
The Confucian Transformation of Korea

A Study of Society and Ideology

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Confucian Legislation: the Consequences for Women

Although Confucianism is a philosophy of agnation, it regards the union between man and woman as the root of all human relations. Furthermore, it holds this union to be the foundation of human morality and the mainspring of the socialization process that extends from the relationship between father and son to that between ruler and subject. In cosmological terms, heaven (*yang*) dominates earth (*yin*); and, correspondingly, male has precedence over female. The clear hierarchical order between the sexes is thus cosmologically sanctioned and is imperative for the proper functioning of the human order. This order can be preserved only when human passions are kept in check. To do this the Confucians drew a sharp distinction between the woman's "inner" or domestic sphere and the man's "outer" or public sphere. This asymmetry of the sexes (*namnyō chi pyōl*) was necessary, they thought, to restrain sexual indulgence and selfishness, which would lead to social disorder, and to establish the different functions of husband and wife.

In the Confucian view, the law of nature thus accorded woman an inferior position. She had to obey her superiors: when unmarried, she had to follow her father's orders; when married, those of her husband; when widowed, those of her son. This was the subordination of the inner sphere to the outer sphere. In the domestic realm, however, the wife was supposed to assume leadership. The

administration of the household was likened to that of a state. Domestic peace and prosperity depended on the way a wife exerted her authority. It was the wife's task to keep the customs pure. This was a heavy responsibility, for the purity of the customs as they were cultivated in the domestic sphere was directly correlated with the rise and fall of the dynasty.

The adoption and implementation of Confucian social tenets at the beginning of Chosŏn lastingly transformed the Korean social scene. At the core of this transformation was the domestic realm, represented by women. Women have rarely been innovators of social change, but social change often seems to have affected the lives of women more than those of men. Women therefore are a convenient focus for studying the acculturation of Confucian social thought.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZING OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY WIVES. The early Neo-Confucian legislators were preoccupied with the "rectification of names" (*chŏngmyŏng*), that is, with determining and identifying social status. For this, only a clear line of descent would provide the criteria on the basis of which descent group membership and thus social status could be verified. The singling out of one wife and her children as a man's rightful spouse and legitimate heirs was therefore of paramount importance. The legislative efforts had consequently to focus on the Koryŏ institution of plural marriage (*chunghon*)—a custom the Neo-Confucians regarded as principally responsible for social confusion at the beginning of the new dynasty. Censorial reports abundantly testified to the fact that high as well as low officials continued to have several wives,¹ a situation that prevented a clear delineation of status groups. The ranking of these women as primary (*ch'ŏ*) and secondary or minor (*ch'ŏp*) wives was thus a fundamental task for stabilizing society.

In 1402, urged by his Confucian conscience and encouraged by his Confucian advisers, King T'aejong ordered the Department of Rites and two prominent members of the Bureau of State Records (Ch'un-ch'ugwan), Ha Yun and Kwŏn Kŭn, to search through the history books to determine the number of royal consorts (*pi*) and concubines (*pin*) the feudal lords (*chebu*) of ancient China and the

kings of Koryŏ used to keep. Perusing China's classical literature, the researchers found a very peculiar model of polygyny (multiple wives or female mates). As practiced by the nobility of feudal China, polygyny was regulated by two rules: a noble, when marrying, could take his wives only from one single family; he was strictly obligated to marry them all at the same time, and he could not marry again. These rules were intended to give the domestic sphere of a noble stability and peace because jealousy should not arise among women of the same status and family background. The rules also excluded rivalry between noble families by concentrating on a marriage alliance with one single family.²

It is not clear whether the Koreans fully understood the complexities of the feudal system, but they gained important numerical evidence: a feudal lord was entitled to take at one time nine women (*yŏ*), a minister (*kyŏng*) or a great officer (*taebu*) one wife and two concubines, and a common officer (*sa*) one wife and one concubine.³ This information furthermore allowed a significant conclusion: the ancient Chinese kings (*sŏnwang*) had classified women for the sake of clarifying human relationships and rectifying the domestic sphere.⁴ This ancient system thus provided the Korean legislators with a rationale that could be used to determine unilineal descent by imposing upon the women's world a strictly hierarchical order.

These insights were first applied to the royal house. Because it had been rocked at short intervals by two succession struggles,⁵ it became a convenient target for censorial criticism. The censors frequently angered King T'aejong with their blunt protests against instances when the proper distinction between women was violated in the royal house.⁶ In analogy to the ancient Chinese system laid down in the *Li-chi* and the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), the Department of Rites suggested in 1411 that the inner quarters of the royal palace should house the queen (*wangbi*), three royal concubines (*pin*), and five ladies-in-waiting (*ing*), all of whom should be descendants of merit subjects.⁷ This suggestion borrowed the outer manifestation rather than the substance of feudal China's marriage institution, and it seems to have been too elaborate for King T'aejong. He limited the number of palace women to one

concubine and two ladies-in-waiting.⁸ The queen, who stood at the apex of the palace women, resided in the central palace. Her position was undisputed, and it was not deemed necessary to confer upon her a special title. She alone enjoyed the prestige and the privilege of being the royal primary wife.⁹

It was obviously not too complicated a task to straighten out the king's inner quarters by a game of numbers. The real test of strength lay in the legislators' attempt to introduce the new classification of women in the elite segment of society. As a first measure, to emphasize that the model of ancient China allowed the *sadaebu* only one legal wife (*ch'ŏ*), the legislators granted honorary titles and land to the primary wife (*chŏngch'ŏ*). It was up to the husband, however, to choose from among his wives the one he wanted to have recognized and honored by the state as his primary wife. The major criterion for his selection was what later Confucians disapprovingly called "the degree of mutual devotion and obligation" between the husband and one of his wives. Some lesser considerations for choosing a primary wife were the sequence of the marriages, the kind of wedding ceremonies, the length of time spent with a particular wife, and at times also the wife's moral qualities.

The delicacy of the choice may be inferred by the officials' reluctance to establish objective standards for the selection. The state's only conditions were that the woman to be selected had to have entered her husband's house as a virgin (*sillyŏ*) and that her family background had to be untarnished by lower-class ancestry.¹⁰ It would seem that the state initially could not go further than this. In fact, the state was forced to lessen the ensuing social tension by issuing a legal ruling according to which a man's various wives would all be regarded as of equal standing regardless of their social origin (*chŏnbi sangdŭng*). This clause conflicted, of course, with the strict interpretation of the ritual prescriptions that allowed a man to have only one main wife. It was undoubtedly a major concession to the social milieu of early Chosŏn, and it was later termed a temporary measure that would not be a permanent part of the dynastic founders' legal heritage.¹¹

Zealously quoting from China's classical literature, the censors

eventually tried to eliminate the inconsistency of the state's attitude toward women. They realized, however, that their efforts to "recapture the spirit of the Ch'un-ch'iu period" would be in vain without some legal sanctions. In a memorial presented to King T'aejong toward the end of 1412, they pleaded for the application of the Ming criminal code to force recalcitrant husbands to comply with the ritual prescriptions. In the spring of 1413, this request was granted, and a law was enacted that forbade a man who had a legal wife to take a second legal wife (*yuch'ŏ ch'wich'ŏ*); a man who broke this law was forced to separate himself (*ii*) from his illegally acquired second wife. This law, which was apparently promulgated in the *Sok yukchŏn* of 1413, was not made retroactive; in cases where men still had several wives (*ch'ŏ*), the only criterion for ranking them was thenceforth the sequence of marriage. Those who intentionally reversed or altered the ranking of their wives were to be punished according to the stipulations of the Ming code.¹²

The new social concept, expressed in the law of 1413, did not easily take root in Korean society. It went against tradition and its consequences for the various wives and their respective sons were grave. By ranking a man's wives, the state incited unusual competition in the domestic sphere. The state's criterion for singling out the primary wife did not in all cases coincide with the husband's personal preference; wives quarrelled about social standing and domestic finances; sons fought to prove their mothers' proper credentials in order to get for themselves the social recognition necessary to become legitimate heirs.

Throughout the first century of the Chosŏn dynasty, the censorial agencies were called upon to punish husbands who neglected or abandoned their primary wives to conclude second marriages, and to investigate claims of legitimacy brought forward by rival half brothers. The final rulings in such cases were particularly difficult when the mothers were of equal social background. For example, in 1437 Cho Yŏng-mu's (?-1414) two sons, who were half brothers, competed for official recognition as their father's legitimate heir. At the end of Koryŏ, the younger son's mother had been honored with an honorary title; but the elder son's mother was called *ch'ŏ*, legal

wife. Trying to deprive her of this designation, the younger son called his older half brother *ch'öpcha*, the son of a secondary wife. He also desecrated his father's ancestral shrine by removing the memorial tablet the older brother had put there for his dead mother to prove his own legitimacy. The censors found the younger son guilty of violating human morality and recommended that he be punished with one hundred strokes of the heavy bamboo and three years of forced labor.¹³ Clearly, women had become all the more key figures in transmitting the rights to descent group membership.

The distinction of 1413 between primary and secondary wives (*chökch'öp chi pun*), hailed as decisive means to clarify human relationships and social status, was a cornerstone of Confucian legislation and had far-reaching implications for the dynasty's social organization. The elevation of one spouse as a man's primary wife and his legitimate heirs' mother gave the lineal principle sharp contours and firmly bound that woman to her husband's descent group. By the same token, it introduced a built-in inequality into the women's world that was eventually correlated with social origin—primary wives were selected from the yangban elite, while secondary wives were of lower-class pedigree. In a wider perspective, then, the ranking of wives was intimately connected with dividing society into two broad categories: the superior and inferior (*chonbi*) or noble and base (*kwich'ön*). This "societal bulwark" (*taebang*) that separated the yangban as a practically endogamous status group from the rest of Korean society came eventually to be regarded as a genuinely Korean social institution that had originated from the wise precepts introduced by Korea's founding father, Kija. Illustrious scholars such as Yi Hwang defended it as the principle by which state and home were maintained.¹⁴ This "social divide" depended largely on the proper social identification of women, and women therefore became the keepers as well as the victims of an unequal system.

MARRIAGE RULES AND STRATEGIES. Marriage with a primary wife was a transaction between two kin groups with strong legal, economic, and political connotations. For a society organized on the basis of structured patrilineal descent groups, the stated purpose of mar-

riage, to bring forth male offspring, was the society's means of survival. The first sentence of the chapter on marriage in the *Li-chi* testifies to this: "The ceremony of marriage is intended to be a bond of love between two surnames, with a view, in its retrospective character, to securing the services in the ancestral temple, and in its prospective character, to securing the continuance of the family line."¹⁵ Thus the purpose of marriage was to guarantee uninterrupted continuation of the descent group in two directions, taking the living as the starting point—toward the dead and toward the unborn.

