

LAND REFORM IN KOREA, 1950

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Drawing on existing documents and statistical data, this paper examines the background, process and results of a land reform undertaken in South Korea after World War II. The reform aimed (1) to achieve socio-economic equity especially in rural communities by abolishing the semi-feudalistic land tenure system, and (2) to create new incentives for higher agricultural productivity by transferring the land ownership from absentee-landlords to tenant-farmers. Basically a form of onerous contract, with the state as the mediator, was adopted as a means to accomplish the reform. In 1950, a total of 577 thousand chungbo of land was distributed to more than 1.6 million farmers. This represented only about 70 percent of the estimated goal and this inefficient performance was due mainly to certain loopholes contained in the Land Reform Act. Moreover, the reform could not be completed as originally scheduled, owing to various difficulties coupled with the Korean War which broke out immediately after the land redistribution. Nevertheless, the land reform did abolish the age long land tenure system dominated by the parasitic absentee landlords and did improve prospects for the modernization of agriculture in Korea.

I. INTRODUCTION

In all agricultural societies status-role designations are closely related to variations in the rights to use and control land. Various social ranks existed in the traditional Korean society were closely associated with the land tenure system of those days. Thus, the change in land tenure in contemporary Korea is of particular interest to social scientists. This paper examines the background, process, and results of a land reform which was tardily carried out in Korea after World War II.

It has been generally recognized that one of the pressing national tasks in Korea after World War II was a land reform, since the land tenure system had been the major obstacle to any social and economic development until Korea's liberation from Japan. In the pre-reform land tenure system the landlords had private ownership of vast acreage of cultivated lands, let their lands to landless farmers, and collected a high rate of rent from them. In fact, the landlords constituted a small minority of people but they owned the major part of arable land and could control a majority of farmers. In 1930, for instance, 77.5 percent of the total households in Korea were tenant-farmers or part tenants (owner/tenant-farmers), only 3.6 percent were landlords, and the rest included owner-farmers and a small percentage of "fire-field tillers." (See Table 2) In that year the landlords actually owned two-thirds of the total paddy-fields and nearly one-half of the total dry-fields.

There were two kinds of landlords: the absentee-landlord and farmer-landlord. However, it should be noted that most of the Korean landlords were parasitic absentee-landlords who never undertook operation of farm at all but simply leased out all of their lands to landless farmers and collected a high rate of rent from them. The average rate of tenant rent was between 55-60 percent of the gross products and its form of payment was mostly share-cropping. A strange fact was that, in spite of the development of modern capitalistic

economic organization in urban area and its impact on rural agricultural sectors, the rate of rent had been gradually increasing during the colonial period, comparing with that of the Yi-dynasty land tenancy, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Increase in Rate of Tenant Rent

Periods	Chongjo*	Tajo**	Chipjo***
Yi dynasty period(early 19c)	33-50%	50%	33-50%
1920	40-50%	50%	39-50%
1930	50-60%	50-55%	50-55%

Source: *Yong-Ha Shin, Land Tenure System in Korea, 1910-1945, Social Science Journal, 1973.*
UNESCO/Korea

* Fixed amount of rent was collected regardless of yearly harvest.

** Share-cropping at a fixed rate, hence the amount fluctuated depending on yearly harvest.

*** The rent was negotiated yearly.

The rent was collected in two ways: produce-rent and money-rent. In 1930, for example, 93.9 percent of tenant rent for paddy fields were collected in kind and only 6.1 percent in money. For dry fields, the proportion of produce-rent was 92.1 percent against money-rent of only 7.9 percent.

Korean tenant-farmers were burdened not only with tenant rent, but also with land-tax and various kinds of public and landlord's private imposts. In 1930, for example 48 percent of the total tenant-farmers were charged with land-tax which was supposed to be charged to landlords.

This kind of land tenure system had greatly hindered the increase in agricultural production and productivity, since the increased share of production was returned only to the absentee-landlords and there never existed any incentives for tenant-farmers to increase their investment in work and input supply. The land tenure system in this period contributed only to Japanese colonialists who faithfully delivered agriculture products from Korea to Japan to support her industrilization. For such tenancy of high rate of rent functioned as the most efficient and convenient apparatus to collect surplus food (rice and other grains) through landlords, suppressing the food consumption of Korean farmers to a very low subsistence level.

Moreover, the land tenure system had intensified the chronic poverty of Korean peasants. Tenant-farmers and part tenants were always deprived and poverty-stricken. Even owner-farmers were not in a better condition. Most owner-farmers were also very poor, since they were small independent farmers who could not afford expensive new farming practices which were forced to be adopted under the Japanese colonial agricultural policy. Many small independent farmers were actually compelled to sell their lands to pay off their debts and finally fell into the position of tenant-farmers.

