about the growth of South Korean capitalism, and about people trying to earn and make money. While it would be an oversimplification to call T’aebaek Sanmaek simply a minjung novel and Han’gang a
8. Categories of Identification

sŏmin novel, there is a change of subject from collective political action to individual economic activity. Jo gives money, its perceived power and the necessity to make it, a central position in Han’gang, and it is what makes the novel compelling and insightful with regard to the categorizations of South Korean society expressed by the neighborhood shopkeepers.

As with my neighborhood shopkeeper informants, the depictions and categorizations in Han’gang are mainly made from the point of view of individual economic actors. Theirs is an identity of a person in a disadvantageous position (sŏmin, have-not) vis-à-vis the wealthy (the haves), but it is not an identity that can lead to, for example, collective action, in the way the identities of worker (nodongja) or “conscious masses” (minjung) are thought to do. They are individuals and atomized units of households constantly needing to perform individual economic activity, that is, to make money, “busy making a living and taking care of their own things”, as one definition of sŏmin goes.

This brings us back to the Neapolitan popolino in Italo Pardo’s work. The shopkeepers as sŏmin have obvious similarities to them in their individual responses to pressures and chances, but their identity as such and identification with the locality are seemingly weaker. The dichotomized categorizations of the neighborhood shopkeepers give a bleak picture of the societal and economic inequalities, which are somewhat balanced with the positive characteristics such as good-heartedness and ability to feel humane affection ascribed to the disadvantaged.

The shopkeepers’ presentation of social stratification and of the categories of their life worlds and wider Korean society does not give the impression that the differences are considered challengeable, but to regard the relevance of those categories mainly from that point of view would miss the mark. Even though social change would appear difficult and unrealistic, or rather, irrelevant in the literally daily pursuit of livelihood, the choices that the shopkeepers make and conceptualize with the categories of society, locality, and gender suggest that household change is conceivable; neighborhood shopkeeping itself shows that there exists a household-centered individual drive towards a better life.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion: Social and Cultural Ambivalence amidst Economic Uncertainty

This is a study of a segment of South Korean capitalist economy – keepers of small business – in an urban neighborhood in Seoul, South Korea. I have followed the life worlds of neighborhood shopkeepers in order to outline and analyze categories and conceptualizations of South Korean capitalism at the levels of households, neighborhoods, and Korean society.

In terms of political economy, this has been a study of Korean neighborhood shopkeepers at the time of economic crisis and its outcomes. The fieldwork for this research took place in the aftermath of a critical juncture in the economic and social currents of South Korean contemporary history: the so-called IMF crisis of the 1990s. Considering the significance of the crisis in the cognitive worlds of my informants and Koreans in general, my field research could be portrayed as “IMF ethnography,” to paraphrase the contemporary colloquial term for the era.

Before the onset of the crisis, South Korean society had experienced several decades of almost unremitting economic growth, urbanization, industrialization, social change, and eventually, a democratic turn. The professional and salaried middle class had risen to a position of social and cultural eminence; a large industrial work force had grown; the reproduction of the self-employed stratum had continued, and its proportion of the economically active population had not diminished significantly. In the contours of the narrative of South Korean modernization, of which these phenomena are a part, the middle class has figured most prominently with its lifestyles and practices emulated by other strata. The keepers of small businesses, in spite of not having proved a declining residual social and occupational group in contemporary Korea, have not been in the forefront in popular, official, or scholarly representations of the narrative, and they have stayed at the fringes of perceptions of modernity and cultural, economic, and political progress.

The economic crisis caused grave economic difficulties for all social strata except for the most wealthy; one specific consequence for the self-employed stratum was that company layoffs as well as government policies contributed to its renewal. New entrants, previously engaged in salaried occupations, sought employment in businesskeeping, which also became a policy device to alleviate unemployment. The economic crisis sharpened Koreans’ social sentiments, already sensitive towards social differentiation, conceptualizations
and materializations of distinction, status, and inequality. Awareness of widening gaps and increasing differentiation in social worlds, lived realities, and in material wealth gave new emphasis and relevance to established notions and categories. It formed the contemporary context of Korean political economy, in which I encountered the shopkeepers in my fieldwork neighborhood. Consciousness and perception of the crisis and its aftermath influenced the shopkeepers’ culturally informed interpretations and applications of concepts and categories of gender, households, the neighborhood, and Korean society, which I have treated in this study.

The changes in work life and family livelihoods wrought by the crisis, with the increased precariousness of salaried employment, the new relevance of self-employment and women’s economic potential, highlighted women’s and men’s conventional roles, which in shopkeeping settings were being challenged and reinterpreted, if not threatened, as I have discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Social distinctions based on money, a major organizing concept in particular among shopkeepers in capitalist South Korea, were increasingly evoked as a consequence of the crisis, and especially the social category which small businesskeepers are commonly made to represent, sōmin (“ordinary people”) gained in significance as a term to apply in conceptualizing economic and social divides.