To give Confucian ideology substance, the Neo-Confucian legislators of early Chosön demanded a rigorous reform of the pre-Confucian marriage institution of Koryö. As a first measure to rectify the "unnatural" family relationships that resulted from uxori-local residence, in 1411 the Department of Rites demanded an extensive revision of the mourning-grade system. The lowering of mourning for matrilineal kin was an important attempt to create a new social milieu in which sentiment and allegiance would shift from matrilineal to patrilineal kin and the married couple would reside virilocally. The adaptation of the mourning system to Confucian usage, however, would be totally inadequate, a fervent reformer pointed out, if it were not placed into a much wider and more fundamental reform of the marriage institution itself.¹⁶

Foremost among the reform requests was the prohibition of intermarriage between close kin. Although marriages with patrilineal second cousins were no longer practiced at the beginning of Chosön, the *sadaebu* continued to marry matrilineal cousins. Because of uxori-local residence, the matrilineal cousins lived under the same roof and were often attracted to each other; yet, since matrilineal first cousins had to wear mourning for each other, a ban on such marriages was imperative. In 1415, Yi Wön (1368–1429) was one of the first to demand that unions with matrilineal first cousins be prohibited.¹⁷

The adoption of the Confucian model not only went against sentimental values, but also raised some practical problems, most of which were economic. Daughters customarily inherited the same

share of land and other properties as their brothers. If the daughter now moved into her husband's house, she could not take land, but would have to be apportioned her share of the inheritance in the form of slaves, clothes, daily utensils, or perhaps some income from her family's land. If a bride's family was not able to provide her with her rightful inheritance, this could constitute an economic burden involving both sides of a marriage contract. A poor groom's family would find it difficult to accept a bride without property of her own.¹⁸

The principal reason, however, why the enforcement of marriage prohibitions with matrilineal kin was so difficult, it was recognized, was that descent groups had not been clearly differentiated during Koryŏ. The great familiarity with the mother's relatives especially blurred kinship limits. Moreover, marriages within the same descent group were often vaguely disguised as unions of the same surname but of different ancestral seats (*pon'gwan*). Nobody bothered to determine whether the origin had actually been the same¹⁹—research which, owing to traditionally vague descent group boundaries, would anyway have been difficult in most cases. As late as 1471, the Censorate still demanded the immediate drawing of a clear line between marriageable and unmarried matrilineal kin. This request was answered with an edict that prohibited marriage within the radius of second cousins.²⁰ Naturally, the same problem did not arise in regard to the wife's relatives because they were not regarded as consanguineous kin, and no legislation was enacted to delineate their marriageability. It became customary, however, to avoid, as a second marriage, a union with an affinal second cousin.²¹

By the end of the fifteenth century, descent-group exogamy was no longer disputed; but the question of what should be regarded as exogamous remained open. Confucian purists persisted in their demand for a ban on marriages between descent groups with either the same surname but different ancestral seats or the same ancestral seat but different surnames.²² Finally, in 1669, the most outspoken and authoritative Confucian of his time, Song Si-yŏl (1607–1689), supported the long-standing request for more restrictive legislation and effected the enactment of a law that prohibited marriages be-

tween descent groups with the same surname but different ancestral seats.²³ This law intended to preclude the possibility that descent groups which had acquired different ancestral seats through segmentation would intermarry. Despite this struggle to deepen descent consciousness and to win general acceptance of restrictive legislation, pre-Confucian marriage customs, for example uxorilocal residence, remained a current that undercut the effectiveness of the Confucians' efforts.²⁴

Social status was the principal determinant of political and economic advancement in Chosŏn society, and marriage was an important way of establishing affinal relationships with powerful descent groups. Thereby elite privileges were maintained and strengthened for the descent group in general and for the descendants in particular. The ruling elite was intent on keeping the prerogatives of political power and economic control within the confines of the group. This attitude especially forbade the introduction of marriage partners from outside the group. Although never explicitly stated in the law codes, the strong status consciousness of the *sadaebu* prohibited intermarriage with lower social groups so that group endogamy was a major factor in the marriage strategy.²⁵ Even within the ruling group, however, there were gradations of social standing and economic influence that affected the forming of conjugal ties. Political affiliation also played a weighty role,²⁶ so that from early in the dynasty Confucian idealists deplored the fact that political and economic considerations and not moral qualities often decided whether a union was a misalliance or a perfect match.²⁷

Although the subject is largely unexplored, sketchy evidence for the second half of the Chosŏn period (observable until recently in rural areas) suggests that the marriage radius in geographical terms was more or less limited and may have been correlated with the social standing of the descent group. The more powerful a descent group, the wider its marriage radius. Although the bride's social credentials were considered of utmost importance, geographical distance was also a factor in the marriage calculation. Since a large proportion of the yangban population used to live in rural villages in which one descent group dominated (*tongjok purak*), the search

for a proper bride had to be conducted outside the village. The choice of a bride whose natal home was conveniently close was usually preferred.²⁸ The marriage radius of brides coming in and that of brides going out may not have been identical. Good marriage strategy ideally demanded the choice of a socially equal or higher spouse for daughters, whereas a daughter-in-law whose standing was slightly lower would eventually be raised to the husband's social level. The search for a proper partner for a daughter was therefore more difficult and covered a geographically wider range.²⁹

It was not uncommon that a woman who had come into a descent group as a bride acted as matchmaker between unmarried members of her natal family and her husband's kin.³⁰ Affinal ties were thus spun, often repeatedly, with descent groups that lived scattered over several counties, but seldom beyond provincial boundaries. If national political prominence was achieved, the capital became the focal point for matchmaking, and daughters could even be sent as consorts to the royal palace. Marriage strategy was therefore an intricate game that could be played well only under certain conditions. A successfully concluded match could establish alliances that bore rich social dividends.³¹

Marriage was not an affair between individuals, but between families. It was the responsibility of a boy's or girl's most senior direct agnatic ascendants to take care of the marriage arrangements. Long before a marriage was actually concluded, preparations were made to defray the wedding costs. A piece of common property was set aside as "land for special obligations" (*ŭijang*), and the income from this property financed social duties such as weddings.³² Another method was to establish an association of descent group members to finance the wedding (*hon'gye*). These economic dispositions underline the extent to which a wedding was the concern of the whole descent group.

The father or grandfather or even an elder of a boy's or girl's descent group was economically obligated to the younger generation, and he was also directly responsible for finding a suitable marriage partner within the proper time limits. Early in the Chosŏn

dynasty, in 1427, the stipulations of Chu Hsi's *Chia-li* were adopted as law: a boy's marriageable age was fixed at between sixteen and thirty, that of a girl between fourteen and twenty. The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* gave only base lines of fifteen for boys and fourteen for girls. It added that marriage could be proposed upon completion of the thirteenth year. Moreover, if one of the parents of either marriage party were chronically ill or over fifty, the limit could be lowered to twelve.³³

The marriage ages in Chu Hsi's *Chia-li* were based on ancient Chinese tradition. The *Po-hu t'ung* gives the following explanation:

Why does the man take a wife at thirty, while the woman marries at twenty? The number of *yang* is odd, the number of *yin* is even. Why [does] the man [marry at] an older age than the woman? The way of *yang* is slow, the way of *yin* is fast. At thirty a man's sinews and bones have become hard and strong, and he is ready to become the father of his children; at twenty a woman's flesh and muscles are fully developed, and she is ready to become the mother of her children. Combined together, they make [the age of] fifty, corresponding to the number of the Great Expansion, which begets the ten thousand things.³⁴

Age regulations were aimed at suppressing the old custom, prevalent during Koryŏ, of marrying off children too early and not letting them mature to a proper age. The reason for early marriages, the officials of the Department of Rites complained, was the pursuit of wealth through affinal ties. Children who entered matrimony too young, they argued, were not aware of the principle that husband and wife are the mainstay of morality. They were unable, therefore, to fulfill their role of socializing their own children, and early marriage spelled sure disaster for descendants.³⁵

Throughout the dynasty, voices were raised against the system of taking into the household a prospective son-in-law (*yesŏ*, Kor. *terilsawi*) or a prospective daughter-in-law (*yebu*, Kor. *minmyŏnŭri*). This system was a method of early marriage, usually contrived for economic reasons. Young children, often less than ten years old, were taken in by faking a wedding ceremony and put to work in the household or in the fields. Such sham marriages led to numerous

abuses and were practiced especially by the commoners, but yangban also were found guilty of violating the government-set age limits in this way.³⁶

Statistical evidence is not available to document the youngest age at which people married, but sporadic references suggest that throughout the Chosŏn dynasty the limit was frequently lower than that set by law. On the basis of data drawn from census registers (*hojŏk*), the age difference between husband and wife, however, becomes clear. The common belief that the wife was generally older than the husband is not valid for the whole dynasty. Data from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reveal that especially among the yangban, husbands tended to be up to ten years older than their wives (in many cases, no doubt, because of second marriages). This trend was reversed in the nineteenth century when wives seem to have been older than their husbands. In contrast, among commoners and lowborn, husbands usually were older. It is plausible that economic reasons prevented commoners from marrying their sons off at an early age. Among yangban, non-economic considerations (for example the importance of affinal ties) must account for early marriage and especially for the brides' being older.³⁷

As the dynasty moved into the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, yangban status came increasingly under pressure. This circumstance suggests that the yangban may have found it more important than ever to tie down proper affinal relationships to maintain social status. The acquisition of affines became more crucial to the survival of a descent group than the immediate production of offspring. Because the act of marriage as such made a boy an "adult," his age at the time of his wedding was of no great consequence. In contrast, a girl's marriageability depended on her physical maturity and therefore her age played a determining role. The youth of the bridal couple and the groom's inability to start a household of his own may account for the often rather long time lapse between the wedding and the actual induction of the bride into her husband's house.

There were some conditions under which the conclusion of a marriage had to be postponed. The most important of these was the

death of a parent or close relative, such as a sibling for whom a year of mourning had to be observed. At the beginning of the dynasty it was deplored that *sadasebu* usually did not wait until after the mourning period to marry. Strict measures to eradicate such bad mores by enforcing the stipulations of the *Chia-li* were demanded. The Council of State therefore ruled in 1404 that during the three-year mourning period for parents and within one hundred days of the one-year mourning period marriages could not be concluded.³⁸ Offenders were accused of unfilial behavior and usually were punished with the confiscation of their patents of office.³⁹ The frequent demands of the censorial agencies to make proscriptive regulations stricter were realized only in the mid eighteenth century when it was ruled that if one parent on either side died, the wedding had to be postponed for three years even if the preliminary ceremonies had been held.⁴⁰ Other conditions under which marriage could not be concluded were, at the beginning of the dynasty, the times when girls were being selected as tribute for China and, during the whole dynasty, at times when the search for girls for the royal palace (*kan-t'aek*) was underway.

Marriage was the precondition for adulthood and to remain unmarried was socially inconceivable. It was of continuous concern to the Confucian legislators that economic reasons might prevent a family from marrying off its daughters at marriageable ages. Near the beginning of the dynasty, a law was passed that held a girl's closest paternal and maternal relatives responsible for getting her married at an appropriate time.⁴¹ Negligence was to be severely punished. The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* contained assurance of government help for needy girls and also carried a warning to family heads to keep within the prescribed time limits.⁴² For a woman, the wedding signified a rite of passage from a childhood during which she received little attention to an adulthood during which she could become a full member of society.

THE CONFUCIAN-STYLE WEDDING CEREMONY. The Confucian wedding ceremony, which found its permanent form in Chu Hsi's *Chia-li*, was based principally on the *Li-chi* and the *I-li*. The six parts of the

wedding procedure outlined in the *I-li* were collectively known as the six rites and became the blueprint for the Confucian-style wedding ceremony. They are 1) sending the present [from the groom's house to the bride's house] (*napch'ae*), 2) asking the bride's name (*munmyōng*), 3) sending news of the favorable divination [to the bride's house] (*napkil*), 4) the sending of the evidences [to the bride's house] (*napching*), 5) asking the time of the ceremony (*ch'ōnggi*), and 6) the meeting in person (*ch'inyōng*).⁴³ In his *Chia-li*, Chu Hsi adopted this basic form, but tightened it and renamed its parts. His outline of procedure was as follows: 1) marriage proposal (*ūihon*), 2) betrothal (*napch'ae*), 3) sending of wedding gifts (*napp'ye*) [to the bride's house], 4) bridegroom meeting the bride in person and inducting her into his home (*ch'inyōng*), 5) presentation of the bride to the parents-in-law (*pugyōn kugo*), and 6) presentation of the bride in the ancestral temple (*myogyōn*). Chu Hsi added a seventh step: the presentation of the bridegroom to the bride's parents (*sōgyōn puji pumo*).

