Some observations on kinship and kinship terminology in Korea

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In the following pages, we wish to attempt a preliminary discussion of certain features of Korean social organization, with particular reference to the kinship terminology and its behavioral and linguistic context. Our data are derived largely from membership in Korean society by one of us and from some intensive interviews with Korean students, both in the United States and in Korea. Material concerning specifically the use of kinship terms and the composition of households was obtained from a group of 17 Korean students at The Ohio State University and The Seoul National University.

Since materials on Korean kinship terms and practices are rare in the literature, it is hoped that our presentation may serve to open a number of questions for discussion. Also, we hope to be able to present data on other aspects of Korean family organization later on. (Chai, 1952)

Kinship units.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Korean kinship terminology, we need to consider briefly the social groupings within which, and with reference to which, this terminology operates.

The smallest of the socially recognized kin units is the household, referred to as a kajok. Such a household may typically consist of a nuclear family, or of what Murdock has recently called a "stem family", i.e., "minimally extended families normally consisting of only two related families of procreation (disregarding polygamous unions), particularly of adjacent generations". (Murdock, 1957, p. 669). From our interviews, we have information on 17 Seoul upper class households and their composition, and, we may briefly consider their make-up.
Traditionally, the Korean family is monogamous, although in the past, secondary marriages (e.g., concubinage) existed among the upper classes. Furthermore, it is ideally patrilocal in residence for the oldest son, and relatives outside the nuclear family who live in a given household might be expected to be connected to it through patrilineal kinship. In actual fact, we found the following: eight of the households in our small sample consisted of only one nuclear family. Four of the remaining households were fatherless, either through death or separation. In only one of these cases, however, did the mother and children live alone; in three out of four cases the household was augmented by maternal relatives: MoFo in two cases, MoFo and MoBr in the remaining case. Four nuclear families were extended by the presence of patrilineal relatives: FaBrSo in one instance, FaJo and FaSi in another, FaJo and So in a third and FaJo and FaBrSo in the last. In two of these cases, then, three generations are represented. On the other hand, in only one case was the nuclear family augmented by the presence of MoFa and MoJo.

Several of our informants also included servants in their list of household members and certain kinship terms, or ekeonymous quasi-kinship terms may be extended to include such servants.

The size of these households, not including servants, varied between 3 and 13 individuals, with an average of 6.25 per household. We may compare our information with that furnished by Cogood (1951, pp. 40-41) for a Korean village. Cogood found that in a total of 26 households the average number of individuals was 6.25, with a maximum of 11.

In half of the households only one nuclear family was present, but for the remaining half the composition corresponds closely to Murdock's definition of the micro family. Where there were extensions of the nuclear family, Cogood found these to be, as a rule, oldest son's wife and children. 2

According to a recent study (Lee, 1959) 66% of 287 Seoul households consisted of nuclear families. Also, this study shows that households size increases consistently
with higher socio-economic status.

While in everyday speech the term kajok is used as synonymous with household, the New Civil Code of Korea defines the kajok as including a man, his wife, his brothers and sisters and their spouses, his sons and daughters and their spouses. This is not a residential group but a kin group, and its bilateral character, (including not only brothers but also sisters and their spouses, not only sons but also daughters and their spouses) should be noted.

Beyond the household, the next largest kin unit is the chinjok, which is translated by our informants as "relatives". Since it includes matrilineal as well as patrilineal relatives it corresponds to the concept of kindred. The chinjok is composed of a paternal side (jongchin or dangnae) and a maternal side (occhin, ) mother’s patrilineage. Upon marriage the chinjok also includes, for a woman all of her husbands kindred; for a man his wife and her parents are added, but no other of her relatives. This clearly means that we are dealing with a personal kindred, for a child’s chinjok is not that of either of his parents, nor is even the chinjok of two brothers quite the same. On the paternal side, a man’s chinjok includes up to the eighth chon (degree) and on the maternal side, traditionally up to the sixth chon. A relationship of one chon is the relationship between father and son, so that eighth chon is one’s relationship to FaFaFaBrSoSoSo, while sixth chon in the maternal line takes us to MoFaBrSoSo.

According to the New Civil Code of Korea, the chinjok includes only up to the fourth chon (MoBrSo) in the maternal line.

The chinjok is exogamous and cousin terms and some others are applied symmetrically to individuals subsumed under this heading. Murdock (op.cit.) does not mention kindreds for Korea.

