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Evaluating structural change in Korea from the perspective of family farm

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Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate the structural changes of family farms in Korea. In an attempt to reach this evaluation, data from the Agricultural Census on production behaviors of family farms was examined by focusing on how they manage to procure input resources and how they run their operations. In addition, several other issues were addressed, such as the family system, the governance of rural communities, industrialization processes, family cycles and the tax system on farmers as a basic transcation enviornment that may affect farmers' management decisions; including the form of business enterprises they undertake.

In Korea, farmlands are not owned by particular farmers, nor are they owned over a long period of time through inheritance. There are virtually no communal constraints on the transactions of leased farmlands. Furthermore, even at the present time, Korean farmers have access to a broader labor market far beyond their community boundaries when in need of additional labor or custom farm services. Under these circumstances, new farmers continually enter and exit farming. If there is a mechanism in the replacement of farmers based on the family cycle where the incoming farmers replace the outgoing ones, the conclusion is that, unless appropriate policy measures are implemented, large-scale farmers will not maintain or expand their size further and that small-scale family farmers will continue to be in the majority.

Key words: Korea, family farm, growth path, structural changes, transcation environment, custom work

Introduction

One of the main characteristics of the agricultural sector in Korea is that it's hard to enlarge farm size, or produce the necessary economies of scale under the present system of small-scale farmers maintaining large proportions of farms and farmland. Therefore, policy makers have been looking into the changes needed to produce the kind of structural modifications needed to provide the kind of high productivity needed to match the borderless competition of the global food market. As a food importing country, it is a serious problem for Korea because of the need to secure the global competitiveness of its domestic agriculture through a change of the present system.

For the reasons mentioned above, over the past few decades, a considerable number of studies have been conducted on seeking suitable ways of agrarian structural reform in Korea. A long-standing issue in those studies can be found in the productivity gap between small-scale farms and large- scale farms, and the limits of family farming as a business enterprise. Generally, there are two main concerns; one is that the economies of scale play a prominent role in helping enlarge the size of large-scale farms rather than small-scale farms. The other concern is that there is a worry that the family farm system might disrupt the emergence of large farms in their pursuit of greater efficiencies and management capabilities as they try to match modern firm business models.

This paper discusses the later issues related to the evaluation of agrarian structural changes taking into account the family system and farm management environment in Korea. Although the former issues have to be taken into consideration; they are not of major concern to this study.

Theoretical Framework

Traditional peasant economics and studies of business enterprises depict a scenario where peasants evolve, first into fam-

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ily farms and subsequently into modern firm as the peasant society becomes fully integrated into modern market economies as highly productive and efficiently managed farmers expand their scale (Frank Ellis (1993), Yoshida, K.(1979), Urabe, T.(1976)). The modern firm mentioned above-as opposed to the family farm-employ permanent workers/staff and divide ownership and management since they are based on capital combination rather than personal relationships.

The typical growth path of a traditional family farm is not applicable to Korea because it does not explain why the transition in farm business enterprise and its size is not progressing in Korea. Furthermore, the large-sized farms tend to use a temporary workforce or custom farming to operate their farmlands; this appears to place them as underdogs in the shift to modern firm.

New Institutional Economics states that a farmer decides whether or not to choose the enterprise form as an internal organization based on the surrounding business environment (Course, R. H.(1937), Williamson, O. E.(1975)) . In this paper, the author presents-through inductive reasoning-that there are no effective elements that induce farms to shift from the family farm paradigm to a modern firm because Korea has a traditional procurement system through which management resources and factors of production are available from large markets.

New Institutional Economics counts not only legal institutions, but also habits, conventions and routines as important institutional factors that affect transactions (Richard, N., Langlois and Paul L. Robertson(1995)). In the case of farmland transactions, these factors may be inherited practices under the family system or communal constraints in rural society. The market environment this paper assumes is not be effected if a farmland is inherited over generations as a family asset instead of being put on the market and if the governance in a rural community tacitly prohibits the transfer of farmland through personal transactions when the ownership and the right of use belong to different individuals. Other factors-the process of industrialization in Korea and agricultural tax system-is also discussed as important institutional factors affecting farmers' behavior and their choice of whether or not to choose the organizational form of modern firm.