The climax of the wedding ceremony as prescribed by Chu Hsi was the rite during which the bridegroom personally inducted the bride into his own home (*ch'inyōng*); this was followed by the exchange of ceremonial bows between the bridal couple (*kyobae*). The first three rites did not involve the wedding partners directly, but during the induction the bridegroom and the bride met for the first time. The rite symbolized the transfer of the bride from the natal home in which she grew up to the household in which she would spend her adult life.

No native ceremonial rite in Chosōn Korea more persistently resisted Confucianization than the wedding rite. The fundamental conflict involved in introducing Chu Hsi's model was the Korean custom of uxorilocal marriage, which prevailed during Koryō and far into the new dynasty. As one of the chief architects of Chosōn society, Chōng To-jōn, complained: "Since the groom moves into the bride's home, the wife unknowingly depends on her parents' love and cannot but hold her husband in light regard. Her arrogance thus grows with every day; and in the end there will be quarreling between husband and wife, whereby the right way of the family declines." The Confucians could not tolerate this custom by

which "yang wrongly followed yin, thus abandoning completely the meaning of husband and wife."⁴⁴ The Confucian model demanded a reversal of Korean marriage customs so that the bride would be transferred to the bridegroom's house to become a member of his descent group.

In 1395, just after the inception of the new dynasty, royal orders went out to the famous Confucian Kwōn Kūn to settle the details of the four ceremonies: capping, wedding, funeral, and ancestor worship.⁴⁵ This was an expression of the dynasty's founder's desire to give Korean society the trappings of Confucian etiquette. In 1404, the highest ministers demanded that the *sadaebu* model their wedding ceremonies on Chu Hsi's *Chia-li*.⁴⁶ Ten years later, King T'aejong was still concerned that the Chinese would ridicule Korea's native marriage customs;⁴⁷ and he continued to demand that the Department of Rites study pure wedding forms as recorded in the Chinese classics and make recommendations to implement them in Korea.⁴⁸

Confucian purists also demanded stringent austerity laws that would strip weddings of luxury items and put an end to the mindless display of wealth on such occasions. Already during the last years of Koryō the use of luxury items at weddings was prohibited.⁴⁹ Such prohibitions became even harsher at the beginning of Chosōn. In 1394, gold could no longer be used, and only the highest civil and military officials were allowed to enjoy silk fabrics and jade ornaments.⁵⁰ Aiming at "straightening out the wedding ritual," the legislators pressed the king to ban all luxury goods and to restrict wedding expenditures.⁵¹ As a result, strict laws against luxury were enacted in the *Kyōngguk taejōn*.⁵²

Despite the fact that the reformers were aware of the inertia of tradition and realized the practical difficulties of ritual innovation, they pressed ahead to make Chu Hsi's *Chia-li* "the etiquette of the *sadaebu*." In 1434, the Department of Rites for the first time devised a ceremonial program for the wedding ceremony that was thought to be suitable for the ranked officialdom as well as for those without rank.⁵³ In all stages the proposed ceremony followed Chu Hsi's prescriptions punctiliously. Without changes, under the title

Chongch'in kŭp munmugwan ilp'um iba bollye (Wedding Rites for the Royal Relatives and the Civil and Military Officials of the First Rank and Below), it was attached to the Five Rites (*Orye*) and later incorporated into the *Kukcho oryeŭi*.⁵⁴ For easy reference, Chu Hsi's *Chia-li* was distributed among the *sadaebu*.

There was no visible effect resulting from either the royal example, which introduced the new-style wedding, or the legislative endeavors. No Confucian-style yangban wedding was reported in the fifteenth century, but under King Chungjong the issue drew new attention. He actively promoted the controversial rite of the groom's personal induction of the bride.⁵⁵ Rather than the king's performance of this rite in 1517, however, it was the great personal influence of Cho Kwang-jo (1482-1519) and his group that stimulated a young enthusiast, Kim Ch'i-un (n.d.), to become, in 1518, the first yangban to take his bride home in person.⁵⁶ Yet Kim's example did not set a new trend, and apparently few followed it.

After Chungjong's time the clamor for making the groom's personal induction of the bride the central part of the wedding ceremony was repeated occasionally,⁵⁷ but the issue never gained wide support. During the early part of the sixteenth century, a compromise formula known as "half *ch'inyŏng*" (*pan-ch'inyŏng*) was devised. After the main ceremony in the bride's house was finished, the bride was presented to her parents-in-law on the following day.⁵⁸ How widely this was practiced is not clear. Even the ritualists in the seventeenth century had to acknowledge that the gap between native tradition and Confucian etiquette was unbridgeable,⁵⁹ and they did not, therefore, support their argument with much enthusiasm. They gave up their struggle to force the wedding ceremony into a Confucian framework and focused their discussions of the nuptial rite on inconsequential details and elaborate textual interpretations of relevant passages in the Chinese classics. They were unsuccessful in relating their learning to the social realities of their time as reflected in the wedding ceremony.

THE ROYAL WEDDING CEREMONY. The Confucian-style wedding ceremony was first performed in Korea not by the *sadaebu*, but by the

royal house. The royal motive for assuming this pioneering role was the belief in the Confucian dictum that the exemplary behavior of the king would influence and eventually transform the conduct of his subjects. The first two occasions when Chu Hsi's *Chia-li* was used to some extent to program the wedding ceremonies at the royal court occurred during King T'aejong's reign.⁶⁰ It was King Sejong, however, who was the first Yi king confronted with the task of establishing the proper etiquette for the wedding of the crown prince who later became King Munjong (r. 1450-1452).

Assisted by an expert in ritual matters, Hŏ Cho, who served as minister of rites during his early years on the throne, King Sejong took special interest in adapting ancient Chinese rituals to use at the royal court. In the summer of 1426, the king ordered the Department of Rites to study the ritual handbooks and devise the details of the wedding ceremony. It is clear that Hŏ Cho and his assistants could not use the brief descriptions of the various stages of the wedding ritual as laid down in Chu Hsi's *Chia-li*. For fixing the fine points of the ceremony, they had to refer to such works as the *Ta-T'ang k'ai-yüan li* and the *T'ung-tien*.⁶¹ A comparison of the sequence of ceremonies that Hŏ Cho drew up for the wedding of the crown prince with the precepts he found in the *T'ung-tien* illustrates the extent to which the Koreans were indebted to the Chinese ritual handbooks. Adapting official titles and some vocabulary to Korean usage, the officials of the Department of Rites adhered meticulously to the Chinese model. The crown prince's wedding to Kim O-mun's (n.d.) daughter⁶² in the spring of 1427 was thus the first adaptation of Chinese imperial etiquette in Korea.⁶³

The precedent set by the royal house was an impressive display of Sejong's intention to usher in a period of "revised etiquette," but its practical effect was small. Subsequent debate revealed that one part of the new ceremony, the bridegroom's personal induction of the bride (*ch'inyŏng*), was the major obstacle to the successful adoption of the royal example by the *sadaebu*.⁶⁴ King Sejong understood the reasons for this seemingly open resistance to royal authority and was unwilling to force compliance by threatening punishment. However, supported by high officials who insisted on a fundamen-

talist interpretation and reenactment of the ancient Chinese wedding ceremony, he was unerring in his belief that the royal house had to continue to set a good example. In the spring of 1434, Sejong told the Department of Rites that if native marriage customs were abruptly changed, the result would be anger and frustration. He pledged, however, that thenceforth the royal house would strictly adhere to the ancient Chinese system; and he ordered the Department of Rites to devise ceremonial rules for the *sadaebu*, who were to follow the king's lead.⁶⁵

The first wedding to follow the form decreed by King Sejong⁶⁶ was that between Yun P'yŏng (1420–1467) and the late King T'aеjong's youngest daughter (by a secondary wife), Princess Suksun (*ongju*), in the spring of 1435.⁶⁷ A year later, in 1436, the Department of Rites devised a proper nuptial protocol for the crown prince on the basis of the ceremonial procedure of 1427.⁶⁸ This protocol became the blueprint for the wedding ceremony of the crown prince as laid down in the *Orye*.⁶⁹ The wedding ceremony of a king, which is described in the section of *Karye* (Festive Rites), was a simplified adaptation of the Chinese imperial ceremony as preserved in the *T'ung-tien*. It consisted of six parts: 1) betrothal (*napch'ae*), 2) sending of the wedding gifts (*napching*), 3) determination of the wedding date (*kogi*), 4) investiture of the queen (*ch'aekpi*), 5) induction of the queen (*pongyŏng wangbi*), 6) presentation of the queen at court (*wangbijo*).⁷⁰ It is significant that the ceremony upon which the Confucians laid the main emphasis, the personal induction of the bride by the bridegroom, was absent from the king's wedding ceremony. The ceremony that was established for the crown prince's wedding did not differ from that of the king in the first four stages, but concluded with three distinct acts: 1) the king's approaching the crown prince's sedan chair to give the last admonitions (*imbŏn ch'ogye*), 2) the bridegroom's personal induction of his bride (*ch'in-yŏng*), and 3) the presentation of the royal daughter-in-law at court (*pinjogyŏn*).⁷¹

The establishment of the royal wedding etiquette thus was one facet of the ideological dialogue between the king and the Confucian officialdom. King Sejong was a monarch who was deeply inter-

ested in Confucian studies and in transforming Confucian ideology into normative guidelines of everyday life. In the case of the wedding ceremony, he had to deal with an especially sensitive issue because it was part of the much larger debate about the compatibility of native tradition and transmitted values. The debate split yangban officialdom into two camps: one that advocated heavy reliance on the Chinese example and one that defended Korean customs. The latter argued that Korea's customs differed from China's and that it would be fruitless to press for sudden changes. Although the scholar-officials were reluctant to model their own wedding ceremonies on the Confucian pattern, they demanded that the royal house strictly comply with Confucian etiquette. This contradictory attitude politicized and polarized the issue after Sejong's time: the yangban's demand for ideological purity in the royal wedding ceremony became a topic of intensive indoctrination which was binding for the king, but not for the yangban.⁷²

After the years of the Yŏnsan'gun's disastrous reign (1494–1506), during which Confucian ideology was totally neglected, Neo-Confucianism was revived with new vigor. The scholar-officialdom intensified its indoctrination, and young King Chungjong proved a docile student. Under him Neo-Confucianism became firmly accepted as state ideology. This was also consequential for the royal wedding ceremony. King Chungjong deplored that King Sejong's efforts to Confucianize the wedding procedure had been largely ineffective and pledged to press for a nuptial ceremony that would include the bridegroom's personal induction of the bride as the central part. He also was confident that the right example given by the upper class would eventually have a reformative influence upon the lower classes.⁷³ The ideological correctness of the wedding ceremony, moreover, was thought to have sociopolitical implications. A royal edict issued in the winter of 1515 declared that only if the wedding rite were correct would the relationship between ruler and subject and between father and son be correct.⁷⁴

