

YÖGONG: FACTORY GIRL



Royal Asiatic Society
Korea Branch

5; lacquerware, 3; glaziers and glass, 5; bicycles, sale and repair, 3; vinyl and plastics, 2; automobile accessories, 9; cutlery, 5.

Religious facilities: temple (Buddhist), 1; Christian churches, Protestant, 5; *mudang* (female shamans licensed), 4; ancestral shrines, 2.

Schools: elementary, 1; middle, 1; high school, 1.

The inventory above reflects the city in microcosm. While all possible services and goods are not available, what is indicated is the labor-intensive society in which specialization is not complex and where there is an immediate face-to-face relationship between purveyor and consumer. To the list, to be sure, may be added the patterns of transportation and transport, the bus and taxi services, the fact that this *tong* is on the recently opened subway line, and the trucking of goods from wholesaler to local retailer. But generally, the ward is self-contained; virtually all needs may be supplied within it.

A girl employed in industry may then find herself in a living situation such as this. Her associations outside of her work will be primarily drawn from her residence location. If she is sent food from her home area, she may, it is true, depend less on the vendors of her *tong*. Yet, even in this case, she may cook her own modest meals in her own or in the kitchen of the houseowner and form an association with the family with which she lives. With the women of the household, she can enter into the patterns of neighborhood life and increasingly find an identity in the alien and threatening city.

4. The Work Situation

As one follows a young woman into her post as a factory worker, it must be obvious that numerous considerations arise. She becomes a part of an extensive labor force. Between herself, her employer, and her co-workers appears a complex set of relationships which ties her not only into her job but extends into governmental policies and the general question of Korean development at large. Relevant through these are to a young woman's situation, she is in the main only dimly aware of them. Her problem is more immediate—how may she adapt to the work situation confronting her?

Uncertain, anxious, and in the main, unskilled, the young woman makes her way to the city. Avenues toward employment are few. Her alternatives lie in domestic service, in waitressing, in the public transportation system, in retailing, and finally, in industry. Although domestic service might offer the safest solution, and even, given board and room and today a wage, a better financial return, the status-conscious younger women find it demeaning. The same is true of waiting table in a small restaurant. Women from the country are usually not sufficiently familiar with districts and streets of cities to be able to serve as fare collectors on city busses. Moreover, such jobs tend to go to younger girls and are poorly paid. If there are contacts with merchants in the city from the home community, or if a young woman possesses a marketable skill, employment in a retail shop is a possibility. But the greatest numbers of available jobs lie in Korea's growing industries. Attention here is directed solely to this issue and to the population segment connected with it.

As a preliminary to the work of factory women in Korea, attention should be paid to the concept of work both as the girl herself sees it and as it relates to the national culture as well. Several commentators

on the contemporary scene have chosen to view the employment of women in a developing country as reflecting an incipient capitalism and the burdens of exploitation associated with it (cf. Yoon, 1976; Park, Y-o, 1977). Factory owners have perhaps made use of the extensive labor pool which the presence of employable women creates, a source of cheap labor. This argument, however familiar, fails to take into account the changing circumstances of family organization and societal structure, nor does it accord a place to personal motivation. To be sure, there are the consequences of economic development taking place in a land only recently urbanized and industrialized. Money, its use or perversion, has permeated all of Korean life. And it is equally true, given a rising capitalism and its attendant manifestations, that young women are left with little alternative but to work, at least in a certain stage of their lives, and to produce either for their families or for themselves. In the main, if not ideal, the situation is acceptable. What is of present concern is the culturally defined attitude which the Korea worker brings to the work situation and the ways in which this colors what she does. There is, in other words, a Korean work ethic, one essentially different from that of the Western world (cf. Spencer, 981).

As in the West, the concerns and aspirations of the person are pitted against those of the group. The Korean orientation is shaded differently. Group solidarity and individual ambition, unquestionably important, require evaluation in terms of specifically Korean standards. The concept of the labor union offers a case in point. Some larger plants have allowed unionization of workers. The present national regime, however, forbids strikes and slow-down and inhibits trends toward national or large-scale unionization. The labor union is thus an in-plant development, meaningful to some workers, to be sure, and reflecting a generally benevolent paternalism on the part of the employer. The unions cannot be said to play an especially significant or modifying role, especially in those factories where the labor force is predominantly female. Nor, from the point of view of the workers themselves, is the labor association particularly desirable. As the work situation in various Korean industrial plants is reviewed, it seems evident that attachments either to the employer or to co-worker are remarkably minimal. Better pay and working conditions, of course, are ideal; if they can be realized, so much the better. But for the individual, the work is not an end in itself. She thinks to complete her stint of employment, three to five years, and then move on to another

and more rewarding activity. If she has a set of associations, these lie elsewhere than her employment.

