

THE PÆKCHONG: "UNTOUCHABLES" OF KOREA

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Introduction

The most outcast group in Korean society was the Paekchong.¹ Their origins, their social treatment and their occupations are described in this paper. In addition, considerable coverage is given to the steps by which they were elevated to the common level of Korean society. Until the recent past, the Paekchong had no social status to speak of.² They were subjected to the cruelest treatment and persecution, just like the untouchables of India or the Eta (outcastes) of Japan.

1. *The Origins of the Paekchong*

There were various legends regarding the origins of the Paekchong. According to one legend, when Prince Hau of Tan'gun, who reputedly set up Korea's first kingdom in 233 B. C., attended the assembly of all nations, he assigned a temporary duty to each attendant. The descendants of those who were appointed to slaughter cattle became the Paekchong.

Another mythology relates that when Kija of the Un Dynasty fled to Korea and set up capital of Pyongyang, he handed all the criminals over to the despised classes, or ch'onmin. After a period of time these classes became the Paekchong.

¹ Since the Koryo Period (918-1392) the term Paekchong simply meant "common people," as in T'ang China. Because of the assimilation policy of the early kings of the Yi Period (1392-1910), the term became associated with the despised outcastes. Consequently, this derogatory notation has been reserved for them ever since. See Herbert Passin, "The Paekchong of Korea," *Monumenta Nipponica*, XII (Tokyo, 1956), pp. 32-34. For a detailed discussion of the term Paekchong in the Koryo Period, when Paekchong is used as the term for common people instead of the despised or servile class, see Fusanoshin Ayugai, *Zakko Hwarang-ko, Paekchong-ko, Nobi-ko* (Miscellaneous Studies on the Hwarang, the Paekchong and the Nobi) (Kokushhokankokai, 1973), pp. 203-211.

² In respect to this, Gyu Tae Lee went so far as to argue that "if there were such terms as the minus status below zero, they would fall into that category." See his *Kaehwa Paekkyong* (Panorama of Enlightenment), Vol. II (Seoul: Sintaeyangsa, 1969), p. 199.

There is another belief that at the fall of the Koryo Dynasty in 1392, seventy-two high officials of the nobility retired into the mountains and strongly resisted the new Yi Dynasty. Eventually, because of starvation, these resisters had to surrender. They were then confined to a restricted area known as Tu-mun-dong in Songdo or Kaesong. It is said that their posterity became the Paekchong.³

There is another theory that the Paekchong were Tibetan immigrants. In still another theory the Paekchong were the descendants of immigrants who were the low castes of India. Another possibility is that they had migrated from Tartar. (The term 'Tartar' seems to have been a general term for all northern peoples, Mongolians, Manchurians, and so on.) Still another possibility is that the Paekchong were the descendants of the offspring of captives taken during the Japanese invasions of 1592-1598.

Most of the above theories have not been substantiated by historical documentation. However, the theory of migration of the Tartars has been taken seriously by some scholars. Their belief is mainly based upon the writings of Jung Yak Yong who was one of the most distinguished scholars on the methodology of historical researches in the reign of King Jungjo (1777-1800) and King Sunjo (1801-1834). In his book, *A-on' gak-bi*, Jung Yak Yong referred the origin of the Paekchong to a roving group of the Koryo period known as the Yangsuchuk or Mujari.⁴

Being an alien people from Tartar, the Yangsuchuk were hardly assimilated into the general population. Consequently, they wandered through the marshlands along the northwest coast. They were engaged in the making and selling of willow baskets. They were also proficient in slaughtering animals and had a liking for hunting. Selling their wives and daughters was part of their way of life. This type of activity was despised by the people of the Buddhist Koryo Dynasty.

³ The view that the Paekchong are the descendants of the loyal subjects of the Koryo Dynasty seems to have been supported by the Paekchong themselves. For example, one of the leaders of the Paekchong outcastes, Chang Chi-p'il said:

Entering the Yi Dynasty, the loyal subjects of the preceding dynasty were compelled to hold the ch'ilch'on, or the 'seven lowest official occupations'. The diehards of them were all given the name of Paekchong because of the uprightness. The *Dong-A-Ilbo.*, May 20, 1923, p. 3.

⁴ *Han'guksa-sajon* (Dictionary of Korean History). Seoul: Tonggach'ulp'ansa, 1959, p. 131. This dictionary was edited by Social Science Publication Society.

It should be noted here that even these scholars who see the connection between the Paekchong and the Hangsuchuk of Koryo period do not argue that all of today's Paekchong are descendants of the Yangsuchuk. They maintain that the alien tribe known as the Yangsuchuk is part of today's Paekchong.⁵ Since the Koryo period, other alien peoples, such as the Manchurian Kitans and foreign captives taken during the wars, might have entered the Yangsuchuk. In addition, even expelled nobility⁶ might have hidden themselves in the ranks of the Paekchong.

In the light of the above discussion, it is clear that finding the true origin of the Paekchong requires further scholarly research.