King Chungjong himself soon had a chance to demonstrate the seriousness of his Confucian commitment. In the late summer of 1517, he climaxed the wedding with his third queen by personally

inducting her into the palace.⁷⁵ He was the first Yi king to perform this ceremony, and his example was followed by later kings.⁷⁶ In 1702, this significant change in the royal wedding ceremony, which symbolized the extent to which Confucian indoctrination was successful in the royal house, was incorporated in the *Oryeŭi*.⁷⁷

At the time when the censoring bodies led by the group of men around Cho Kwang-jo pressed for ideological purity, it is not surprising that King Chungjong's wedding had an ideological aftermath. Following the performance of the "proper rite," a controversy was stirred up by the request of a member of the Office of Special Counsellors (Hongmungwan), Yi Cha (1480-1533), that the king conclude the wedding ceremony with the queen's presentation in the ancestral temple. This rite, the memorialist argued, was the most important part of the wedding ritual because it established the bride as a married wife and secured her social position.⁷⁸ Since this was a new rite that had not been performed before, King Chungjong ordered the Council of State and the Department of Rites to study the proposal. While the censoring agencies insisted on an exact interpretation of the ancient ritual literature and opined that the already performed rite would be meaningless without the concluding ceremony, the state councillors and the officials of the Department of Rites argued that although the desire to perform this rite was laudable, Korean usages differed from those of China. Moreover, the bride had already been installed in the queen's quarters and her patent requested from China, acts that amply established her in her position as queen. The king sided with the state councillors and rejected the censors' further presentations.⁷⁹ When, however, the censors convinced the king of the simplicity of the rite, the king reopened the debate.⁸⁰ It was unavoidable that the continuing discussion threatened to become a futile exercise in hair-splitting interpretations of ancient texts. The king repeatedly refused consent and finally ended the controversy with the somewhat lukewarm argument that all the high officials of the government had spoken against performing the rite.⁸¹

This last episode concluded a century of searching for the wedding rite befitting a Confucian king. Under King Sejong the royal

house had assumed the role of pioneering the development of a new ritual form; this act was thought to have an exemplary influence and to encourage the general compliance with Confucian precepts that was demanded of *sadaebu* society. But the issue was complicated by a variety of factors. There can be no doubt that the general commitment to Confucianizing Korean customs was genuine, but in no area of social mores was native tradition more resistant to change than in marriage rites. And in no other area of Korea's social life was the country's peculiarity more strongly defended against transmitted Chinese values. It was a formidable task to rationalize the acceptance of the Confucian system in some sectors and to insist on special precautions in others.

THE KOREAN WEDDING CEREMONY. A scholar-official of the sixteenth century, Cho Sik (1501-1572), pointed out that in Korea the Confucian precepts were followed only in general and not in detail,⁸² an explanation as well as a justification for Korea's special wedding customs. Although the law prescribed compliance with the rules laid down in the *Chia-li*, the nuptial ceremony that was performed in yangban houses during the Chosŏn dynasty essentially continued native tradition.⁸³ Nevertheless, the native ritual incorporated certain features of the Confucian ceremony to highlight its principal parts. It was thus not a Confucianization of indigenous customs, but rather an indigenization of Confucian elements.

The Korean wedding ceremony came to consist of three distinct parts: the betrothal (*napp'ye*), the presentation of a wild goose (*chŏnan*), and the bride's entering the groom's house (*urye* or *ugwi*).⁸⁴ In the Confucian ceremony, the groom's presentation of a wild goose to the bride's parents was preliminary to the groom's personal induction of the bride, and it was performed just before the groom led the bride away to his house where the actual nuptial rite took place. In Korea, this act was made the centerpiece of the wedding ceremony. The goose, often a wooden replica, replaced other wild animals that had customarily been sent to the bridal home, usually three days in advance.⁸⁵ The gift was supposed to strengthen the marriage ties. This act set the stage for the climax of the ceremony,

the ritual conjoining of the bridal couple. According to Korean custom, bridegroom and bride exchanged ceremonial bows and a nuptial cup in the house of the bride (*sōbu kyobae*), thus preserving Korean uxorilocal tradition. It was the merit of a prominent Neo-Confucian, Sō Kyōng-dōk (1489–1546), to combine *chōnan* and *kyobae* and have them performed on the same day.⁸⁶ The *Chia-li* was consulted only for some practical details of the ceremonial program.

The wedding ceremony,⁸⁷ the elaborateness of which depended on the wealth of the wedding partners, thus consisted of a series of acts that took place in different locations at different times. Because there were also distinct regional variations, it is impossible to describe a "typical" Chosōn-dynasty yangban wedding. The description that follows is based on a variety of historical and ethnographic sources and gives a composite picture.

When a boy approached marriageable age, his parents started to look for a suitable bride for him. This was done informally by listening to reports about talented, pretty girls of acceptable social background. Personal interviews were impossible; but to verify hearsay, servants were sent out to take a look at the prospective bride. As soon as a desirable candidate was discovered, a middleman (*chungmae*)⁸⁸ was appointed to explore the social and economic background of the bride-to-be. If the result of this investigation was positive, the wedding masters (*honju*),⁸⁹ usually the fathers of the future couple, got together in the men's quarters of the bridegroom's house to conclude the initial marriage negotiations (*myōn-yak*).

Some time later—years could pass if the couple was very young—the groom's wedding master sent a formal letter to the bride's house asking that the wedding take place (*ch'ōnghōnsō*).⁹⁰ This letter contained the groom's vital statistics: the four pairs of cyclical characters (*p'alcha*) that indicated the hour, the day, the month, and the year of his birth. Called the "four stars" (*sasōng*) or the "four pillars" (*saju*), these eight characters told the fortune of the person concerned. Signed by the wedding master and often also by the descent group elder (*munjang*), the letter testified to the fact that the union was a matter that concerned the whole descent group. The receipt

of a favorable reply (*hōhōnsō*, "letter granting the wedding") and of a letter that contained the dates for the betrothal and the wedding (*t'aegil* or *yōn'gil*) set the stage for the first part of the wedding ceremony, the betrothal.

The betrothal established official relations with the bride's house by presenting the formal wedding contract (*hōnsō*) and a variety of gifts.⁹¹ The groom's parents prepared gifts of colored silks or thread (typical colors were red and blue) and special items, most of them fertility symbols, such as millet ears, silkworm cocoons, and red pepper. The most important object placed in the lacquered wedding box was the wedding contract, which sealed the match as far as the two descent groups were concerned.⁹²

Especially at the beginning of the dynasty, the question of when during the wedding procedure the union should be regarded as unbreakable was repeatedly raised. The censorial agencies had to deal with frequent complaints that betrothals were not honored, and brides and grooms were lightly abandoned. Consequently, a law was enacted, stipulating that the transmission of the marriage contract and the wedding gifts from the groom's house to the bride's would be irreversible evidence of affinal relations between two descent groups. This piece of legislation was confirmed in the *Kyōngguk taejōn*.⁹³

This regulation eventually had grave consequences for the mutual mourning obligations. There came to be instances when the bride had to mourn for her future parents-in-law; but if the bride's parents died, the groom's family regarded this as a loss of influence and demanded the wedding gifts back. The legal stipulations of the *Kyōngguk taejōn* were not specific enough to forestall such cases; but in the middle of the seventeenth century, a royal edict ruled that if after the betrothal one parent of either partner died, the mourning period of three years had to be observed before the wedding ceremony could be concluded. This law was repeated in the *Sok taejōn* of 1746.⁹⁴

This law significantly regulated the mourning obligations between the two descent groups involved, but it left untouched the question whether the prospective bride should mourn for her dead fiancé or vice versa. Early in the dynasty this problem had arisen a

few times. The cause célèbre was the controversy that was stirred up when Sejong's youngest son by a secondary wife, Prince Tamyang, died at the age of twelve in 1450. Shortly before the young prince's death, King Sejong had planned to marry him to Nam Kyōng-u's (n.d.) daughter, but the wedding gifts had not yet been sent to Nam's house. King Munjong felt that the bride-to-be should mourn for the prince, whereas his highest ministers did not agree. The Department of Rites sided with the king and demanded that Nam's daughter mourn as if she had been fully married because the dates of the betrothal and induction had already been fixed. A dissenting voice was that of the minister of the Department of Rites, Chōng In-ji. He was concerned that the handling of Prince Tamyang's case would set a precedent for the future and argued that on the basis of the Chinese classics and the *Chia-li* the wedding date was fixed only after the betrothal. If Nam's daughter were to mourn, she would have to be ennobled and later enshrined in Tamyang's ancestral shrine. This would be against the prescription of the classics which stipulated that as long as a bride was not presented to the ancestral shrine, she would not become a full-fledged member (*sōngbu*) of the descent group. Therefore, Chōng urged, Nam's daughter was under no mourning obligations. The other ministers eventually supported Chōng's argument, and the king followed suit.⁹⁵ Although never put into the law books, this ruling in fact determined that the betrothal made the future bride a de facto wife, and that she therefore had to mourn for her dead fiancé for three years. Customarily a bride who had fulfilled her "wifely duties" was not supposed to marry again.⁹⁶

Although not always performed in yangban houses, the capping (*kwallye*) of the bridegroom was a preliminary wedding rite. It had been demanded in the early sixteenth century, but without much effect except at the royal court.⁹⁷ Considered the "way into adulthood," it was performed on a propitious day shortly before the wedding day. In front of family and guests, the groom's freshly washed hair was put up in a topknot (*sangt'u*), and the headband (*manggōn*) and the man's hat (*kat*) were added. Collectively, this ceremony was called *samga*, "the adding of the three things." If the groom was

still very young, he wore a simple straw hat instead of the horsehair *kat*; and when he was about twenty years old, he changed to the *kat*. The groom was thus initiated into the men's world and went out to meet his bride as an adult.⁹⁸

Usually within a year after sending the wedding gifts, the bridegroom prepared himself for the actual wedding ceremony which took place in the bride's house.⁹⁹ After announcing his impending wedding to his ancestors in the ancestral shrine (*komyo*), he rode on horseback to his bride's village (*ch'obaeng*). He was accompanied by some closely related adults, his father, uncle, or grandfather—called *sanggaek*—and servants who carried the box containing the wedding presents, if it had not been sent a few days before, and a live or wooden goose. After the groom was welcomed into the bride's house by the bride's father, he first presented the goose to his parents-in-law and then proceeded to the ceremonial table which had been set up under a tent in the courtyard of the main hall of the house (*chungdang* or *taech'ōng*). The bride, elaborately dressed and coiffed, was led by an elderly confidante to a position west of the ceremonial table (*ch'oryesang*). On this table, arranged in a specified order, were specially prepared foods—cooked rice, seaweed soup, honeycakes—and propitious items such as bamboo and pine branches, a live chicken, *taech'u* nuts, dried persimmons, cotton seeds, and various kinds of dried fish that were thought to help produce sons. The bride first bowed four times, then the groom, assisted by a master of ceremonies, bowed twice in reply.

