[page 69]

**Kyongno-dang of Korea**

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INTRODUCTION

Kyongno-dang (敬老堂) are neighborhood clubs for elders in the Republic of Korea. There are more than 9,000 of them in the country (personal communication from Mr. Park, Jae-Gan, Director of the Korean Institute of Gerontology, 1984). Hereafter, we will refer to Kyongno-dang as “KNDs.”

This report presents preliminary findings from research carried out on fifty-two KNDs located in the southeastern part of the Republic: 29 in Pusan, a large city; 15 in Andong, a small city; and 8 in Uisong-gun, a rural county. Our purpose is to introduce the KND as an institution, showing both similarities and differences among the three samples. Although our presentation will be mainly descriptive, we do have an initial hypothesis — that KNDs serve the needs of Korean “senior citizens” by relieving their families of responsibility for their care during daylight hours, thus making the three-generation stem family household a viable institution, despite the pressures of modernization and urbanization.

In our research we have used two different types of interview schedules. One was a set of questions used to interview the chairpersons and other officials of each KND and was mainly concerned with identifying key characteristics of the KNDs as institutionalized groups. The other schedule was used in interviewing KND members and included somewhat different questions concerning demographic, family and health characteristics. Thus we have 29 interviews from Pusan officials but 288 interviews from respondent members of the KNDs. From Andong we have 15 official interviews and 79 KND member interviews. From Uisong-gun we have 8 KND official interviews and 40 KND member interviews.

The present report is only a partial analysis of data in the interviews and is based mainly on KND official interviews. However, a few salient features of [page 70] KND member characteristics, based on the KND member interviews, will be presented.

KND MEMBERSHIP

The important Korean “rite of passage” at age 60 in effect creates eligibility for KND membership. After age 60, most Korean men cease to work at economically gainful occupations; hence the daylight hours tend to become idle time. At the KND of a dong (동) or neighborhood these men can meet and fill the hours with talk, games, food, drink and TV-watching. Women may also be KND members; but they are more likely to still be active in the households.

So far, we have been unable to discover the origin of the KND concept. Some Korean informants say that it goes back to the distant “traditional” past, essentially Yi dynasty times. But we believe this is merely a poetic reference to the old sarang pang (사랑방), gatherings in the “guest rooms” of important lineage heads (Brandt 1971:20).

Our KND officials interview data indicate that most KNDs were founded within the past 27 years (i.e., since 1970): 86% in our Pusan sample (26 out of 29 KNDs); 80% in our Uisong-gun sample (really 4 out of 5, with 3 yielding no data); 93% in our Andong sample (14 out of 15).

We suspect that there is some connection between the recent proliferation of KNDs and the Saemaul movement, a community development program initiated by the Korean government in the 1970s,first in rural areas, later in cities. At present it seems that each dong within a city, town or village has at least one KND center. A dong is a formal subdivision of a ku (구),which in turn is a large ward-like subdivision of a city. In rural areas the comparable units seem to be villages ri (리) and perhaps their subdivisions.

KND centers are open seven days a week; all of our KND official interviews report this. Hours during the day vary, mainly from 8 to 12 hours, but a few KNDs report being open round-the-clock, 24 hours a day.

The small city and rural county KND members report somewhat more education than the large city members. Andong-si reports 57% with some schooling; Uisong-gun reports 53%; but Pusan reports only 44%. This difference is mainly because Andong and Uisong-gun both had 17% reporting education in traditional private schools called so-dang (서당), contrasting with a reported less than 1% for Pusan. With respect to public school education, all three samples are approximately the same (Primary: Andong=25% Uisong-gun=25%, Pusan=29%; Secondary: Uisong-gun=10%, [page 71] Andong=15%, Pusan=14%). Only Pusan reports college or university education (2 individuals, less than 1%).

There is a general subjective impression in Pusan that KND members are “always” from the poor, lower class levels of the population and there is a tendency to apply this as a generalization for the entire country. However, a comparison of the main occupations of KND members during their most active years suggests some variation in social stratification, both within and between specific samples.

