

Chapter 4

I WANT MY SON TO BE A PEASANT: THE IMPACT OF PEASANT ATTITUDES TOWARD FARMING ON INNOVATION AND VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT

A major motive in conducting this survey was to determine whether peasant attitudes toward farming explained any considerable proportion of the variance in decisions to implement certain innovations or to cooperate in village projects. Evidence offered in the preceding chapter in support of this hypothesis has not been overwhelming. Some alternative hypotheses were tried, relating innovation and cooperativeness to religion, physical energy, age, and other factors, but none of these provided adequately positive results. Was it possible that the peasant's attitude toward his daily work did not make a perceptible difference in his behavior? Table 3.1 showed that there was some difference of opinion about farming as an occupation; attitudes in the countryside were by no means unanimous concerning the nature of farmwork.

Although a peasant might not dislike his work and might even think of it as interesting, he might also recognize that there is little or no future to be gleaned from the soil for himself and his family. Especially when in a rapidly developing economy, like Korea's since the 1960s, the status of agriculture tends to remain stagnant despite steadily increasing output, peasants might easily come to believe that they occupied a backwater in the stream of change in their country.¹ Thus regardless of their like or dislike of farming, there is another subtly associated perception that might be critical to the peasants' attitudinal outlook and behavior, namely the perception whether farming had a viable future or not. Fortunately there was one question that related to this issue: "Would you prefer your son (or sons) to attend agricultural high school or a non-agricultural high school?" To interpret an answer to this question somewhat broadly, it might be suggested that a peasant who preferred the agricultural school for his sons was likely to perceive some future in the occupation of farming, while those who did not prefer to send their sons to an agricultural school may have had some doubts about the future of agriculture in Korea, opting for a possible urban occupation for their sons. Alternative interpretations might also exist depending, e.g., on the availability of scholarships, but these cannot be assessed with the present data. Most peasants seemed to have a negative attitude toward the future of agriculture; 60.2 percent of the respondents did not want their sons to attend an agricultural school, against 39.8 percent who did. Seventy-one persons did not respond to this question, some because they read the question literally and had no sons as yet. As in the case of comparing the peasant's standard of living with that of other Koreans, a sizable percentage of the peasants may have doubted the future of the agricultural sector and thus may not have wanted their sons to attend farm schools.

If the responses to this question are interpreted as signifying faith, or lack of faith, in the future of agriculture, the resulting cross-tabulation of

this attitude and other attitudes and behaviors is suggestive and interesting. The preceding chapter showed that sending sons to agricultural schools did load on a number of factors, making it of intrinsic interest as a possible key concept. As a first step, the relationship of the choice to the strong pattern among the other questions regarding attitude toward farming was determined. Not surprisingly, a close relationship was uncovered, as shown in Table 4.1. Peasant attitudes toward farming formed a distinct pattern and were generally unassociated with other attitudes, such as village morale. Since sending sons to agricultural school was associated with such a pattern, the following analysis uses it as an individual indicator, assuming that it contains some meaning associated with the other attitudes in Table 4.1 as well as some variance (association with other variables and attributes) that is unique to itself.

Table 4.1
Desire to Send Sons to an Agricultural High School
and the Attitudes Toward Farming*

FARMDRDG	-0.67
STANDING	-0.55
ENJOY	0.47
DISADVTG	-0.46
MOVECITY	-0.42
UNINTST	-0.59
FARMRINT	(0.28)
AGSCHOOL	0.45

*The factor reported in this table is the result of an orthogonal, Varimax rotation of a complete factoring of the national sample of attitudes. Attitudes toward farming were the most salient result, attesting to the reliability and possible validity of this dimension.

In the first place, there was some difference between those who would send their sons to agricultural schools--we will call these peasants the agschoolers--and those who would not in terms of their influence and of their desire to have more influence. The former also seemed to admit to being more energetic, but both groups showed the same high preference for making the decisions of a group. Why the tendency for the agschoolers to feel more energetic? Unfortunately, there were no data supporting a guess that these peasants were healthier. This may possibly have been not only a physical characteristic but also a psychological attribute. Since the agschoolers were also those who tended to like farming, it might have been somewhat easier for them to carry out their agricultural work with greater verve. This explanation becomes more probable as further relationships appear with this attitude.