The highlight of the ceremony was the exchange of the nuptial cup that was passed back and forth between the bridal couple by the two attendants (*kyogūp* or *ch'orye*).¹⁰⁰ After this the bride was led back into an inner chamber, and the groom and his entourage ended the day with an elaborate banquet. These lavish ceremonies and feastings, witnessed by relatives and neighbors, publicly demonstrated the legality of the union and the legitimacy of its future offspring. Depending on regional wedding customs, during the first night the bridal chamber was surrounded by womenfolk who amused themselves by poking holes in the paper door and peeking into the room to make fun of the young couple. This was called "guarding

the bridal chamber" (*susinbang*). On the day after the wedding, the groom was roughed up and teased (*tongsangnye*).¹⁰¹

On the following day, those who had accompanied the groom took an official look at the bride and left for home. The groom usually stayed three days in the bride's house and then returned home, only rarely taking his bride with him. Shortly thereafter, from three days to two months later, the groom went again to the bride's home (*chaebaeng*), stayed there for a few days, and went back home. If the distance to the groom's house was very far, he stayed for one night in the house of some relative of the bride and proceeded from there to visit his bride for the second time. Three months after the actual wedding, the groom returned to the bridal house for the third time (*sambaeng*). During his absence, there had been an intensive exchange between the two houses in the form of letters, presents, and visits. The bride's house sent expensive foodstuffs and presents to the groom's house, especially on holidays.

Years might pass before the last act of the wedding ceremony, the bride entering the groom's house (*sinhaeng* or *ugwi*), took place. Depending on the economic situation of the newly related houses, and also on the ages of the wedding partners, the groom took his bride home shortly after his third visit or stayed on with his in-laws. In the latter case, the first child might be born before the couple returned to the husband's house. The bride's induction occurred on a carefully selected auspicious day. She took with her an array of gifts including cloth, wine, and special foods (*p'yebaek* or *chip'ye*), which she presented to her parents-in-law after she had bowed to them and offered them wine (*hōn'gurye*). This scene was observed by the husband's relatives, to whom the new bride was introduced.¹⁰² Thereafter, the bride had to pay her respects to her parents-in-law in the morning and in the evening, and three days later she was presented to her husband's ancestors (*komyo*).¹⁰³

Presentation to the ancestors was the final rite of the wedding ceremony, and it confirmed the bride as a full member of her husband's descent group. She then began her married life in the new environment, as daughter-in-law and as wife. If a bride died before she was presented to her parents-in-law and to her husband's ances-

tors, her spirit tablet was not enshrined in the ancestral shrine. This raised some ritual problems. Since the bride customarily entered her in-laws' house years after the actual wedding, and often after having borne her first child, it was thought ridiculous to make her status within the husband's descent group dependent on her visit to the ancestral temple. The more important criterion became, therefore, the existence of a son.¹⁰⁴

TRAINING AND INDOCTRINATION OF WOMEN. The "virtuous conduct" prescribed by the Confucians for women had to be learned from the social precepts laid down in the Chinese classics. Because few women learned enough Chinese to read them,¹⁰⁵ vernacular versions propagated by the kings of the early Chosŏn dynasty for the instruction of women were their key to the classics. One of the earliest such works was the *Samgang haengsilto*, an illustrated collection of stories about the proper application of the three social principles: faithful minister, filial son, and chaste woman.¹⁰⁶ The traditional introductory text to Chinese wisdom was the *Ch'ŏnjamun* (One Thousand Character Classic) which listed one thousand basic Chinese characters arranged in groups of four for easy memorization.

The most important and influential textbook for women was compiled in 1475 by the mother of King Sŏngjong, Queen-Consort Sohye (her posthumous name). Entitled *Naehun* (Instructions for Women), this book consisted of quotations from educational works such as the *Sobak* (Chin. *Hsiao-hsiieh*), compiled as a primer for children by Chu Hsi. *Naehun* taught girls the four basics of womanly behavior: moral conduct—women need not have great talents, but must be quiet and serene, chaste and disciplined; proper speech—women need not have rhetorical talents, but must avoid bad and offensive language and speak with restraint; proper appearance—women need not be beautiful, but must be clean in dress and appearance; and womanly tasks—women need not be clever, but must pay attention to such duties as weaving and entertaining guests. *Naehun* also elaborated on the roles a married woman had to fill: she had to serve her parents-in-law, be an obedient and dutiful wife, and a wise and caring mother.¹⁰⁷

Similar in content and didactic quality was the *Yŏsasŏ* (Four Books for Women), which was translated into the Korean vernacular by Yi Tŏk-su (1673–1744). The *Yŏsasŏ* combined four Chinese works written especially for the instruction of women. Another textbook was the *Tongmong sŏnsŭp* (First Training for the Young and Ignorant). This booklet, compiled by Pak Se-mu (1487–1554), elaborated on the five moral imperatives (*oryun*) by quoting passages from the Chinese classics and illustrating particular points with famous stories from Chinese history. These textbooks were often supplemented by biographies of virtuous women.¹⁰⁸

Education for women was indoctrination. Its purpose was to instill in women, through the weight of China's classic literature, the ideals of a male-oriented society and to motivate them for the tasks of married life. Indeed, the pattern of behavior developed by the Confucians had the rigidity of a stereotype which did not allow for individual variations, so that Confucian society acclaimed particular women not for their individuality, but for the degree of perfection with which they were able to mimic the stereotype.

Before marriage, girls were not only instructed in Confucian ideology, but also experienced its practical consequences. After the age of seven, girls could no longer associate with boys or men. They were more and more confined to the inner quarters of the house where they received instruction in domestic duties from their mothers and grandmothers. They learned embroidery and the cultivation of silkworms, and were initiated into the intricacies of sacrificial food preparation.

Girls' cultural training was focused entirely on filling the role of married women. Training in ideology and in practical duties was based on the Confucian dictum that the moral human being was molded by the teachings of the sages. The successful application of these teachings was reflected in customs and manners. It was important to prepare girls for their future functions as moral guardians of the domestic sphere and providers for the physical needs of their families.

LIFE IN THE HUSBAND'S HOUSEHOLD. A woman became through marriage an adult member of society. When she left her natal home—

perhaps after several married years during which her husband had resided uxorilocally—and started her life in her husband's family, she found herself in an environment in which she was an outsider, and with her field of action hedged in by a set of Confucian social rules and values that stressed objective over subjective relationships. The descent group into which she married took precedence at all times over the family she had started or was about to start. Within the descent group, the members' roles were differentiated on the basis of age and sex. Ideologically, Confucianism postulated a clear delineation of the male and female spheres, with the public domain dominating the domestic. This social division was accentuated by the emphasis Confucianism laid on agnatic organization as the backbone of the patrilineal kinship system. As a result, the intergenerational relationship between father and son was given priority over the conjugal union.

The Confucian image of woman was thus a double one: she had to be modest and submissive, but also strong and responsible. On the level of Confucian idealism, the image was considered virtuous; on the level of daily life, it often meant bondage. Although the bride came to her husband's home fully indoctrinated with the values of sex-separation and agnation, she soon found herself subjected to the tension between an ideology that aimed at social harmony and a reality that was fraught with daily conflicts.

Easy interaction between the sexes had been natural during the Koryŏ period, but the Confucian moralists at the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty were convinced that this unrestrained association jeopardized the integrity of the social structure. From the first years of the dynasty, the Censorate demanded legal provisions that would limit a yangban woman to having contact only with her closest kin.¹⁰⁹ Numerous reports of cases of adultery prompted the legislators to take severe measures to halt the "destruction of the human order." As a warning against future offenses, the wife of a high official who had committed adultery with a distant relative who had free access to the inner chambers was decapitated in 1423; her lover was banished. The king justified this harsh punishment by stating that a woman of such high social standing should have behaved with propriety.¹¹⁰ Although King Sejong himself demanded the enact-

ment of laws that would bar relatives outside the mourning grades from visiting each other, he was opposed to the request of the censors that capital punishment for notorious adulteresses be made mandatory. The heads of families were thenceforth held responsible for enforcing the separation of the sexes.¹¹¹

The increasingly restrictive legislation also affected women's freedom of movement. From early in the dynasty, wives of high-ranking officials were no longer allowed to go around in open palanquins, as had been the custom during Koryŏ.¹¹² During King Sejong's reign the regulations concerning women's conveyances were further specified. Prototypes of a closed palanquin were built on royal command so that everybody could take them as models. In addition, palanquins had to be painted in different colors to identify the social ranks of the women who rode them. A later memorial handed in by watchful censors demanded that yangban women be banned from the streets during the daytime since they did not have to look after public affairs.¹¹³

Moreover, Neo-Confucian legislators, "to rectify the womanly way" and confine them to the domestic sphere, particularly censored women's frequent visits to Buddhist temples. In 1404, temples were declared off-limits to women except for memorial services for their parents.¹¹⁴ Not only were they legally restricted from Buddhist temples and shrines, but shamans' houses were also found to have a corrupting influence and patronizing them was forbidden in 1431. Conniving officials and temple bonzes were threatened with harsh punishment; but laws and admonitions, the government complained, had little effect. The censors' efforts to bring temple-going women under control were rewarded in 1447 when the king approved their request that the heads of families and their closest agnates be charged with guilt by association for the trespasses of their womenfolk.¹¹⁵ The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* made women's temple visits and outings into the mountains a crime punishable by one hundred lashes.¹¹⁶

Not only were the Neo-Confucians of early Chosŏn concerned about checking the "corrupt" female mores inherited from the previous dynasty, but they also focused attention on reforming wom-

en's fashions. Dress style and color were convenient means for pointing up social differences. The Censorate complained that the indiscriminate use of style and fabrics had blurred the line between social status groups, and they demanded frugality.¹¹⁷ By the middle of the fifteenth century, new dress and accessory styles still had not been found; but the Confucian legislators agreed that the female figure had to be clothed in such a way that no unauthorized eyes could catch a glimpse of it. They especially insisted that when primary wives went outside the house, they had to wear a veil or "screen-hat" (*yŏmmo*) that covered the face completely and was not to be lifted. Earlier, women had hidden their faces behind fans. In 1449, the use of silk gauze, patterned silks, and the color bright red became the exclusive privilege of yangban women and female entertainers. The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* further restricted the choice of dress material and color to provide visual aid in differentiating social classes.¹¹⁸

In practical terms, the separation of "in" and "out" had a number of implications for the new bride who took up residence as primary wife¹¹⁹ in the inner quarters of the house (*anch'ae*). Her freedom of movement was curtailed so that she virtually lost contact with the outside world. Only after being married for years would she venture forth on her first outing in a sedan chair accompanied by slave servants. The circle of men whom she could freely meet and talk with was usually limited to relatives up to and including the tenth degree, that is, fourth cousins, on the side of her own kin and the closest affines of her husband's family, that is, husbands of her husband's sisters and husbands of her husband's aunts.¹²⁰

The bride who had just entered her husband's house had to try to find a place for herself in a female world in which authority and prestige were determined by the status of the men to whom the women were attached. The inequalities of the men's world were clearly reflected in the women's world. The most authoritative position was held by the husband's father, or possibly the husband's grandfather; and his counterpart was the husband's mother, the wife's mother-in-law.¹²¹ The mother-in-law was the most important individual in the life of the young bride, since she stood at the apex

of female social prestige and authority while the young bride was on the lowest level. The degree of tension created by the generational difference in position between the mother-in-law and the wife and by their competition for the attention and confidence of their common male worked with the need to avoid conflicts. This largely determined the daughter-in-law's behavior toward her superior. The filial daughter-in-law strove to follow the mother-in-law's orders punctiliously, and she avoided situations that might give rise to scoldings. She did not display insubordination by talking back. Smooth interaction with her mother-in-law was the young daughter-in-law's most important source of satisfaction and fulfillment, while friction and antagonism were the most important sources of frustration and unhappiness.