In terms of social structure, this research has concerned the location of small shopkeeper households and non-middle-class residential neighborhoods in South Korean capitalism. I have treated the business establishments of Korean neighborhood shopkeepers in one sense as family businesses, showing how family or household resources can be essential for their continuation and survival, and how the concerns of households inform choices concerning shop livelihood. However, I have also argued that “family business” is an inadequate designation for Korean neighborhood shops, since the application of notions and practices of family to the specific livelihood of shopkeeping is conditional and restricted, and the identification of the shop with the proprietor’s family and household is vague.

Neighborhood business is one synonymous expression for the shopkeeping livelihood of my informants that I have used throughout the work; it has referred to the physical location of the shops, to their conceptual position in Korean political economy, and to the level of cultural classifications of Korean society and economy to which I have focused. The conceptual deficiency of the term family business has not, as I indicated, rendered the notion of family inadequate for analytical purposes but called for more precise delineations and invited the simultaneous use of the more livelihood-oriented concept of household. In this I have followed Immanuel Wallerstein’s and Joan Smith’s
(1992) ideas about the analytical significance of the household as the basic unit of the reproduction needs of individuals and, I would add, of families as well.

That operating a small business is a means of household reproduction and attainment of family aspirations introduces complexities and contradictions, which reflect the convergences of real and perceived (and often culturally informed) economic necessities, and cultural understandings and social values. Among the keepers of Korean neighborhood businesses, household resources and labor are not appropriated for the benefit of the business with the kind of claims by a patriarchal authority over the labor of the offspring that is ascribed to corresponding Chinese establishments (even though such authority may be manifest in other household relations). Similarly, household labor is not utilized to maximize sales or profits at the expense of other household aspirations. Households utilize more finely tuned principles, conditioned by material necessities, and being not only economically but also culturally sensible: the importance of children’s education for household reproduction; notions of social status; and gender roles, assigning proper, conventional spheres for men and women, which may be at odds with shopkeeping.

The conventional household-related gendered conceptualizations of domestic and public, inside (an) and outside (pakkat) as well as ideas of men’s and especially women’s roles are among the culturally and socially informed principles. While the absence of intergenerational business succession along family trajectories was reflected in the educational and occupational aspirations of the offspring as well as in their conditional participation in shopkeeping, the less conditional appropriation of the labor of married spouses indicated the nature of shopkeeping as intragenerational strategy of household reproduction. The lesser conditionality was still culturally informed, which appeared for example in the application of gender-related categories and terms of address and reference to shopkeeping husbands and wives irrespective of their actual roles and skills in the establishment, and as husbands’ and wives’ differently appropriated labor, in which, for example, the male prerogative of leisurely mobility was often complemented by female responsibility for tending the business establishment.

If the circumstances of married couples operating small businesses suggested discrepancies between the predicament of shopkeeping and gender ideologies and notions of status and prestige, women as relatively well-earning individual business proprietors further highlight these divergences, as they expressed alternative or inverted interpretations of certain gender-based categories and emphasized others. The specific livelihood of the women provided circumstances for the reappraisal of these gender-based concepts,
allowing women to present themselves reversedly as masculine in certain respects, and describe their husbands with characteristics that are conventionally feminine in their Korean contexts, such as “gentle” (yamjŏnhada) and “kind” (ch’akhada). Further illuminating the significance of gender for female shopkeeper’s concepts of livelihood was that the key concept in my examination of those three women, “life force” (saenghwallyŏk), the economic capability to maintain a household, is applied to men when it is deemed deficient, and to women when they exercise it, especially in comparison to their husbands or other male household members.

Conceptually contrasted to the livelihood, or work (il), of the neighborhood shopkeepers was leisure, as defined by the very inclusive verb nolda. Despite apparent temporal and spatial blurredness between the two, it was a major conceptual distinction in the lived world of my informants, and consequently, a major marker in the lifestyle of the shopkeepers. Work was performed by proprietor household members in atomistic business establishments, whereas leisure was neighborhoodly in orientation. Leisure was a field of convergence between the keepers of individual establishments and their neighborhood peers in the absence of communal or reciprocal patterns of work, while small businesseskeepers in residential neighborhoods were by virtue of their livelihood deeply enmeshed with their surroundings through local patronage. Notwithstanding patronage, work in a small business incorporated the establishment into the sphere of the household, whereas use of the shop space for leisure provided it with a public character in the sense of neighborhood communality. In contrast to the analyses in many scholarly presentations, work prestations by household members tended not to remain unremunerated, and even formally non-waged wives in shops operated by married couples acquired some authority over the monetary value created in the business, not merely on the basis of their involvement but because of gender-associated Korean ideas of money and its management. In contrast to household labor, even considerable and frequent contributions by persons from outside the household sphere but from within the individual’s notion of neighborhood remained unpaid and were not defined as work but conceptualized as leisurely visiting with the term nolda.