Features of the family farming system

Change of farm size

The farm size per farm in Korea exceeded one hectare in the 1980s and reached 1.47ha in 2010. The rise in the sales and leasing on farmlands pushed up the percentage of farms over 3ha from 0.3% in 1960 to 8.3% in 2010. However, even in 2010, 65.3% of all farms are less than one hectare and 40.6% are below 0.5ha. Nonetheless, the percentage of farms between one and two hectares dropped from approximately 30% in 1990 to 19.7% in 2010. Some interpret the fall as proof of the steady progress of "bipolar diffusion with a turning point at 1.5ha." (Kim, J (2012)) Yet, as of 2010, only 3.4% (39,590) of all farms were over five hectares with 0.8% (9,385) over 10 hectares. This indicates that the expansion of farm size is slow to progress and large-scale farms are still very few in number.

Distribution of farmland

Table 1 shows the state of farmland ownership for paddy field and upland field by farmland size. The following are the salient characteristics gleaned from it.

Firstly, in every classified farm size, very high percentages of farmers have both paddies and upland. This indicates that Korean farmers are seeking economies of scope that come from growing a multiple of different crops rather than relying solely on rice; the staple food of Korea.

Secondly, 61.2% of tenanted land is distributed to farms of less than 3ha and only 16.3% is managed as farms over 10ha. This means that Korean farmers are competing for rented farmland and that in such a competitive environment, small-scale farmers have an advantage over large-scale ones.

Thirdly, many tenant farmers do not own farmland at all. They are "pure tenants" representing 31.8% of rice paddies and 46.9% of the upland farms in tenancy farms. Sixty-five point six percent (65.6%) of rented rice farms and 62.4% of the upland rented farms with a holding of less than 50ha are pure tenants. Even among farms over 50ha, 22.2% of rented rice farms and 38.4% of upland rented farms contains no land that is owned.

Employment of farmworkers

Table 2 shows the percentages of farms that hire workers for different periods of employment. It shows that 20.5% of farms employed temporary workers for less than one month, 5.0% for one to three months, 1.1% for three to six months and 1.1% for over six months. Regardless of farm size, 20% to 30% of farms hire workers for periods shorter than one month during the busy farming season. It is noteworthy that some very large-scale farms (dozens of hectares) do not hire

Table 1 Distribution of Farmers and Farmland by farm size

	less than 0.5ha	0.5~1ha	1~3ha	over 3ha	(over 10ha)	(over 50ha)	Total (ha or households)	
Distribution of farms and farmland (%)								
farm householdes	40.6	24.7	26.4	8.3	0.8	0.0(239)[a]	100.0	1,163,629
farmland								
Paddy field	12.6	18.1	31.5	37.8	10.7	1.6	100.0	839,996
Up land field	23.7	20.8	29.0	26.5	7.8	1.5	100.0	609,364
Holding of farmland(%)								
Paddy only	23.1	16.6	10.1	11.2	15.1	17.3	17.1	198,723
Paddy-cum-upland	24.4	59.4	74.2	73.9	69.8	53.4	50.3	585,071
Upland only	52.5	24.2	15.7	14.9	15.1	29.2	32.6	379,835
Percentage of tenancy farms(%)								
Paddy fields								
by farm size	20.9	38.5	62.4	83.2	88	79.7	37.9	297,119
Pure tenancy in tenancy	65.6	29.7	15.6	11.5	9.2	22.0	31.8	94,359
Upland fields								
by farm size	23.2	38.4	51.6	63.9	73.0	74.1	30.2	291,090
Pure tenancy in tenancy	62.4	35.2	23	28.8	31.0	38.4	46.9	136,388
Distribution of tenanted land (%)								
Paddy field	5.5	11.1	29.7	53.6	16.3	2.2	40.3	338,298
Upland field	14.3	16.3	28.5	40.9	14.7	3.0	33.2	202,103

Source: 2010 Census of Agriculture in Korea
Note: The real number of farms over 50ha

Table 2 Farm households number by period of employment (%)