Individual aspirations, hopes, ambitions, characterize the worker. To be sure, a girl may seek various outlets for herself, such as to remain in the city and not return to a backwater, to achieve some higher level of education, to marry upward, or to find some degree of personal independence. However much such goals, often only vaguely articulated, are uppermost, the working girl remains motivated by her involvement in the Confucian ethic which has so pervaded Korean society and culture over centuries.

The Confucian view of a natural order, one in which human interpersonal relations are both ritually and behaviorally fixed still persists in determining cognitive processes and perspectives. It is through this pervasive tradition that the Korean sees himself as a participant in the social order, determining as the system does, not only the sets of obligations operative within a family setting, thus emphasizing the place of the family, but by extension, general social relations. Inferior-superior relationships, lent force by honorific and pejorative language so characteristically Korean, are a projection of the Confucian system which effectively locks the person into sets of definable relationships. The woman in Korean industry, raised in these patterns, according proper respect to father and family elders, to teachers in school, to any, in short, occupying a conceptually elevated position in hierarchically organized systems, carries this attitude through to her employer. Her own *kibun*, a notion of balanced selfhood, is marked by her assumption of a proper place within the circles in which she moves (Crane, 1967:7-12). Thus in a work situation, a supervisor evokes respect, standing to some degree *in loco parentis*, while an older co-worker is also given deference, sometimes being called by an "older sister" term, a reflection of the principle of social relations founded in relative age (cf. McBrien, 1978).

The Confucian perspective, the general work view which it creates, carries through to management as well. A Korean plant manager, educated in the United States and employed by an American-owned company, goes on record as stressing "internal harmony" in his operation. He has instituted an educational program in the plant where "... everyday subjects relating to man's harmony and relations to his fellow man or neighbor or family" are discussed. On familiar ground, the workers in the plant respond fairly eagerly. "Ardent work, rewarding rest," a motto used in the plant indicates the mean,

the proper balance of man and society, the order of things and events in the universe which the Confucian ethic has laid over societies in the Chinese cultural orbit.

The stress in Korea on the Confucian principle of human relations in a social hierarchy has been said by some to outstrip such patterns in China. "Korea is more Chinese than China" is often said with pride. The fact that the mainland Chinese have repudiated their heritage appears to give the Confucian perspective more weight in Korea, the point arising in antagonisms toward North Korea (Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea) and over disavowal of any Marxist-tainted ideology. While not necessarily extolling Confucius, Mencius, or the Neo-Confucianists, Chu Hsi or Wang Yang-ming, matters reserved for the scholar, the emphasis on harmony, peace, dependability, and credibility operative within the social system are Confucian ideas with which most can readily identify.

The upshot of such social perception is that the worker expects, in her work situation, to give of herself and to perform the task assigned. It is unquestionably this attitude, one especially strong among women workers, given the subordinated self-image brought out of the familial structure, which makes them both willing and productive and by the same token, disinclined to complain or rebel. It is no accident that foreign firms have found a dedicated labor pool in Korea. True of Japan, Taiwan, and even mainland China however differently rationalized, Korea offers an especially strong variation on the Confucian theme. The resulting work ethic mirrors the propriety of behavior, the acceptance of a situation, and the adaptation to constituted society. The work pattern, however much oriented to meeting individual goals, is thus conceptualized totally differently from the Western notion of work as achievement.

But it is also clear that the girl in urban industry is confronted with a dilemma. She begins to be aware of new modes and structures, cognizant of alternative ways of solving problems, but her background has not equipped her to deal with them. The result on the one hand is that she is drawn to the security arising in the narrow focus of her work but to holding tightly kinship relations and obligations on the other. There is security in sending money home, in underwriting a sibling's education, in short, in keeping the sense of family to the fore. And there is security as well in doing the job and fitting in, not intimately necessarily, but faithfully to the work routine. If she begins to move more freely into the social domain of the city, her initial

steps will be at best highly tentative as will indeed any signs of rebellion.