The patrilineal section of the chinjok is referred to as jongchin or dangnae, lit., "within a hall " or "within a house". As stated above, it includes all a man’s FaFaFaFa’s
(op. cit., p. 50) tells us that dolrin names are given in a preordained order and Bailet (op. cit., p. 134) says the following with reference to names:

The legal proper name is sometimes bestowed in childhood, but usually only at the time of marriage. It is composed of two Chinese characters, and among the nobility, all persons who are descended from a common branch or line must add to it a conventional character, which changes with each generation, so that by merely seeing this character one immediately knows the number of generations in direct line which separate it from the original line and the degree of kinship in the collateral line.

The headship of a dongjak is held by the senior male of the senior generation alive.

Kinship Terminology.

The kinship terms to be discussed in the following derive primarily from interviews with Korean students in the United States and in Seoul. In these interviews, the students themselves distinguished between terms used in addressing relatives, those used in reference to a kinsman of one's own in speaking to a relative, and those used when speaking to a non-relative. They also introduced, where relevant, epistolary forms and two kinds of childhood forms of address: a) those used prior to the speaker's marriage and b) in the case of certain affinal relatives, such as FaXi and HuYbr, terms used prior to the marriage of the person spoken to. The primary emphasis of our interviews was on kin living within the same household, so that variation resulted in the number of kin types mentioned in each interview. A variety of alternate terms for each kin type were reported by our informants; however, even the fairly large number of terms reported includes only a limited segment of the total range of kinship terms. Class variation and regional variation were largely eliminated, by virtue of the fact that we dealt with subjects who lived in Seoul and who belonged to the upper social stratum.

We shall comment on the multiplicity of alternate terms presently. For the moment, however, let us consider the systematic aspects of the kinship terminology. We have grouped the most formal terms used by male lgo in speaking of his kinsmen to con-
relatives (Table 1) and call this terminological level 1. We have also grouped terms used by male holo in addressing his kinsmen formally and find that these terms are also used in referring to his kinsmen, in speaking with relatives (Table 2). We may call this terminological level 2. If we now compare these two levels, we find certain notable differences.

In level 1 we find that the prefix oc (Chinese, lit., "outside") distinguishes all cousins on the mother's side, from all cousins on the father's side. Thus we have here, in Murdock's (1957) classification, a Buryat cousin terminology. Other matrilineal relatives who are distinguished from patrilineal relatives by the prefix oc are hoko, hoFa, hoBr and hoBrI. Aunt terms are bifurcate collateral, in that distinct terms are used for ho, hoSi and FaSi. The term for FaBr is either a derivative of the term for ho, or is descriptive, as is the term for hoBrI. The avuncular terminology is one in which the terms for Fa and FaBr are distinctive elementary terms, but the term for hoBr is derived from that for FaBr by the prefix oc.

However, it might be more correct to say that terms for cousins as well as terms for FaBr and hoBr are not indeed basic kinship terms, but, although they designate classes of kinsmen unequivocally, they refer to numbers of chon (degrees) distance from holo. Literally, thus cousin means "fourth chon" and uncle "third chon", FaBr "wife of third chon", etc. Terms for FaSiBu and hoSiBu are descriptive as are terms for hoko, FaFo, hoFa, FaFa. holo distinguishes between oBoBr and oBoI, but uses only one root term for yrBr and yrSi (dongo - younger sibling), although distinction as to sex may be made by a prefix (yew - female, nam - male). Patrilineal emphasis appears in the fact that FaBrI may be called by a derivative of the term for ho: big mother or second mother, depending on the relative birth order of her husband, while such an extension is not made to hoSi, or hoBrI.

Level 2 (Table 2) represents a terminology used for formal address and somewhat less formal reference. It is distinguished from level 1 by a number of features, not the least of which is a reduction in the number of distinct terms. We find here a Hawaiian cousin terminology and a derivative bifurcate merging avuncular terminology, holo. FaBr is called by a derivative of the term for Fa (big father
or second father, depending on birth order), but *MoBr* is distinguished from both
and called by a term also used for *MoSiHu* and *FaSiHu*. In other words, all "uncles"
outside the patrilineage are merged. Indeed, alternatively, a lineal avuncular
terminology is used, with the extension of this term to *FaBr* as well. We also note
here a lineal aunt terminology, with one term for *Mo* and another for both *MoSi* and
*FaSi*, which is also extended to *MoBrWi* and *FaBrWi*. Another shift which we observe,
is that in level 1 discourse *OlBrWi* is referred to be a distinctive term, while in
level 2 she is addressed (and referred to) by the same term as *FaSi* and *MoSi* and
*MoBrWi*.