All the burdens levied on peasants by land tenancy had made Korean farmers extremely poor. According to the statistics of Government-General of Korea, 68.1 percent of tenants were indigent farmers who usually suffered from hunger in the spring season in 1930. Similarly, 37.5 percent of part tenants and 18.4 percent of owner-farmers were also indigent.

During the Japanese colonial period, the proportion of independent farmers declined considerably and the rate of tenancy gradually increased. At the end of Yi-dynasty period, a sizable number of independent owner-cultivators had existed as a middle class in rural communities although a slow decline had begun in the later Yi-dynasty period. In the colonial period, however, the fall of owner-farmers to tenant-farmers had become a nation-wide tendency as the encroachment and buying of land had been accelerated by Japanese and Korean landlords. As shown in Table 2, the proportion of owner-farmers had

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Farm Households by Types of Land Tenure, 1913-1942

Year	Landlords	Owner-Farmers	Owner-Tenant	Tenants	Agricultural Labourers	Fire-field Tillers
1913	3.1%	22.8%	32.4%	41.7%	—%	—%
1914	1.8	22.0	35.1	41.1	—	—
1915	1.5	21.7	40.8	36.0	—	—
1916	2.5	20.1	40.6	36.8	—	—
1917	2.8	19.6	40.2	37.4	—	—
1918	3.1	19.7	39.2	37.6	—	—
1919	3.4	19.7	39.2	37.6	—	—
1920	3.3	19.5	37.4	39.8	—	—
1921	3.6	19.6	36.6	40.2	—	—
1922	3.7	19.7	35.8	40.8	—	—
1923	3.7	19.5	36.2	41.6	—	—
1924	3.8	19.4	34.6	42.2	—	—
1925	3.8	19.9	33.2	43.2	—	—
1926	3.8	19.1	32.5	43.3	—	1.3
1927	3.8	18.7	32.7	43.8	—	1.0
1928	3.7	18.3	32.0	44.9	—	1.2
1929	3.7	18.0	31.5	45.6	—	1.2
1930	3.6	17.6	31.0	46.5	—	1.3
1931	3.6	17.0	29.6	47.4	—	1.4
1932	3.6	16.3	25.3	52.8	—	2.1
1932	—	18.4	24.9	51.8	2.9	2.0
1933	—	18.1	24.1	51.9	3.1	2.8
1934	—	18.0	24.0	51.9	3.4	2.7
1935	—	17.9	24.1	51.9	3.6	2.5
1936	—	17.9	24.1	51.8	3.8	2.4
1937	—	18.0	25.1	51.7	3.8	2.4
1938	—	18.1	23.9	51.9	3.8	2.3
1939	—	17.9	23.7	52.4	3.7	2.3
1940	—	18.0	23.3	53.0	3.3	2.2
1941	—	17.9	23.5	53.7	3.0	1.9
1942	—	17.4	23.9	53.8	3.1	1.8

* The statistical reporting system was changed in 1932.

Calculated from Government-General of Korea: *Chosen Sotokufu Tokei Nempo* (Statistical Year Book of Government-General of Korea), Seoul, 1923-1941, from Government-General of Korea: *Chosen Nogyo Tokeihyo* (Statistics of Korean Agriculture), Seoul, 1934-1941, and from Government-General of Korea: *Chosen no Nogyo* (Korean Agriculture), Seoul, 1931-1942.

fallen from 22.8 percent in 1913 to 16.3 percent in 1932. Since 1932 the Government-General of Korea had changed the form of statistics to cover up the rapid decline of owner-farmers. Absentee-landlords were omitted altogether from agricultural population statistics; farmer-landlords were combined with owner-farmers; and a new category of agricultural laborers was introduced. Even with the modified categorization, the rapid decline of the owner-farmers had continued with a drop from 18.4 percent in 1932 to 17.4 percent in 1942. The proportion of part tenants had also declined from 40.8 percent in 1915 to 23.3 percent in 1942. On the other hand, the proportion of pure tenant-farmers had markedly increased from 36.0 percent in 1925 to 53.8 percent in 1942. If we combine these tenant-farmers with part tenants, more than three-fourths (77.7%) of agricultural households were involved in tenure relations with absentee-landlords in 1942.

The land tenure system under the Japanese colonial rule was so cruel that Korean tenant-farmers offered stubborn resistance against the land tenure system and the Japanese

colonial rule over Korea. For instance, the number of cases of tenancy group-dispute had strikingly increased from 15 cases in 1920 to 31,799 cases in 1937. Most of the tenancy disputes, however, were not settled on the basis of reasonable bargain of both parties involved, but they were one-sidedly oppressed by the authorities of the Japanese Government-General of Korea who had always supported landlords. Japanese were so busy to facilitate the delivery of Korean foods to Japan, exploiting the efficient collection mechanism of agricultural products through the land tenancy. Therefore, in spite of the great discontent of Korean tenant-farmers and most of Korean people, the land tenure system could survive until the end of World War II with the strong support of Japanese colonial authorities. Under such circumstances, a land reform was urgently called for as soon as the Japanese colonial rule over Korea was collapsed.