	Period of employment (%)			
	less than 1 month	1~3 month	3~6 month	over 6 month
less than 0.5ha	14.9	1.8	0.4	0.5
0.5~1ha	22.7	4.2	0.9	0.9
1~3ha	25.4	7.9	1.5	1.4
over 3ha	26.3	14.5	3.2	3.0
(over 10ha)	28.2	22.0	6.5	7.2
(over 50ha)	22.7	21.7	14.1	21.3
Total	20.5	5.0	1.1	1.1
(householders)	239,090	58,586	12,267	122,356

Source: 2010 Census of Agriculture in Korea.

any workers and that very few farms hire workers for six months or longer. These large-scale farms are probably using farm labor contracts (Chang, M & Lee, J.(2011)). It is unclear how this workforce is counted on the census.

Custom farm work

Although less than 20% of Korean farmers own farm machinery, important rice farming works are mechanized on nearly 100% of the farmlands. This due to the fact that many farms do not own farm machinery, but instead use custom farm works. The percentages of farmers who purchase custom farm works in Korea (2010) show that 62.8% of tilling, 65.9% of rice transplanting and 83.9% of harvesting are done through custom farm works. In each area of work, the percentage of farmers who use custom farm works has been increasing steadily compared to 10 years ago (1990).

The percentages of farmers who use custom farm works for rice harvesting are approximately 90% of farms smaller than one hectare, 75.1% of farms between one and three hectares, 37.7% of farms over 3ha, 26.0% of farms over 5ha and 19.1% of farms over 10ha. Even among farms over 50ha, 29.1% do not have a combine harvester and 33.8% purchase custom farm services for rice harvesting (see Table 3).

On the other hand, Korea's agricultural census shows that the farmers who work as custom farm operators represent only three percent of all farmers that own a rice paddy. The shares of custom farm operators by farm size show that many farms less than 3ha work as custom farm operators.

Here the total of farmlands worked on by custom farming (496,662ha) wholly and the 50% of the total of the

Table 3 Farm householder Numbers related to Custom Farming

	Farm households having rice harvester (%)	Percentage of farm households by farm size		
		Utilizing custom farm work to rice harvest	Providing custom farm services[a]	
			by farm size	of total
less than 0.5ha	2.3	90.4	0.6	9.7
0.5～1ha	6.4	87.7	1.6	14.2
1～3ha	19.4	75.1	4.9	32.9
over 3ha	57.9	37.7	17	37.1
(over 10ha)	79.8	19.1	25.1	5.4
(over 50ha)	70.9	33.8	21.6	0.1
Total	10.8	83.2	3.0	
(households)	(84,588)	(652,132)	(23,331)	

Source: 2010 Census of Agriculture in Korea.
Note: The percentage of farmers who answered that they provide custom farm services that includes rice harvesting.

Table 4 Farm household numbers: careers in census years

Census year	2000		2005		2010	
Career	Numbers of Farm households ('000)	%	Numbers of Farm households ('000)	%	Numbers of Farm households ('000)	%
less than 5years	55.1	4.0	49.8	3.9	59.9	5.1
5～9	62.8	4.5	67.0	5.3	77.3	6.6
10～14	81.9	5.9	79.0	6.2	91.9	7.8
15～19	68.4	4.9	48.8	3.8	49.0	4.2
20～24	152.9	11.1	113.3	8.9	98.1	8.3
25～29	81.1	5.9	67.1	5.3	46.8	4.0
over 30years	881.2	63.7	847.9	66.6	754.3	64.1
Total	1383.5	100.0	1272.9	100.0	1177.2	100.0

Source: 2010 Census of Agriculture in Korea.

Table 5 Farm household numbers: reasons for entering the farm business

By resasons	Careers					Total	%
	1st year	2nd year	3th year	4th year	5th year		
Inhertied from a parent	1,518	1,861	3,015	1,892	3,032	11,318	13.9
Enter into farm business	5,411	6,186	9,367	6,435	9,155	36,554	45.0
from other occupation Enter into farm business as a part-time farmer	3,403	3,968	6,774	4,612	7,660	26,417	32.5
Others (branch family etc.)	1,082	1,181	1,908	1,252	1,600	7,023	8.6
Total	11,414	13,196	21,064	14,191	21,447	81,312	100.0

Source: 2010 Census of Agriculture in Korea.

farmlands worked on by custom farming (25,438ha) partially were be added and regarded as farms demanding custom rice harvesting. Then, the sum was divided by the total number of farmers that worked as custom farm operators (23,331). As a result, if every custom operator provides 22ha as custom farm services, all the demand of custom rice harvesting would be covered. According to the results of many related case studies, there are custom farm operators across wide areas that utilize contracts for farmlands between 20ha and 100ha (Yun, S.(1990)). Thus, there is little possibility that the custom farming system would not function due to a lack of custom farm operators.