Just as the concept of family business proved partial and insufficient to describe small businesses, the concept of neighborhood, while a major ordering category of the shops and shopkeepers and also a place of identification for many shopkeepers, should not be essentialized; I only need to point out the very transitory nature of the proprietorship of several of the shopkeepers in the locale. Judging by the cases I recorded, once the person moved the business elsewhere, ties to the neighborhood were in effect severed. This is reminiscent, in essence, of the generationally transitory nature of shopkeeping
itself. On the other hand, this should not deny the significance of “neighborhood” for the lived material and social worlds of the shopkeepers’ and other residents’ immediate, everyday environment, which I gather from the plethora of my informants’ references to it. The common use of “neighborhood” to refer to petty scale, meager economic opportunities, lack of development, and wealth – lesser capitalist value in short – was counterbalanced by my informants’ association of the term with positive notions of more traditional Korean-ness, less spoilt by the inhumane facelessness of urbanity, further evoking notions of the presence of a feeling perceived as typically Korean: chàng, or humane affection.

In the rapidly changing vicissitudes of South Korean society and economy, confronting episodes such as the late 1990s’ economic crisis, “neighborhood capitalism” is fluctuating and often transitory, as people like Mr Chŏng move elsewhere in enterprising zeal, and people like Mrs Kang and Mr Kim, Mrs Ch’oe and Mr Cho, and Mr and Mrs Ko close their shop never to return. However, in addition to transitory persons, there are established shopkeepers such as Mr Pak, Mr Paek and Mrs Chang, and Hong wŏnjang with little intention and incentive to move, and, significantly, new entrants like Mr Mun and Yumin’s mother to open businesses in vacated shop spaces. The facets of the local social structure of the lived worlds of the shopkeepers – households, shops, and the locality – were in a mutual relationship with cultural categories and ideas and social practices (work and leisure, patterns of local patronage, ideas and practices of household, family, and gender, and uses and notions of money and cash) as applied and enacted in everyday life to constitute and reproduce a specific form of South Korean capitalism at the urban residential neighborhood level of Korean political economy.

In the final chapter of this study, I delineated and analyzed concepts and categories of identification and classification of and for the Korean neighborhood shopkeepers. It presented a picture of a society perceived as strongly stratified, in which the most fundamental social divides are seen to originate from money and wealth especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis, the consequences of which have been retained in economic structures as well as in people’s cognition: underprivileged sŏmin, defined by social, political, and economical alienation; the haves and have-nots; and continuously expanding gaps of wealth.

These are categories of South Korean capitalism at the turn of the 21st century, socially produced and reproduced at all levels of society: politics, administration, big businesses, education, and neighborhood shopkeeping, to name a few. The emergence and contemporary popularity of the term sŏmin, largely as a consequence of the crisis, attests to this reciprocal constitution of
9. Conclusion

categories. As people to whom this social category is most commonly applied, this leaves the businesskeepers in neighborhoods and other commercial localities in an intriguingly but also inconveniently ambiguous and ambivalent social position. Small businesskeepers enjoy certain representativeness and sympathetic understanding as the epitome of “ordinary people”, attested by the self-identification of the shopkeepers themselves in certain contexts and manifested in Korea in popular societal discourses, in the media, and in political rhetoric. Still, as the lack of shopkeeping succession or reproduction of the parents’ occupational or social status in the family trajectories suggests, and what also the conversions of monetary value created in shopkeeping into social properties – salaried occupations – indicate, the social status of shopkeeping is not on a par with the approving imagery that the term sŏmin conveys.

Household economies, as delineated by Immanuel Wallerstein and Joan Smith (1992), are the main units of reproduction of individuals, and when the distinction is made, of families as well. As households are units that gather together the means of individual and family reproduction, including the pooling of different kinds of income, it also follows that conversion of value should take place within the confines of households for its reproduction needs. To emphasize the cultural logics behind the capitalist practice of value conversion, it is useful to return to Marshall Sahlins’ (1994) remarks on the cultural appropriations of capitalism that produce different forms and different values of exchange.

The cultural motives which lie behind the conversion of value in Korean shopkeeper households is best exemplified by once more referring to the words of the entrepreneurial businesskeeper Mr. Chŏng, who recounted his ordeals and humiliations when delivering meals to downtown offices in his new hometown: “Not even a dog touches trader’s money.” Korean cultural notions – ideas of value – intervene in neighborhood capitalism as exercised by the shopkeepers. What commonly takes place or is aspired in Korean neighborhood shopkeeper households is the conversion of commercial value – Mr. Chŏng’s “trader’s money” – beyond the necessary maintenance of the business to the reproduction of the household and family, primarily through educational investments in children. The cultural logic of “trader’s money” informs the reproduction of the household not as a businesskeeping one but as a household with aspirations in salaried occupations.