The Factory Scene

In an industrialized society where the element of the human contribution, a labor intensity, is primary, the factory, despite whatever other opportunities may exist, is the most acceptable source of employment for the urban in-migrant. Just as there are occupational status levels operative in other types of work, so also is the view that some factories confer higher status than others. Somewhat greater prestige is accorded the employee of the foreign-owned plant, those whose activities are perhaps world-wide and whose administrative base is located in Europe or the United States. Although low-level management, with some exceptions, is Korean, the structuring tends to be along lines operative abroad and the resulting cosmopolitan flavor often proves attractive. In such plants, the girl worker may be provided with a uniform, a coat or smock, there may be a refectory, a clinic, as well as various recreational outlets instituted by management. There is further more receptivity on the part of the plant administration to give attention to worker suggestions and requests. Not that such features are lacking in Korean-owned and managed installations, but it is clear that the plant based only in Korea and run exclusively by Korean is seen as less polished. Conversely, the local industry is more attractive to some because its management and activities conform more closely to the familiar. The foreign company may be seen by a few as too impersonal.

In the present study, every attempt was made to select representative industries, to offer a fairly broad spectrum even if a limited number of plants was available for scrutiny. This is no easy task, especially since a status-conscious Korean company, however proud of its product or its labor-management relations, is hesitant for fear that any description will weigh bad with good. To a degree, the same problem exists with a foreign-owned firm; less so, clearly, but there may be still some anxiety about relations with government. No purpose is served in identifying the installations which ultimately gave permission for interviews with workers. A word, however, on the general climate of work, the kinds of patterns which develop, appears in order.

The factories selected were two foreign-owned electronics firms, a dye works, a leather goods manufacture, and a ceramics factory, the latter three owned and managed by Koreans. With the exception of the dye factory, all are medium-sized, meaning that they have from 1,500 to 5,000 employees. The dye works employs 145 people, of whom 80 are women. Very large plants, those with more than 5,000 workers, such as Lucky Gold Star, with its highly diversified manufacture of electronics and electrical equipment, or Hyundai, with its intensive heavy machinery and automotive production, prove difficult of access and were not investigated here. Gold Star hires a large female work force; Hyundai does not. Middle-sized factories, those concerned with textiles or knitted goods, with paper products, or with food and beverage processing, depend chiefly on women workers.

A good deal may be said of the work atmosphere which these various installations create. Each one has its own distinctive cast, yet the organizational pattern is fairly consistently the same. Without exception, the supervisory personnel is made up of men, at least on all higher levels, even if a girl, long in service, may achieve a post as team supervisor. The male contingent, from heavy labor and maintenance to those with administrative responsibilities, tend generally to see their jobs as career oriented. The turnover among girls, on the other hand, is rapid. The girls so employed are usually assigned to a production unit, a "line," all of the members of which perform the same tasks. The sense of routinized activity is stressed by nearly all workers. Many complain that they find their jobs tedious and boring but it is also clear that they expect little else. Although some opportunities for promotion and better pay may arise, these are usually in association with the mastery of a familiar task. In this sense, industrial employment for women is a dead end.

Regardless of the product involved, the system of labor operative in each factory is structured along parallel lines. Thus while the foreign-owned electronics companies may create a work situation somewhat more free of constraint than the Korean, seeking to enlist worker loyalty by providing an appropriate atmosphere along with social and recreational outlets, the work pattern follows that characteristic of Korean plants. This is not to say that Korean factories lag behind in the development of more favorable work conditions; it is simply that the foreign factory makes the work expectations explicit, while on the Korean side, they remain implicit. It is the worker herself who brings a set of understandings from her background.

