

A Study on the Transformation of the Surname System in Late Chosŏn

- The Phenomenon of Surname Acquisition by the Name-less Class -

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Introduction

Today, all Koreans have surnames (*Sŏnggwan*, 姓貫). A Korean surname is made up of a family name (*sŏng*, 姓), which denotes one's family origin, and *pon'gwan* (sometimes translated as clan seat, 本貫), which represents one's regional origin. It is generally known that not all Koreans had surnames until the class system was abolished and household registers (*minjŏkbu*) were created after the Kabo Reforms of 1894. Before then, a large part of the Korean population belonged to the surname-less class (無姓層). This means that only a mere hundred years ago, all Koreans were finally able to acquire surnames. So then, when and through what process did Koreans acquire their surnames?

The Korean people began to acquire surnames in the early Koryŏ dynasty. In Unified Silla, which came before the Koryŏ dynasty, only a limited number of people, such as royalty, central nobility, and the people who were in close contact with the Chinese culture, used Chinese style surnames.¹ The number of people who had surnames began to increase in

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the early Koryŏ dynasty with T'aejo's reform policy for counties (*kun*) and prefectures (*hyŏn*). T'aejo, the first monarch of the Koryŏ dynasty, enforced the reorganization of counties and prefectures after the unification of the Later Three Kingdoms. In this process, he required an assessment of family names and *pon'gwan* of the local ruling class, categorized by the places of their birth or current residence. As a result, a surname system was formed, composed of family names, which signified paternal relations, and *pon'gwan*, which indicated the places where the families were from. *Pon'gwan*, which indicated the place where the family clan was from, was largely divided into three categories: county, prefecture, and special administrative divisions, such as *hyang*, *so*, *pugok*, *yŏk*, and *haedo*. *Pon'gwan* indicated different social authority depending on the status of the regions. *Yangin* (commoner) in Koryŏ recorded the areas of residence as their *pon'gwan*, and through this, the Koryŏ government controlled their subjects and conducted local administrative activities, such as imposition of mandatory public service.²

The Korean surname system, which was formed in the Koryŏ dynasty, was greatly transformed in the early Chosŏn dynasty. In the process of reorganizing counties and prefectures, the boundaries of administrative divisions from the Koryŏ dynasty were changed in the Chosŏn dynasty, and as a result, the surname system was transformed as well. Due to the change in regional divisions, *pon'gwan* was no longer able to represent the regional foundation of a family name. As a result, family names and *pon'gwan* gradually came to signify the patriarchal family ties in the Chosŏn dynasty after the fifteenth century.³ In this way, the characteristics and the form of the surname system in Korea changed over time.

1 Li Sugŏn, *Han'guk chungse sahoe yŏn'gu* (A study on the Korean medieval society). (Iljogak, 1984), 54-55.

2 Li, *Ibid.*, 60-92.

3 Yi, Sugŏn, "Chosŏn hugi sŏnggwan ūisik-gwa p'yŏnbo ch'eje-ŭi pyŏnhwa" (The change in the awareness of surnames and p'yŏnbo system in late Chosŏn). *Kugok Hwang Chŏngdong Kyosu Chŏngnyŏn kinyŏm Sahaknon Ch'ong*, 1994.

The Korean surname system also underwent a big transformation in the late Chosŏn dynasty. Significant changes occurred in terms of the formation of the Korean surname system particularly in the eighteenth century. During this time, the most noteworthy transformation of the surname system was the rapid increase in the number of people with surnames. It is understood that even until the late Chosŏn dynasty, there was a large number of people without surnames. Who were these people who comprised the surname-less class? What was the social background in which the people of the surname-less class were able to acquire surnames? The answers to these questions are related to the question of how all Koreans today came to acquire their surnames. This study attempts to explore the phenomenon of surname acquisition by the surname-less class around the eighteenth century and the social background in which this phenomenon occurred.

To this end, this paper will examine specific case studies to identify the group of people who did not have surnames even until the late Chosŏn dynasty, explore how they were able to acquire surnames, and examine various characteristics that surfaced during the process of surname acquisition. This paper hopes to expand the understanding of the changes that occurred in the Korean surname system in late Chosŏn and its significance in the formation of the Korean surname system today.

The State of Surname Acquisition by the Surname-less Class in Late Chosŏn

Various geographical treatises and census registers are useful sources in understanding the surname system in the Chosŏn dynasty. In geographical treatises, such as *Kyŏngsang-do chiriji* (Geographical Treatise on Kyŏngsang Province), which is one of the first sources that provides information on the Korean surname system, and *Sejong sillok chiriji* (Geographical Treatise in the Annals of King Sejong), records major surnames from each county and prefecture. The records of surnames in

geographical treatises included pon'gwan by county and prefecture, and the records on individuals can be confirmed by census registers. Census registers are important sources for ascertaining the changes in individuals' surnames as they contain detailed records of individuals' surnames. In particular, census registers contain comprehensive information on all social classes, and they are also the most informative sources on the surname-less people, most of whom belonged to the lowest caste (*ch'ŏnmin*). Therefore, an analysis of census registers is crucial to the research on the surname-less class in late Chosŏn.

The census registers from the Chosŏn dynasty that survive today have been created in regions such as Tansŏng, Taegu, Ulsan, and Ŏnyang. In particular, the *Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province* has great historical value because the original records from the early seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century survive today, and also because a lot of the surviving records from different time periods contain information on all administrative areas. Therefore this paper will focus mainly on the *Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province* to analyze the changes in the surname system in the eighteenth century, as well as parts of the *Census Registers of Sŏsang Township (Sŏsang-myŏn) in Taegu District (Taegu-bu), Kyŏngsang Province*.