Domestic tranquility hinged upon more than the peaceful relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The wife's position within the domestic group was also determined by the other daughters-in-law who happened to live under the same roof. The composition of the domestic group tended to be more complex the higher the social standing of the descent group. The large extended family was typical, however, for only a comparatively small, wealthy segment of yangban society.¹²² In the extended family several married brothers lived together, their ranks fixed on the basis of the sequence of their births. This gave the oldest brother a definite position of prestige because he, as the ritual heir, would carry on the main line of descent. The latent rivalry between the brothers was ideologically smoothed over by the concept of brotherly love (*che*) that demanded the younger's deference to the older. The women who married into the descent group (*tongsŏ*) fitted into the brotherly hierarchy and carried into the inner chambers of the house the same conflicts and discord that might exist in the outer quarters. The wife of the eldest brother naturally held a position of eminence because she was to bear the son who would continue the primary descent line. She also had some ritual prerogatives in the domestic realm that the other wives did not have.

Human relationships within the female sphere of the house were

further complicated by the presence of secondary wives and a large number of slave servants. The extent of a woman's influence and radius of action thus depended primarily on the position she received by marriage and only secondarily on the natural disposition and manipulating skills she acquired by birth and experience. Whatever the bride's qualifications, she knew that despite the inherent contradiction, her husband's family usually preferred the women who were born into it to those who married into it. Until the wife bore a son, her position in her husband's house was insecure. Only after the birth of a male heir had the wife fulfilled her duty and gained the privileges and authority of motherhood. With her husband, she eventually received filial piety, the expression of a new generation's respect and subordination.¹²³

Women were rarely referred to by personal names. As girls, they were called by Korean-style names. Unlike the personal names given to sons that consisted of one or two Chinese characters, the girls' names were composed of single Korean elements and frequently ended with the diminutive *i*.¹²⁴ Lacking a respectable name and ultimately of little use to her natal family, a girl was rarely registered in the genealogical records of her descent group (*chokpo*). After marriage, she was entered into her family's genealogy with her husband's name. In her husband's genealogy she was recorded as "spouse" (*pae*) and identified by the surname and ancestral seat of her natal descent group. Sometimes, the name and official title of her father and his immediate agnatic ascendants and of her maternal grandfather, collectively known as *sajo*, the four ancestors, were added to certify the impeccability of her ancestry. A married woman's natal family referred to her by her husband's surname and the title *sŏbang* to which the post-noun *taek* (house) was attached. In her husband's village, people called her by the name of her native place to which *taek* was added. A woman who had borne a child was simply designated as the mother of her son or daughter. Women who had married into the same descent group usually addressed each other by kin names.¹²⁵

In official documents such as the census registers (*hojŏk*), the wife's

social origin was clearly expressed in the terminology of the listing. The primary wife (*pae*) of a yangban householder was recorded by the surname and ancestral seat (*pon'gwan*) of her natal family. To the former the respectful term *ssi* was added; to the latter the term *chök* (register). This nomenclature contrasted with that used for commoner wives and, in the case of the ancestral seat, even with that of her husband: *ssi* was then replaced by *sasa* and *chök* by *pon*. In both cases, vital information about the four ancestors was added to the wives' names.¹²⁶

As much as yangban women were isolated from the men's world, they were indirectly tied to the public sphere by the honorary titles they received on the basis of their husbands' official ranks. This privilege was reserved for women who were daughters of primary wives and who themselves were primary wives.¹²⁷ The granting of ranks to primary wives (*myöngbu pongjak*) was instituted in the early years of the Chosön dynasty and codified in the *Kyöngguk taejön*. Titles were conferred upon women only on their husbands' merits, but the seriousness with which the Confucian legislators put down the rules may have been an acknowledgment of the truth of the Confucian dictum that only a man whose wife worked for domestic peace and prosperity could rise in the official realm.¹²⁸

THE MARRIED WOMAN'S LEGAL AND RITUAL FUNCTIONS. In Confucian terms, the family was a judicially self-sufficient unit within which domestic peace had to be preserved and disputes among its members smoothed over by ideological values that stressed the hierarchical structure of the family and the male-centered distribution of authority. Although women were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the family and thus largely determined the quality of the domestic atmosphere, highest authority over the family members and their behavior was lodged in the family or household head.¹²⁹ He had to judge right and wrong, arbitrate disputes, and take ultimate responsibility for keeping the family members in their places and for ensuring harmonious relations among them. The family head's authority was officially upheld by legal stipulations that ordered capital punishment for family members who defied their su-

periors. In judicial cases, the testimony of inferior family members—son, younger brother, wife, or slave—against their superiors was not accepted.¹³⁰ Within this power structure the woman's position was clearly subordinate. Although a woman as mother exerted lasting influence on her children's intellectual and emotional development, she had officially only limited authority over them.¹³¹

A woman could assume a leading role in the family only under one condition: her husband's death. If there was no adult son who could directly succeed to his father's position, the wife could become the head of the family or household.¹³² Her tenure, however, was temporary. It ended as soon as the headship could be transferred to her son upon his maturity, that is, when he got married, or when it was entrusted to a legally established heir. In the latter case, the widow had one important prerogative: her will prevailed in the choice of such an heir.¹³³ With the passing of the household headship into the hands of the younger generation, the widowed mother became a member of the new household unit. She was not likely to establish a separate household.¹³⁴ A woman thus could not lead an independent existence. Her point of orientation for livelihood and domicile was at all times a male member of her family or household.

The woman was not only subject to male authority, her lot was intimately tied in with the fate of the household head. It was customary to punish the whole family when the head of the family was found guilty of a major crime. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did the law prohibit the capital punishment of the primary and secondary wives of the leader of an armed rebellion. Yangban women and children also could no longer be enslaved.¹³⁵ In criminal cases other than treason and rebellion, women of yangban status enjoyed certain privileges that women of the lower classes do not seem to have had. A yangban woman could be jailed only after a report was submitted to the judicial authorities. In case of conviction, she usually avoided punishment by paying a compensation.¹³⁶ After 1745, a woman could not be arraigned except in cases of rebellion and treason. She did not have to appear in court and could be represented by her son or son-in-law or even by a slave. A yangban woman had to submit to flogging only in rare cases.¹³⁷ Punish-

ment of a pregnant woman was deferred until one hundred days after she had given birth.¹³⁸ From early in the dynasty on, men were responsible for preventing women from breaking laws and for keeping them in their place.¹³⁹

The integration of women into their husbands' descent group as demanded by Confucian ideology is impressively illustrated by the daughters' gradual loss of inheritance rights. As has been discussed in Chapter Five above, by the middle of the dynasty daughters who upon marriage left their natal family were deprived of their stake in their families' ancestral property and entered their husbands' home without the land and slaves they had brought in earlier. All they may then have taken with them were some heirlooms and possibly some slaves. Women thus lost the economic independence they had enjoyed at the beginning of the dynasty. This development was closely connected with the gradual acceptance of the rule of primogeniture that concentrated a descent group's ancestral land and slaves in the hands of its primary agnatic heir. A concomitant factor was the change from uxorilocal to virilocal residence.

A married woman, upon her husband's death, could be called upon as widowed mother (*kwamo*) to oversee the distribution of her late husband's property. In case there was no male heir, she had the right to her husband's estate, but it was only a usufructuary right. As soon as an heir was established, she had to relinquish her claim to the property. Economically, then, a woman came to be completely dependent on wealth controlled by the male members of her affinal home.

Ritually, a married woman was assigned a marginal role. The only duty of the wife of the main officiant at the domestic ancestral rites was the presentation of the second libation (*chaebŏn* or *ahŏn*).¹⁴⁰ On the mourning chart, a woman as mother was granted a three-year mourning period by her son (*chaech'oe*); but if her husband was still alive, this mourning was shortened to one year.¹⁴¹ Although this reduction was not in tune with Chu Hsi's *Chia-li*, it was felt that the obligations of a three-year mourning period would make it difficult for a mourning son to serve his old father in a proper fashion.

ion.¹⁴² For her own parents, a married woman mourned only for one year.¹⁴³

A wife wore mourning for her husband for three years; but she, being replaceable as a wife, was mourned by her husband for only one year. For the death of an "inferior," the husband was originally not entitled to an official leave of absence. After a legally stipulated period of three years, a widower was urged to marry again as an act of filial piety toward his parents. This period could be reduced to one year if his parents wished it or if he was over forty and still sonless.¹⁴⁴

The ultimate proof that a woman had been a primary wife, whether she had sons or not, came after her death. At the end of the mourning period, her spirit tablet was enshrined in her husband's ancestral shrine (*sadang*); and, having become an ancestor, the dead wife was commemorated at regular memorial services.

SECONDARY WIVES AND THEIR SONS. The distinction between primary and secondary wives, legalized in 1413, ended the Koryŏ tradition of plural wives. It restricted a member of the officeholding elite to one primary wife. She was selected as spouse on the basis of a number of social criteria. She was inducted into the descent group by the proper rites and, most importantly, only she could assure her son a full share of the social recognition necessary for him to become the legitimate heir of his father's descent line and succeed in the world. Consequently, any other woman the husband may have taken into his house was, as far as his descent group was concerned, of secondary importance. The acquisition of a secondary or minor wife was a "private" arrangement. Such a wife lacked the primary wife's social prestige, and her attachment to a man's domestic group was precarious and, if she remained sonless, often only temporary.

The *Po-hu t'ung* explains the difference between a primary and secondary wife thus: "What do [the words] *ch'i* (Kor. *ch'ŏ*) and *ch'ieh* (Kor. *ch'ŏp*) mean? *Ch'i* means 'whole.' [The wife forms] one whole body with her husband. From the Son of Heaven down to the common man [the word *ch'i* is used with] the same meaning. *Ch'ieh*

means 'to connect.' [The concubine] at regular times meets the man for connection."¹⁴⁵

The clear differentiation of wives was also rationalized in cosmic terms. The loss of sequence between primary and secondary wives, it was warned, would result in cosmic disorder that would spell disaster for the human world.¹⁴⁶ The law consequently barred a secondary wife from ever advancing to the position of primary wife.¹⁴⁷ Strong ideological and legal considerations thus separated secondary wives from primary wives. The severity with which this discrimination was upheld had no counterpart in China and was uniquely Korean.

The social discredit that came to be attached to secondary-wife status eventually eliminated yangban daughters as potential secondary wives, except in cases of economic destitution, and limited the selection to the lower social classes.¹⁴⁸ The social origin of secondary wives was, therefore, varied. Often the daughters of secondary wives in turn became secondary wives of other yangban. Other candidates were girls of commoner status (*yangch'öp*), professional entertainers (*kisaeng*), and even slave girls (*ch'önc'öp*).¹⁴⁹ Widows who had no means of support occasionally also became secondary wives. Clearly, the taking of a secondary wife was not limited by rules of class endogamy.

The life of a secondary wife was subject to social rules that accentuated her inferior position within the descent group. At the beginning of Chosön, when a son by a secondary wife of commoner status could become his father's ritual heir, the reason for acquiring a secondary wife often was the primary wife's sonlessness. Later, as the system became increasingly inflexible owing to an ever more conscientious enactment of the agnatic principle that culminated in the institution of primogeniture, this criterion could no longer justify the existence of a secondary wife. Other reasons then may have been a particular woman's attractiveness as an entertainer and sexual partner and the social prestige the possession of several wives gave to a man of high political office and good economic standing.