The electronics industries provide generally pleasant working conditions. A girl, once hired, is assigned to a production line and is mainly concerned with the wiring and soldering of electronics components with the aid of a microscope. In the ceramics factory, girls work as assigned to various teams, glazing, marking, and firing dishware, or initiating, baking, and packing bathroom tiles. Similarly, in the leather goods plant, one concerned both with novelty leather goods and plastics, the workers are charged with cutting, sewing, or polishing the purses, billfolds, and key containers which the company widely exports. The smallest plant, the dye works, bringing in loads of unbleached fabrics, cotton, denim, and synthetics from local textile mills, puts its workers on lines to mix dyes, to run the materials through the vats, and to dry and pack the finished product for forwarding to other manufacturers. But in all cases, whether large or small, the factories make use of a team approach. The workers are put on sections of the plant to learn a specific operation. Once this skill has been acquired, it is difficult for the employee to move to another activity since different tasks may be involved. The "line" or team, depending on kind of work, is made up of from 10 to 25 girls, most frequently under the eye of a male or female supervisor.

While it may be understood that in the case of the foreign based plants, upper level administrative personnel are not Korean, even if they are, these tend to be drawn into operations and management abroad so as to maintain close contact with the administrative home elsewhere. Governmental pressures, true of many developing countries, are toward the gradual assumption of all administration and management by native Koreans. The need for foreign capital, however, inclines toward a situation of some indifference toward this goal. The Korean plants, on the other hand, are somewhat more rigorously controlled by planning and regulation imposed by governmental units concerned (Cole and Lyman, 1971:164, seq.).

The Korean development, it must be stressed, is wholly recent, reflecting the growth of the decades following not only the civil war but the handicaps arising from the earlier Japanese occupation. This implies that the large-scale industrial installations are new, representing enterprises stemming from salvaged or developed capital. The ceramics factory, for example, is a family enterprise, with a single lineage of an extended family as its founder. The men of the lineage have developed through their pooled resources a rather extensive financial empire, a frequently encountered contemporary phenomenon. The

family in question has retained 40% of the stock in the factory, but has retained managerial rights, not difficult to arrange, in view of the sale of the remaining 60% to relatives beyond the immediate lineage grouping. Others in the family have developed a construction firm, are involved in equipment sale and rental, and are currently moving into industrial real estate. The family bought the ceramics unit in 1971, expanded it, and assigned a younger member to its management. When the plant was dedicated under its new ownership, the wife of then President Park Chung-hee was present, giving rise to a rumor among the workers that the Park family was the owner.

The dye works shows a parallel, although here a single owner was successful in purchasing the factory on the strength of money drawn from a family mass of capital. When the relations between family and capital accumulations are considered, especially on an elite level, some further light is thrown on the Korean industrial pattern. Adaptations to Westernized modernity require analysis of the continuing import of such familial structures, a point considered here only in relation to the workers themselves. Family concerns are again reflected in the leather goods plant. Here the manager-personnel director is a member of a lineage which has developed this along with numerous other enterprises. Not the least of these is food-processing, a result being that this parallel family-owned activity supplies food for the dining-hall of the leather goods works at cost.

The atmosphere thus created by the three Korean-owned plants is understandably different from those with foreign ownership. In all cases, however, an attempt is made to secure worker loyalty to the factory even if the non-Korean concerns go about this in a somewhat different way. The company-instituted labor unions, for example, are given somewhat more scope in the foreign-based plants. The Korean-run factories, perhaps more secure in relations with governmental units, allow unionization but accord the workers considerably less voice. Although they may permit the development of intramural sports, soccer and volleyball, and make much of an annual worker picnic, little attempt is made to encourage the workers to generate recreational outlets for themselves. Quite the reverse is true among the factories with foreign ownership and management. Here, in addition to organized sports activities, one finds such features as choirs, literary clubs, efforts made to accommodate worker interests in many areas, not excluding the religious.

Given the Korean factory atmosphere, no plant can expect to make

too heavy a claim on worker loyalty and must use some care to avoid the creation of too authoritarian a climate. According to the leather-goods plant manager, a factory with dormitories, if he or his staff find a girl who repeatedly absents herself at night, he would wish to write to her parents to inform them of it. On the other hand, he says he has not as yet done so even though considering it in several cases. A comparison with Japan and its industrial worker relations development is perhaps unavoidable; it seems evident, however, that the sense of commitment to plant and product, so apparent in Japan, is lacking in Korea (cf. Matsumoto, 1976; Cole, 1971; Dore, 1973).