As mentioned before, there was a fairly large number of people without surnames even until the late Chosŏn dynasty. Then what percentage of the whole population belonged to the surname-less class, and how did the trend of surname acquisition progress?

<Table 1> is an analysis of the surnames of the heads of households recorded in the *Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province* between the second half of the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴ There are largely two characteristics that can be confirmed through <Table 1>.

4 The surname record was centered on the head of the household. Surnames of the members of the household who were related to the head of the household by blood were not listed separately, but it can be assumed that they had the same surname as

Table 1. The Trend of Surname Acquisition in Tansŏng Prefecture from the Late Seventeenth Century to the Early Nineteenth Century

Classification Year	Households with Surnames		Households without Surnames		Total Number of Households
	Number of households	Percentage (%)	Number of Households	Percentage (%)	
1678	1061	50%	1057	50%	2118
1717	1849	74%	665	26%	2514
1720	1962	76%	605	24%	2567
1729	2165	74%	747	26%	2912
1732	2193	75%	734	25%	2927
1735	1397	75%	462	25%	1859
1750	1930	79%	516	21%	2446
1759	2268	83%	450	17%	2713
1762	2128	85%	364	15%	2492
1780	2770	93%	208	7%	2978
1783	2805	93%	202	7%	3007
1786	2863	94%	182	6%	3045
1789	2442	95%	130	5%	2572
1825	3059	99%	24	1%	3083

First, only about half of the total households in Tansŏng Prefecture had surnames in the late seventeenth century. The total number of households

as the head of the household. Slaves were generally considered to not have surnames, but there are some records of slaves with surnames. These slaves were heads of independent households. In other words, certain slaves who were heads of households had their surnames listed in census registers. On the other hand, when they were unable to form independent households and had to be listed under their owners, their surnames were not recorded. Considering this, it seems more appropriate to focus on the heads of households when using census registers to analyze the changes in surnames. (Kim, Kyungran, “Chosŏn hugi musŏngch’ ũng-ŭi yusŏnghwa kwajŏng-e taehan punsŏk—Tansŏng chiyŏk-ŭl chungsimŭro” (Analysis On How Koreans Came To Have Their Own Family Name in The Late Joseon Dynasty - In the Danseong area). *Taedong munhwa yŏn ’gu* (Study of Eastern Culture) 62. (2008): 78-79.

in Tansŏng in 1678 was 2,118. Among them, the residents of 1061 households, or about half of all households, had surnames. The number of households without surnames was 1057, which accounted for the other half of all households in Tansŏng. This shows that only about half of all population had surnames in the late seventeenth century.

Secondly, a rapid decline in the number of surname-less people occurred in the eighteenth century. The number of surname-less households, which accounted for half of all households in Tansŏng Prefecture in the late seventeenth century, decreased to only one percent of all households in 1825. This confirms the fact that many people acquired surnames around the first half of the eighteenth century.

According to the analysis of the records as indicated above, only about half of the total households in Tansŏng Prefecture had surnames in the late seventeenth century. However, a mere century later, almost all households had surnames. In other words, surname-less households, which accounted for half of all households in Tansŏng acquired surnames during the eighteenth century.

Could this phenomenon have been characteristic of Tansŏng Prefecture? Or was it something that occurred similarly in other regions as well? These questions can be clarified to a certain extent in <Table 2>, which illustrates the trend of surname acquisition in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District, Kyŏngsang Province.

<Table 2> classifies the households in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District, Kyŏngsang Province by whether the head of the household had a surname or was surname-less. A close comparison of <Table 1> and <Table 2> shows that the distribution of the surname-less households and the tendency of surname acquisition were similar in both regions. The percentage of households with surnames in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District was 55 in 1681. However, in 1816, past the eighteenth century, 94 percent of all households in Sŏsang Township had surnames. Compared to Tansŏng Prefecture, the percentage of households with surnames was a bit lower, but it still shows that people acquired surnames rapidly around the eighteenth century in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District as well.

Table 2. The Trend of Surname Acquisition in Sōsang Township of Taegu District from the Late Seventeenth Century to the Early Nineteenth Century

Year Classification	Households with Surnames		Households without Surnames		Total Number of Households
	Number of Households	Percentage (%)	Number of Households	Percentage (%)	
1681	444	55%	362	45%	806
1684	464	57%	345	43%	809
1708	588	67%	287	33%	875
1714	620	67%	312	33%	932
1717	658	68%	306	32%	965
1723	698	69%	308	31%	1010
1729	703	67%	348	33%	1052
1732	699	65%	368	34%	1074
1735	682	68%	317	32%	1002
1738	770	70%	329	30%	1103
1747	951	72%	368	28%	1320
1756	1068	76%	327	23%	1398
1759	1125	80%	279	17%	1409
1762	1189	85%	254	17%	1443
1765	1258	85%	214	15%	1477
1783	1401	92%	121	8%	1528
1789	1474	92%	126	8%	1605
1795	1535	93%	115	7%	1658
1816	1524	94%	94	6%	1618

As illustrated in <Table 1> and <Table 2>, which compares the trend of surname acquisition in Tansōng Prefecture and Sōsang Township of Taegu District, surname acquisition by the surname-less class was a general trend in the late Chosōn, although there was a difference in increase by region. Then who were the members of the surname-less class, which made up about half of the population of Chosōn until the late seventeenth century? A close examination of the occupations of the heads of surname-less households sheds light on this question.