Many aspects of a secondary wife's life came to be regulated by custom rather than by law—a circumstance that made her a rarely

discussed person in official documents. Because secondary wives continued to be part of upper-class households well into the twentieth century, the following discussion also draws on information gathered in recent times.

There was no fixed ceremony when a man acquired a secondary wife.¹⁵⁰ It was customary, however, to conduct an abbreviated wedding ceremony if the bride was of commoner background. No ceremony was performed for a slave girl. For these secondary marriages, public recognition was of no great importance; they did not aim at tying affinal relations of any consequence, yet the husband was held responsible for the upkeep of his secondary wife. Some acknowledgment of a secondary wife's existence in a household was given by entering her name in the census register (*hojök*); but even if she had a son, her name remained unrecorded in genealogical records. No numerical evidence therefore is available to allow an estimate of how widespread the keeping of secondary wives was. A secondary wife was commonly known by the name of her place of origin to which *taek* or *chip*¹⁵¹ was added. Although the bond with her husband, or master (*kun*), was not well defined, a secondary marriage could not be dissolved without good reason. For a woman, the arrangement was most often her only source of support.¹⁵²

A secondary wife often lived in the same household as the primary wife. At times, one wife lived in the countryside, the other in the capital, and the place of residence may have been a device for ranking the wives at the beginning of the dynasty.¹⁵³ It was the primary wife's duty to maintain peace in the house, but accounts of domestic discord between the wives abound. A source of tension was the hierarchical order that was imposed upon the women's world. Also, the different social backgrounds of the wives gave rise to envy and dissatisfaction. Moreover, the marginal position of their mother within the descent group created for the children of a secondary wife personal frustration and resentment.

A secondary wife had no parental authority over her children. As long as her master was alive, such authority was vested in him. If after his death the primary wife became the temporary head of the household, parental authority was transferred to her (*ch'öngmo*).¹⁵⁴

In principle, a secondary wife could not become the head of a household; but after her master's death she might, with the consent of the new household head, form a separate domestic unit.¹⁵⁵ She also was not in line to receive a share of her husband's property, although he might have given her some. He, however, would get her property if she died without a son.¹⁵⁶ The concept of family was not fully applicable to the union with a secondary wife. If she was sonless, there was no need to adopt a son. A secondary wife's relationship with her master was intended to last only during his lifetime and was not supposed to form a social unit that had to be perpetuated.

The secondary wife's marginal position within a descent group was also evidenced by the lack of ritual obligations toward her master's ancestors. She was excluded from the regular services for his ancestors; and her spirit tablet, if there was one, was not placed in her husband's ancestral shrine. A secondary wife was, however, required to fulfill ritual duties toward her master, the master's primary wife, and the master's immediate lineal ascendants and descendants. The ritual concerns of her own descendants were accorded second place. Consequently, she had to mourn for her dead master for three years, whereas she herself was mourned for only three months, or not at all if she was sonless. She had to mourn for her master's eldest son by the primary wife for three years, whereas the mourning period for her own son lasted for only one year. She had to observe a one-year mourning period for the primary wife, although a primary wife had no mourning obligations toward a secondary wife. After her death, she was mourned by her own son for only one year and not, as was customary for mothers, for three years. If ancestral services were held, they had to be conducted in a purified room; and they were discontinued after her son's death.¹⁵⁷

The social inequities that were created by the secondary-wife system were most acutely reflected in the discriminatory treatment of the sons of a secondary wife (*ch'ŏpcha* or *sŏja*).¹⁵⁸ The status of a secondary son in Chosŏn dynasty society became a vexing problem because it involved not only, in a narrow sense, a definition of who could be considered legitimate within a descent group, but also, in

a wider sense, pertained to the delineation of social class boundaries. As suggested before, women played a decisive role in determining their offspring's legitimacy. Representing a certified and publicly recognized elite patriline by whose surname she continued to be known, a primary wife joined her social equal when she was ritually inducted into her husband's house. Their combined social credentials legitimized their progeny as full-fledged members of their father's family and patriline and, in addition, provided them with an enduring link to matrilineal kin. In contrast, a secondary wife, originating from the lower classes, lacked the social prestige of a well-established descent group and entered a yangban's house without public acclaim to take up the position of a subordinate. Although a secondary wife's son was recognized as having inherited his yangban father's "bones and flesh," he did not for this reason become a fully legitimate member of his father's descent group (although a secondary son by a base mother could, if his father held high office, become a commoner). It was not a question of paternity alone. What disqualified such a son was the fact that his mother had nothing to contribute to a socially determined "status fund" which would confirm his full legitimacy.

Legitimacy, that is, the affirmation of status, thus derived first of all from social rather than legal criteria. Already in Koryŏ, social status was primarily defined in terms of descent and heredity—a definition to which the matriline gave as much weight as the patriline. This tradition the Chosŏn Koreans upheld—against the dictates of Confucian agnation. For the elite, status ascription remained bilateral. This juxtaposition of genealogical and cultural values found expression in the uniquely Korean formula of the "four ancestors" (*sajo*) that included, besides a man's three lineal ascendants, his matrilineal grandfather. The latter's presumed non-existence in a secondary son's ancestral mix condemned such a son to a life as "half-yangban"—an admittedly unsatisfactory halfway station that, it was always feared, could give cause to insubordination and a consequent breakdown of the social hierarchy.

It was not only traditional status consciousness, however, that deprived a secondary son of legitimacy within his father's descent

group. The Confucian patrilineal descent ideology equally pushed him to the sidelines. Early in the dynasty, a secondary son of commoner status was occasionally called upon to become the ritual heir of his father's descent line if there was no son by the primary wife; and this practice had legal backing. But with the gradual expansion of lineal thinking, which came to encompass the entire descent group, and the eventual implementation of ritual primogeniture, which even excluded second sons, a secondary son's heirship became unacceptable for his father's line as well as for the descent group as a whole. The strenuous efforts in mid sixteenth century to formulate comprehensive rules for regulating ritual heirship testify to the difficulty of reconciling the social status of the ritual performer with the dictates of the patrilineal principle. The ultimate solution was to remove secondary sons completely from heirship and succession, and this may also have been the time when their names started to drop out of genealogical records. When the continuation of a descent group was henceforth threatened by the lack of a lineal heir, adoption of an appropriate substitute, ideally an agnatic nephew, solved the problem. Adoption, increasingly practiced from the middle of the dynasty, thus destroyed one of the main reasons for concluding secondary marriages.

Moreover, a secondary son's precarious standing in the domestic realm prevented him from advancing in the political world. From the early days of the Chosŏn dynasty on, secondary sons were barred from holding regular government posts; and this discrimination was strengthened by the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, which explicitly excluded secondary sons and their descendants from taking the civil service examinations.¹⁵⁹ Secondary sons thus were unable to climb to political prominence. Even though from the middle of the sixteenth century occasional attempts were made to alleviate the secondary sons' predicament with the argument that the state was interested in selecting officials on the basis of ability, such initiatives largely proved ineffective. They clearly stood at cross-purposes with the yangban's insistence on keeping descent group legitimacy and, by extension, eligibility to political power within their own group. Legal and

ritual discrimination against secondary sons remained one of the Chosŏn dynasty's most pernicious social issues.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE CONJUGAL BOND. Ideologically, the dissolution of the conjugal bond was a social impossibility. Combining the husband's forbearance (*ŭn*) and the wife's sense of obligation (*ŭi*) was the ideological basis of marital harmony. If the wife failed in her role because of her "dark and ignorant nature" (she represented *yin* in the *yin-yang* duality), it was her husband's task to guide her to reform herself and to restore domestic peace. Would it not be cruelty to expel a wife without fully exhausting the possibilities of amending her conduct?¹⁶⁰ The sages of ancient China, however, granted the husband a number of criteria with which he could justify the expulsion of his wife: the seven instances of extreme disobedience (*ch'ilch'ul*)—disobedience toward the parents-in-law, failure to produce a son, adultery, theft, undue jealousy, grave illness, and extreme talkativeness. To prevent abuse in the application of the seven disobediences, the sages stipulated three instances when a wife could not be expelled (*sambulgŏ*): if the family fortune had improved greatly during the marriage, if the wife could not return to her own family, and if she had mourned for either or both parents-in-law.

In the Chosŏn dynasty, the Confucians recognized the two sets of criteria for and against the expulsion of a wife as a means of moral pressure rather than as of legal value. For a woman who received recognition and social standing in society only through marriage, the threat of being expelled from her husband's family and the social stigma attached to remarriage were effective means of keeping her obedient and submissive.¹⁶¹ Since Confucian ideology attributed the ultimate responsibility for keeping peace in the domestic sphere to the morally superior husband rather than to the naturally inferior wife, the censors generally treated a husband harshly if he expelled his wife without weighty reason. They were backed by the provisions of the Ming criminal code, which prescribed eighty strokes of the heavy bamboo for a husband who expelled his wife without

having proof of one of the seven disobediences or who did not have official permission to divorce her on the grounds of a criminal act. For example, when a wife assaulted her husband, the husband could receive a judicial divorce (*ii*). The judges usually dismissed undue jealousy, grave illness, and extreme talkativeness as valid reasons for a husband's separation from his wife because they were merely part of a woman's natural disposition; in such cases, a reconciliation of the spouses (*wanch'wi, pokhap*) was considered possible.

Of much greater moral and legal intricacy were the first four of the seven disobediences because they were intimately connected with descent group concerns and human morality. In the judgment of such cases, the conflict between ideological considerations and the application of legal stipulations was evident. The following example makes this clear. A man's greatest offense was lack of filial piety, and the most unfilial act of all was the failure to bring forth an heir. This argument was presented in self-defense by a man who had expelled his sonless wife and taken another wife. The censors originally refuted his plea with the counterargument that his first wife had mourned for her father-in-law; they demanded a reconciliation. Later they dropped this demand and had the husband punished with ninety strokes of the heavy bamboo, the penalty for taking a primary wife when he already had one.¹⁶²

The application of the criteria for and against the expulsion of a wife depended to a large degree on the interpretations and the moral attitudes of those who had to judge a case. Frequently the opinions based on the two sets of criteria conflicted. This is illustrated by the dispute King Sejong had with the censorial officials in the suit against Yi Maeng-gyun (1371-1440) in 1440. Yi's seventy-year-old wife had been jealous of her husband's secondary wife (who was a slave), mistreated her, and eventually caused her death. Yi, who held high office,¹⁶³ tried to cover up his wife's crime. The disclosure of the facts stirred public sentiment, and the censors demanded the wife's official expulsion (*ii*) on the grounds of jealousy; she also had no son. The king declined to act on this recommendation because the wife profited from two reasons for which she could not be expelled: she had lived through her husband's climb to prominence, and she

had mourned for her parents-in-law. The king further argued that the wife's misdemeanor was closely connected with the husband's failure to keep peace in his house. He ordered Yi's dismissal from office and the invalidation of the wife's official patent. Pressed by the censors' demands for heavier punishment, the king finally agreed to Yi's banishment, but resisted further punishment of the wife.¹⁶⁴