Wages and Earnings

Korea's thriving economy has not been without its problems and serious disadvantages. Not the least of these arises in the national stress on industrialization and the fact that government, in its eagerness to promote industries, has reduced relative capital costs (Kuznets, 1977:111-127). The upshot is to place workers in an essentially marginal earning position. The returns for work are expectedly low. Nor have wages kept pace with the inflationary trends which have marked the Korean economy over the past several years. The large human reservoir, coupled with the prevailing need for money as the nation moves toward capitalistic development, implies that a fairly tight restraint can be imposed on worker returns. For the worker, the situation is competitive and there are no significant disparities in wages or salaries available to the essentially unskilled worker. As between the firms examined, as well as from extensive comparative data, scales are approximately the same.

The result is that a girl who aspires to work in Seoul will consider not so much the work in which she will be engaged but rather the contacts she has, the availability of housing, ideally nearby, or any other advantages she may perceive. The product made or the work itself are not primary considerations. Knowing fairly well what she can earn, she frequently fails even to ask the employment office to which she applies what her salary will be. She sees herself in any case as a "factory girl," somewhat embarrassed at having to take such a post, viewing it in terms of low wages and diminished social status. Foreign firms, for the reasons noted, which offer somewhat better working conditions and greater rewards for education achievement,

whether middle or high school graduation, may confer higher status. But if there are advantages in working for a foreign company, they are felt to lie in the fact that the foreign-based firm can be expected to hold to predictable hours of work. Although a company may demand overtime and is supposed to pay accordingly, this is seen by many as too great a burden.

Korea, among the foremost of nations in the developing world, has fashioned, through aid and internal development, an elaborate system of manufacture for export. Even factories which do not produce for export, aiming largely at internal consumption, have been able to take advantage of the benign climate for financial growth. This means in turn that while profits may be expended for continuing growth and expansion, even in the face of rising inflationary costs, worker profits cannot wholly keep pace. The developmental stage has not yet been reached where production can take alternative forms. This is of course why Korea, despite remarkable economic growth over three decades, is not yet on a stabilized level of industrialized production comparable with the more developed areas of the world. Given the large population in so small an area, along with the pronounced trends toward urbanization and industry, it is difficult to predict with any exactness the nature of the Korean economic future. The result is to leave the worker in the bind of limited earning capacity, with adjustments for inflation, perhaps, but with wage levels fairly tightly fixed.

These factors affect the female worker especially. The argument of ruthless exploitation of the female work force made by many is not, however, wholly applicable if the nature of Korean development is taken into account. There are, after all, no operative economic alternatives either for the girl in factory work or for her employers. In fairness to the government in power at this writing, it must be noted that numerous ameliorative plans have been put forth, not the least the continuation of the Saemaül Undong (New Village) movement which has to some degree been effective in inhibiting wholesale urban in-migration (Brandt, 1976:32-39). Clearly, too, efforts to raise rural income have not been wholly unsuccessful.

This is perhaps less the case in the urban setting. In the main, the Korean factory worker has few expectations. It is true that she works and earns for a specific purpose, one usually family-connected, but she takes an essentially passive view of her earning potential. When it is found, for example, that men in the ceramics plant who do exactly

the same work as women earn twice as much as the women with whom they work, the prevailing female attitude is that this is as it should be. Some girls, especially in the foreign-based factories and with perhaps somewhat more extensive urban experience, protest not the inequities between male and female income but rather the fact that women workers abroad, in Europe or the United States, are paid eight to twelve times as much for the same work. This point is frequently made by the governmental ministries concerned and it is one about which the incumbent administration appears to feel some embarrassment, so much so that a study such as this one is not accorded support or approval. Yet where strikes have occurred, some women have taken a leading role.