Table 3. Occupations of Heads of Surname-less Households in Tansŏng Prefecture

Occupation Year	1678	1732	1759	1786	1825
Slave (<i>nobi</i>)	957	581	381	151	13
Military serviceman and other occupations held by <i>yangin</i>	92	79	64	27	21
Unlisted	4	35	5	3	3
Torn	4			1	
Total (Surname-less Households)	1057	695	450	182	24
Total Number of Households	2118	2514	2713	3045	3083

<Table 3> shows the occupations held by the heads of surname-less households recorded in the census register of Tansŏng Prefecture from five different years between the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century. The five years, from which the census registers were pulled, are each about thirty years apart. The most noteworthy fact that can be gleaned from <Table 3> is that most of the heads of surname-less households were slaves. For instance, the records from 1678 show that surname-less households numbered 1057 among a total of 2118 households. And among 1057 surname-less households, the heads of 957 households were slaves, which means the majority of the heads of surname-less households were slaves. On the other hand, only 92 heads of surname-less households were recorded as having occupations of the *yangin* class and of military servicemen. The fact that most heads of surname-less households were slaves can be gleaned from the analysis of other four years as well.

The analysis of the sources mentioned above shows that surname-less households were made up of slave households for the most part and a small number of *yangin* households. This means most *yangin* had surnames while slaves did not. Therefore an understanding of the slaves in

Chosŏn would be important in understanding the sudden increase in the number of people who acquired surnames around the eighteenth century.

The Trend and Circumstances of the Transformation of Slaves into Yangin

As explained in the previous section, significant changes to the Korean surname system occurred in the eighteenth century. In other words, most surname-less people, who made up half of the population of Chosŏn, became *yangin* around the eighteenth century. Then what kind of changes did the slaves, who made up a majority of the surname-less class, experience in the process of acquiring surnames? This issue is directly related to understanding the social background in which the phenomenon of surname acquisition took place in the eighteenth century. <Table 4> and <Figure 1> provides an explanation of this issue.

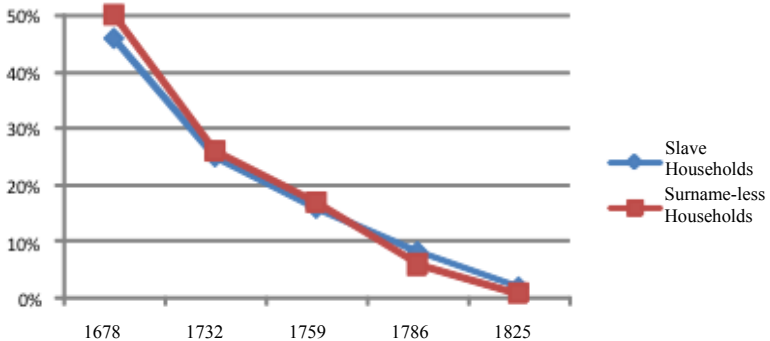
<Table 4> displays the percentage of slave households that appear in the *Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture* in five specific years between the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century. First, 968 households from a total of 2,118 households in Tansŏng Prefecture were recorded as slave households in 1678. This shows that about half of all households—46 percent to be exact—were slave households. However, the percentage of slave households decreased dramatically throughout the eighteenth century. The percentage of slave households decreased to 25 percent in 1732, and dropped further to two percent in 1825. According to <Table 4>, the number of slave households, which had made up about half of all households in the seventeenth century, declined over the eighteenth century to the point of extinction.

How, then, is this rapid decline in the number of slave households over the eighteenth century related to the rapid increase in the number of people with surnames around the same time? Let us examine <Figure 1>.

Table 4. The Percentage of Slave Households in Tansŏng Prefecture

Category Year	1678	1732	1759	1786	1825
Slave Households	968	739	436	232	63
Percentage (Slave Households / All Households)	46%	25%	16%	8%	2%
Total Number of Households	2118	2911	2719	3040	3082

Figure 1. The Number of Slave Households and Surname-less Households in Tansŏng Prefecture



<Figure 1> depicts the changes in the percentage of slave households and surname-less households between the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century. According to this figure, the lines in the graph pass through almost the same points, meaning the percentage of slave households was nearly the same as the percentage of surname-less households. A closer examination of the figure also reveals that the percentage of slave households and surname-less households, which accounted for about half of all households in the late seventeenth century, decreased dramatically during the eighteenth century, down to one percent in the early nineteenth century. Considering the two facts that can be

deduced from <Figure 1>, it seems clear that the decline in the number of surname-less households is closely related to the increase in the surname acquisition by surname-less households. Therefore examining the factors that caused the decrease of slave households in the eighteenth century can provide an explanation for the dramatic decrease in the number of surname-less households and the rapid increase in the number of households with surnames.

The eighteenth century saw a significant change in slave policies in the Chosŏn dynasty. This change was mainly related to procuring a sufficient number of people for mandatory public service. The status of the children and the possession of property that resulted from the intermarriage between a slave and a *yangin* was determined by a regulation based on the hereditary principle (一賤則賤), meaning any person with a slave parent was considered a slave, which had been stipulated in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* (Great Code of Administration). This regulation implemented in the early Chosŏn Dynasty resulted in an increase in the slave population and a decrease in the *yangin* population, who were in charge of undertaking public service. In the late seventeenth century, measures were created to change the status of those who had been born to a slave father and a *yangin* mother to *yangin* from a slave. After several controversial debates surrounding this measure, the matrilineal succession law (*Chongmo chongyangbŏp*), which stipulated that the legal status of the child should be inherited from the mother's status, was passed in the seventh year of Yŏngjo's reign (1731).