2. *The Social Treatment of the Paekchong*

In discussing how the Paekchong suffered from the contempt and discrimination in ordinary society, it is interesting to notice that the status of the Paekchong was far below that of the slaves in the traditional Korean social system.⁷ They were both the ch'onmin, or the "despised people"⁸ who were at the bottom of the social strata. Their status, however, was quite different. The slaves were chattels of varying degree, whether their masters were private individuals or the State. Although the slave status was hereditary, there were ways to buy free-

⁵ See, for example, Tomo Imamura, *Chosen Fuzoku-shu* (Compilation of Korean Customs) (3rd ed., Seoul: Utsuboya-shoseki-ten, 1919), p. 43; Sang Chan Ch'a, *Chosonsa oesa* (A Chronicle of Korea), Vol. I: *Custom and Institution* (Seoul: Myongsongsa, 1947), pp. 102-103; and *Han'guksa-sajon*, *loc. cit.*

⁶ For example, during the reign of Yon'sangun (1495-1503), Yi-Jangkon who had been a high official of the nobility, went into exile and hid in a Paekchong community. Also, he married a Paekchong woman. For a more detailed account, see GYu Tae Lee, *Han'gukin ui inmaek* (Extract of the Korean Peoples), Vol. III (Seoul: Sintaeyangsa, 1971), pp. 139-141.

⁷ According to Man Gab Lee, six classes, plus an outcaste group, existed in the traditional Korean social system: the royalty, the nobility (yangban), the country gentry (hyangban), the middle folk (chungin), the illegitimate sons of nobility (soja), the commoners (sangmin), and the "humble folk" (ch'onmin). *Han'guk Nongch'on-ui sahoekujjo* (The Social Structure of Korean Villages), Vol. V (Seoul: Korean Research Center, 1960), pp. 4-5.

⁸ This class included Buddhist monks, nuns, shamans, buffoons, traveling dancers, singers, and the Paekchong; and also included private and public slaves. For a detailed account of the "despised people" see Gregory Henderson, *Korea, the Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 53-55.

dom and to attain the status of sangmin or the commoners.⁹ As Herbert Passin observed, however, "there was no way for the Paekchong or their descendants to break out of the outcast status and to become yangmin."¹⁰ In this sense, the Paekchong were untouchable just like the untouchable of India or the Eta of Japan.

The woes of these untouchables were too many to enumerate. Some of these are to be seen in the following illustrations of discriminative treatment.¹¹

a. *Separate communities*

Until the breakdown of Korea's traditional social order at the end of the 19th century, the Paekchong were forced to live in segregated quarters isolated from the common people. As Herbert Passin noted:

These were usually on the outskirts of towns and villages, and the paekchong were not allowed to move freely outside the boundaries of their allotted territory. Even when there was a great increase in population and in the number of house, these areas were not as a rule enlarged, so that in the course of time, they became very overcrowded.¹²

The Paekchong had to live in segregated communities not only by popular custom, but also by law, since the 15th century. According to the provisions of the Compilations of National Laws known as the *Kyongguk-taejon*,¹³ the Paekchong were limited to residence in only certain areas of the capital as well as in certain areas throughout the provinces. The rationale for these laws was that the Paekchong were originally vicious and uncivilized, and they enjoyed killing animals. They were, therefore, kept apart from the ordinary people in order to maintain public peace and public morals. Accordingly, the common people treated them just as they would treat those who serve a sentence of penal servitude.¹⁴

⁹ The vast bulk of the Korean population fell into the class of commoners or sangmin. (The commoners were also called yangmin.) They were producers, such as farmers, artisans, and merchants. For further information see Kwang Chull Lim, *Yicho Bongkun Sahai-sa* (Feudal Social History of the Yi Dynasty) (Tokyo: Chaeilbon-chosonin-yonmaeng Chungwang-ch'ongbonbu Mun'gyobu, 1949), pp. 90-93.

¹⁰ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹¹ For discussions of these illustrations I am indebted to Ch'a, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-109; Imamura, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-47; Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-43.

¹² Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹³ These laws were promulgated by King Songchong in 1474.

¹⁴ Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

b. *Restrictions on Dress*

The Paekchong were forbidden to wear the ordinary headgear of black varnished lacquer which was worn by all married people. It was considered too good for them. Instead, they had to wear the p'aeliangi, a crude bamboo hat. On the street, the Paekchong were easily identified at a glance, because they wore the p'aeliangi on their heads with dishevelled hair. Instead of the usual black silk band to tie that hat on, they had to use a thin cord. Although the common people wore the p'aeliangi at funerals, the paekchong had to wear a kerchief on their heads. They were unable to wear silk clothing. They could not wear the common long coats (called chung ch'imak); instead, they had to wear a high-length upper garment (the chokoli) and the broad trousers (called pachi). These were really workclothes. They were forbidden to wear the durumagi (the Korean overcoat). On their feet they could wear only straw sandals, not leather. The common married women wore their hair in a bun at the back of their head. The Paekchong women, however, parted their hair in the middle and twisted the sides down over the forehead. They were forbidden to wear ornamental hairpins.¹⁵

The following two examples will show to what degree the Paekchong longed to wear the common man's headgear and desired to dress like the common people. When they were liberated under Resolution 37 (passed on August 2, 1894) of Kabo Reform "they were so elated that they wore their hats day and night."¹⁶

When a Japanese scholar visited a Paekchong house in the early 1910s, he observed the strange ancestral altar. He saw the common man's hat and the durumagi laid before the wooden spirit tablet of the departed father. Having been asked what these were meant for, the head of the family explained that his father had died before the new law was passed, and was, therefore, unable to enjoy wearing the hat and the durumagi. Therefore, he offered them to his father's spirit as a token of consolation.¹⁷ What a heartrending story!

¹⁵ Ayugao, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191. Cf. Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ S. F. Moore, "The Butchers of Korea," *Korean Repository*, V, 1898, p. 131.

¹⁷ Imamura, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

c. *Marriages and Funerals*

According to common custom at weddings, the groom wears a crown and rides to his bride's house on a saddled horse. The bride rides in a covered palanquin. The Paekchong groom, however, was forbidden to ride on horseback although he was permitted to wear a crown. The Paekchong bride was not allowed to ride in a covered palanquin. In spite of these humiliations, the Paekchong men, as an expression of ostentation, rode on a bull, while their women rode in the uncovered palanquin or stretcher.¹⁸ Intermarriage, of course, was completely forbidden.