In the Uisong-gun sample, 27% reported themselves as in business, political office or other administrative or ownership categories. In addition, 67% reported agriculture as an occupation while 5% reported being in the “labor” category. Both Andong and Pusan scored higher in the business/administrative/owner category: Andong with 36%, Pusan with 30%. The rest of the Andong respondents reported agriculture as occupation — 67%. Pusan had a surprising 32% reporting agriculture, 18% reported labor and 20% reported “no occupation.” The occurrence of agriculture as an occupation in the second largest Korean city may seem a paradox. However, two possible explanations can be offered: (1) a Korean city includes a surrounding rural area within its administrative boundaries, peripheral to the urban core; and (2) the city has usually grown outward, to include within its urbanized core formerly rural areas. The dong included in our Pusan study include several in the northern part of the city which were rural and agricultural thirty or forty years ago.

We cannot evaluate reported agricultural occupations in terms of social status without more information 一 such as: Were the respondents owners or hired workers? If owners, how much land did they own?

The 20% of Pusan respondents reporting “no occupation” probably involves women who did not participate in, or identify with, their husbands’ occupations. No female respondents reported “housewife” as an occupation.

Our general impressions concerning social status, as reflected in occupations, are these:

(1) There is some heterogeneity of social position, with significant percentages of “white collar” occupations, some “blue collar” and very large numbers (and percentages) of respondents reporting agriculture as an occupation;

(2) The small city, Andong-si, has a larger representation of “white collar” respondents than the other two samples, with the large city, Pusan, showing the lowest and Uisong-gun intermediate;

(3) Former political officials were prominent in the Andong and Uisong- [page 72] gun samples (13% and 7%, respectively) but were absent in the Pusan sample;

(4) We can probably assume that most of the “white collar” occupations reported were of a “lower middle class” sort.

HEALTH CARE FOR KND MEMBERS

In our research we are especially concerned with health problems of the elderly. Therefore, one question on our KND officials’ interview schedule asked if the KND has an arrangement for emergency health care with clinics, hospitals, individual doctors (Western or Eastern practitioners or other possible health care sources. Only four of the 29 Pusan KNDs reported such an arrangement — 14%. The statement, in each case is simply “(Government) health centers check on the health of members.”

At present we have comparable data from the fifteen Andong KNDs, obtained quite recently in a “check-back” by Yi, but none from Uisong-gun. Unfortunately, the pertinent question was not part of the original version of the interview schedule that was used in Andong and Uisong-gun.

The data obtained on this point from fifteen Andong KNDs are however, interesting in detail. There is a good arrangement with a health clinic, which provides the following services for KND members: (1) free physical examinations once a year (in April or May); (2) free X-rays; (3) free liver function tests; (4) free medical examinations in any emergencies; (5) free care until recovery for any members who have tuberculosis — including free medicine and free injections. The interview data conclude with the following comment: “The Center doesn’t have arrangements with a hospital or doctors dislike aging persons and poor persons.” Presumably, this comment applies to private physicians since the health clinic probably has one or more doctors associated with it.

HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE OF KND MEMBERS

We have an initial hypothesis that KND membership of elders aids the families of these elders in performing their obligations to provide residence in three-generation households. Several questions on the KND members’ interview schedule were concerned with this. These questions probed for information concerning respondents, residence at three different time periods: Now, respondent’s Age-50, and respondent’s Age-10. Because respondents, current ages vary from 60 to 86, their Age-50 and Age-10 data naturally cover con-siderable numbers of years in the past. However, most Age-50 data fall in the [page 73] post-World-War-II period, during which Korea has again been an independent nation. This contrasts with the time period covered by the Age-10 data, most of which fall into the Japanese Occupation of 1910-1945.