However, there seems to have been a lot of obstacles that needed to be overcome in order for the matrilineal succession law to be carried out in practice. A number of instances in census registers show that this law had not been applied in real life. Despite the realistic difficulties, the government continued to emphasize the enforcement of this law and focused on assessing the number of people who had been born to a slave father and a *yangin* mother. This policy must have played a huge role in the decline in the number of slaves, which dropped dramatically in the late seventeenth century and continued to decrease throughout the eighteenth

century. In this way, the principles embedded in slave policies, before and after the enactment of the matrilineal succession law in the early eighteenth century, seem to have resulted in the increased number of slaves who became *yangin*.

In addition, the policy on state-owned slaves, who belonged to central and regional government offices, also accelerated the phenomenon of changing the legal status of slaves to *yangin*. The number of state-owned slaves decreased steadily in the late Chosŏn dynasty. To compensate for the decrease in tribute levy, which the slaves paid instead of partaking in public service, the government attempted to seek out any unregistered or hidden slaves. However, this project of seeking out hidden slaves was ineffective, and the government switched its policy and decided to lighten the economic burden on slaves to stop them from running away. Originally, the slaves were burdened with paying the tribute levy of two rolls of cotton for a male slave and one and a half rolls for a female slave. However, during the reign of King Hyŏnjong, the tribute levy for slaves was reduced to one and a half rolls for a male slave and one roll for a female slave.

Still, procuring a sufficient number of state-owned slaves remained a difficult project despite the government's policy to reduce the tribute levy for slaves. This led to a discussion on the law called *chŏngch'ongbŏp*. *Chŏngch'ongbŏp* stipulated that a certain number of slaves should be maintained within a province at all times, procuring a steady amount of tribute levy for provinces, although the tribute levy could be reduced or increased on the town and village level. The implementation of *Chŏngch'ongbŏp* caused a lot of controversy, but was finally enforced in Kyŏngsang Province in the 21st year of Yŏngjo's reign (1745). Afterwards, this law was implemented in Chŏlla Province as well, and it was expanded to include not only state-owned slaves who belonged to government offices but also slaves who belonged to palaces.⁵

5 Chŏn, Hyŏngt'aek. *Chosŏn hugi nobi sinbun yŏn'gu* (A study on the slave caste in late Chosŏn). (Iljogak, 1989): 143-167.

Chōngch'ongbōp, which had been passed to eliminate the evil practices involved in capturing and returning runaway slaves to their owners and procure a minimum amount of tribute levy from slaves to recoup the financial losses of the government, was not very effective in practice because the number of slaves that the government had estimated was larger than the actual number of slaves who were to pay tribute. As a result, the measure to lessen slave's tribute levy was implemented once again. In the 50th year in Yōngjo's reign (1774), a male slave's tribute levy was reduced to one roll of fabric, which was the same as what a *yangin* man had to pay for not partaking in mandatory public service, and a female slave was completely exempted from paying the tribute levy. This allowed both the slaves and *yangin* to shoulder an equal burden in terms of tribute levy for not partaking in mandatory public service. As a result, the central government no longer needed to classify *yangin* and slaves into separate groups. The abolition of the government and palace slave system in 1801 can be understood in this context.⁶

From the information mentioned above, it seems clear that there was a close relationship between the acquisition of surnames by surname-less slave households and the procurement of sufficient population to participate in public service.⁷ Therefore the series of policies that the government implemented to secure manpower for mandatory public service in turn allowed a huge number of slaves to become *yangin*, and under these circumstances, the phenomenon of surname acquisition by the surname-less class surged on.

6 Kim, Kyungran, "Chosŏn hugi kukga-ŭi ch'ŏnin yŏsŏng p'aaksilt'ae-wa p'yŏnje pangsik – *Tansŏng-hyŏn hojŏkdaejang-ŭi 'pi' kijae yangsang-ŭl chungsimŭro*" (National Census and Organization of Low-class Women in the Late Chosun Dynasty- Focused on records of 'Bi (female servant)' in "Danseong Village Family Register"-), *Taedong munhwa yŏn'gu* (Study of Eastern Culture) 52. (2005).

7 There were a few slave households with surnames, and there were a few surname-less households that were required to participate in public service. The heads of these households seem to have had parents whose legal statuses were ambiguous. Further study is required to understand these anomalies.

Characteristics Derived from the Process of Surname Acquisition by the Surname-less Class

A detailed examination of the sudden phenomenon of surname acquisition around the eighteenth century revealed that this phenomenon occurred due to the slaves becoming *yangin* in the same period of time. In this section, this paper will explore the process in which slaves acquired surnames as they became *yangin* as well as various changes that surfaced in the process. To this end, this study will analyze specific cases of slaves who acquired surnames in the eighteenth century.

① Itnam, a private slave who lived in Sindŭng Township, Tansŏng Prefecture, in 1780, was the head of a surname-less household—neither his family name nor clean seat was recorded in the census register.⁸ The records of his four immediate ancestors indicate that Itnam's father was named Myŏnghwa (命化), and his occupation was listed as *kasŏn* (嘉善). The occupations of Itnam's paternal grandfather and great grandfather were not listed, while his maternal grandfather's occupation was recorded as *nojikt'ongjŏng* (老職通政). His mother's occupation was also unlisted. Itnam was not included in the census register from 1783, and therefore no records about him can be found in that year.