Wages for the various industries may generally average out as much the same but several factors, particularly the Korean system of wage payment, require attention. Complexities arise in the apprentice system and in the bonus pattern characteristic of all salaried Koreans. Apprenticeship is fairly readily understood. Once hired, a girl, or a man in the same situation, is expected to acquire some skill in the operation to which she is assigned. While a learner, she earns somewhat less than an unskilled worker. When skill is demonstrated, however, she can move up into an improved wage bracket. This is perhaps best exemplified by the ceramics works. When Lee Ok-sun, for example, a 20-year-old, came to work for the plant in 1974, she was hired on at ₩410 (\$1.03 by the exchange of the time) per day. To this was added ₩40 (10¢) for lunch, the plant lacking a refectory, and ₩10 for the fact that she had graduated from middle school. Her total earnings were thus ₩460 (\$1.15) per day, or ₩2,760 for the 48-hour six-day week. Optional overtime opportunity is accepted by all or nearly all workers in the plant. Because the factory must keep its kilns fired and operating over a seven-day week, any interruption creating too costly a heat loss, workers put in an extra day. Despite legal insistence on a six-day week, the management reaches an understanding with newly hired workers that a seven-day schedule would be required and a modest overtime rate be paid. To Ok-sun, as an apprentice, this extra day paid ₩540 (\$1.35), lunar allowance and the schooling reward again being paid and raising her rate for the day to ₩590. Her weekly starting salary, lowest of any encountered, then stood at ₩3,350 (\$8.40). At the end of her apprenticeship after three months, Ok-sun was raised by roughly 10%, becoming a regularly assigned unskilled plant worker with an ostensibly permanent job.

But even this lowest level salary is subject to further augmentation. This comes about through the prevailing Korean system of quarterly bonus payments, a pattern somewhat different, although paralleling, the industrial procedures of Japan (cf. Cole, 1971:60 seq.). The bonus (*sangyōgūm*) applies to all salaried levels in contemporary Korean society. Government employees, the various bureaucrats, civil servants, teachers, and many others, receive an extra month's salary every quarter. In the case of government, the bonus is interpreted as one of 400%, i.e., one extra month's salary paid four times in a calendar year. In industry, however, somewhat higher benefits may be paid, a matter essentially negotiable between management and the company help. This is one area, in fact, where the local company labor union may play its most decisive role. It is, moreover, one of the principal factors which a worker may take into account when applying for employment. High bonuses, 600% or more, characterize some industries despite government objections in the face of inflationary trends. Some concerns, such as O.B. Brewing and Hyundai heavy construction, have reputations of giving especially favorable bonuses. In the case of the ceramics plant, the bonus was set at 600%, meaning that the equivalent of six weeks' earnings were paid each quarter in addition to the established wage scale. This is held to be quite favorable.

In Ok-sun's case, equally true of all workers in the plant, the company paid the quarterly bonus on the basis of a 48-hour week, omitting the lunch and schooling allowances and not taking the extra day's overtime into account. Thus in a 30- or 31-day calendar month, Ok-sung would have worked 26 or 27 days for bonus purposes. They bonus then paid, reflecting 26 days in one month, with 13 additional days to make the 150% figure applicable to the quarter, would amount to $39 \times \text{₩}410$ or ₩15,990 (ca. \$50). In summary, her quarterly wage as an apprentice amounted to ₩57,390 (\$143.47).

The situation described is in process of change as a result of heavy inflation, necessitating salary increases, and growing sophistication in production techniques. Although the latter development may tend toward reduction of manpower needs on the part of some manufacturers, often a cause of considerable anxiety on the workers' part, most have been obliged to refine and upgrade personnel practices. Yet the wage and bonus system remains generally constant. The devaluation of the monetary unit, the *wōn*, a response to an inflationary spiral, makes some changes in worker's salaries. By the same token, to evaluate them in terms of a foreign currency, as has been done

here, is hardly meaningful. The equivalents are little more than approximations and serve only to define a basic level.

One marked effect of the bonus pattern is to keep the worker fairly tied to his or her job. Practices vary among industries and companies but frequently the bonus is forfeited if the worker leaves before the end of the quarter. Some companies offer terminal percentages if a worker quits after six weeks in the quarter. Workers intending to leave their jobs, as, for example, the girl who steps from industrial life to marriage, usually try to stay on until the bonus is paid. To the worker, especially the factory woman, it represents a small "nest-egg," an anticipated amount and plans are made for its expenditure.

An interesting reflection of a Korean cultural mode may be noted in the fact that girls working in the same plant, meeting socially at lunch, after work, or in the dormitory, never discuss actual money amounts. Considerable hesitation is apparent in discussing how much of one's earnings goes to parents, how much for housing, how much is saved. It is this which makes a worker hesitant to ask a personnel manager what her salary will be. The same hesitation has been noted in rural areas (cf. Brandt, 1971:166). But much time is spent in discussing the bonus anticipated. Not that the amount is mentioned, but plans for its expenditure, such as having a dress made by a local dressmaker, purchasing furniture for use after marriage, or paying a sibling's tuition, are aired at length, often boastfully. Girls who avoid these topics are considered by others to be poor or in debt.