II. PREPARATION OF LAND REFORM

1) Attempt of First Land Reform

When Korea was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the demand of tenant-farmers for a land reform could not be overlooked, otherwise a violent revolt was imminent. And, it was quite certain that universal suffrage was to be given to the farmers for the first time in Korean history. Thus, a land reform was imperative to attain national unity by abolishing such an anachronistic semi-feudal land tenure system which had been serving to create a wide gap between the wealthy and the poor. It was also so urgent to attain overall national socio-economic development by increasing agricultural production and productivity. So, it was quite natural for all the political parties and social organizations at that time to advocate a land reform.

Although a land reform was the most imperative task of the nation after the liberation from Japan, different opinions prevailed as to the method of implementation among different social groups, and various proposals were presented by political parties and social organizations. Under strong political and social pressures from Korean people, the first attempt of land reform was undertaken by the American Military Government which came into being on September 8, 1945.

At first, the American Military Government promulgated Ordinance No. 9, "On the Determination of the Ceiling of Rent Rate," on October 5, 1945. The ordinance was intended to slash the high rate of rent, regulating the ceiling of rent rate at one-third of annual yields. By this measure, tenant rent should never exceed 33 percent of gross products for a given year. The reduction of tenant rent was favourably received by Korean farmers, but they were not completely satisfied. In Spring of 1946, farmers strongly demanded the early implementation of land reform and some tenant-farmers even started radical movements.

In Spring of 1947, through the consultative body of Korean agricultural expertises, the Legislature Assembly (立法議院) and the American Military Government jointly drafted the South Korea Land Reform Law and referred it to the provisional legislation. The essence of this provisional law was to let the to-be-established Korean Government purchase tenanted lands from landlords and sell them to tenant-farmers at the same prices, with the ceiling of 2 *chungbo* (one *chungbo* is equivalent to 2.45 acres) per farm household. The price of the land to be sold was 300 percent of the average annual yields of past five years, and should be paid in equal annual installments over a 15 year period. That is, the yearly payment was set at 20 percent of average annual yields in kind.

This provisional South Korea Land Reform Law was generally viewed as for landlords' interests. However, some assemblymen who seemingly represented landlords still opposed these measures, and finally the Legislature Assembly shelved the provisional law on the

assertion that such a law should be enacted after the establishment of Korean Government.

American Military Government discontented with the evasion of Legislature Assembly and decided to take an initiative for the execution of land reform in Korea. It seemed to be intended to satisfy the aspiration of tenant-farmers for landownership, to prepare for the establishment of western form of democracy, and to avert the pressure of a radical revolutionary movement. On march 22, 1948, the Military Government promulgated Ordinance No. 173 to start the distribution of the government-vested lands owned by New Korea Company(新韓公社) among tenant-farmers. New Korea Company had been organized by the American Military Government to administer formerly Japanese-owned farm lands including those owned by the Japanese Oriental Development Company. New Korea Company owned a total of 282,480 *chungbo* of farm land which represented 13.1 percent of the total farm land in South Korea. This included mostly fertile paddy-fields in plain regions. More specifically, the Company owned 205,988 *chungbo* of paddy-fields which actually represented 16.6 percent of the total acreage of paddy-fields in South Korea.

As shown in Table 3, the American Military Government actually distributed 189,518 *chungbo* of paddy-fields and 56,036 *chungbo* of dry-fields to 554,067 tenant-farmers. The distributed paddy-fields represented 92 percent of the total paddy-fields acreage owned by the New Korea Company and 87 percent of the total dry-fields owned were distributed lands by the American Military Government constituted 29.6 percent of the total tenanted lands in South Korea at the time. More than one-third(35.1%) of the total tenanted paddy fields were so distributed.

Area	Administered Land		Distributed Land	
	Paddy-field	Dry-field	Paddy-field	Dry-field
Seoul	24,453	10,713	22,243	10,168
Taejon	28,962	11,024	24,648	10,216
Taegu	13,499	6,503	13,065	5,761
Pusan	26,084	7,327	22,946	5,161
Iri	47,905	8,496	56,828	8,610
Mokpo	55,085	18,568	49,788	16,120
Total	205,988	62,631	189,518	56,036

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

The first attempt of land reform by the American Military Government greatly influenced the later land reform of Korea in 1950. When the subsequent Land Reform was carried out by the Government of Republic of Korea, the distributed lands by the American Military Government was recognized and confirmed as an established fact after reducing the price of the lands according to newly legislated Land Reform Act, within the limits of 3 *chungbo* per farm household. Since the first attempt of land reform by the American Military Government had regulated the ceiling of the distribution at 2 *chungbo*, the results of the first attempt of land reform could be subsumed and recognized as established facts in the Land Reform by the newly-born Government of the Republic of Korea.