When in mourning, the Paekchong were not allowed to wear mourning hats or to use mourning staves. They were not allowed to use the community funeral cart to transport the corpse. These carts were usually found in each village.¹⁹ Furthermore, their dead had to be buried in segregated plots so as not to pollute the sacred burial grounds of the common people.²⁰ These restrictions described above were extremely humiliating and must have brought on very deep resentments.

d. *Restrictions on Names*

Throughout most of the Yi era (1392-1910), the Paekchong were permitted to have only personal names, not family names. Subsequently, family names were allowed, but "they were restricted to words of 'unpleasant' meanings, such as, ch'u (autumn), p'i (skin), kol (bone), and yae (no meaning)."²¹

Even for personal names, the Paekchong were barred from using certain Chinese characters, such as, 仁 (in), benevolence, 義 (ui), justice, and 禮 (ye), civility. If they used words having respectable meanings, they could be lynched on the ground that this was an indiscreet act.²² Under these circumstances, the Paekchong, usually, had to choose names, for example, that were used for slaves: 萬石 (mansok) 億石 (oksok), 武劍 (mukom), 小介 (sokae), etcetera.²³

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46. Cf. Lee, *Kaehwa Paekkyong*, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁹ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Cf. Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁰ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

²² Lee, *Kaehwa Paekkyong*, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

²³ Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

e. *The Honorifics*

If a sangmin (a commoner) met a yangban (one of the nobility) on the road, the sangmin was obliged to bow out of the way and to use extremely respectful language, even to the children of the nobility. Likewise, the Paekchong had to act with the utmost servility before the sangmin. Whenever a Paekchong addressed a commoner, the following honorifics had to be used: "saengwonnim" to old persons; "sopangnim" to young men; "doryongnim" to young boys and "aekissi" to young girls.²⁴

According to Korean custom, the man always used the low form in speaking to boys, who, in turn, had to use the highest forms when replying. In the case of the Paekchong, however, this custom did not apply. Even from boys of all other ranks, the Paekchong received low form and, in turn, had to address them in the high form. It was this above all else that generated a sorrow which penetrated even into their bones. A Paekchong expressed his feeling with regard to the above facts:

It were much easier to endure the ignominy of going hatless, and mangelless but no amount of money loss could be compared to the grievous trial of being addressed in low talk by 'boys'.²⁵

f. *The Census*

Because of their position on the social scale, the Paekchong were not counted in the census. As a result of this, they did not have the civil rights held by the ordinary people. Since they were not considered worthy of citizenship, they were exempt from taxation, military service, and compulsory labor.²⁶ Even if they were willing to do these duties, the State never thought that they were fitted for such obligations.

Following the census registration law of 1899, the Paekchong's names were finally being counted. To have their names entered in the census register was to them a great honor as well as an auspicious occasion. Consequently, when the census was being taken in the Paekchong communities, the census takers often were given a warm reception along with a dinner party. The census takers were the local police.²⁷

²⁴ Lee, *Kashwa Paekkyong*, *op. cit.*, p. 201. Cf. Imamura, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²⁵ As quoted by Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²⁶ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁷ Lee, *Kashwa Paekkyong*, *op. cit.*, p. 203. Cf. Imamura, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

In addition to the previously mentioned injustices, it was forbidden for the Paekchong to use tile for the roof of their houses.²⁸ They were not allowed to buy fresh fish in the public market.²⁹ They were even punished differently from the other peoples. Normally, as punishment for offenders, prisoners were placed on a platform and beaten with a cane. Paekchong prisoners, however, were never placed on the platform; instead, they were thrown on the ground and beaten.³⁰ In addition, they were not allowed to smoke or drink in public. They were not permitted to hold parties that would attract attention from the outside.³¹

3. Occupations

According to Herbert Passin, the Paekchong were divided into two basic groups: the chaecin and the Paekchong proper. The former were the actors, jugglers, acrobats, and magicians; the latter were the butchers, leather-workers, and basketmakers. These groups at times were together and at other times became separate.³²

The special occupations of the Paekchong proper enumerated by Passin were as follows:

- (1) basketry, which was the main occupation of their ancestors, . . . including making baskets, wickerwork, sieves, hoops, etc.;
- (2) butchering, which included the slaughter of animals, selling meat, processing the meat, making tallow from the fat, etc.;
- (3) leatherwork, including tanning, shoemaking, armor-making etc.;
- (4) straw-sandal making.³³

They also performed specialized tasks such as barkpeeling, removal of carcasses, dog-catching,³⁴ killing of wild dogs,³⁵ and operating restaurants which specialized in soups prepared from dog meat.³⁶

In discussing Paekchong's occupations, it should be noted that butchering — their main occupation — was more a public obligation than a source of income. They slaughtered the animals for the five great animal sacrifices that were offered each year. At these sacrifices a great

²⁸ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Cf. Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁹ Passin, *loc. cit.*

³⁰ Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 107. Cf. Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³¹ Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³² Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

³⁴ Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁵ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁶ Imamura, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Cf. Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

number of animals — some 350 to 450 head of oxen, sheeps, and pigs — were slaughtered.³⁷