A note on the Chinese origin of some of these terms may be in order. In level
1, *bu chin* for *Fa* appears to derive from the Chinese *fu* (father) *chin* (relative,
parent). Feng (1937 p. 217) says of this term that it "may be used as a literary
vocative by the son addressing the father, as in a letter". However, the Chinese
stereotyped form of address is the entire formula *fu chi in ta jen chi in hsia*. The
term *mo chin* appears to have a parallel origin, the Chinese *mu* being the elementary
term for mother (ibid, p. 22). Feng further lists *ku* and *ku mu* as terms for *FaSi*,
which in our list (level 1) become *komo*. Chinese *ku fu* (combining terms for *FaSi*
and *Fa*), *FaSiHu*, becomes *Korean komyo*. Similarly, we find Chinese *i mu* (*MoSi*) as
*imo* and Chinese *i fu* (*MoSiHu*) as *inobu*. Hyewng (*OlBr*, m.s.p. and *OlSi*, f.s.p.) appears
to derive from Chinese *hsuing*, possibly former *huang* (ibid, p. 321). In all these
cases, the corresponding Chinese character is used in writing Korean. Also, as
pointed out earlier, the prefix *oe* - is Chinese in origin. With the exception of
the *OlBr* term, there appear to be no terms of Chinese origin in level 2 (Table 2).

In his "World Ethnographic Sample" (1957), Fairchild describes Korean social
organization as being characterized by paternal descent, Eskimo cousin termin-
ology and bifurcate collateral avuncular terminology i.e., "distinct elementary
terms for *Fa*, *FaBr*, and *MoBr". This classification corresponds to our level 1. If
we ignore the classificatory significance of the prefix *oe* - which differentiates
matrilateral from patrilateral relatives. (This, however, is tantamount to ignoring
the English suffix -in-law in an analysis of consanguinal and affinal kin.) According to Murdock's (1949) classification, then, this represents an instance of the Guinea type of social organization, which "includes, by definition, all societies with exogamous patrilineal kingroups and cousin terminology of either the Eskimo or Hawaiian type." (Murdock, 1949, p. 235). Murdock further describes this as a type of social organization, which is transitional from "the stable bilateral types, Eskimo or Hawaiian, and which have evolved patrilineal descent on the basis of patrilocal residence, without having yet undergone the adaptive modifications in cross-cousin terms necessary to achieve a more typical patrilineal structure". (Ibid., pp. 235-236). In a more recent classification, Murdock (1957) places the Koreans in his Type 5, with Eskimo cousin terminology. This group consists of societies "characterized by the presence of kin groups with patrilineal descent and exclusively or predominantly patrilocal residence". Such an arrangement favors "the rise of patri-clans and patrilocal extended families". (p. 136). Here no reference is made to the transitional nature of Type 5 societies with Eskimo or Hawaiian cousin terminology.

The terminology represented in our level 2 (Table 2), like that reported for Korea by Murdock (1957) represents in Murdock's (1949) scheme an instance of the Guinea type of social organization. According to Murdock (1949, p. 253) the lepcha represent an example of such a social organization with patrilineal descent, Hawaiian cousin terminology and a lineal aunt terminology. If Murdock's hypothesis is correct and the Guinea type of social organization does indeed represent a transition from bilateral to patrilineal descent, then this might suggest the lineal aunt terminology of level 2 might be older than the bifurcate collateral terminology of level 1, or the bifurcate collateral avuncular terminology of level 2, for that matter. It is interesting to note here that the terms for mōsi and nači, which give rise to the bifurcate collateral aunt terminology are of Chinese origin. The Buryat cousin terminology of level 1, which serves to emphasize the distinction between patrilateral and matrilateral
kin, is also based on a Chinese marker; however, it does not produce the "cross- 
cousin terms necessary to achieve a more typical patrilineal structure". It is 
possible that this cousin terminology, whether Hawaiian, Eskimo or Buryat, argues 
for an earlier bilateral phase of Korean society. One might wonder, however, how 
long transitional phases last. Patrilineal descent exists in Korea at least as 
long as Confucian influence. 12 In the passage cited, Murdock further suggests 
that patrilineal descent evolves on the basis of patrilocal residence; the shift 
in cousin terminology is related not only to rules of descent but also to rules of 
residence. However, in Korea residence rules are related to the husband's birth order. 
Only the first son is required to take up patrilocal residence. Marriages of younger 
sons may be neolocal and frequently are. Indeed, in the case of daughters who are 
only children, patrilocal residence is to be expected, nowadays without the adoption 
of the son-in-law. (Chai 1962). As far as Korean residence rules are concerned, 
Murdock (1957) in his table (p. 679) identifies Korean residence as patrilocal, with 
neolocal as a patterned alternative, which occurs "with sufficient frequency to suggest 
either the survival of an earlier rule or the incipient emergence of a new one". The 
possible relevance of birth order to residence rules is not indicated here. This, as 
well as the effect on kinship terminology, and social structure of a strong emphasis 
on male primogeniture, such as exists in Korea, would appear to be in need of further 
exploration.