Replication of family farms

The percentage of farms having successors dropped from 16.4% in 1990 to 3.5% in 2010. The figure is often referred to in the discussion of the crisis of family farms. However, Table 4 shows that, at present (2010), 11.7% of all farm

operators began farming 10 years ago or later. The percentage has stayed a little below 10% since the 2000 Census. This figure has been on a gradual rise recently. Table 5 lists the responses to the question 'What made you choose farming as a profession?' This question was asked to farmers who have been in the business for less than five years. Thirteen point nine percent say they had inherited their farm business from a parent. Forty-five point zero percent switched careers, while 32.5% began farming as a part time enterprise. Eight point six percent mentioned other reasons (such as establishing a branch family). In Korea, the replication of farmers relies not only on hereditary succession, but also on new entries from non-farming households.

Institutional factors effect to famer's behavior

In order to clarify the causal relationships among the features mentioned above, several questions need to be answered.

The first question is how and why the farmlands were put on the market as leased lands? Under the family system, farmlands and farm businesses are supposed to be inherited by a farmer's offspring. In addition, the post-war land reform distributed land ownerships widely and evenly. The second question asks whether new entrants including those from non-farming households encounter constraints when they acquire operational resources such as farmlands and factors of production. The third question is: why are even large-scale farmers content with purchasing factors of production from the market despite the fact that they have assets and an internal labor market to rely on? Or, put differently, do these factors prompt them to choose an enterprise form as an internal organization.

To answer these questions, this paper examines issues such as the family system, governance of rural communities, industrialization processes, family cycles and the tax system on farmers as important institutional elements that may affect farmers' management decisions.

Inheritance and succession within the family system

Under Korea's family system, family property-farmland in particular-has been inherited by all the sons in a family, albeit unevenly. Since ancient times, there have been very few cases in which the family line, family property and family businesses are combined and inherited (Gwang-Gyu Lee(1992)). The family lineage is handed down to an individual-the eldest son in particular-in a direct line, but this only gives him the right to represent the family, bestows upon him the status of ' head of the family' and gives him authority rights. Korea's family farm operations are similar to those of the West as the farm is not inherited by offspring. It is the heir that makes the decision on whether or not to undertake the farm operation.

The convention of farmland inheritance and succession of a farm operation in Korea is one reason why farmland markets are maintained in a sustainable way where farmlands change hands from those who have inherited farmland, but have no intention to pass down the farm operation to those who are in need of farmland.

Governance on rural community

Korea has a rural community system called "maeul" only a small number of studies have been conducted on the organization and governance structure of "maeul". These studies highlight the characteristics of Korean society: "blood relation is the most fundamental element of any community" (Kuramochi, K.(1994)) ; there is no formal organization based on territorial connection (Katou, K(1993)); the community is based on personal relationships; and therefore, individuals and households are able to move across different regions freely (Akitu, M.(1998)).

There are few communal lands owned by "maeul" in rural Korea, so "maeul" is hardly a constraint in land transfer. Incidentally, lease contracts of farmlands are not confined within a certain geographical area-"maeul"-rather, they are conducted across regional boundaries, making it free for anyone to enter or exit farming.

Kato says there is no "social stratum on farm size" inside Korea's "maeul" that shows the family's status in the "maeul". He has drawn this conclusion from the fact that anyone can lease farmland easily if they so desire. This means that in the context of the entry barrier to agriculture, anyone can begin farming because there is no constraint to obtaining farmland.