Here I also return to Marshall Sahlins’ argument that capitalism is able to master the cultural order through its capacity to “reduce” social properties into market value (1994: 416). The example of Korean neighborhood shopkeepers suggests that the processes between social properties and market
values work also in the opposite direction, and argue that cultural orders have the capacity to “expand” market value into social properties.

This, I see, is at the heart of the ambivalence of the existence and livelihood of the keepers of neighborhood shops in Korea, for the continuation and reproduction of businesses tends not to be among the social properties that the market value is “expanded” and conversed into, despite socially and politically appreciated cultural elaborations. The neighborhoodly life and livelihood of the shopkeepers – the lived world of neighborhood capitalism – consists of laborious and precarious operation of business and, at best, of practices of convivial reciprocity and communality based on notions of positively defined Koreaness and warm-heartedness of proper human beings. In the perspective of wider Korean society, these ideas fail to carry far as far as familial reproduction is concerned. For the most, the aspiration for intergenerational mobility towards white-collar occupations means that the practices and ideas cherished at a certain time become obsolete, and even for those who appear to have fully subscribed to practices and ideas of such life and livelihood, it remains a generational strategy, to which the offspring are not introduced. Even so, as I have demonstrated in the chapters of this work, in their lived worlds the neighborhood shopkeepers continue to make sense of their present conditions and their experience of making a living – of making money – in the neighborhood and in Korean society.
abŏji father
aegiŏmma “children’s mother,” wife, mother
agasssi girl, unmarried young woman
ajŏssi uncle, man of one’s parents’ age
ajumma, ajumŏni aunt, auntie; woman of one’s parent’s age
annil inside work
ap’at’ apartment house
ap’at’ tanji apartment house block
arubait’ part-time work
chaebŏl (財閥) conglomerate
chaemit’ to be enjoyable, fun, interesting
chaerai sjang (在來市場) marketplace, traditional marketplace
chagop (作業) productive work
chagûn abŏji father’s younger brother
chagûn omŏni father’s younger brother’s wife
chajŏnsim (自尊心) pride, self-respect
ch’akhada to be gentle, nice, proper
chal salda to live well, to be prosperous
chal sanin saram person living well, wealthy person
ch’amlida to bear, to endure
changgi (將棋) East Asian chess
ch’anggop (創業) business opening
changsa business, trading, shopkeeping
changsahangun saramdul businesskeepers, people engaged in shopkeeping and trading
changsakkun trader, businesskeeper
chayŏngop (自営業) self-employment, businesskeeping
ch’eryŏk (體力) physical strength
chesa (祭祀) ancestor ritual
chibanil household work
chikchang (職場) work, workplace, employment
chikchang tanida to go to work, to be employed
ch’iljŏn p’algi (七顛八起) standing firm in difficulties
chimulp’o (紙物鋪) wallpapering and flooring shop
ch’in’gu (親舊) friend
ch’innokhoe (親睦會) friendship circle
chip house, home, household
chipsaram wife, “house person”
chokpal (足) pork hock
chŏng (情) affection, warmheartedness
ch’onggak (緒角) bachelor
chŏnggyŏng yuch’ak (政經癡着) bonds between government and business
chŏngmiso (精米所) rice mill
chŏnmunjik (專門職) professional occupation
chŏnse (傳貫) leasing real estate on a deposit basis
chubangjang (廚房長) chef, kitchen chief
chubang ajumma (廚房) “kitchen auntie,” female kitchen worker
ch’ugaijam (祝意金) congratulation money
ch’ulga oen (出嫁外人) “outmarried daughter is a stranger”
chungsanch’ung (中産層) middle stratum, middle class
ch’usŏk (秋夕) Harvest Moon Day, lunar August 15
chut’aek (住宅) house, domicile; detached house
chut’aekka (住宅街) small house neighborhood
hagwŏn (學院) private extracurricular school
himduldâ to be tiresome, heavy, stressful
himdulge salda to live a hard life
hojang (會長) chairman of conglomerate or association
hoesa (會社) firm, company
hyŏng (孝子) filial son
hyŏngnim (兄—) older brother (with honorific nim)
hyŏngsunim (兄嫂—) older brother’s wife (honorifically)
ibalso (理髮所) barbershop
il work, employment, task
ilhada to work
imo (姨母) maternal aunt
inn saram wealthy person
(disparagingly: inn nom)
insim (人心) people’s minds, public mind
int’elli educated person, intellectual
kagyebu (家計簿) household account book
kama sack of rice
ki (氣) energy, strength, vigor, spirit
kimchi pickle made of Chinese cabbage, garlic, and chili
kiŏp (企業) business, enterprise
kohyang (家鄉) home place, native place
kŏjich’on (一村) beggar village
kojit (固執) steadfastness, resoluteness, persistence
kolmok alley
kongdongch’e (共同體) community
kongdori (工一) male industrial worker
kongsuni (工一) female industrial worker
kosa (告祀) ritual offering to tutelary spirits or household gods
kosaeng (苦生) hard time, suffering, hardship
kosi (考試) state examination
kosich’on (考試村) area with many dormitories for exam preparation
kosiwŏn (考試院) dormitory for exam preparation
kayongju (雇用主) employer
ku (區) administrative district in cities, above tong