On the basis of Murdock's classifications, then, not only the kinship terminology 
but also the residence rules would indicate the possibility of an earlier bilateral 
phase in Korean society. Other indications of bilateral tendencies are to be found 
in various other features that have already been mentioned: the official bilateral 
definition of the kajok and the existence of personal kindreds (chinjok), which are 
clearly, though asymmetrically, bilateral, as well as the bilateral extension of the 
incest taboo.
as far as the kindred is concerned, another interesting point should be noted. As mentioned earlier, relatives are distinguished within the kindred according to the number of chon or degrees they are removed from ego. The relationship of one chon is the relationship between father and son, the relationship between a man and his brother is two chon, since he is ego's father. Note that this implies an important difference between the "onion" scheme of the Korean kindred compared to that of the American kindred, as described by Parsons (1943). The narrowest ring (one chon) includes ego's parents and children; his siblings, whom, in contrast to the American pattern, it does not include, together with his grandparents and grandchildren belong to the second ring (2 chon), etc. In spite of the existence of patrilineal descent in Korea, the kindred (as distinct from the unilineal descent group, lineage or sib) is, like the American system, in Parsons' words, "open", i.e., there is no system of preferential marriage. Unlike the American system, which increases in number of lines at each generation toward the past, the Korean kindred is not "multilineal". While the sib is patrilineal, the chinlok is "trilineal" and that asymmetrically, for it includes, in the paternal line, up to FaFaFaFa and his descendants, in the patrilateral line up to FaMoFaFa and his descendants and in the maternal line to ego's MoFa, and his descendants. Ego's Mo line is omitted, although ego's Mo is included. Nor is the Korean system "conjugal" for the emphasis is not on the conjugal units but on the relationship between parents and offspring.

At present, both of our terminological levels represent compromises between bilateral and patrilineal tendencies. That the patrilineal emphasis are indicated largely by Chinese terms and characters is in itself of the greatest interest. It is likely that current and future influences on Korean society will tend to strengthen the existing bilateral tendencies at the expense of the patrilineal ones. (Chai, 1962, Lee, 1959).
It is possible, then, that the analysis of kinship groupings and kinship terminologies may provide us with an insight into the history of Korean society. In this connection, the study of Korean kinship terminologies points up another interesting matter: shifts from a terminology of formal reference (level 1) to less formal reference (level 2) reveal a shift in the pattern of the kinship terminologies. Thus, while there exist many alternate kinship terms in Korea, the implications of the existence of such variants are in one way significantly distinct from the implications of the existence of alternate forms in some other systems, e.g., the American kinship system. In discussing variations in American kinship usage, Schneider and Homan (1955) distinguish between the ordering or classifying aspect of kinship terms on the one hand and their role or relationship designating aspect on the other. They conclude, that, although the American kinship system allows latitude in the role or relationship designating aspects of kinship terms, the classifying or ordering aspect is not disturbed by this variety of alternate forms. Regardless of variant individual terms used, the basic kinship pattern is preserved. While the great number of variants in Korean kinship terms do indicate some latitude in the role designating aspects of the terms, it is precisely the ordering or classifying aspect of kinship terms that is changed in the shift from a very formal set of Korean kinship terms to a somewhat less formal set.

Variations or shifts in the ordering or classifying aspects of kinship terms are undoubtedly not unique to the Korean situation. (Cf. Frake 1960). We may therefore ask what the significance of such shifts is. Indeed, we may ask whether the very possibility of such a shift does not raise questions concerning the entire traditional system of analysing kinship terminologies. At any rate, it indicates clearly that the collection of alternate kinship terminologies is necessary not only for an evaluation of the role designating aspects of kinship terms but also for an analysis and typology of the ordering or classifying aspects of kinship terms. We may further ask whether the implications of such shifts are significant primarily in allowing us historical insights, or whether other functional, implications are also to be discerned. Further, we may wonder as to the difference between societies which do reveal such shifts and those which do not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ghinhalabewji</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Oshalanabewji</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Chinhalamewni</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Oshalanewni</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Abewji (<em>m</em>-hin, buchim)</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Ekwanewji (<em>m</em>-hin, mochin)</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Keunexewni (<em>m</em>-im)</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Jaleunexewni (<em>m</em>-im)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Yamchon</td>
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<td>10.</td>
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<td>Ooamagontaoek</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Kono</td>
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<td>Konomu</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Imo</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Limbu</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Nyeung (<em>m</em>-ap), obba (<em>f</em>-ap)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Nongim (<em>m</em>-ap), obba (<em>f</em>-ap)</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Dongsaeng</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Sachon</td>
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<td>Osaag</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Abewji (plus birth order)</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Dual (plus birth order)</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Jekha</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Nyewanwi</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Sawi</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Sonju</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Sonnery</td>
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* *m*-ap. (male speaking)