The dissolution of marriage, especially when it involved the first two of the seven disobediences, was an affair that went beyond the spouses' personal concerns. The parents' voice in their son's married life was licensed by the often quoted saying: "Dissatisfied parents make their son expel his wife even if he gets along with her; parents who like their daughter-in-law force their son to live with her, even though he does not like her." Expulsion of one's wife could therefore be a filial act. This is illustrated by the case of a higher official under King Sejong who justified the expulsion of his wife and his remarriage by claiming that he had done so upon his father's last request because he had no son. He had made his first wife leave after she had observed a three-year mourning period for her father-in-law. The censorial agencies were suspicious of the man's motives and demanded a reconciliation of the spouses because of the wife's filial act toward her father-in-law. The king, however, did not accept this recommendation, but insisted that a son was bound to obey his father's orders. To mourn for the parents-in-law was in Sejong's judgment not enough to make up for sonlessness.¹⁶⁵ King Sejong also ruled in favor of the father-in-law in the following instance: A father-in-law demanded a daughter-in-law's expulsion on the grounds that she had been disobedient. It turned out that the real reason for her father-in-law's displeasure with her was her maltreatment of the domestic slaves who had fled in great numbers. The censors pleaded for reconciliation, but the king upheld the patriarch's testimony and agreed to the expulsion.¹⁶⁶

While the force of ideological arguments could control and at times even limit the applicability of the law, there were occasions when ideology was used in lieu of law. The seven disobediences were recognized as an important judicial weapon where the application of legal stipulations was problematic, most significantly in

cases involving criminal women of yangban status.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, when ideology did not complicate the judgment, the law was harshly applied. A husband who expelled his primary wife without sufficient reason and remarried had to expect heavy corporal punishment or, if he was a higher official, even dismissal from office and forced reconciliation. Numerous censorial reports illustrate the variety of unjustifiable motives for expelling a wife. One defendant wanted to use his second marriage as a vehicle for gaining official appointment. He did not receive the patent of office.¹⁶⁸ A bridegroom who was disappointed with his bride's physical appearance and her poor trousseau falsely accused her of adultery and expelled her. He was punished by sixty strokes of the heavy bamboo and one year of forced labor. He also had to take his bride back.¹⁶⁹

Confucian society provided a married woman with neither ideological nor legal grounds that would have entitled her to seek a divorce from her husband. Once married into a descent group, a woman had no way of separating herself from this bond. In rare instances, when a woman wanted to leave her husband, she could do so only by using "male tactics." One such woman forced her spouse to give her written evidence of expulsion and then married another man. She and her second husband were severely punished.¹⁷⁰

The dissolution of the conjugal bond thus was not an easy matter. Both ideology and law stressed the indissolubility of marriage and the security of the married woman. They held the husband responsible for maintaining order and harmony in his private life. The implications for the whole descent group as well as the moral ramifications therefore made the intentional termination of marriage an unwieldy instrument for settling marital and domestic discord.

WIDOWHOOD AND REMARRIAGE. Marriage was largely a descent group affair, and, as far as the wife was concerned, it lasted beyond her husband's death. After her spouse died, the wife's point of orientation shifted to the next generation: as mother, she became a senior member of her son's household. Confucian ideology stressed as the greatest of womanly virtues the wife's devotion to one husband,

and, in logical extension, to one descent group.¹⁷¹ This emphasis on the exclusive nature of the marital relationship eliminated the rationale for taking a second husband. Adapted from Chinese sources, this ideal had influenced the Korean attitude toward marriage even before the Chosŏn dynasty.

During Koryŏ, remarriage of widows seems to have been rather common, and the anti-remarriage ideology was confined principally to the widows of high civil and military officials, who were ennobled if they did not remarry.¹⁷² With the advent of Neo-Confucianism, remarriage became an important issue and the official attitude stiffened. In 1389, the highest government authority suggested that widows of aristocrats should not be allowed to marry for a second time, whereas widows of high officials could do so after the mourning period for their husbands. Remarriage was easier for women of lower social status, although those who chose not to marry again were, after they died, specially honored with commemorative tablets.¹⁷³

At the beginning of Chosŏn, reports about women's serial marriages abounded. An amazing number of women, not always widows, concluded second and third marriages. Such behavior, it was argued, was injurious to the quality of the country's moral life. In 1406, the government revived the Koryŏ law that women who had married three times were to be recorded in the *Chanyŏn* (Register of Licentious Women). Now the law was made to apply specifically to primary wives of yangban status.¹⁷⁴ Compliance with this law seems to have been lax; but thirty years later, in 1436, stricter observance was demanded by the censors. The issue gained importance in 1468 with Kim Kae's (1405–1484) case when, despite the fact that his mother had been married three times, Kim was promoted to high official rank through special royal favor. The Censorate was outraged by King Sejo's seemingly insupportable gesture and argued that the son of a mother who had behaved so badly was not fit for office. The censors pointed to the strong correlation between an orderly domestic sphere and a healthy state.¹⁷⁵ Kim Kae was an isolated case, and the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* repeated the stipulation that thrice-married women had to be registered.¹⁷⁶

The Confucian legislators supported widows who "preserved their chastity" with special economic measures. The wife who was recognized as the primary wife was, after her husband's death, awarded a certain percentage of her husband's rank land (*kwajŏn*): two-thirds if she had sons, one-third if she was sonless. This land was called "land to preserve faithfulness" (*susinjŏn*) and was intended to guarantee the widow an independent existence, but it was a luxury the government found difficult to continue for long. With the conversion of the rank land into office land in 1466, the *susinjŏn* was abolished. There were frequent pleas later to restore it, but without results.¹⁷⁷

More important than the economic incentives were the legal sanctions that the government took to correct "the ugly custom of remarriage." One of the first such measures was to deprive widows who remarried of their honorary titles.¹⁷⁸ Despite the many heroic stories about young widows who resisted their parents' pressure to remarry and fled to their parents-in-law's house—clear indication of uxori-local residence—to serve as filial daughters-in-law or cut their hair and became nuns, it is evident that government policies did not deter even primary wives from entering a second marriage.

The subject continued to claim the legislators' attention throughout the first half of the fifteenth century. The Confucians expressed their disdain for serial marriages by putting them into the same category as secondary marriages and adultery: they all were aberrant forms of a woman's attachment to man. Because such marriages were common, they could not easily be outlawed; but severe restrictions were put on the offspring of such unions. The *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* of 1471, an edition which is not extant, apparently carried a provision that barred the sons and grandsons of thrice-married women from advancing into higher officialdom. A general debate on the problem of remarriage held in front of King Sŏngjong in 1477 revealed that the majority of officialdom favored restricting this prohibition to third marriages. It was argued that for young widows who had neither parents nor children the only way to escape destitution was remarriage and that, consequently, sonless widows should be allowed to remarry upon receiving permission from parents or descent

group elders. Only a few officials demanded an amendment of the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* that would contain a clear prohibition of second marriages. King Sŏngjong, who made the purification of yangban mores his special concern, sided with the minority opinion. To press his point didactically, he printed and distributed a vernacular treatise entitled *Samgang haengsil yŏllyŏdo* (Conduct of the Three Human Bonds with Illustrations of Virtuous Women).¹⁷⁹ Ideology, thus, was the principal reason the offspring of twice-married women were banned from official careers. The revised edition of the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* of 1485 stipulated that the sons and grandsons of adulteresses and remarried women would not be eligible for civil or military office; and together with the descendants of secondary marriages, they were not allowed to compete in the lower and higher civil service examinations.¹⁸⁰ Remarriage as such was not outlawed, but the ideological and legal implications for the immediate descendants of a remarried woman made it well-nigh impossible for a widow to enter a second husband's house and function as a primary wife.

Remarriage, therefore, was, when it occurred, a lackluster affair concluded as a means of economic support; and since in most cases it was a secondary marriage, no particular rite marked the occasion. To remarry, a widow needed to get the consent of the head of her deceased husband's household or, sometimes, that of her own parents. If she had children, she lost her parental authority over them; and she could not claim a share of her late husband's estate.¹⁸¹ Although chaste widowhood was regarded as a "beautiful custom," throughout the dynasty voices were raised in favor of abolishing the anti-remarriage laws. Nevertheless, despite its decidedly negative character, the custom of chaste widowhood became so well entrenched that a widow's remarriage bore a social stigma until recent times.¹⁸²

Even for men, remarriage with a second primary wife was not unproblematic, for in ancient China second marriages were prohibited according to the principle that two primary wives could not coexist in one house.¹⁸³ While in ancient China these marriage rules had mainly functioned as political measures to minimize rivalry

among regional lords by prohibiting multiple marriage alliances, in Korea they were given a purely social meaning. In China, when the wife of a feudal lord died, she could be replaced by the wife next in line who was her sister or cousin.¹⁸⁴ In Korea, because of the preferential status of the primary wife, no immediate substitute was available. Remarriage after the primary wife's death, however, was a social necessity: the female hierarchy in the inner chambers could not be left without a leader, and some classical literature advised against raising a secondary wife to the position of the primary wife.¹⁸⁵

The search for a viable solution to this ritual dilemma may have been at least partly necessitated by the enactment of the law of 1413 which put special emphasis on the importance of the primary wife. Close scrutiny of the Chinese model drew the Korean Confucians to the conclusion that the Chinese remarriage prohibition had applied primarily to the feudal lords and not to their retainers. The Koreans thought they were on safe ritual ground with their assumption that the royal house but not the *sadaebu* was subject to the remarriage prohibition. Although a man like Pyŏn Kye-ryang regretted that the ancient Chinese system was not applied more consistently in Korea, King Sejong himself lent his voice to the argument that the *sadaebu* were not bound by the same social rules as the royal house. Nevertheless, he set an example (little heeded by later kings) by refusing to remarry when he was urged to do so after the death of his consort in 1446.¹⁸⁶

THE CONFUCIANS' IMMUTABLE IMAGE OF WOMEN. The implementation of Confucian ideology in Korea meant a rigorous regimentation of women. By granting political and economic prestige to men, the Confucian legislators allowed women to have status and authority only within the domestic confines. The women's domain was the "other world," a world the state did not wish to deal with directly. It therefore inflicted its sanctions against women's misbehavior—their deviations from assigned functions—rarely on the women themselves, but on their male representatives—their husbands and sons.

Confucian ideology devised for women roles that called for spe-

cific behavior ("virtuous wife," "obedient daughter-in-law," "chaste widow"), and women were remembered either for their perfect enactment of these roles or for their rebellion against them. Biographies of women written by their kinsmen and appended to their collected works, therefore, only rarely yield information of a personal nature. Rather, such documents tended to depict women stereotypically as loyal personifiers of ideological dictates.

Whatever the lofty ideals were with which the women's incorporation into their husbands' descent group was rationalized, for women real life was neither tranquil nor serene. They naturally reacted to the functions and values ideology imposed upon the women's world. Within this system, women had to develop strategies to secure for themselves and for their offspring the best means of survival. When the curtain of ideology was lifted, realpolitik dominated the domestic scene. For the male onlookers, therefore, women were forever scheming and calculating, and conflict and tension were part of everyday life. To be sure, some women could make ideology work for them: a young widow, for example, who for whatever reason preserved her "chastity" by loyally serving her parents-in-law instead of giving in to her family's pressure to remarry was sure to be rewarded with public applause. Far more frequent, however, were the reports about wayward and jealous behavior. Women escaped ill-treatment from husband and parents-in-law by committing suicide. With the stakes in the well-being of their children so high, jealousy and discord between primary and secondary wives were endemic, and many a primary wife felt herself grievously betrayed by her husband's love affair with a low-status companion. Confronted with such "lack of propriety," the Neo-Confucians never relented in insisting on correct womanly behavior. After all, women were to give substance to the ideological standards and provide state and society with the "right men."