2) Legislation

When the Government of the Republic of Korea was established on August 15, 1948, the land reform again became the most urgent task of the newly-born Republic. Several organizations and authorities proposed their own outlines of the land reform. Out of these, two major drafts emerged and they were presented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and by the Industry Committee of National Assembly.

In November of 1948, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry presented a draft of land

reform which was prepared by agricultural specialists. This draft proposed that the state purchase the lands of absentee-landlords and excess farm lands of large farmers who owned excess of 2 *chungbo*. The price was set at 150 percent of average annual yields, and landlords were to be compensated in equal annual installments over a 10 year period. And, the Government was to sell the lands to tenant-farmers with the price of 120 percent of average annual yields in equal annual installments over a 6 year period. The difference between the prices of purchasing and selling of lands was to be appropriated from the payments of tenant-farmers for the government-vested lands and government finance. The draft also set the ceiling of distribution and possession of lands at 2 *chungbo* per farm household.

In March of 1949, on the other hand, the Industry Committee of National Assembly presented another proposal of land reform after careful study of the Ministry's draft. The draft of the Committee was designed to purchase by the Government the lands of absentee-landlords and the land of large farmers, which exceeded 3 *chungbo* per farm household, with the provision of issuing Land-value Bills to compensate landowners. The price of purchasing of these lands was to be determined on the basis of 300 percent of average annual yields. The draft provided that these lands should be distributed by the Government among tenant-farmers and owner-farmers of submarginal scale of operation, with the repayments to be made in equal annual installments over a 10 year period at the same price of purchase.

On April 27, 1949, the National Assembly amended its Committee proposal and finally passed the Korean Land Reform Bill. In this Bill the price of compensation for landlords was cut down to 150 percent of average annual yields, and the rate of repayment by farmers to 125 percent. The difference was to be appropriated by Government finance. The term of repayments was also shortened to 5 years. On May 2, 1949, the Bill was transferred from the National Assembly to the Executive Branch of the Government to be promulgated and enacted.

However, the Bill was sent back to the National Assembly, calling for a revision of rates of compensations for landlords and repayments by tenant-farmers to be equally coordinated at the same price, since the Government had no enough finance to pay off the difference between 150 percent compensation rate and 125 percent repayment rate of average annual yields.

In January of 1950, the Industry Committee which conspicuously declined to be conservative, repropose a revised land reform bill to the National Assembly, calling for a revision of compensation and repayment rates up to 240 percent of average annual yields over a 8 year period, with the yearly payment set at 30 percent. The proposed Bill was turned down by a general meeting of the National Assembly and it was finally agreed to fix the price of lands for purchase and sale by the government at the same rates of 150 percent of average annual yields over a 5 year period. It was the final setting of the legislation of the Land Reform Act of Korea. On March 10, 1950, at last the Government promulgated the Land Reform Act as Law No.108 and undertook the execution of the Land Reform starting April 10, 1950.

III. EXECUTION OF LAND REFORM

1) Land Purchased

The Land Reform Act of 1950 designated two types of farm lands to be redistributed: the government-purchased lands and government-vested lands. Government-purchased lands included the farmlands listed below:

- a) Farmlands owned by absentee-landlords.

- b) Farmlands owned by non-self-cultivators.
- c) Farmlands which exceeded 3 *chungbo* per farm household.

On the other hand, the government-vested lands comprised of the following farmlands:

- a) Farmlands owned by the Government.
- b) Farmlands confiscated by the Government (formerly Japanese-owned lands).
- c) Ownerless Farmlands.

The Land Reform Act, however, exempted many farmlands from the reform. The most distinguished exemptions were as follows:

- a) Farmland which was less than 500 *pyong* (about 0.17 *chungbo*) per household, owned by non-farmers as vegetable gardens.
- b) Orchards, nursery gardens, mulberry fields, and other farmlands cultivated with perennial plants.
- c) Farmland which was planned to be used for purposes other than farming by the Government, public institutions, and educational institutions as public ground, school sites, school experimental stations, military park, municipal planning lands, road and highway sites, waterway sites, reservoir sites, power plant, and dam sites, etc.
- d) Farmland cultivated by all types of schools, religious institutions and public welfare institutions.
- e) Farmland which was used for some special purposes such as academic researches and experiments.
- f) Farmland which was set aside for the care of ancestral tombs designated as Wito(位土), with a ceiling of 0.2 *chungbo* per tomb.
- g) Reclaimed lands unfinished.
- h) Reclaimed lands finished after the Enactment of the Land Reform Act.