Besides these, sacrifices to the ancestral shades are offered twice per month when about 10 heads of swine are killed; sacrifices are offered to the household gods of the palace several times a month, a representative of the king attending. Sacrifices are also offered monthly to Koan Kong, the Chinese general, who is said to have come in a cloud some 300 years ago and rained arrows upon the Japanese, thus enabling the Koreans to win the victory. His image is found in the large temples outside the south and east gates where even the king bows and sacrifices, and Koan Kong is considered the greatest among the gods next to Hananim. Special sacrifices are frequent — twice per year to Confucius, and there are sacrifices to Hananim, 'The honorable Heavens,' accompanied by prayer for rain, or for cessation of rain, or for freezing weather, when the king sends some nobleman as his representative who prays from a written form.³⁸

At all of the sacrifices animals were slaughtered, and this was not an easy task. This work took place at the capital as well as the various magistracies throughout the country. It was done by the Paekchong without pay.³⁹

In addition, whenever an ordinary man wanted some butchering done, he would call a Paekchong to do it. No compensation was received in these instances as well.⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that these despised occupations were not only an imposition but also a monopoly. It allowed the Paekchong to control certain areas of economic activity.⁴¹ They were permitted to drive out competitors who tried to enter the slaughtering business or any of the other Paekchong occupations. "When, for example, in the 20th century, non-Paekchong went into slaughtering and other traditional occupations of theirs, they raised a great protest against this invasion of their prerogatives."⁴²

³⁷ Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴¹ On this subject, for example, Gregory Henderson states: "Butchers . . . are still one of Korea's most cohesive groups, with electrically swift means of informal price controls operating through hundreds of small stores. The Paekchong were not necessarily poor, and the butchers especially, maintaining good price controls and profit margins, are today comparatively well-off." Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

⁴² Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

In addition to the occupations mentioned above, the Paekchong were assigned to do torturing and executing of prisoners.⁴³ In Seoul, there was an official executioner, called kosa and some of the provinces had a regular executioner called mangnanbu. However, when no regular executioner was provided, a Paekchong was called in to carry out capital punishment.⁴⁴ This was especially true in the provinces. This was an extremely distasteful job. As Passin said: "When Paekchong community was called upon to supply an executioner, the job was assigned to some hapless member, sometimes practically an insane person."⁴⁵ The latter fact seems to explain why the executioner was also called huikwang⁴⁶ which implies insanity.

Some of the Paekchong were chosen as Yosakun who drew the coffins and horses at state funerals. The Paekchong considered this function very honorable. This was a very rare occasion since they were able to participate in functions along with the ordinary lower class people.⁴⁷

After a funeral service or an execution, they were given special privileges which corresponded to the particular activity. On the basis of these privileges they were allowed to establish the Paekchong Guild in the latter Yi period. The headquarters of the organization was called the Sungtong Doka and was located in the eastern part of Seoul's Pagoda Park known as kaechangsukol.⁴⁸ Later on, branches of the organization were set up in the Paekchong communities throughout the country.⁴⁹ An executive and guiding committee was also established and it was made up of representatives from the provincial Paekchong communities. The organization carried on many beneficial activities. These included the establishment in Seoul, of a supervised slaughterhouse and restaurants that specialized in dogmeat dishes. The organization was also able to act as the official representative of the Paekchong in dealing

⁴³ Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Imamura, *op. cit.*, p. 48. Cf. Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 44, and Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 108. It is interesting to note that when a Paekchong was not available to perform executions, the merchant class, the lowest of the commoners, substituted for the Paekchong. This shows how much the merchant class was also despised in the Yi era. See Sang Guk Lee, *Han'guk munhwasa Kaekwan* (A general Cultural History of Korea) (Seoul: Hyondaesa, 1955), pp. 458-459.

⁴⁵ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Cf. Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ For example, in Pyongyang there was a branch organization called okachong or tochung. It kept in touch with Seoul until the 1894 reform when it ceased to exist. See Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

with the authorities.⁵⁰ They had sufficient authority to adjudicate disputes within the Paekchong community and to enforce and execute its decisions.

4. *Attempts to Improve the Status of the Paekchong*

This paper concludes with a brief history of the attempts to improve the status of the Paekchong.

a. *The Assimilation Policy of the Early Yi Dynasty*

With the beginning of the Yi Dynasty, actions were taken to remove the Paekchong from the chonmin class. It was done by forcing their absorption into the common people class. They were ordered to stop wandering, to settle down in regular communities, to begin farming and to give up their traditional occupations. In addition, they were required to intermarry with common people. By the standards of a caste society, no such drastic measure as intermarriage had been conceived.⁵¹

But in spite of the efforts of the authorities, the new policy of assimilation did not work. The common people and officials refused to accept them into their ranks. Accordingly, the Paekchong refused to engage in farming, and they did not give up their wandering as well as their thieving and illegal slaughtering. They, therefore, remained separate from the ordinary communities.

At this point one may begin to wonder about the motives behind the attempts to assimilate them in this caste-ridden society. The full explanation may be too complex. It seems to be clear, however, that such a measure was taken because the Paekchong had become a great menace to the public order. It was not from a desire to emancipate these peoples. With regard to this matter, Passin pointed out:

There is no evidence ... that this was conceived as part of a democratic reform of the class system as a whole. No effort was made to abolish the chonmin as a class; on the contrary, their definition and separation from the common people was affirmed even more strongly than before.⁵²

⁵⁰ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 41. It is interesting to know that the head of the organization was called yongwi. He allotted to his subordinates the office duties such as general management, public trial, business management and accounting. Those who performed these duties lived on the income contributed by the Paekchong membership. See Ch'a, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁵¹ Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

b. *The Tonghak Rebellion of 1894*

An important aspect of Korean society was, on one hand, the fanciful life of the elite class, and, on the other, the poverty stricken life of the peasants. The Tonghak Rebellion of 1894 was the earliest uprising of the Korean people against both foreign subjugation and the rule of the landed gentry. This great peasant revolt established its headquarters in Cholla Province. The peasant insurgents overwhelmed the Korean government forces. The revolt failed, however, chiefly because of the armed support given to the Korean government by the Chinese and the Japanese.⁵³