Farm labor procurements

In rural Korea, there is a kind of social convention in the farming sector in that farmers in the community cooperate with each other in the busy farming season. The practice is a form of reciprocal transaction typical of the non-commercial exchange seen in peasant society. However, it is reported that both before and after the war, the reliance on communal collaboration in farming was relatively low in the closed rural communities, and that many farmers used migrant customized farm

operators or seasonal farm workers moving across the country (Jeong, Y. (1979), Oh, M.(1983), Yun, S.(1990)). Even at the present time, Korean farmers have access to a broader labor market far beyond the community boundary when in need of additional labor or customized farm services.

Industrialization processes

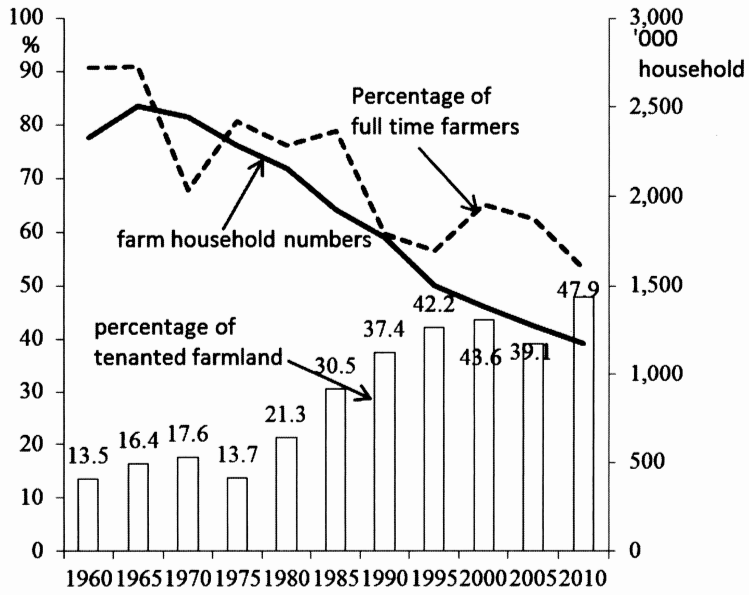
Migration of the rural population in Korea exhibits a distinct feature: it is not only a single member of a household; rather, it is the whole household that leaves a rural community (Park, J.(1989)). Part of the reason for this phenomenon is the country's policy on industrial location. The rural communities outside the designated industrial locations have few opportunities to secure another income source besides farming. Thus, the migration of rural populations to urban and industrialized areas was, in many cases, a household-wide migration (Taniura, T.(1995), Aris Chowdbury and Iyanatul Islam (1993)). As increasingly greater numbers of farming households left the rural area while they retained the ownership of their farmlands, it was a natural development that some of them became leased farmlands. For the farmers who stayed and had no source of income other than farming, there were very few options available to them to maintain and increase their livelihood, but to lease the farmlands left by the farmers who had abandoned farming and left for urban areas (Jeong, G.(1993)). Thus, the economic development based on the industrial location strategy that was unique to Korea, and the consequent labor migration it caused gave rise to the emergence of great numbers of absentee owners and farmers who needed to rent farmlands from them.

Figure 1 shows the changes in the number of farmers, the percentage of fulltime farmers and the percentage of leased farmlands between the 1960s and 2010. While the percentage of fulltime farmers has remained at high levels, the farmlands left unoccupied by farmers who abandoned farming are distributed as leased farmlands among fulltime farmers and the percentage of leased farmland has been rising every year.

Family life cycles and investment behavior

Jeong (Jeong, G.(1993)) and Kim (Kim, J (2012)) used the individual census data to prove that there is a strong correlation between farm size/farm equipment ownership and a farmer's age/household size. The farm size and mechanization rate peak out when the farmer is in his 40s and 50s and remains low among younger or older farmers. It indicates that Chayano v's family cycle (Chayanov(1961)) is a constraint on the expansion of Korean farmers' scale of operation.

If the family cycle has a strong influence over the decision making on capital investment in farm equipment and other factors, the farm as an enterprise will not be sustained over generations. As the farmer grows older, the management resources he acquired and the business he has been in will be transferred to other farmers. The process repeats itself over time.