The above exceptions allowed the landlords and large-scale farmers to evade the land reform. Of course, the Land Committees at the various administrative level were organized to administer and supervise the purchase and sale of lands. However, the Land Committees were usually composed of influential local magnates. With the approval of the Committee, mayors or provincial governors could defer certain purchases or sales. Even those landowners who had abandoned farming were allowed to defer their sale of lands to the government if they could convince the Committee that they were returning to farming. Actually a vast acreage of farmlands owned by various types of land-lords could be left untouched by the reform. The Government actually could purchase only 331,766 *chungbo* of farmlands (226,465 *chungbo* of paddy fields and 105,301 *chungbo* of dry-fields) which represented 63.4 percent of the total lands expected to be purchased.

2) Compensation for Landlords

The Government purchased the lands of absentee landlords and large farmers with Land-value Bills called *Chika Chungkwon*(地價證券) which were issued in advance by the Government for the land value compensation expressed in the amount of produce such as rice and barley on the basis of 150 percent of average annual yields over the past five year period. For the paddy fields, the Government chose the standard rice-fields with average fertility and calculated 150 percent of average annual rice production of past 5 years. For the dryfields, the Government calculated the average annual yields of the highest priced crop of past 5 years. However, the actual calculation of compensation for landlords was carried out on the basis of sliding scale according to the acreage of the landownership of each landlord, as shown in Table 4.

The Government was to pay the compensation in cash to landlords according to the Land-value Bill in five annual payments, by calculating the legal cash price of the noted

Table 4. Sliding Scale of Compensation for Landlords

Size of Compensation	Sliding Scale of diminution
Less than 75 <i>suk</i>	Non applied
75- 100	3% of Excess of 75 <i>suk</i>
100- 130	5% of Excess of 100 <i>suk</i>
130- 200	8% of Excess of 130 <i>suk</i>
200- 400	12% of Excess of 200 <i>suk</i>
400-1,000	17% of Excess of 400 <i>suk</i>
1,000-2,000	23% of Excess of 1,000 <i>suk</i>
2,000-5,000	30% of Excess of 2,000 <i>suk</i>
5,000-10,000	38% of Excess of 5,000 <i>suk</i>
more than 10,000 <i>suk</i>	47% of Excess of 10,000 <i>suk</i>

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

amount of crops of a given year. However, in the event that the amount of compensation was relatively small or the landlords were public institutions authorized by the Government, the payment was to be stretched.

The Land Reform Act originally intended to help landlords to transform themselves into industrial capitalists or entrepreneurs. When a landlord wanted to use his Land-value Bills as industrial capital or he applied for a loan from public financial institutions, the Minister of Finance had obligation to guarantee a low-interest loan. And, when a landlord wanted to buy government facilities at disposal such as factories, mines, ships, fishing grounds, breweries, printing facilities, cleaning mills, orchards, nursery gardens, mulberry fields, cocooneries, forests, reclaimed lands, etc., the Government had the obligation to give preference to the Land-value Bill holders. A small number of large-scale landlords were successful to establish themselves as industrial capitalists, taking advantage of the Land Reform Act.

3) Distribution of Lands to Farmers

Lands so purchased by the government and government-vested lands were to be sold to such farm operators as those who could be expected to devote themselves to farming, according to the following priority:

- (1) Tenant-farmers who had been actually cultivating the tenant lands at the time of the enactment of the Land Reform Act.
- (2) Tenant-farmers or owner-farmer who were cultivating relatively small holdings comparing with his family labour force.
- (3) Bereaved families of patriots who had experiences of agricultural operation.
- (4) Agricultural laborers who had family labour for independent agricultural operation.
- (5) Returned countrymen from abroad whose original occupation was farming.

The Government adopted a scoring system to gauge the capacity of farm operation for the purpose of distributing the purchased lands. This scoring scheme is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Score for Family Capacity of Farming

Type of Resource	Score
1. Number of Family Members	30
2. Family Labour Force	60
3. Agricultural Implement	10
Total	100

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

However, the Government decided not to apply the scoring system in case of (1) tenant-farmers who were actually cultivating the tenant land at the time of the enactment of the

Land Reform Act, and (2) tenant-farmers or owner-farmers who were cultivating less than 3 *chungbo*. Therefore, the scoring system was only applied to (1) tenant-farmers who were operating relatively very small holdings comparing with his family labour force, (2) bereaved families of patriots, (3) agricultural labourers and (4) the returned countrymen from abroad. In practice, since average scale of operation of tenant-farmers was very small, the ownership right was transferred, in most cases, to the tenant-farmer who was actually cultivating the land. In general, the land reform merely transferred ownership to cultivators, leaving the size of farm almost unchanged. It was especially disadvantageous to small scale tenant-farmers and owner-farmers.

As mentioned earlier, the Land Committees at various administrative levels made decisions and supervised the redistribution of lands. First, the local government authorities drew up the lists of redistributable lands for every eligible farm household. The Land Committee reviewed and finalized the lists of redistributable lands. Then local governmental authorities opened the lists to the public and asked farmers to take their objections, if any, to the Land Committee within 10 days.