What is most significant in the peasant revolution in connection with the Paekchong problem was to be found in a program presented by the Tonghak leader, Chon Pongjun (1854-1895). He had proposed a 12-point program to the government as the basis for a truce agreement. Two of the 12 points in the program were: (1) To end slavery by burning up the servitude contracts, and (2) To improve the welfare of 'the seven socially degraded groups' and to get rid of the p'aeli-angi, a crude bamboo hat, which was worn by the Paekchong.⁵⁴ This peasant revolt was concerned about the oppressed classes including the lowest class of all, the Paekchong. This concern for the Paekchong is not very well known.

c. *The Kabo Reform of 1894*

As previously mentioned, the Tonghak Rebellion was crushed by the armed intervention of China and Japan. When there was no longer any danger of internal unrest, the Korean government requested the withdrawal of the foreign armies. In response to this request, China proposed a simultaneous withdrawal of Chinese and Japanese troops from Korea. China had found it difficult to make either war or peace with the Japanese. Japan, however, dared not only to establish strong control over Korea, but also to provoke war with China. The provoca-

⁵³ For detailed discussion, see Son Kun Lee, *Han'guksa* (A History of Korea), ed. by Chindan Hakhoe, Vol. VI (Seoul: Ulyusa, 1971), pp. 2-123.

⁵⁴ For text of the 12 points, see Chong Ch'ang Mun, *Kunseilbon-ui choson ch'imt'alsa* (A History of the Modern Japanese invasion and Assault on Korea) (Seoul: Baekmundang, 1964, pp. 361-362. According to S. F. Moore, the seven socially degraded groups consisted of the following: 1. The servants of the sheriff who beat men; 2. The buffoon — the traveling singer; 3. The butchers; 4. The basket weaver; 5. Women sorcerers; 6. Dancing girls; and, 7. Shoemakers. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

tions brought about the Sino-Japanese war in August of 1894. Japan was quickly able to defeat the Chinese armies, and to remove all Chinese influence from Korea.⁵⁵

As a result of her victory, Japan established a pro-Japanese government in Korea. She pressed the king to make a number of reforms which were designed to modernize the country. These reforms were also supported by reformist factions which were under Japanese influence. A reform program had been established and became known as the Kabo Reform of 1894. It extended to every field of economic activity, politics, society, and culture.

Its most interesting features, from our point of view, are the ones directly affecting the class system:

... the equality of common people and yangban before the law; the destruction and abolition of registers of public and private slaves; the prohibition of the sale of human beings; the ending of the unfree class status for tanners, actors, station keepers, and members of particular occupations; the abolition of the old system of examination for office; the establishment of a new law for selecting officials;... the abolition of distinctions of superiority for civil officials and inferiority for military officials;⁵⁶

In the reform program described above, improvement was made in status of the tanners as well as the actors, and all of these people were members of the Paekchong. The status of the other despised classes was also improved.

The Kabo Reform removed all legal discrimination against the Paekchong. Old prejudices, however, die hard especially in conservative societies. Assimilation was, therefore, quite slow, but the position of the Paekchong improved nevertheless, especially in the cities. One could, however, still find strong prejudices as well as a good deal of covert social discrimination, especially in the countryside. For example, in 1907, a reactionary farmers' association in Chinju, located in the southern part of Korea, demanded that the Paekchong men wear the p'aeliangi, a crude bamboo hat with a leather tie cord. The association also demanded that Paekchong women wear a skirt with a patch of black hemp cloth. Both these measures were taken to demoralize the

⁵⁵ Takashi Hatada, *A History of Korea*, trans. and ed. by Warren W. Smith, Jr. and Benjamin H. Hazard (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1969), p. 102.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103. For further detailed discussion of the reform program, see Lee, *Han'guksa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-245.

Paekchong by making them conspicuous at a glance.⁵⁷ Writing as late as 1911, a Japanese scholar stated the following:

Only the law recognizes the paekchong as equal . . . Even though the rules forbidding them to wear the long clothes and the hat have been withdrawn and they enjoy many advantages, including sending their children to schools, still people cannot accept them on a level of equality and associate with them.⁵⁸

d. *The Influence of Christianity*

Meager as it seems to be, the influence of Christianity regarding the elevation of the Paekchong was to be seen in and around Seoul, the capital.

The Reverend S. F. Moore, of the Presbyterian Mission to Korea, was the pioneer in the field of evangelism among the Paekchong. The missionary was assigned to the Kong Dang Kol Church, which was particularly interesting since upper classes and members of the Paekchong belonged to the same congregation. When the church was established in 1893, it had a membership of forty-three. A year later, however, when a Paekchong by the name of Pak was converted and came into church, several of the nobility or the yangban class of people left the church.⁵⁹ Their position was that "they had endured the admission of servants and other low class people to the church, but butchers were a little too much."⁶⁰ In a couple of weeks, however, they all returned to the church except one yangban by the name of Shin. He said that he would return on one condition: that the yangban be given "high seats" and the Paekchong "the low ones."⁶¹ Even among Chris-

⁵⁷ Lee, *Kaehwa Paekkyong*, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Roy E. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 88-89.

⁶⁰ Samuel F. Moore, *Evangelistic Report to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.* (Seoul: 1895). Cf. Harry A. Rhodes, *History of the Korea Mission, Presbyterian Church U.S.A. 1884-1934*, Vol. I (Seoul: Chosen Mission of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., 1934), p. 101.