His name appeared again in the census register from 1786, where he was listed as the head of a household with the surname Yi of Kyŏngju clan.⁹ Although Itnam was listed with a surname in 1786, his occupation remained "private slave." In the census register from 1789, Itnam was once again listed with the surname Yi of Kyŏngju clan, yet in this register, his occupation was recorded as "*yangin*," and his residence was also

8 *Kyŏngsang-do Tansŏng-hyŏn Hojŏkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province), Sindŭng-myŏn 2-ri, Chungch'ŏn 1-ho, 1780.

9 *Kyŏngsang-do Tansŏng-hyŏn Hojŏkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province), Sindŭng-myŏn 5-ri, Yangjŏnch'ŏn 3-t'ong 3-ho, 1786.

changed to Pömmurya Township.¹⁰ The occupations of his father, paternal grandfather, paternal great grandfather, and maternal grandfather were listed as *kasōn* (嘉善), *napkasōn* (納嘉善), *napt'ongjōng* (納通政), and *t'ongjōng* (通政) respectively, which were all occupations that held by *yangin*. The occupation of Itnam's mother remained blank.

Research on the process through which Itnam acquired the surname Yi of Kyōngju clan revealed the fact that Myōnghwa, who was listed as his father, was registered as the head of an independent household in the census register from 1780. In the same register, Itnam's father, Yi Myōnghwa, was listed with the surname Yi of Kyōngju clan, and his occupation was *kasōndaebu tongjijungch'ubusa* (嘉善大夫同知中樞府事), a junior-second civil court rank title.¹¹ Therefore, these records show that Itnam, a child of Yi Myōnghwa by a concubine, was unable to use his father's surname when he was registered as a slave, and he only recorded his surname after a certain period of time, as his occupation was gradually changed to that of a *yangin*'s.

② In the census register of Pömmurya Township of Tansōng Prefecture from 1792, a surname-less slave who worked at the town's government office named Sarip was recorded as the head of a household.¹² The record about Sarip did not mention his family name and only listed his *pon'gwan* as Hapch'ōn (陝川).¹³ As for Sarip's immediate ancestors, his father was listed as a private slave named Sach'ōl, and the occupations of his paternal grandfather, great grandfather, and maternal grandfather were all recorded

10 *Kyōngsang-do Tansōng-hyōn Hojōkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansōng Prefecture, Kyōngsang Province), Pömmurya-myōn 14-ri, Ch'ōlsuch'on 4-t'ong 2-ho, 1789.

11 *Kyōngsang-do Tansōng-hyōn Hojōkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansōng Prefecture, Kyōngsang Province), Pömmurya-myōn 19-ri, Changch'ōnch'on 1-t'ong 1-ho, 1780.

12 *Kyōngsang-do Tansōng-hyōn Hojōkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansōng Prefecture, Kyōngsang Province), Pömmurya-myōn 1-ri, Kasulch'on 10-t'ong 4-ho, 1729.

as private slaves. The occupation of Sarip's mother was unlisted. In the next recording year, 1732, Sarip was not included in the census register.

Then, in the census register from 1735, Sarip was listed with a surname, both the family and *pon'gwan*, as the head of a household.¹⁴ The surname that Sarip acquired was Yi of Hapch'ŏn clan, and his occupation was changed from a private slave to *ŏyŏngbo* (御營保), a military rank. The occupations of Sarip's father, paternal grandfather, paternal great grandfather, and maternal grandfather were listed as *ŏyŏngbo*, *napt'ongjŏng* (納通政), *napt'ongjŏng*, and *yangin* respectively, which was completely different from the fact that they were all recorded as "private slaves" in 1729. His mother's occupation was still unlisted.

In the process of researching the way Sarip acquired the surname Yi of Hapch'ŏn, it was confirmed that he acquired the surname of his grandfather Yi Sibong. The 1729 census register contained the record of Yi Och'ŏl, the legitimate son to Sarip's grandfather Yi Sibong. Och'ŏl and Sarip's father, Sach'ŏl, were brothers, yet unlike Sach'ŏl, Och'ŏl was Yi Sibong's son by his legal wife. Therefore the record indicated that Och'ŏl inherited his father's surname, Yi of Hapch'ŏn clan.¹⁵

13 Given that the members of the surname-less class were people who did not have a full surnames (lacking either a family name or *pon'gwan*, or both), they can be classified into three categories: those who have family names but not *pon'gwan*; those who do not have family names but has *pon'gwan*; and those who neither have a family name nor *pon'gwan*. The people of the first and the second group seem to have been products of the process of transition from surname-less households to households with surnames. (Kim, Kyungran, "Chosŏn hugi musŏngch'ŏng-ŭi chonjae hyŏngt'ae-wa sŏnggwan hoekdŭk kyŏngno" (Existence forms of the class with no surnames and achievement routes of surname and origin in the late Joseon Dynasty), *Sahak yŏn'gu* (Journal of Historical Studies) 110, (2013).

14 *Kyŏngsang-do Tansŏng-hyŏn Hojŏkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province), Pŏmmurya-myŏn 1-ri, Kasulch'on 8-t'ong 1-ho, 1735.