Finally it should be noted that the Land Reform Act exempted tenant-farmers from various taxes associated with landownership rights such as land-registration tax and immovables-acquisition tax.

4) Conservation of Distributed Lands

The Land Reform Act of 1950 provided for the transfer of ownership of the distributed lands to the cultivators as soon as the distribution was carried out. However, the Land Reform Act provisionally prohibited any sale, donation and mortgage of the distributed lands until the distributed land was completely paid off. When payments for the distributed land were delinquent without any acceptable reasons, the Government had the right to institute a suit to the court for the return of the distributed land to the Government. If any lands were returned to the government for such reasons, the Government was to pay the farmer over 75 percent of the already paid amount by farmers plus the costs of land improvement. The Government had the same obligations when a farmer chose to quit farming or changed his occupation and decided to move to cities before he completed the repayment.

According to the Land Reform Act, the Government and local Land Committee had the right to consolidate, exchange, divide and improve the distributable lands, and also to change the use of the lands in order to enhance the agricultural productivity. In reality, however, little land consolidation works were carried out during the land reform. The Act also prohibited strictly any kind of new tenancy, lease or trusteeship of land operation, not only in the distributed farmlands but also in the original owner-farmers' lands. By this measure, the Land Reform Act of 1950 permanently abolished any forms of land tenancy in Korea. However, since the redistribution of lands was not effectively completed, some land tenancy was left illegally even though it was not significant.

IV. IMMEDIATE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LAND REFORM

1) Effects of Distribution of Lands

We have two different sets of statistics about the immediate achievements of the land reform. The first one was compiled by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry immediately after the execution of the land reform. Another was prepared by the Korean National Agricultural Cooperative Federation more than 10 years after the land reform. Since the second source excluded the lost acreage of the distributed lands during the Korean War, the figures in the second source slightly underestimate the results of actual land reform.

According to the first source, a total of 331,766 *chungbo* of government-purchased land was distributed to 918,548 farm households and 235,554 *chungbo* of government-vested land to 727,632 farm households. As shown in Table 6, 415,983 *chungbo* of paddy field and 161,337 *chungbo* of dry field were redistributed by the reform. According to the second statistics, on the other hand, a total of 470,022 *chungbo* of lands including 352,410 *chungbo* of paddy field and 117,612 *chungbo* of dry field, was distributed by the reform.

Table 6. Results of the Distribution of Lands

	Paddy field (in <i>chungbo</i>)	Dry field (in <i>chungbo</i>)	Total	No. of Household
Government-Purchased Land	226,465	105,301	331,766	918,548
Government-vested Land	189,518	56,036	235,554	727,632
Total	415,983	161,337	577,320	1,646,180

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

When we compare the first set of statistics with the tenant lands at the end of 1945, only 39.3 percent of the tenanted acreage was redistributed by the land reform: 47.6 percent of the tenanted paddy field and 27.8 percent of dry field. When the same comparison is made with the tenanted acreage of June of 1949 which was one year before the execution of the land reform, only 69.4 percent of the tenanted acreage was redistributed: 77.0 percent of the tenanted paddy field and 51.3 percent of the tenanted dry field. (see Table 7)

On the other hand, when we compare the second set of statistics with the tenanted lands at the end of 1945, only 32.5 percent was redistributed by the reform: 39.36 percent of the tenanted paddy field and 21.30 percent of the tenanted dry field. Similarly, only 55.9 percent of the tenanted acreage as of June, 1949 was redistributed by the reform: 62.9 percent of the tenanted paddy field and 51.6 percent of the tenanted dry field. (see Table 8)

Table 7. Comparison of Distributed Lands with Tenanted Lands (A)

Type of land	Tenanted Lands (in 1,000 <i>chungbo</i>)		Distributed Lands (C)	Percentage	
	Dec. 1945(A)	June 1949(B)		(C/A)%	(C/B)%
Paddy field	890	540	416	46.7%	77.0%
Dry field	580	291	161	27.8	51.3
Total land	1,470	831	577	39.3	69.4

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Table 8. Comparison of Distributed Lands with Tenanted Lands (B)

	Tenanted Lands (in <i>chungbo</i>)		Distributed Lands (<i>chungbo</i>) (C)	Percentage	
	Dec. 1945(A)	June 1949(B)		(C/A)%	(C/B)%
Paddy field	895,313	560,196	352,410	39.36%	62.91%
Dry field	552,046	280,067	117,612	21.30	51.57
Total land	1,447,359	840,263	470,022	32.47	55.94

Source: National Agricultural Cooperative Federation

Again, when we compare the first set of statistics with the actual goal of the reform of estimated in 1949, only 69.2 percent of the goal was reached by the reform: 76.1 percent of the estimated goal of distributable paddy field and 55.2 percent of the estimated goal of distributable dry field. When the second set of statistics was compared with the goal of the reform estimated in 1949, only 56.4 percent of the goal was reached: 64.5 percent of the estimated goal of distributable paddy field and 40.2 percent of the estimated goal of distributable dry field. (see Table 9)

It is clear that the immediate achievement of the land reform was far behind the estimated goal. The following reasons may be responsible for this account.