kukpap soup with rice
kūlloja (勤勞者) wage earner
kumŏngkage “hole-in-the-wall” shop, small shop
kūmyung (金融) financing, financing industry
kwasobi (過消費) overconsumption
kye (契) rotating credit association
kyech’ŭng kujo (階層構造) stratum structure
kyeŏp kujo (階級構造) class structure
maenzŏn “mansion,” small apartment house building
makkŏli alcoholic drink fermented from rice
mandu (飯頭) filled dumpling
manjida to touch, to feel, to finger
maru wooden floor, elevated seating floor
masil-kagi reciprocal leisurely visiting
matpǒri joint earning, both husband and wife working outside home
maăl village
mijangwŏn (美髪院) hairdressing parlor
minjung (民衆) socially and politically conscious masses
misi young working wife
miyongsil (美容室) hairdressing parlor
mŏkkō salda to make ends meet, to make a living
mot salda to be poor, underprivileged
mudambo mubojung (無擔保無保証) without security and guarantee (in lending business)
mudang shaman
nagune vagabond
namp’yön (男便) husband
nanminch’ŏn (難民村) refugee camp
nodong (勞動) work, labor
nodongja (勞動者) worker
nogada construction work, hard physical labor
nolda to play, to have a spree, to be idle, to be out of work or unemployed
nolchap’an mokchap’an “feasting and having fun”
nolgi chohahan saram people fond of enjoyment
noraebang (一房) singing room, karaoke
nori play, game
norim gambling
nunch’irul poda to read other’s mind, to mind other’s intentions
nunyŏk (能力) ability, capability
oesang buying on credit
ōmnun saram have-not, poor person
paduk East Asian board game, go
paetchang boldness, effrontery
palkanil work outside household
pan (旺) administrative area below tong
pangakan mill
pammal (平—) blunt speech level
pench’ŏ “venture,” venture business
pilla “villa,” small apartment house building
pinbu kyŏkcha (貧富格差) gap between the poor and the rich
ponikpun pukpu (貧富貧富) “poor getting poorer, rich getting richer”
pinnim (貧民) poor people
pisanggŭm (非常金) emergency fund
pojanggŭm (報奨金) guarantee money
polch’o (伐草) cutting the grass of a gravesite
ponŏp (本業) main work, main activity
ppaek “back,” connections
ppang bread, pastr y
puai (轉儀) consolatory contribution
ppŏngt’wigi pop rice
puja (富者) rich person
puijogŭm (扶助金) condolence contribution money
pungoppang fish-shaped pastry
punsik (粉食) flour-based food, small restaurant
puŏp (副業) side work, side activity
puyuch’ŏng (富裕層) wealthy stratum
rējô leisure
riŏk’a pushcart, “rear car”
saellŏrimaen “salary man,” white-collar worker
saenggyehyŏng (生計形) livelihood-type
saenghallyŏk (生活力) “life energy,” capability to earn money and maintain a household
sahoe saenghwal (社會生活) social life, being occupied outside of household
sandongne (山一) hillside squatter neighborhood
sajang (社長) company president, business owner
samch’ŏn (三寸) paternal uncle
samnim (師母一) teacher’s wife, esteemed woman, upper-class woman
sangga (商街) shopping mall, business arcade
sangkwŏn (商圈) business area
sangin (商人) trader, merchant, businesskeeper
saŏp (事業, 社業) private business
saopka (事業家) enterpriser, businessman
saram person, human being
sarang affection, love
sida apprentice
sigi (猜忌) jealousy
sigol countryside
sijang (市場) market, marketplace
sijip (媳一) woman’s affinal family
siktang (食堂) restaurant
siksa (食事) meal
sintosi (新都市) “new town,” newly developed town
soqaebi (紹介費) introduction fee
soju (焼酎) vodka-like liquor with low alcohol content
söl Lunar New Year
sömin (庶民) common people, ordinary people
sönginbyöng (成人病) “adult disease,” illness common in modern society
sugobi (一費) compensation for help
syup’, syup’omak’et supermarket, grocery store
tabang (茶房) tea house, coffee house
tae’ul (貸出) loan, lending
taehakkyo (大學校) university
taenong (大農) wealthy farmer
taep’yo (代表) representative, company head
taerijöm (代理店) branch shop, agency
taeyöjöm (貸與店) lending shop
tal tongne hillside squatter area
tandok chut’ak hillside detached house
tojang (圖章) seal, stamp
tomae (都賣) wholesale
ton money
tong (洞) administrative unit in cities below ku
t’onjjang (統長) head of tong administrative unit
tongne ajössi neighborhood uncle
tongne ajumma neighborhood auntie
tongnechangsə neighborhood business
tingsöng tongbon (同姓同本) same surname and same lineage origin
tonkasu (脈一) pork cutlet
tonul polda to earn money
tosi pin’gonch’ung (都市貧困層) urban poor stratum
towa chuda to give help
tılık rice cake
ummak dugout hut
wangttta severely ostracised person
wölbüš patta (月給一) to receive monthly wages
wölgüphaengi (月給一) monthly wage earner
wollum “one room,” studio apartment
wönjang (院長) proprietor of hairdressing parlor
yangjönhada to be gentle, modest, kind
yangban (兩班) premodern hereditary scholar-official stratum
yangbokchöm (洋服店) tailor shop
yangjojang (釀造場) wine brewery
yennal sigolsik “like in the old times in the countryside”
yepphada to nurture
yesujaengi Christian, “Jesus believer” (disparagingly)
yöga (餘暇) leisure
yögwon (旅館) inn, motel
yoksim (慾心) desire, greed, ambition
yölsimhi (熱心一) diligently
yongdon (用一) pocket money
yorisa (料理師) cook
yöyu (餘裕) leeway, freedom, scope
yugyojök (儒教的) Confucian
yujön mujoe mujön yujoe (有錢無罪無錢有罪) “not guilty if money, guilty if no money”
yut’ong (流通) distribution
References