15 *Kyŏngsang-do Tansŏng-hyŏn Hojŏkdaejang* (Census Registers of Tansŏng Prefecture, Kyŏngsang Province), Pŏmmurya-myŏn 1-ri, Kasulch'on 8-t'ong 3-ho,

③ Chosi, a private female slave who resided in Sōsang Township, Taegu District, did not have a surname, as only her *pon'gwan* was listed as Hyōnp'ung (玄風) in the census register from 1708. The records of her four ancestors were listed as *yangin*, government slave, government slave, and a station clerk (驛吏) for her father, paternal grandfather, paternal great grandfather, and maternal grandfather, respectively. Her mother's occupation was "private slave."¹⁶ However a decade later, Chosi was listed as the head of a household with both the family name and *pon'gwan* in the census register of 1717. Chosi acquired the surname Kwak of Hyōnp'ung clan, which was her father's surname. In the census register of 1717, conducted after she acquired her surname, her occupation was listed as "freed slave," and her immediate ancestors were listed as *yangin*, *t'ongjōngdaebu* (a senior-third civil court rank title), *kasōndaebu*, and station clerk.¹⁷ This means that in 1717, when Chosi, the head of a household, acquired a surname, the occupations of her paternal grandfather and great grandfather, which had been formerly listed as "government slaves," were changed to *t'ongjōngdaebu* (通政大夫) and *kasōndaebu* (嘉善大夫). Yet the occupations of her father and her maternal grandfather, who had been listed as a *yangin* and a station clerk in the census register of 1708, remained unaltered in the census register of 1717. This shows that when the heads of households acquired surnames, they also changed the occupations of their immediate ancestors in cases where they held occupations that were of a lower class than *yangin*, while those who held occupations of the *yangin* class or higher did not change much. The occupation of Chosi's mother had also been changed from "private slave" to "*yangin*" as well.

1729.

16 Kyōngsang-do Taegu-bu Hojōkdaejang (Census Registers of Taegu District, Kyōngsang Province), Sōsang-myōn Kwandōkjōng-ri, 5-t'ong 3-ho, 1708.

17 Kyōngsang-do Taegu-bu Hojōkdaejang (Census Registers of Taegu District, Kyōngsang Province), Sōsang-myōn Kwandōkjōng-ri, 5-t'ong 2-ho, 1717.

④ Sŭnggŏn, a *sunabyŏng* (巡牙兵, a military serviceman) private slave, who resided in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District in 1708 was the head of a surname-less household. Only his *pon'gwan* had been listed as Kyŏngsan. The occupations of his father, paternal grandfather, paternal great-grandfather, and maternal grandfather were listed as those of *yangin*—*poin* (保人, a yangin who did not serve in the military), military serviceman (正兵), military serviceman, and *poin*, respectively. His mother had been listed as a private slave.¹⁸ Fifteen years later, in 1723, Sŭnggŏn was listed with the surname Yang of Chunghwa clan. This differed from his original *pon'gwan*, which had been recorded as Kyŏngsan in 1708.¹⁹ In the process of acquiring a surname, Sŭnggŏn's *pon'gwan* was changed. Due to the changing of the *pon'gwan*, called *kaegwan* (改貫), Sŭnggŏn acquired a different *pon'gwan* from his father, whose surname was Yang of Kyŏngsan clan.

When Sŭnggŏn acquired a surname, his occupation was also changed to *palgun* (撥軍), one of the military ranks for *yangin*. The record of his father was also changed to military serviceman, while the records of his paternal grandfather and paternal great-grandfather were listed the same as 1708. The record on his maternal grandfather was not listed, and the occupation of his mother, who had been registered as “private slave” in the census register of 1708 was removed from the census register of 1723.

The four cases examined above are specific instances in which surname-less slaves acquired surnames. Among them, the first two were from Tansŏng Prefecture while the latter two were from Sŏsang Township of Taegu District. Despite the differences in the region of their residence, there were three characteristics that were common in all four cases.²⁰

18 Kyŏngsang-do Taegu-bu Hojŏkdaejang (Census Registers of Taegu District, Kyŏngsang Province), Sŏsang-myŏn Kwandŏkjŏng-ri, 1-t'ong 2-ho, 1708.

19 Kyŏngsang-do Taegu-bu Hojŏkdaejang (Census Registers of Taegu District, Kyŏngsang Province), Sŏsang-myŏn Sindongnae-ri, 2-t'ong 4-ho, 1723.

20 More cases that illustrate the phenomenon of surname acquisition by the surname-less class in Tansŏng Prefecture and Sŏsang Township in Taegu District

First, all four heads of the households changed their occupation when they acquired surnames. They had been listed as slaves when they belonged to the surname-less class, yet after they acquired surnames, their occupations were changed to that of *yangin*, such as a military serviceman.

Second, when the heads of households acquired surnames, the occupations of their immediate ancestors including their fathers were changed as well. Among the immediate ancestors, those who had been listed as slaves before the head of the household acquired a surname, were listed as having *yangin* occupations after the head of the household acquired a surname, but those whose occupation was that of a *yangin* did not change greatly.

Third, the occupation of the mother was changed in the process of surname acquisition as well. While the mother's occupation had been listed as "private slave" before acquiring a surname, it was removed completely or changed to "*yangin*" after acquiring a surname.

