

“Kye” in the Korean Rural Community
— A Case Study in Chindo, Cholla-nam-do —

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The present paper examines the role of “Kye” and its meanings in the Korean rural community. “Kye” is the most popular organization of the traditional rotating credit association, and plays a great part in the village life. In the village in Chindo, on which the data of this paper is based, there are two types of “Kye” organizations in terms of the scale and recruitment of members, and their purposes; the first type is organized by many members in village-scale, and its membership is ascribed by residence, and the second is the type of voluntary associations with small number of members, which are primarily recruited through the friendship among the same generation, cutting across the lineage boundaries, and plays the primary social and economical roles in their members’ households, especially in preparing for the funeral or wedding ceremony, saving, and improving their mutual friendship.

Each “Kye” organization of the voluntary type is temporary in its nature, because it is organized and managed by the strict contract basis of an egalitarian give-and-take principle, on the base of personal intimate relations in daily life. Its membership is not succeeded to by the next generation with few exceptions. Each adult villager participates in many “Kye” organizations of various kinds, so that units of “Kye” are partly overlapping in their members.

The “Kye” system, or principle, is of as great importance as patrilineal kinship system, in analyzing the village social structure,

especially, the corporate community with high autonomy to be found in Chindo; it contributes to the improvement of integration and corporatedness of the village community, by suppressing the arising of conflicts or antagonisms between the dominant lineages.