Source: Report on the Farm Household Economy Survey in Korea (1960-2010)

Figure 1 Changes on farm households Numbers and Tenanted farmland (1960~2010)

Tax on agricultural sector

The Korean government abolished the tax on income from farming in 2009. Even before that, there was virtually no tax imposed on the income earned from growing crops. Besides, farmers are eligible for 50% or more exemption on the tax on capital gain from the transfer of self-owned farmland, tax on the acquisition of farmland or farm equipment/facilities, and value-added tax (Kim, M. and Kim, S.(2011)). Agricultural cooperatives are also eligible for the same preferential tax treatment. Thus, farmers do not have to keep a record for the balance of their tax return or do the account processing that is required to calculate the tax since they do not have to pay income tax. It is an important factor that hampers the farmer in any endeavor to streamline and improve management using calculative control so that he manages his operation more like a modern company. Therefore, under the present tax system, farmers will probably not become business enterprises or corporations in the way modern firms are run because they do not have to reduce tax payment or increase management efficiency to save on tax payments.

Conclusion and Discussions

In general, the shift of the family farm to the model of a modern firm progresses in parallel with the change that occurs in the management structure of large-scale tenant farmers as they expand their scale. The process starts with the landed farmer who needs more than a family labor force. As more leased land is added and the scale of operation grows, family labor does not meet the demands of expansion, therefore, investment goes into farm equipment and external labor to make up the shortage. Out of this process, a modern firm based on a hierarchical model is derived to meet the high levels of management needs (Kanaoka, M. (2012)).

However, in Korea, relatively large numbers of farmers-even among large-scale ones- do not have in-house farm equipment or employed permanent workers. This explains how farmers may continue to rely on temporary workers or custom farming when they obtain additional land. One reason behind this is the unique transaction environment where farmland, labor and custom services are freely purchasable or available in the respective markets.

In Korea, farmlands are not owned by particular farmers or over a long period of time through inheritance. There are virtually no communal constraints on the transction of leased farmlands. Under the circumstances, new farmers enter and others exit from farming. If there is a mechanism of family farm's replication based on the family cycle where the incoming farmers replaces the outgoing ones, the conclusion is that, unless appropriate policy measures are implemented, large-scale farmers will not maintain or expand their scale further and that small-scale family farmers will continue to be in the majority.

This paper is not an experimental study on the farmers' procurement system for management resources and factors of production based on an econometrics model or different monographs on field surveys. Korean farmers neither invest actively in farmland and equipment, nor do they show any desire for change to modern farming models. Experimental studies need to be conducted in the future on factor prices and management performance to see whether Korean farmers' contractual transactions are a rational choice that ensures economic efficiency (like those advocated by Hayami, Y. & Otsuka, K.(1993)). Korea is not a developing country where the market economy system does not function properly in rural areas. However, the observations alluded to above and the analytical methods employed by traditional peasant economics may still be effective in explaining the economic behavior of small-scale farmers who represent a dominant proportion of all farmers who rely on farming for their livelihood.

In conclusion, I would like to pose a question. Many Korean farmers rely on market exchange although it may not be a rational choice. This being the case, do the relatively high prices of agricultural products in Korea and the country's tax system that imposes no tax obligation on farmers form the basis of their raison d'être?

The fact that the prices of agricultural products are high enough to make even small-scale farming profitable with many farmers ignoring the calculative control of farm operation management indicates that farmers may continue with economically inefficient transactions as long as they are able to pay the factor price.

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家族農業経営を通してみる韓国農業の構造変化

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要　約

本研究は，韓国の家族農業経営を通して，韓国農業の構造変化を展望したものである。分析に当たっては，一つに，農業センサスにより，経営資源および生産手段の所有と利用をめぐって，韓国の家族農業経営は，企業組織による内部取引より市場取引を選好していることを確認した。二つに，社会的慣習もしくは取引環境としての家族制度，農村コミュニティのガバナンス構図，産業化のプロセス，租税制度は，農業への参入，経営資源や生産手段の市場取引を妨げる要因ではないことを論証した。

このような分析により，農業への参入制限がなく，かつ経営資源や生産手段を各々の市場から自由に調達できる取引環境の下では，企業的経営による農地の蓄積や経営管理の高度化は進まず，零細農家が大部分を占める農業構造に大きな変化は期待できないという結論を導いた。

キーワード：韓国，家族農業経営，構造変化，取引環境，農作業受委託

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