Mention is made of the use of the Western calendar in the computation of time worked and salaries paid. As may be expected, Korean business, like that of other nations, has adapted to the Gregorian system. But several departures exist, indicating that for many Koreans it is the lunar calendar of Chinese origin which is preferred. Government, foreign companies, educational institutions regularly reckon time by the Western methods, paying the quarterly bonus in January, April, June, and September, accommodating the payment to whatever pay dates the unit in question employs. State universities, for example, pay on the 15th of the month. The ceramics factory pays its employees on the 7th, one electronics firm on the 10th. Many Korean-owned companies, however, may vary the times when the bonus is paid. The bonus may accompany the last salary payment of the quarter or it may be paid separately at a specified time. If the latter is the case, the bonus may tie into the lunar calendar and the festivals and practices associated with Korean traditions.

Rather than pay on January 1, some prefer, at least in respect to bonus payment, to observe the lunar New Year and pay in anticipation of it, even allowing several days' leave for its celebration. This is true, for example, of the dye works, which, although its regularly closes down on Wednesdays and Sundays, requiring of its workers a five-day week, shuts down for five days at the lunar New Year, paying the bonus in advance of it. At this time, the workers, girls from many parts of the peninsula, make it a practice of returning to their home areas, using the bonus not only for transportation but also for gifts, especially of clothing, for their relatives. Here, clearly, is a conservative pattern promoted by the dye works owner. While observation of the lunar New Year may in turn affect the time at which further bonuses are paid, such as in the late spring, the same traditionalism operates in respect to the observation of Ch'usök, the ancestral festival held on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. Widely observed in Korea, it is the day of visits to ancestral graves and shrines. Some families go as groups to a picnic meal; others leave the observance to the family males. If a family stresses the festival, a girl may take off work, even forfeiting pay, to attend it.

Also related to the bonus payment, again in small Korean-based factories, is the payment at the time of *kimjang*. This is a season rather than any particular date and depends on the availability of the white cabbage which forms the principal ingredient of the ubiquitous *kimch'i*. The pickling, done in jars of pottery, requires the considerable effort of obtaining quantities of the many required materials, cutting and preparing them. Many differing recipes, often in line with family preferences, along with the need to prepare for a coming year, demand numerous cooperative man-hours. A girl may leave her work and go home to assist. If her bonus is paid at this time, she is in a position to help her mother and other women of family and village not only through labor but in paying for the needed ingredients. The *kimjang* period may fall in late November or early December and a benevolently traditional employer may take the period into account. Unlike Ch'usök, this is no formal period; it is rather a reflection of an activity marking the onset of winter and as such universally understood. Westernized firms are considerably less concerned with such traditional patterns.

To be sure, there are differences in work classifications achieved through time. A girl who stays with a plant beyond the three- to five-year stint followed by most may find that her seniority works to her

earning advantage. Korea, again offering a parallel to Japan in this respect, finds nothing amiss in rewarding seniority, although this is truer of men's work than of women's. Moreover, aside from length of service, promotions are possible in all the plants surveyed. A supervisory job classification may carry a better salary; similarly, movement is possible from apprentice to unskilled and skilled categories. If a girl can get the appropriate training, as a few have done, and move from the factory line to clerical and other office work, her status changes for the better. She may, in fact, be on the road to a career, although none saw office work as a lifetime commitment; marriage is still the only acceptable avenue. But the upshot is that while there are differences in job classification and salary return, the social place of the factory girl is fairly well fixed by her earnings and by her limited capacities to earn. The question is not so much the amount of her income but rather the place she defines for herself in its use.

What has been described in terms of monetary returns in the form of either wages or bonus seeks to do more than offer a perspective. Some plants obviously pay better but may not offer a favorable bonus. Others, like the ceramics works, pay fairly poorly but have a more generous bonus return.