⁶¹ Moore, *Evangelistic Report*, *op. cit.*, 1895. It is interesting to note that "some South Indian Churches have always made their ex-untouchables sit apart from their ex-Brahmins." Clark D. Moore and David Eldredge, ed., *India: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Bantam Pathfinder, 1970), p. 91. During the Tokugawa Period in Japan (1600-1868), Buddhism was the state religion. "In those temples to which both outcastes and non-outcastes belonged, separate seats within the temples, Eta-Za, were set aside for the Eta of the community." Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "Non-Political Approaches: The Influences of Religion and Education," in *Japan's Invisible Race Caste in Culture and Personality*, ed. by George DeVos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), pp. 88-89.

tians, equality with the Paekchong was hard to swallow. Since that time, however, the number of lower class people increased much more rapidly than the yangban class. In the four years following the birth of the church, one hundred eight adults were baptized. Thirty of them belonged to the Paekchong caste.⁶²

Since the Reverend Moore was very much interested in the Paekchong and wanted to raise their position to the level of the ordinary Korean working people, he appealed to King Kochong as well as to the Japanese Minister, Count Inouye whose influence was strong in the pro-Japanese government. As a result, the government promised to grant the requests asked in the appeal. That is to say, the government pledged to post bills throughout the kingdom, commanding the people to cease oppressing the Paekchong and to recognize their right to wear hats and be treated like "ordinary people."⁶³

It is interesting to note that when the Reverend Moore petitioned the king, he did it with the help of Dr. C. R. Avison, the king's physician⁶⁴ as well as a Presbyterian medical missionary. Dr. Avison presented this matter in a private meeting with the king. Thus, the Reverend Moore and Dr. Avison were instrumental in securing the right of citizenship for the Paekchong.

At the time when the regulations of the Kabo Reform were slow in bringing about changes, the first Paekchong convert to Christianity, Mr. Pak, petitioned the government three times for liberation and equal treatment. The petitions were accepted and the Paekchong were given improved social and political status. For example, in response to Mr. Pak's petition of April 1895, the government replied as follows: "Your desire is granted. Wear the hat and mangan, dress like other men, and be on common level."⁶⁵ As for Mr. Pak's appeal of March 1896, the reply was as follows: "Since all are alike subjects, how can your request be refused, and your grievance be left unremoved?"⁶⁶

Mr. Pak became an evangelist and devoted all his time to preaching the gospel everywhere among his caste. In many towns he persuaded the magistrates to put the government order into effect. Since many Paekchong did not dare to put on their hats because of public pressure,

⁶² Shearer, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶³ Moore, *Evangelistic Report, op. cit.*, 1895.

⁶⁴ More, "Butchers of Korea," *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Mr. Pak, together with several other Christian Paekchong, "went about encouraging their brethren and thus assisted them in donning their hats."⁶⁷ At one meeting in the city of Suwon, located about 25 miles south of Seoul, 50 Paekchong were present to hear the Word. They had to sit, however, out in the yard on mats under the starry sky since the place where the address was given was too small. Mr. Pak thus became an instrument for spreading Christian liberty as well as social freedom among his caste. In a few years, there were 132 Christian Paekchong in the capital and in the provinces.⁶⁸ This figure, of course, was not a large one since it was reported that the whole Paekchong class numbered "thirty thousand."⁶⁹ What is important, however, is that there were a few social prophets who were trying to save them not only spiritually but also socially. If the Korean Protestant Church had followed the gospel preached by them, it never would have been known today as an "other-worldly church."⁷⁰

e. *The Hyongpyong-sa, or, "Equality Society"*

All legal discrimination and disabilities were removed since the Ka-bo Reform of 1894. The Japanese Government-General continued this

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁶⁸ Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁶⁹ Moore, *Evangelistic Report, op. cit.*, 1895. Also found in George L. Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 1832-1910* (Pyongyang, Korea: Union Christian College Press, 1929), p. 193.

⁷⁰ On this subject, Dr. Chai Joon Kim, one of the few prophets of social Christianity on the Korean religious scene declared:

The Korean Church has been too much other-worldly. The believers are given a simple itinerary: to withdraw from 'the world' into the churches where they remain until they go to heaven after death. Hence, they do not attempt to concern themselves with the mundane things. In order to keep their faith pure, they try to escape from the world as much as possible. . . . The Korean Christians confine themselves in the fortress of the church and aim their guns at the rest of the world. They look as if they are ready to shoot when it comes too near.

It is regarded as the church's missionary function to send out guerrillas to the world in order that they may capture some sinners and carry them into the church. They do not want to admit that this world is the object of God's love and Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. They believe that this world is destined to perish by the brimstone fire under the judgment of God. They do not feel, therefore, obligated to solve the economic, social, political and cultural problems. The Church does not need to be concerned with worldly problems. Even though they do not assume responsibility for these problems, they shared the results. This is a shameful attitude. Chai Joon Kim, "Christianization of the Korean Church," *The Third Day*, trans. by Soon Man Rhim, I (March 1, 1971), p. 11.

policy of nondiscrimination on an official level since their occupation in 1910. The Paekchong, however, were still an object of social contempt and ill-treatment. Under these circumstances, the Hyongpyong-sa or "Equality Society" was organized in May of 1923 in the city of Chinju. The purpose of this organization was to liberate the Paekchong.