** *f*-ap. (female speaking)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Malewé</th>
<th>FaFa, Nofa</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Malewé</td>
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<td>3. Malewé</td>
<td>FaNo, NáFa</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Keumnwéjí</td>
<td>FaObr</td>
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<td>5. Keumnwéjí</td>
<td>FaYbr</td>
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<td>6. Keumnwéjí</td>
<td>Zo, Njéko</td>
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<td>7. Keumnwéjí</td>
<td>FaLibóka,</td>
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<td>8. Keumnwéjí</td>
<td>FaYlibóka,</td>
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<td>Libók, Fatbóka (Fabfr)</td>
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<td>12. Nyeuwé (f.sp.)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Minim (m.sp.)</td>
<td>Libók</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All junior relatives are addressed by name, or as above, Table 1.

* m.sp. (male speaking)

** f.sp. (female speaking)
NOTES

1. Throughout this paper, the following abbreviations will be used for kinship terms: Fa: father; Mo: mother; Hu: husband; hi: wife; So: son; Da: daughter; Br: brother; Si: sister; Ol: older; Yl: younger.

2. Students at the Seoul National University collected information on seven households in various rural regions to the South of Seoul. These households ranged in size from 4 to 11, with an average of 7.43. Of these, only one was a nuclear family, while all others contained two nuclear families, connected patrilineally, or at least elements of a second such family.

3. Feng, "997, p. 217, ft 73, says that in Chinese "Ch’iin means ‘relative’", or "ja, ka, or alk a.

4. or e ka Feng, op. cit., p. 175 makes the following distinction for the Chinese terminology: "Related are divided along sib lines, into sib relatives (tsang ch’iin) and non-sib relatives (wai ch’iin or nei ch’iin)." p. 172 "Nai Ch’iin refers to relatives through women of the sib married out and the affinal relatives of father, father’s father and ascending. Nei Ch’iin refers to kgo’s own affinal relatives." Thus Korean jongch’iin parallels Chinese tsang ch’iin, Korean ch’iin parallels Chinese wai ch’iin whereas ha doen parallels Chinese nei ch’iin.

5. Note the asymmetry of the kindred of a man and of a woman. In this connection, note also that a woman may not marry her deceased husband’s brother, since her husband’s kindred is also hers, but there is no rule against a man marrying his deceased wife’s sister.

6. According to one source, National Etiquette, edited by the Association of National Morality Studies, Han’kyosa, Seoul, 1956, onkyo is a quasi-kinship group, consisting of the family’s close associates for many generations. However, note relatives.


8. Though, 1899, discusses the government of the Korean sib, its headship, council, functions, etc.

9. Anthropologists generally make a distinction between terms of address and terms of reference, and as a rule only the latter are subjected to systematic analysis. Fei (1946) points out that a distinction may be made between terms of address, terms of reference — where terminology used will in part depend on the relative status of the speaker, interlocutor and person spoken of, and relationship terms, i.e., terms used to describe the relationship. It is these latter that form the classical subject of anthropological kinship studies under the label "terms of reference".

10. Terms used to refer to the kin of one's interlocutor are as a rule honorifics of higher formality than those used in referring to one's own relatives, where honorifics are used only in reference to one's elders, or affinal relatives either of greater seniority or opposite sex. For a discussion of this distinction in China, see Peng, op. cit.; for Japan, see Norbeck and Befu (1955).

11. Both level 1 and 2 distinguish between older and younger siblings of same sex and opposite sex. In level 2 this distinction is extended to cousins, since sibling terms are extended to them. In contrast to this, Osgood (op. cit., p. 51) states: "...the differentiation 'elder' and 'younger' are given by male speakers to all male cousins, but only to female cousins of the speaker's clan. Women speakers use the differentiations of 'elder' and 'younger' for women of the same generation, but not to any males". However, the Korean terms are not given.

12. In this connection, it is perhaps of interest to note that in Japan we find an Eskimo system overlain with heavy matrilineal influences, which, however, have not modified the structure of the kinship system itself. In this connection, Osgood (op. cit., p. 242) says with reference to Korea: "The matrilineal family system may have been prehistoric, but was certainly accentuated under Chinese influence..."
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