The three characteristics explained above shows that when a slave acquired a surname, not only his but also his immediate ancestors' occupations were changed to that of a *yangin*, and the occupation of his mother, a slave, was also changed to "*yangin*" or completely removed. The change in listing the occupations provides room for speculation about the social background that allowed slaves to acquire surnames. As mentioned above, the central government's slave policies in the early eighteenth century granted a large number of slaves to become *yangin*. After becoming *yangin*, they were allowed to list their surname, and they listed not only their own occupation but also the occupations of their

can be found in the following studies:

Kim, Kyungran, -----, "Chosŏn hugi musŏngch'ŭng-ŭi chonjae hyŏngt'ae-wa sŏnggwŏn hoekdŭk kyŏngno" (Existence forms of the class with no surnames and achievement routes of surname and origin in the late Joseon Dynasty). *Sahak yŏn'gu* (Journal of Historical Studies) 110. (2013).

Kim, Kyungran, "Chosŏn hugi nobi-ŭi pusŏng ch'atgi—yangch'in kyohonja sosaeng nobi-rŭl chungsimŭro—" (Finding Family Names of Slaves in Late Joseon Dynasty-Focused on slaves born between commoner and slave). *Sarim* 54. (2015).

immediate ancestors and mothers to those of a *yangin*. In other words, it seems that the heads of independent households or their wives recorded their own occupations as that of a *yangin* in census registers, and also changed the records about their immediate ancestors and mother to match their own and erase the traces that could hint at their former status as slaves.

Besides the three characteristics mentioned above, there was another point that is worthy of note. While most slaves acquired surnames that indicated blood relations, not all kept their father's surname. Korean surnames were fundamentally patrilineal, and therefore people kept their father's surname when verifiable.²¹ However, there were cases when slaves chose a different surname from their fathers even when they were able to verify the patrilineal relationship. The fourth case explored above represents one such case. When only Sŭnggŏn's *pon'gwan*, Kyŏngsan, had been listed in the census register of 1708, his father's surname was Yang of Kyŏngsan clan. Yet, when Sŭnggŏn acquired a full surname in 1723, he changed his *pon'gwan* from Kyŏngsan to Chunghwa, and as a result, his surname was listed in the census register as Yang of Chunghwa clan rather than Yang of Kyŏngsan clan. As seen in this case, the act of changing *pon'gwan* occurred rather frequently in the process of surname acquisition by those who did not have surnames.²²

21 Kim, Kyungran, *Ibid.*

22 *Kaegwan* refers to the act of changing of the *pon'gwan* while keeping the family name. After the sixteenth century, a consciousness of lineage began to build up in Chosŏn society, and those bearing surnames of low-class origin, who did not have renowned or prominent ancestors, began to change their *pon'gwan*. As a result, an extensive merging of traditional surnames took place. *Kaegwan* occurred continuously after early Chosŏn and even after the first half of the eighteenth century among people who have already acquired surnames in the process of changing their surnames. Unlike the early Chosŏn dynasty, when *yangban* usually changed their *pon'gwan* for a more prominent one, people of the middle and low classes changed their *pon'gwan* in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty. It is understood that the members of the middle and low classes seemed to opt for changing their surnames to a prominent one in the regions where they resided, as

The process of surname acquisition was difficult to verify for the most part through census registers. As explained above, the majority of the surname-less class was slaves. Records about slaves are relatively sparse compared to other occupations, and there were far more slaves whose patrilineage could not be accounted for. For many heads of surname-less households, records about their parents and immediate ancestors simply stated “Unknown,” or their parents and immediate ancestors were all slaves who could not have surnames. As a result, it seems that there would have been a lot of slaves who could not choose a surname of their blood relations. Instead of creating a new surname, these slaves seem to have had a strong tendency to acquire existing surnames of socially powerful families, and this tendency was closely related to the formation of illustrious surnames in Korea.

Conclusion

As explained in this paper, significant changes in the Korean surname system occurred in the late Chosŏn dynasty, which is closely related to the surname system in modern Korea. Only about 300 years ago, in the late seventeenth century, about half of Chosŏn’s population made up the surname-less class. Through the eighteenth century, the members of the surname-less class gradually acquired surnames, and as a result, most of the Chosŏn population had surnames in the early nineteenth century.

This transformation was a general trend that occurred in Tansŏng Prefecture as well as in Sŏsang Township of Taegu District.

The sudden increase in the number of people who acquired surnames during the eighteenth century was directly related to the state’s slave

people tended to avoid those with surnames of low-class origin. (Kim, Kyungran, “18 segi Kyŏngsang-do Tansŏng-hyŏn-ŭi kaegwan silt’ae-wa t’ŭkjing” (The Real Condition of the Trend for Changing Family Clan & its Characteristic at Danseong-hyeon, Gyeongsang-do in the 18th Century). *Sarim* 46. (2013).

policies. The majority of the surname-less class was slaves, and it seems that they became *yangin* as a result of the government's slave policies in the eighteenth century. Chosŏn's policies on slaves in the eighteenth century were fundamentally related to procuring sufficient manpower for mandatory public service. After two major wars, the Japanese invasion of Korea in the sixteenth century and the Second Manchu invasion of Korea in the seventeenth century, the Chosŏn government faced difficulties in procuring manpower for public service, and increasing the number of *yangin* who could partake in public service was one of the major government tasks at the time. As a result, a series of slave policies was instituted to procure sufficient manpower for mandatory public service.