Attitudinally the agschoolers also appeared to be those for whom farming was a more compatible occupation. While a single percentaged table is reproduced (see Table 4.3), the other attributes characterizing the set of attitudes

toward farming were also related to this attribute, as shown in Table 4.1, and strongly indicated that peasants with some faith in the future of agriculture were among those who liked their occupation best. While in a general sense both groups of peasants believed that people do not shun cooperation, the ag-schoolers were more specific in their attitudes concerning village morale. It can be seen that they generally got along better within their village milieu than did others. This pattern of relationships was fairly consistent and was related to a series of questions presented earlier on the questionnaire. The ag-schoolers were somewhat more likely to believe that there was opportunity to improve the villages through mutual cooperation. More importantly, they had been among those who tended to donate more time to such village improvements in the past and, above all, they appeared to be most willing to donate time in the future. A possible conclusion is that if village improvement projects are to be successful in raising the quality of life in the countryside, it is essential that peasants be assured that agriculture has a bright future. It was among these persons who believed in the future of agriculture that the readiest village workers were found. It was among these individuals that the greater percentage was found of peasants who listened to agricultural radio programs. With this evidence, in addition to the evidence that these peasants had probably donated more time in the past to village projects, it becomes apparent that some attitudes might really be critical to the behavior of peasants, a possibility that is most heartening and that has so far received little support in the analysis of this survey.

There is no evidence that these peasants found it any easier than others to express their opinions, which is consonant with the finding that the groups did not differ in their participation in group decisions. However, the ag-schoolers tended to feel more efficacious. This is a particularly interesting result, given the evidence in Table 4.2 that the ag-schoolers as a group were somewhat less educated than their counterparts.

Turning to the crucial innovative behaviors, we get mixed results, but where differences existed between the ag-schoolers and other peasants, they corroborate the hypothesis of the impact of this attitude most encouragingly. The two groups did not differ in the use of weedicide nor in the percentage raising the new rice strain nor was there any indication that the ag-schoolers might have introduced the new rice earlier. But ag-schoolers did seem to be more modern in their use of insecticide and in the introduction of commercial crops, and they also reported an increase in the yield of their rice crops, possibly as a result of somewhat better farming techniques.

With the distinction between the ag-schoolers and other peasants there was also some indication at last that the Saemaul movement may have had a differential impact. The ag-schoolers tended to be those peasants who had attended Saemaul schools, probably in the summer of 1972. To be sure, this is a slight relationship. As seen by the tables, there were no differences between the groups in some of the aspects of the Saemaul message--both suggested aspects of the Saemaul movement that stressed psychological benefits provided to peasants and methods of management. However, there was a slight difference in opinion concerning the movement's message in terms of economic improvements for peasants. Moreover, the two groups differed strongly over the public usefulness of the movement--the tendency to mention this aspect of the program might have been related to the ag-schoolers' greater degree of village morale--

Table 4.2

Some Attributes Associated with the Desire
to Send Sons to Agricultural School

(Unless otherwise indicated, the results reported
are statistically significant using
a chi-square criterion)

DECISION				
	Myself %	Others %		
Agschool				
Yes	82.6	17.4		
No	79.2	20.8		
ENERGY				
	Energetic %	Often tired, or varies %		
Agschool				
Yes	37.6	62.4		
No	24.3	75.7		
INFLUENCE				
	A great deal, or more than most %	Average, or less %		
Agschool				
Yes	56.9	43.1		
No	50.1	49.9		
DESIRE FOR MORE INFLUENCE				
	Want more %	Satisfied %		
Agschool				
Yes	84.7	15.3		
No	76.8	23.2		
EDUCATION				
	Elementary school %	Junior High %	Senior High %	Higher Education %
Agschool				
Yes	28.0	27.5	33.4	11.1
No	18.8	19.8	43.3	18.0

Table 4.2 Some Attributes, continued

DEBT INCREASE			
	Increase %	Same %	Decrease %
Agschool			
Yes	10.8	18.2	71.0
No	15.2	24.6	60.2
HELD POSITION IN ORGANIZATION (but not government official)			
	Yes* %	No* %	
Agschool			
Yes	49.8	21.0	
No	35.8	28.9	

*The remaining percentage were not members of organizations and a small percentage did not reply.