Table 9. Comparison of Distributed Lands with Goal of Distribution unit: chungbo

Type of land	(C) Goal of Distribution	(A) Distributed Lands*	(B) Distributed Lands**	(A/C)%	(B/C)%
Paddy field	546,410	415,983	352,410	76.1%	64.5%
Dry field	292,472	161,337	117,612	55.2	40.2
Total lands	833,882	577,320	470,022	69.2	56.4

Source: * Materials of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

** National Agricultural Cooperative Federation

First, it took too long to deliberate the legislation of the Land Reform. By the time the Act was put into effect, vast acreage of lands in the possession of landlords had been turned over to tenant-farmers either through 'black market' sales or credit sale at a higher rate than the price regulated by the Land Reform Act. Owing to social instability and uneasiness after World War II, landlords were already disposing their lands at their convenience. This can be evidenced by the fact that the lands transferred to tenant-farmers under the Land Reform Act of 1950 did not exceed 40 percent of the total tenanted lands at the end of World War II.

Secondly, since the Land Reform Act allowed so many exceptions, surveillance over the execution of the land reform was very difficult and many landlords could manage to evade the reform. Even those landlords who had abandoned farming were allowed to defer sales of their lands if they were considered by the Government or the Land Committee as returning to farming. Actually the Land Committees were composed of influential local magnates. Moreover, landlords were given the right to entrust the operation of their lands to caretakers of their ancestral grave with the limit of 2 *tanbo* per tomb. Also, those farmlands owned by authorized schools, social welfare institutions and public organizations were excluded from the reform. Thus, vast acreage of lands earmarked for sale escaped the redistribution. While tenant-farmers were destitute of influential political power of their own, the power of local magnates was so strong that they could easily incorporate their lands as properties of school foundations or as lands set aside for disguised graveyards. Because of such irregularities, the land reform was carried out far less effectively than originally expected. This can be evidenced by the fact that the lands transferred to tenant farmers by the land reform did not exceed 70 percent of the originally expected acreage.

2) Repayments of Farmers

The results of the repayment by farmers were far less than satisfactory. By the year of 1954 which was the legal termination year of repayment, 43 percent of required amount of repayment were still unpaid. (see Table 10)

Following reasons can be considered for this unsatisfactory result: First, it was actually

Table 10. Repayment of Formers for Distributed Lands by 1954 unit: suk

	Required Amount of Repayment (A)	Repaid Amount	Unpaid Amount (B)	(B/A)%
Government- purchased Land	5,814,665	3,600,626	2,214,029	38%
Government- vested Land	4,398,375	2,201,790	2,196,585	50
Total	10,213,030	5,802,416	4,410,614	43

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

too heavy burden for former tenant-farmers to pay for the distributed lands at the rate of 30 percent of average annual yield over a 5 year period. Farmers had already been suffered from the chronic poverty and yet they had to make the required payments even when they had bad harvests. This was already too heavy a burden for farmers to bear.

Secondly, farmers were required to pay land income tax at the rate between 5 percent and 25 percent of their yearly harvests according to the sliding scale on the basis of the farm size. For instance, a farmer who owned 1 *chungbo* was required to pay 23 percent of his annual harvest as the land income tax. Such a high rate of land income tax was also a heavy burden for that farmer, considering that he was formerly a poor tenant farmer.

Thirdly, farmers had to bear a heavy burden of public imposts during the Korean War. The local governments imposed various kinds of taxes and imposts on farmers because farmers were usually stable sources of public finance at the time of a war. Actually it was recorded that more than 50 different taxes and imposts were levied on the poor shoulders of farmers during the Korean War. In other words, with all payments combined the charges imposed upon farmers for over the 5 year period were heavier than the tenant rents imposed on them before the land reform. For instance, a farmer with 1 *chungbo* was required to pay (1) 30 percent of annual yield as repayment for his distributed land, (2) 23 percent of annual yield as land income tax and (3) about 10 percent of annual yield as his public imposts. Actually, that farmer was required to pay a sum total of 63 percent of average annual yield for over a 5 year period. This was really heavy a burden for indigent Korean farmers. This conclusion can be reinforced by the fact that legally appointed completion year of repayment, about 99 percent of repayments for the distributed lands were paid 9 years after the legal termination of repayment.

