

E. Social Factors in Korean Agricultural Development

The milieu of the Korean farm village is dualistic. It is marked by increasing rationalization of farming patterns while retaining time-honored consumption preferences. There is new physical mobility, but traditional hierarchical family relationships are still evident. Increased female employment in urban areas has not yet broken sex discrimination in farm labor wages. Modern education is perceived to be a positive goal, but much of what is taught is Confucian in content. The farmer is cajoled by the government to grow certain crops and to donate labor for village projects; but he may remain autonomous if he feels his interests are threatened. Some of these changes have occurred as a result of increased agricultural production, a byproduct, in part, of agricultural research.

There has been a major migration to urban areas, for the mecca of the city is not only a call to the possibility of greater income; it is also an escape from the monotony of village life and the stratification of both the family and the village age and power structure. This results in an aging of farmers. Farm families' sizes have also declined from an average of 6.17 in 1975 to 5.03 persons in 1979. The farm population under thirteen has declined by 1.3 million during this period. More important for current labor needs on the farm, is the drop in younger and middle-age workers between 1975 and 1979, the 14 to 19 year cohort declined from 1.9 million to 1.6 million and the 20 to 49 year group, from 4.2 million to 3.5 million, approximately equally among both men and women. Labor has become increasingly scarce. Among new Sae-maul-constructed houses, one can occasionally see a more traditional one abandoned, now perhaps used for storage or animals.

The implications of these changes are important. Government figures indicate about a 7 percent rate of tenancy; yet informal estimates indicate that it may be higher and indeed is growing. Informal tenancy or working for wages on land owned by those who have migrated, at least temporarily, to urban areas has placed pressure on mechanization and the use of herbicides, thus reducing labor demands for weeding. Since Tongil rice requires more labor, and as barley for food is not profitable under present circumstances but especially if cash is required to hire labor, there is tension between the demands of national policy for higher yields of staple grains and the national need for industrialized export production.

The increased demand for education, financed mainly by the consumer as the government has invested less in education than in most developing countries, has also contributed to mobility. The better educated the boy or girl, the greater the likelihood of migration, for that is the goal. In a Confucian society, education is not only an inherent good; it is the social security of the family and the opportunity to escape to the unrestricted anonymity of urban life. Increased education also reduces family farm labor as children remain in school longer. So effective research resulting in higher incomes increased off-farm migration.