The Age-Now responses revealed remarkable similarity among the three samples. In all three, over 70% of the respondents were living in a son’s household: 77% of Andong respondents, 72% of Uisong-gun and 79% of Pusan respondents. We assume that most of these were three-generation households, of the sort we call “patristem,” since most of the sons must have been married, with families. KND members living with spouse only varied. Andong and Uisong-gun were similar — Andong 23%, Uisong-gun 22%; but Pusan had only 11%.

Data from the 1980 Census of Korea provide some interesting contrasts. For all of Korea only 16% were three-generation households (about 8% specifically patristem) and 53% of the households were of the 2-generation nuclear sort (parents and children, with no other relatives). (1980 P&HCR, Vol 1, Table 3.)

For the total Korean population we can safely assume that a majority of the nuclear families involved children in the junior generation. This contrasts with our assumption concerning the families of KND members who lived with sons — i.e., that the second generation would generally be adults and that a third generation of children can frequently be assumed.

Actually, we only have to assume this for the Pusan elders. We can demonstrate it quantitatively for Andong and Lisong-gun. Three-generation patristem families make up 62% of our Uisong-gun sample, 69% of our Andong sample. Nuclear families are 10% and 8%, respectively, and in all cases the younger generation consists of unmarried adult sons and/or daughters.

Age-50 and Age-10 data for elders in our samples show a pattern more similar to that for contemporary Korea as a whole. Nuclear families were predominant, with children as the main portion of the junior generation. There are some variations among the three samples. At Age-50, Pusan has 86% nuclear families, Uisong-gun has 62% and Andong has 57%. At Age-10, Pusan has 86% again, Uisong-gun has 70% and Andong has 63%. Patristem families are almost completely absent at both time points for Pusan. But Uisong-gun has 35% patristem at Age-50 and 37% at Age-10.

Three-generation extended families or two-generation joint families (each involving two or more brothers living together, with their families) occur occasionally for all three samples at one time or another, at between 1 and 2 1/2%. Koreans refer to both extended and joint families as “grand families” [page 74] and such large households may have been more frequent during the 19th century.

Our inability to be more precise about household structure for Pusan at Age-Now is due to the fact that the specific question concerning this was missing from the schedule used in Pusan, though present on the (earlier) schedules for Andong and Uisong-gun. The question “Who are you living with?” was used for Pusan Age-Now. Responses to this indicated predominant residence with sons but not information concerning the total household pattern.

SUMMARY

Basically, a KND is a neighborhood gathering place or “club” for elderly persons. Memberships average around 50; thus primary group relations are possible and seem to occur frequently. Most KNDs are open just during the daytime; but a few are open on a 24-hour basis (thus enabling some elders to sleep in the KND building?). Males outnumber females, over-all, as members in the KNDs we have investigated. Some KNDs have exclusively male member- snip; a few have exclusively female membership. Others have both male and female members. KND officials are usually men.

A majority of KND members have low socio-economic background, if we assume that agricultural occupations are mostly low in status. However, a significant minority of respondents are clearly from at least lower middle-class backgrounds.

Health-care arrangements seem to be minimal or absent in Pusan but rather satisfactory for the fifteen KNDs in Andong. We lack data on this point for Uisong-gun. Korean medical practice does not yet seem to include geriatric specialization. We suggest a growing need here. The Korean government and/or the Korean medical profession should begin to promote geriatric specialization. This could be very efficiently and economically channeled through the KND structure.

Household data tend to confirm our initial hypothesis that KNDs help support 3-generation households (usually patristem) to care for elders over age 60.

[page 75]

**NOTES:**

Prof. Shin, Ph.D., Professor of Nursing Science at Pusan National University Medical College, supervised collection of Pusan data. Ms. Yi, a teacher in Andong Girls’ High School, Andong-si, North Kyongsan Province, supervised data collection in Andong and Uisong-gun.

Data from the 1980 Census of Korea were obtained by two students (sisters) in a University of Maryland class on social problems held in the fall 1987 in Pusan: Ms. Park, Hae-jun and Ms. Park, Hae-shin.

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