Table 4.3

Desire to Send Sons to Agricultural School
and Association with Selected Attitudes

DONTCARE			
	Agree %	Uncertain %	Disagree %
Agschool			
Yes	29.3	19.3	51.4
No	31.3	28.0	40.6
p. < .0001			
ABLE			
Agschool			
Yes	85.7	6.5	7.8
No	78.9	10.5	10.6
p. < .01			
FARMDRDG			
Agschool			
Yes	21.9	4.8	73.3
No	37.3	7.8	54.9

Table 4.4
Desire to Send Sons to Agricultural School
and Village Attitudes and Cooperativeness

CONCERN			
	Little (%)	Often (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	35.7	64.3	
No	44.5	55.5	
PROBDISC			
	Often (%)	Not Often (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	52.9	47.0	
No	38.1	61.7	
IMPROVE			
	Yes (%)	No, or Don't Know (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	93.1	6.9	
No	84.4	15.6	
DONATE			
	Yes (%)	No, or Don't Know (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	80.6	19.4	
No	60.4	39.6	
PASTDNTE			
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	76.7	23.1	
No	63.7	36.3	
WHOLECOM			
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Agschool			
Yes	80.8	4.4	14.8
No	84.2	6.3	9.6
p < .01			
AGLISTEN			
	Often (%)	Sometimes, Seldom, and Never (%)	
Agschool			
Yes	58.6	41.4	
No	43.7	56.3	

Table 4.4 Village Attitudes and Cooperativeness, continued.

VILLAGE PEACEFUL			
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Agschool			
Yes	55.3	13.8	30.9
No	42.9	19.8	37.3
VILLAGE COOPERATIVE			
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Agschool			
Yes	79.0	6.9	14.1
No	64.8	13.6	21.6

Table 4.5
Some Innovative Behaviors Associated with the Desire
to Send Sons to Agricultural School

INSECTICIDE		
	Before, or Both (%)	After (%)
Agschool		
Yes	92.7	7.3
No	84.9	15.1
COMMERCIAL CROP		
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Agschool		
Yes	54.9	44.8
No	48.3	51.6
YIELD INCREASE		
	Increase (%)	Same, or Decrease (%)
Agschool		
Yes	81.5	18.5
No	70.8	29.2

and the improvement of the local environment. Given these results, it is possible to conjecture that the greatest impact of the Saemaul movement up to 1973 had been among peasants who were convinced of the future of farming. Unfortunately it is impossible to ascertain whether the movement itself had convinced them that agriculture was to enjoy a more respectable future in Korea or whether they had had this attitude prior to their contact with the movement.

Finally, there was a very strong relationship between the two groups on the question whether they would move from the country into the city, provided that they were assured of a somewhat higher income. The evidence here suggests that it was not necessarily the most productive, energetic, or progressive individuals who tended to leave the farms, but those who were less able to succeed. It points to the "push" rather than the "pull" factors, lack of success in and dissatisfaction with farming rather than the attractiveness of urban life that had the greatest effect on who would move from the farm to the city. This evidence corroborates the pattern shown on Table 4.6, but it is also limited since many potential leaders might already have left their farms before the survey was taken.