The leaders of this society consisted mainly of self-conscious and wealthy Paekchong⁷¹. They had been influenced and encouraged by the successful activities of the Japanese eta's Suiheisha or "Levelers' Association." This latter society was organized in March 1922 in order to aggressively eliminate the social discrimination that still existed in Japan.⁷²

The starting of the Hyongpyong-sa, however, was a result of the bitter experiences of Hak Ch'an Lee, a wealthy Paekchong living in the city of Chinju. The bitter experiences resulted from repeated efforts to have his son admitted to school. His son was rejected on each occasion by the parents of the students as well as by the school because he was a Paekchong.

Having been angered by these rejections, Hak Ch'an Lee, together with his friends, visited Kang Sang Ho, a young progressive, and Sin Hyon Su, the manager of the Chinju Branch Office of the *Choson Ilbo*. They told them of their predicament and discussed the possibility of starting a social movement to end the discrimination against the Paekchong. With the hearty support of the two gentlemen, they founded the organization.⁷³

⁷¹ Ui Hwan Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe rul wihayo — Hyongpyong Undong" (For the Equality of Society), in *Han'guk hyondaesa* (A Modern History of Korea), Vol. VIII (Seoul: Sin'gumunhwasa, 1971), p. 353. There were considerable numbers of wealthy Paekchong. This was due to the fact that many were able to make fortunes in their monopolistic occupations. They, however, could not spend their fortunes on the purchase of a luxurious life. See above, pp. 6, 7. Consequently, it is said that some poor nobles as well as common people secretly visited the Paekchong to borrow money. At the time they borrowed money, they used terms of respect toward the Paekchong. When they returned money, however, they treated the Paekchong as usual. See Imamura, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.

⁷² Passin, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67. For further information on the Japanese eta's Suiheisha, see George O. Totten and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "Emancipation: Growth and Transformation of a Political Movement," in *Japan's Invisible Race*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-61.

⁷³ Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe . . .", *op. cit.*, p. 357.

Soon after the founding, the movement grew rapidly throughout the country. This was accomplished by the assiduous efforts of its leaders, the enthusiastic support of the Paekchong themselves, and the progressive social organizations. Within half a year after its start, the Hyongpyong-sa had 12 branch offices and 67 district offices.⁷⁴ The organization at its high point of membership had an enrollment of 16,000 persons.⁷⁵ As is shown in the following chart,⁷⁶ this figure is nearly half of the Paekchong population of 1923, the year of the birth of the organization.

PAEKCHONG POPULATION, 1923

<i>Province</i>	<i>Number of Households</i>	<i>Population</i>
Kyonggi	509	2,431
Ch'ungchong-puk	493	2,418
Ch'ungchong-nam	737	3,296
Cholla-puk	863	3,724
Cholla-nam	759	3,034
Kyongsang-puk	1,367	6,121
Kyongsang-nam	811	3,384
Hwanghae	894	4,221
P'yong-an-nam	259	1,015
P'yong-an-puk	337	1,456
Kangwon	429	2,184
Hamgyong-nam	118	394
Hamgyong-puk	12	34
	7,588	33,712

The above data shows that there were 33,712 Paekchong in 7,588 households. It is interesting to note that the great bulk of the Paekchong lived in the present area of South Korea whereas relatively few Paekchong lived in the present area of North Korea. The largest numbers of Paekchong lived in the south-eastern section which was known

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁷⁵ Passin, *op. cit.*, p. 66

⁷⁶ Chart based upon a survey made by Police Section of Korean Government-General. See Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe..." *op. cit.*, p. 356. Hyongpyong-sa, in its official pronouncements, estimated Paekchong Population of 400,000. See *The Dong-A-Ilbo*, May 20, 1923, p. 3., and January 22, 1927, p. 4. There seems to be no basis for this figure, however. It was estimated there were over 500,000 Paekchong during the Yi Dynasty. See Lee, *Han'guk munhwasa ... op. cit.*, p. 309. But for this estimate as well, there was no basis.

as the Yungnam district. These areas were the strongholds of Confucianism. The Confucianists upheld the feudalistic class system.

As the equality movement became more successful, strong resistance arose in various places, especially in the southern provinces. It was reported that there were 42 serious disturbances between the Paekchong and common people from May 1923 to September 1925.⁷⁷ In Kyongsangpuk Province alone, where there was a dense population of the Paekchong, 109 incidents were reported from 1923 to 1927.⁷⁸ A few examples may serve to see the nature of the incidents.

In the southern part of Korea, there was a low-class farmers' organization known as the Nongch'ong, which consisted of petty farmers and farm laborers. A local unit of this organization was composed of 20 to 200 members, mainly young men. The organization had been given the right to control the Paekchong. It was a reactionary group which was devoted to defending the interests of its masters. The landlords had given them the right to lynch Paekchong.⁷⁹ The organization was never an important pressure group which was against landlords and employers.

On May 14, 1923 the day following the formation of the Hyongpyong-sa, about 2,000 members of the Nongch'ong gathered in the city of Chinju to demonstrate against this Paekchong organization. They demanded that the Hyongpyong-sa be dissolved. In the midst of this gathering a member of the Nongch'ong brought in a cow and killed it in front of the people. After covering the platform with the animal's blood, he raised up the blood-stained knife and called upon the people not to buy meat from the Paekchong. This animal sacrifice developed into a meat boycott. Marking themselves with the blood flowing from the platform, the demonstrators resolved not to buy meat from the Paekchong.⁸⁰

Reacting against this, forty members of the Hyongpyong-sa climbed to the top of a mountain in the vicinity of Chinju and at this place organized a preparedness for death squad. Then they performed a ceremony which entailed a pledge to die willingly for the human rights of

⁷⁷ Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 360

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁷⁹ Lee, Kaehwa Paekkyong, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

the Paekchong. Because of this, the city of Chinju was filled with a feeling of uneasiness and some of the citizens sought safety by fleeing.⁸¹