References


Hong, Doo-seung and Hagen Koo. 1993. Sŏhoe kyech’ŏng, kyejumnon [Theories on social strata and classes]. Seoul: Tasan.


References


Kang, Man-gil. 1975. *Yi-choŏi sangin* [Merchants of the Yi (Chosŏn) dynasty]. Seoul: Han’guk Ilbosa.


References


References


References

261


——. 1991. “Sŏul k’un’gyonongch’onŭi kyŏngjewa kyŏrhon” [Economy and marriage in a village in the vicinity of Seoul]. In Lee Hyo-jae et. al. (eds.),
References

Chabonjuui sijanggyoengjewa kyörhon [Capitalist market economy and marriage], 117–145. Seoul: Tto Hanau Munhwa.


NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, AND INTERNET NEWSSITES


Taehan Maeil, June 21, 2002.
Index

Housing, 2, 23–24, 29–30, 40–43, 44–48, 50, 54, 67, 71, 78–79, 86, 112, 139, 216, 221, 227; see also: apartment houses; small houses

Immigration, 93, 93, 102, 176

IMF (International Monetary Fund), 5, 9; see also: economic crisis of the late 1990s

IMF crisis, see: economic crisis of the late 1990s

Inequality, 209, 218–219, 223–224, 225–228, 235, 238–239

economic, 14, 160, 171, 222–223, 227–228

Insim (people’s minds) 162, 163, 217, 236

Jager, Sheila Miyoshi, 64

Japan, the Japanese, 58, 60, 65, 76, 85, 93, 94, 101–102, 123, 157, 158, 167, 170, 191, 193, 213, 215, 231


Janelli, Roger, 12, 28, 48, 174, 175–176, 191, 193n, 228n

Jo, Jung-rae (Cho Chông-nae), 163, 228, 238–239

Kang (Mrs Kang of the beef restaurant), 28, 55, 80–86, 87, 88, 95–96, 101, 107, 109, 120, 121, 122, 124, 168, 180, 184, 187, 205–206, 211, 235, 244

Kangbuk, 39

Kangnam, 38–39, 46, 47

Kapferer, Bruce, 210

Kendall, Laurel, 11, 12, 100, 129, 133, 159

Kim (Mr Kim of the beef restaurant), 28–29, 55, 80–82, 84–86, 87, 95–96, 99, 101, 107, 124, 184, 187, 205, 234, 244