Table 4.6
Saemaul School Experience and Desire
to Send Sons to Agricultural School

Attended Saemaul School, Summer		
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Agschool		
Yes	71.3	28.5
No	64.8	34.8
Helps the Environment		
	Mentioned (%)	Not Mentioned (%)
Agschool		
Yes	63.2	36.2
No	48.2	51.6
Increases Public Benefits		
	Mentioned (%)	Not Mentioned (%)
Agschool		
Yes	60.1	39.3
No	50.0	49.8
Economic Improvements for Farmers		
	Mentioned (%)	Not Mentioned (%)
Agschool		
Yes	70.2	29.2
No	62.2	37.6

What was the nature of the agschoolers' optimism about the future? On the attitude concerning the expectations of youth in the future, no differences occurred between agschoolers and others. Both groups showed a high level of positive affect toward a young man's expectations about the future. Unfortunately this perception did not focus attention on a young man's expectations

about the future *as a peasant*, which distinction had not occurred to us when devising the questionnaire. However, to anticipate the village data to be reported in Chapter 5, several evaluations were made in that expanded questionnaire using Cantril's ladder technique. The village data, presented in Table 4.8 show that village agschoolers had higher expectations about the future. Given the nature of the ladder assessments, it is likely that villagers did have farming in mind when they evaluated the past, present, and future. As a group, village agschoolers seemed more sanguine about the present and future. The relationship of the village results to the national sample is, of course, moot, but it is interesting that the percentage of village peasants who wanted their sons to attend an agricultural school was about the same for the national sample. They, too, were a minority.

Table 4.7

Desire to Send Sons to Agricultural School and Willingness
to Move to City for Economic Reasons

MOVECITY			
	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
Agschool			
Yes	39.1	8.7	52.2
No	62.9	10.4	26.7

Table 4.8

Assessments of Past, Present, and Future by Village
Agschoolers and Others, Using Cantril's Ladder

	Past	Present	Future
Agschool (N=37)	4.6	6.1	8.5
Nonagschool (N=117)	4.4	5.1	7.1
t-tests	NS	p < .01	p < .003

As an addendum to this analysis, it might be interesting to determine whether the agschoolers had more or less self-esteem than their counterparts. We have already mentioned that both men and women seemed to score low on some of the questions intended for this attitude. Both were assessing themselves as peasants rather than distinguishing themselves by sex; if there was an invidious comparison, it was between themselves as peasants against urbanites. Agschoolers and nonagschoolers gave almost identical responses to the statement, "I feel I do not have much to be proud of," agreeing 64.0 and 65.3 percent, respectively. Behind the agschoolers' apparent optimism there seemed to lurk the shadow of a humble self-evaluation.

Although many hypotheses were tested to determine which peasant attitudes or attributes were the most critical in relating attitudes to cooperation and innovative practices, none provided the consistent predicted relationship of the decision to send sons to agricultural school. This was indeed a critical attribute that seemed to underlie many disparate patterns of behavior and frames of mind. While it is not clear exactly what the choice of an agricultural school for one's sons might have signified, it would seem appropriate to surmise that it indicated at least a faith in the future of agriculture as an occupation. That a minority of peasants seemed to believe this contributes to the realism of this conjecture. A transitional society such as Korea probably provides ample reason to lose faith in the possibility of an adequate quality of life in the countryside. It is the urban environment, changing more rapidly than the countryside, that seems to hold more promise for the future. But it is among peasants most optimistic about the future of farming who are most like the innovators the village programs are trying to produce. If farming is to have a constructive future, it will be to some degree because of this minority among the rural population.

Both groups seemed able to perceive in the Saemaul movement an effort to affect the peasant's psychology and the adequacy of his farm management, but it was the agschoolers who tended to perceive the movement's potential impact on their rural environment, on the peasants as a group, and on the farm economy. This faith in the future was not simply an isolated mental attitude but, as shown in the foregoing analysis, apparently translated itself into actual efforts at improving conditions in the village and in personal efforts at adopting more innovative techniques.

It would seem obvious that such a faith in the future of agriculture must be stimulated by more than slogans. The peasants must enjoy the reality of an increasing quality of life, and their efforts, such as the agschoolers seemed already to have contributed in projects and personal farm improvements, must receive and be perceived as receiving some rewards. The distinction between those peasants having faith in the future of agriculture (some one-third) and those that were more doubtful (the remaining two-thirds) is very eloquent evidence of where things stood in Korea in 1973. The Saemaul movement had a good deal of resistance to overcome, a large degree of proof to offer the peasants, but a fair potential for success in the future.