Labor Unions

The place of labor unions is assessed with difficulty. To the Korean worker, accustomed to a hierarchical system, it represents an innovation with which the worker is not entirely comfortable and where the benefits in terms of betterment and how to achieve it are far from clear. Since the strike is not a permissible mechanism, the worker's course of action is inevitably clouded. The point may also be made that as the union development is evaluated, weighing advantages for the worker as against those for management, it is the latter which appears to come out ahead. This does not imply a negative interpretation, as some claim, which imputes motives of exploitation of workers to management. On the contrary, it is to the advantage of the plant administration to have open channels of communication with its workers. This, however, is difficult, leaving the union as the only effective way of promoting interaction between the two groups. Workers in lower ranks, men and women both, feel obliged to

approach the "boss" with deference, meaning anyone in authority in the work situation. It is interesting to note that bitter arguments between workers may arise when the supervisor in the immediate day-to-day work routine is younger than those under her. Establishing a proper mode of interaction becomes difficult when all the associated subtleties of language and behavior so necessary to social situations arise. The worker does not, in any case, bring to those in higher authority complaints, problems, or suggestions. Here the union representatives and officers, however constituted, form part of the system, but the latter, at least, not in the work hierarchy, may provide a solution.

A case in point is provided by a girl working on the factory line who is seen to be continually weeping. If her problem is financial, she may tell a fabricated tale to her sympathetic coworkers or to the elected union representative for the line on which she works. At the request of the latter, she may be contacted by the plant union official and the true story emerges. If it happens that her behavior arises in her disappointment at being unable to attend a family function because of lack of funds, a common enough problem, the union may advance her the money for fare as well as for the gifts she feels obliged to bring. In such cases, the union may increase a worker's effectiveness in the plant. The union may work to settle disputes of various kinds, those arising between workers. At the same time, it may arrange social events, picnics and games, usually held away from the plant. The management, on the other hand, may also organize competitive games, softball, volleyball, soccer for men, between the various sections. A culturally defined pattern may be picked up by the union in that there may be both financial assistance and attendance by members at a crisis situation, such as a wedding or funeral. Although in such cases not all workers interest themselves in these events, management combines with labor to create a climate conducive to the improvement of worker morale.

But can the union deal effectively with the problem of wage increases, improvement of working conditions, of worker morale and its broader implications? Partly, and especially in regard to the latter two concerns, these are matters handled chiefly by management. On the question of salary adjustments for an entire plant, an across-the-board raise which a union may request, limitations arise. Not the least of these is the company itself and its resources, its sales, exports, or investments. More cogent, however, is the impact of the national planned economy. Under governmental regulation, while wage scales

are not directly controlled, activities of the various industries are subject to sets of laws and strictures related to a complex series of national economic aims. To note only one example, but one which affects the industrial worker, levels of compensatory adjustments against inflationary trends incline to be fixed. Thus while the type of manufacture requires consideration, a comparison of wage and salary levels shows a fairly consistent uniformity in parallel industries.

The upshot is that while a union may respectfully request a pay increase, its expectations can rarely be met. In the union of one electronics plant, representatives and the union chairwomen prepared an elaborate justification and defense of a wage increase. This 1978 document, written in Korean and translated into English for presentation to the management, contains a statement of "minimum demands," stating, "Of course, there are many reasons why (this factory) has grown so rapidly. Despite worker cutbacks and times of uneasy employment, we believe that such growth is due to the skill of the Korean management and workers." The petition then goes on, "However, every time we workers receive our paychecks we are not only disappointed and depressed, but also angry. The company says that (it) provides the best salaries and welfare benefits in Korea. But when we meet our friends we hate to tell them where we work." With this preamble, the request is made that a minimal 32.7% increase be accorded the workers across the board.

The figures the document offers are interesting in their reflection of estimated worker needs. The average salary (1978) exchange is noted as ₩44,100 (\$88.00, higher than the figure noted above but with cost-of-living and inflationary adjustments as well as monetary devaluation). The need for the single worker living alone is set at ₩58,538 per month, including bonus and food benefits, or \$117.00. But the statement is also made that "on average, each union member has to support 0.95 of a person from their wages. Taking this into account, the minimum average wage needed is ₩76,089, i.e., a 72.5% increase." The union officials then detailed the needs of the worker in Seoul.

A 26% increase was forthcoming in 1978, one which the union leaders regarded as woefully insufficient. Yet the governmental Office of Labor Affairs sanctioned this raise and would not consider an appeal by the company union. The company itself, according to the union chairwoman, has not responded to further appeals or requests. There the matter rests.