On August 14, 1925, a young men's oratorical contest was held at Hyongpung-myon in Talsong County which is in Kyongsang-puk Province. When one of the speakers, a certain So, delivered a speech in which he praised the equality movement, the audience shouted and stopped the speaker. After the meeting, So, together with a member of a progressive youth organization, a Mr. Kim, cursed those who had interrupted the address by telling them they were inferior to cats. Finally, on August 29, Mr. Kim clubbed a Mr. Cho because the latter had verbally attacked the youth organization to which Mr. Kim belonged. This youth organization was closely allied with the Hyongpyong-sa. This incident enraged the common people. They assembled about 600 supporters out of those who gathered on the September 2nd market day. These people began to search for both Kim and So. They failed to find them, however. About 100 of them, then, stormed the houses of the director and the executive secretary of the Hyongpung district office of the Hyongpyong-sa. They destroyed the furniture in both houses. The authorities arrested 12 ringleaders and committed them to prison. The hostility between the Paekchong and the common people continued to exist in that area for a long time afterwards.⁸²

Besides the outside conflicts described above, the Hyongpyong-sa also had to cope with debilitating factionalism within its ranks. Since 1926, one could see the struggle between the Hyongpyong-sa progressives and the Hyongpyong-sa conservatives. The former group advocated active participation in the socialist movement, whereas the latter group wanted to separate the social movement from the political one. (The progressive group was controlled by the members of non-Paekchong origin.)

On July 23, 1926, an incident involving Korean communists occurred and 30 communists were arrested. In connection with this, several leaders of the headquarters group of the Hyongpyong-sa were also rounded up.⁸³

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe...", *op. cit.*, pp. 365-366.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

In January 1927, Chang Chi-p'il as well as a few other leaders of the Hyongpyong-sa were arrested because of a so-called Sinuichu Communist incident.⁸⁴

When the Hyongpyong-sa was started, communist leaders quickly established communications with their leaders and sought to affect political trends within the Hyongpyong-sa. On March 17, 1929, it was reported:

The People of this class do not have much class consciousness, and even their leaders, Chang Chi-p'il and O Song-hwan, do not have a thorough, class-conscious understanding of social revolution. Therefore, a healthy movement here is yet to be constructed.⁸⁵

From this report one is able to see that the Korean communists were not successful in expanding their influence among the Paekchong. After the arrest of the Chang Chi-p'il, et al, the mainstream of the Hyongpyong-sa made it clear that their movement would separate itself from political movements and only concentrate on bettering the status of the Paekchong.

Since early 1927, the organization began maintaining closer relationships with the Japanese eta's Suiheisha by exchanging visits of their leaders. The disputes between the Paekchong and the common people began to subside after 1929.⁸⁶

Before 1930, despite many difficulties, the Hyongpyong-sa had some success in raising the sense of personal dignity of the Paekchong. This was done through organization, activities, education and training. Many had been deeply moved by the Paekchong's enthusiastic attitude toward education. During the time of the equality movement, the percentage of common peoples' children attending school was only 5% of their total population, whereas the percentage of the Paekchong attending school was a fantastic 46%.⁸⁷

As the Japanese continental policy in the 1930s became more and more aggressive, the Hyongpyong-sa, like many other social movement

⁸⁴ Chi Hun Cho, *Han'guk minjok undongsa* (A History of the Nationalist Movement in Korea), Vol. I, "Han'guk munhwasa taeke" (An Outline of the History of Korean Culture) Seoul: Koryotaehakkyominjok-yon'guso, 1964), p. 733.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, Part I. "The Movement." (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1972), Chapter II. "The Years of Trial," p. 70.

⁸⁶ Cho, *op. cit.*, p. 733.

⁸⁷ Kim, "P'yongdung sahoe..." *op. cit.*, p. 355.

organizations, was forced by the Japanese authorities to dissolve. The organization, however, maintained its headquarters in Taechon under the name of Taetonghoe. It lost its function as a social movement organization. Accordingly, the leaders of the organization could not but go underground.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays, students of class, stratification, and race relations are familiar with the word "untouchability" which is usually associated with the low castes of India. Untouchables, however, can be found in other Asian countries, for example, Japan. There the untouchables are called the Eta. This group has drawn the attention of many scholars. And yet, the untouchables of Korea, known as the Paekchong, are least known to scholars.

As far as I know, except for the articles by Herbert Passin,⁸⁸ there is no English work that offers detailed treatment of the Paekchong problem. It is hoped that research would be continued in order to achieve a fuller understanding of this segment of Korean history.

The term Paekchong has at the present time almost disappeared from the daily language in Korea. For an understanding of the term Paekchong, the younger generation has to consult a dictionary. In North Korea, especially, it is claimed that discrimination against the Paekchong has ended once and for all through land reform. Many other democratic reform measures have also been adopted since the liberation from Japanese rule in 1945.⁸⁹ After centuries of institutionalized immobility, they, the Paekchong, have vanished almost without trace into the main stream of Korean society.

We should not forget that the Korean people are not different from other Asian peoples who had oppressed their minority groups as if they were lesser humans. This study shows that the Koreans have come a long way in recognizing their brothers and sisters as equals.

⁸⁸ See his "The Paekchong of Korea," *op. cit.*, pp. 27-68; and "Untouchability in the Far East," *Monumenta Nipponica*, XI (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 27-47.

⁸⁹ *Ryoksasachon* (Historical Dictionary) (Tokyo: Sahoekwahak ch'ulpansa, 1972), p. 982.