The regulation which determined one's status based on the hereditary principle from early Chosŏn that was stipulated in *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* resulted in the increase of slaves and a decrease of manpower for public service. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the government began to seek out measures to make slaves who were born to a *yangin* mother into *yangin*. After a number of controversies, the matrilineal succession law was instituted in the seventh year in Yŏngjo's reign (1731). The basis of slave policies around the time the matrilineal law was instituted in the early eighteenth century allowed a large number of slaves to become *yangin*. Moreover, the policies on state-owned slaves who belonged to the central and local governments in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty accelerated the process of slaves becoming *yangin*. Policies were implemented to lighten the "tribute" levy for slaves, and in the 50th year of King Yŏngjo's reign, a policy was instituted to reduce the tribute levy of a male slave to one roll of fabric, the same as that of a *yangin* who did not partake in mandatory public service, and exempted female slaves from paying the tribute levy completely. As a result, state-owned slaves and *yangin* were required to pay the same amount of tribute levy, and the central government no longer had to distinguish *yangin* from slaves. Under these circumstances, the government and palace slave system was eradicated in 1801. The series of slave policies that were implemented around the eighteenth century to procure the manpower for public service

resulted in allowing a large number of slaves to become *yangin*, and set the scene for a sudden increase in surname acquisition by the surname-less class.

An examination of the process through which slaves acquired surnames shows several interesting facts. At the point a slave acquired a surname, not only his occupation, but also the occupation of his immediate ancestors were changed to those of a *yangin*, and the record about his mother who was a slave was either removed or changed to *yangin* as well. In other words, slaves who became *yangin* were able to list their names in the census register, and when they did so, they changed the records about their immediate ancestors and their mothers to match their own. It seems that the slaves who became *yangin* changed the records about their immediate ancestors and their mothers to match their own so that they could erase any trace of their past as slaves on census registers. As a result, the sudden increase in surname acquisition by the surname-less class in the eighteenth century can be understood as a phenomenon that resulted from the government's policies to procure sufficient manpower for public service and the slaves' intention to fully become *yangin*.

In sum, many Koreans acquired surnames in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty, and the current form of surnames seems to have been formed during this time, as numerous people went through the process of adopting a family name and changing their *pon'gwan*. However, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the change in the surname system in the latter half of Chosŏn and its relationship with the modern surname system, it would be important to explore the kind of surnames the former slaves newly acquired, and the kind of results that were brought on by changing the *pon'gwan*, in addition to the surname acquisition phenomenon that was explained in this paper. These are questions that need to be answered after further research.

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<Abstract>

A Study on the Transformation of the Surname System in Late Chosŏn

- The Phenomenon of Surname Acquisition by the Name-less Class -

Kim Kyungran

Significant changes occurred in the late Chosŏn (Joseon) dynasty in terms of the formation of the Korean surname system we know today. The most noteworthy change of the surname system during this time was a drastic increase in the number of people who had newly acquired surnames. It is generally known that there was quite a large population of the “surname-less class (無姓層)” until the late Chosŏn dynasty. Who were these people who made up the surname-less class? What kind of social background allowed the people of the surname-less class to acquire surnames? The answers to these questions are related to the question of how all Koreans came to have their surnames today. This study attempts to explore this phenomenon of surname acquisition by the surname-less class and the social background which allowed this phenomenon to take place. The members of the surname-less class numbered about half of the population of Chosŏn only about 300 years ago in the late seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century, people who belonged to the surname-less class quickly began to acquire surnames, and as a result, most of the population of Chŏson had surnames by the first half of the nineteenth century.

The rapid decline in the surname-less class population was directly related to the government’s policy on slaves (*nobi*). It can be understood as a result of the government’s policy to secure sufficient manpower for public service and the slaves’ intention to erase any trace of their former status after becoming *yangin*.

Keywords: surname, surname-less class, people with surnames, the process of surname acquisition, slave, *yangin* (commoner), occupations

〈국문초록〉

조선후기 姓貫體制 變動에 대한 연구 - 無姓層의 有姓化 현상을 중심으로 -

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조선후기는 현대 한국인의 성관체제의 형성과 관련하여 매우 의미있는 변화가 이루어졌던 시기였다. 이 시기 성관체제의 가장 주목할 만한 변화상은 급격한 有姓化 현상이 나타나 많은 無姓層이 새롭게 성관을 갖게 된 것이다. 즉, 조선후기에 이르기까지 아직 성관을 갖지 못한 많은 無姓層이 존재하고 있었던 것으로 알려져 있다. 이들 무성층은 어떤 존재였으며, 성관을 갖게 된 사회적 배경은 무엇이었는지에 대한 해명은 현재 모든 한국인이 어떤 경로를 통해 성관을 갖게 되었는가에 대한 문제와 직결된 것이다. 따라서 이 글은 조선후기의 유성화 현상과 그러한 현상이 나타난 사회적 배경을 구명하고 한 것이다. 그 결과 다음과 같은 사실들을 확인할 수 있었다. 불과 300여년 전인 17세기 후반 무렵 조선의 무성층은 전 인구의 절반 가량을 점하고 있었다. 18세기를 경과하면서 무성층은 빠르게 성관을 가진 유성층으로 변화해 갔고, 그 결과 19세기 전반 무렵에는 인구의 대다수가 성관을 갖게 되었다. 18세기의 급격한 유성화는 당시 국가의 노비정책에서 그 직접적 원인을 찾을 수 있다. 즉 양역자원 확보를 위한 국가의 정책과 완전한 양인화를 꾀한 노비들의 의도가 맞물려 나타난 현상으로 이해된다.

주제어: 성관(姓貫), 무성층(無姓層), 유성층(有姓層), 유성화(有姓化), 노비, 양인, 직역