Kim (Mr Kim, jeweler), 181, 187, 205, 205n

Kim (Mr and Mrs Kim, bookshop keepers), 31, 97, 208, 227n

Kim, Dae-jung, 213, 216

Kim, Kwang-ok, 174n

Kim, Seung-Kyung, 131

Kim, Young-sam, 224


Household members’ labor, 17–18, 64, 95–99, 100–101, 110, 123–125, 242–243
Minjung, 52, 194
Migration to and in cities, 14–
15, 165–166, 199–200, 204–205, 230
233–234; agnostic, 34, 44, 68, 70, 72, 77,
83, 98, 99–100, 111, 140–142, 144–145,
167–168, 178, 204; affinal, 1, 2, 83, 94,
98, 99–100, 140, 142–145, 161, 166,
178, 187, 204; terminology, 57, 69, 74,
137, 179n, 232–237; see also: 
ajossi; ajumma; agassi
Ko (Mr and Mrs Ko), 32, 34, 105–106, 113–
114, 115–116, 181–182, 194, 244
Kajip (steadfastness) 146, 154
Koo, Hagen, 11, 13, 212
Korean-Americans, 15, 93
Koreanness, 17, 43, 51, 54, 102, 185, 188,
217, 233, 236, 244, 246
Koreanness, 17, 43, 51, 54, 102, 185, 188,
217, 233, 236, 244, 246
Korff, Rüdiger, 52, 53
Kum’ôngkaje (small shop) 46, 52, 194
Kwôn (Grandfather Kwôn), 20, 25, 26, 43–
44, 44n, 50, 55–56, 69, 73, 81, 86–87,
151, 158, 162–163, 170, 182
Kwôn (Grandfather Kwôn), 20, 25, 26, 43–
44, 44n, 50, 55–56, 69, 73, 81, 86–87,
151, 158, 162–163, 170, 182
Language, 16, 19–20, 75–76, 106 148,
166, 173, 185, 211–212, 213, 215, 225n, 232,
237; use of Chinese-origin words, 26,
48, 49, 78, 143, 197, 215, 225, 226, 231
Laundry, 6, 18, 20, 26, 34, 45, 55–59, 62–
63, 86, 87, 93, 103–104, 136, 150–151,
182, 218, 223–224
Lee, Hyo-jae, 41, 42, 190–191
Lee, Chungsan. (198), 7–8, 10, 12, 13b, 15,
17, 23, 24, 38–39, 40–42, 46, 62, 81–82,
86, 91–93, 102, 104, 123, 126, 128, 139,
154, 160, 168–169, 172, 174–175, 176,
191–192, 193, 200, 203, 206, 208, 211,
213, 216, 220, 235, 240, 241
Migration to and in cities, 12, 13, 14, 16,
35, 36, 37, 39, 44, 45, 46, 52, 61, 68–69,
86, 133, 155, 163, 206n, 228
Miller, Daniel, 52, 194
Minjung (conscious masses) 208, 212–214,
217, 220, 221, 238, 239
Money, management of, 139–141, 143,
145, 146–147, 171–182; characteristics of,
99, 156–160, 161–163, 165, 170–171,
172–173, 182–183; and women, 39,
127, 135, 139, 140, 146–147, 152, 172–
182, 183; and men, 88, 145, 146–147,
170, 172–182, 183; as source of stratifi-
cation, 59, 139–140, 145, 162–163,
218, 222–228, 238–239, 241, 244–245;
social power of, 60, 64, 158, 161–163,
239; in households, 99–100, 125, 131,
140–141, 164–166, 166n, 171–182, 183,
204, 205n; in rituals, 165–167, 204,
230; earning and making of, 61, 71–73,
75, 76, 84, 88, 135, 139, 151–153,
156, 161, 168–171, 182, 184–185, 190,
231, 238–239, 244–246
Money lending, 76–79, 80, 133, 143, 159,
171
Moon, Okpyo, 174, 203
Mun (Mr Mun of the dumpling restaur-
.ant), 28, 101, 107, 110, 121, 244
Neighborhood, 23–25, 47–49, 51–54, 206–
207, 208–209, 221–222, 243–244; ef-ects of economic crisis in, 7–10, 84–
85, 217–218, 240–241; stratification of,
41–45, 192, 216–217, 223, 235; as a
business area, 66–68, 73–74, 84, 102,
221
Neighborhood and local reciprocity, 24,
71, 80, 100, 102, 117–118, 141, 160–
161, 173, 187, 184–190, 192–203, 246
Neighborhood shopkeeping, definitions of,
17–18, 26–27, 29, 34, 51–54, 55–56,
79, 80, 86, 8–89, 91–92, 98, 100, 101–
102, 104–105, 108, 123–126, 132,
New Year in lunar calendar (sôl), 67, 98,
195n, 199, 203, 204
Ordinary people, 3, 8, 11, 23, 39, 41, 77,
154, 177, 208, 209, 210, 213–214, 218,
219, 220, 221–222, 226–227, 233, 236,
238, 241, 245
Paduk (board game) 27–28, 65, 185, 192,
196, 197, 201
Paek (Mr Paek of the meat shop, see also:
Chang, Mrs), 32, 50, 117, 181, 244
Pak (Mr Pak of the rice cake bakery), 1–2,
8, 18, 19, 31–32, 33, 34, 43, 44, 49, 51,
55, 65–71, 81–82, 86, 87, 97–98, 99, 100,
112, 116–117, 137, 141, 164, 175–176,
187, 188–189, 193, 195–199, 200, 201,
203–204, 207, 227, 232–233, 244, 244
Pak (Mr and Mrs Pak, keepers of a 
neighborhood supermarket), 116–117,
219
Pak, Min-ja, 14, 91, 91n, 93
Palais, James, 159
Index

Pangakan, see: rice cake bakery and mill
Pardo, Italo, 209, 218, 239
Park, Chung-hee, 46n, 61, 62, 77n, 217
Park, Kyeyoung, 156, 159, 171
Park, Soo-keun (Pak Su-g"un), 214,
Parry, Jonathon, 156, 159, 171
Pharmacy, 24, 132, 155
Pilla (small apartment house) 23, 41, 62
Pocket money, 17–18, 96–98, 99–100, 125, 140
Poor neighborhoods, 36–37, 44–45, 46;
see also: taltongne
Poverty, the poor, 7–8, 17, 24, 36–37, 36n,
43, 44–47, 64, 68–70, 86, 87, 130, 131,
135, 160, 163, 189, 209, 214, 217, 220,
220n, 221, 223, 225–226, 228,
Proverbs, 75, 153, 159n, 169, 182, 224,
227–228, 228n, 245
Reciprocity, see: household reciprocity,
Neighborhood reciprocity
Restaurants, 10, 18, 19, 27, 28–29, 45, 71–
72, 73–76, 78, 79, 80–86, 88–89, 95–96,
100, 101, 104, 106–111, 112–113, 114–
117, 118–119, 120, 121–122, 124, 132,
137, 151, 169–170, 180, 184, 187, 190,
205, 230, 231, 234–236
Rice cake bakery and mill (pangakan), 1–
2, 18–19, 32–33, 49, 65–68, 69, 70–71,
99, 100, 112, 187–188, 193, 195–196,
198, 199, 201, 232–233
Ryu, Chae-u, 11, 14
Saenghwallyok (economic capability) 127–
128, 139 141, 142, 154, 243,
Sahlins, Marshall, 4, 145, 245
Sajang (company head, business owner),
29, 75, 78, 81, 107, 109, 111, 121, 136–
137, 232–235
Samonim (esteemed woman), 219, 233–
236, 237
Sand, Jordan, 213n
Scase, Richard, 89, 90n, 91–92, 92n
Sin, Ch’ang-wôn, 225
Small houses, 23, 24, 26, 28–29, 30, 38, 40–
41, 42–43, 46–47, 50–51, 54, 67, 76, 112,
114, 139, 148, 216
Smith, Joan, 3–4, 241, 245
S"omin (ordinary people), 3, 8, 11, 24, 39,
41, 42, 77, 154, 208–210, 212–216, 218–
221, 225, 226, 227, 232, 233, 236, 238–
239, 241, 244, 245
Son, Chông-mok, 36
Song, Hyang-Keun, 48
Sorensen, Clark, 130
Spencer, Robert F, 50n
Squatters, see: taltongne
Studio apartment house, 26, 223
Social stratification, 24, 38–43, 48–50, 54,
127–128, 174–175, 182–183, 203–206,
208–209, 211–212, 219–221, 223–225,
225–228, 232–237, 239
Supermarkets (grocery stores), 18, 27,
31–32, 34, 43, 67, 69, 88, 95, 98, 104–
105, 108, 114, 115–116, 148, 181, 194,
201, 202, 204, 217, 222
Tabang (coffee house, tea house) 61, 74–
75, 77, 114–115, 115n, 191
Taltongne (hillside squatter area), 36, 38,
44n, 45–46, 47, 133
Tongne (neighborhood) 17, 23, 34, 47–51,
53, 54, 74, 178, 224, 233, 236
Tongnechangs (neighborhood business)
17, 51, 53–54, 193
Traveling, 62, 81, 140, 203–206
United States, 15, 45, 58, 61, 62, 65, 93,
141, 176, 189, 191, 228n
Urbanization, 12, 34–37, 45, 68–69, 86,
132, 133, 162–163, 174, 190, 228, 238,
240
Venture business (pench'ok), 10, 79, 85, 234
Wallerstein, Immanuel, 3–4, 241, 245
White-collar work, 12, 15, 28, 66, 81, 84,
94n, 102, 116, 121–122, 138, 139, 174,
176, 190–192, 193n, 211n, 225, 228n,
245–246
Yamjŏnhada (to be gentle), 146–147, 153,
161, 243
Yi, Man-gap, 13
Yi (Mr and Mrs Yi, supermarket proprie-
tors), 27, 98, 194
Yi, Sang-il, 186
Yi Sŏn, 233–234
Yim, Dawnhee, 28, 48, 174, 175–176
Yoon, In-jin, 102, 102n
Yu (Mr Yu, the laundry keeper), 26, 103,
151, 168, 170, 179–180, 181, 218, 223–
224
Yumin’s mother, 26, 127, 131, 137, 148–
154, 168, 171, 178–179, 183, 214, 227,
236, 244; husband, 152–53, 154, 179,
236
Yun (Mr Yun), 25, 27–28, 29–30, 31, 80, 81,
84, 114, 201, 207, 235