3) Compensations for Landlords

The compensation for landlords for their lands sold was unexpectedly far behind the schedule. Only 28 percent of the required amount of the compensation had been paid by the legally appointed year of 1954. The Government could pay the estimated amounts of compensation for landlords only in two years of 1950 and 1951, and after that the Government was unable to pay according to the schedule. This means that the Land-value Bill which was given to the landlords for their lands sold was not exchanged in currency by the Government as designated in the Land Reform Act of 1950. By 1963, nine years after the appointed completion year of compensation, 97.2 percent of the compensation-value was paid for landlords, with devaluated price since the fixed legal price was applied by the Government. (see Table 11)

Table 11. Compensation for Landlords for Purchased-land by 1954 unit: Thousand Won

year	Required Amount of Compensation(A)	Compensated Amount(B)	Uncompensated Amount	(B/A)%
1950	318,805	302,115	16,690	95
1951	1,265,984	1,242,290	23,695	98
1952	3,885,537	2,620,123	1,265,414	67
1953	3,885,537	91,079	3,794,458	0.2
1954	5,971,625	—	5,971,624	—
Total	15,327,488	4,255,607	11,071,881	28

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

As mentioned earlier, the Land Reform Act originally intended to transform the landlords into entrepreneurs or industrial capitalists. The Act stipulated that the Land-value Bill could be used prior to the currency in buying the industrial plants and facilities owned

by the Government at its disposal. It was really a great favour for the landlords. However, this measure generally failed to produce new entrepreneurs except the case of a few large landlords. The following seem to be the two salient reasons for this failure.

First, the Korean War broke out shortly after the enactment of the Land Reform Act caused the economic and social collapse of most of the landlords. In fact, 82 percent of 169,803 landlords were small scale landlords with less than 50 *suk* (one *suk* is equal to 5.9568 bushels) of compensation. They actually consumed their indemnities to pay their living costs, since they used to live on tenant rents. Moreover, those landlords with more than 50 *suk* of indemnities also failed to invest the Land-value Bills in industrial projects. Instead of investing their Land-value Bills in the purchasing of the government-owned industrial plants and establishments, they sold them to the security brokers at a devaluated rate between 30 percent and 60 percent of the actual value, because the Government could not exchange and compensate the Land-value Bills in currency as scheduled. Most landlords only contributed toward the accumulation of capital for the newly-rising speculative capitalists.

Secondly, most landlords had long been accustomed to unproductive, parasitic, consuming, and pleasure-loving way of life. Therefore, they actually had no substantive ability to adjust actively to the changing situation resulted from the land reform and could not transform and establish themselves as entrepreneurs or industrial capitalists. They frequently considered their Land-value Bills as another form of the unearned income.

On the whole, the land reform of Korea and the followed Korean War actually stroke a fatal blow on the landlords. They could not help but selling their Land-value Bills at the devaluated rate of 30–60 percent of actual value in advance to the speculative capitalists through security brokers. Only some capitalists who were in collusion with political power bought the government-owned plants and industrial facilities at low prices by using the actual value of the Land-value Bills. In addition, taking advantages of inflation, foreign aids and privileged public loans, new industrial capitalists emerged after the land reform, with strong ties with the political power, apart from farmers and landlords.

Under such circumstances, only a few large landlords could be exceptionally successful in transforming themselves into industrial capitalists. This group includes the following:

- (a) A few very large landlords who had previously invested in the manufacturing sector could use the privilege given to the Land-value Bill and participated in buying the government-owned plants and industrial facilities as its disposal along with the newly-rising capitals.
- (b) A few large landlords who had previously invested or entrusted their lands in the school foundations and educational institutions could evade the influence of the land reform. Actually they could serve as directors or trustees of school foundations and as capitalists in various enterprises.
- (c) The landlords who had invested in their children's higher education could maintain their socio-economic status through their university-educated children who actively participated in the newly-rising business enterprise. They actually could turn into industrial capitalists through their descendents.

However, the landlords who could transform themselves into industrial capitalists through the land reform were extremely small in number. Most of the landlords eventually went bankrupt under the influences of the land reform and the Korean War.

V. CONCLUSION

Land reform has been generally viewed as having dual purposes of serving as both a redistributive instrument primarily for the achievement of greater social equality and a

vehicle for achieving increased agricultural productivity.

The land reform of Korea did attain the former purpose to a large extent. The reform essentially abolished the transitional and semi-feudalistic land tenure system and the class of parasitic landlords. It was principally successful to transform the tenant-farmers to free owner-farmers and to establish social equality and social justice to a large extent in rural Korea. Thus, the reform dissolved basically the age-long structural conflict and antagonism between tenant-farmers, owner-farmers and absentee-landlords and helped to achieve the social stability to a great extent in rural communities. Abolishing the high rate of rent, it also created new incentives for increased agricultural productivity for the former tenant-farmers. It is believed that all of these changes resulted from the land reform provided a favorable setting for the modernization of agriculture and the advancement of democracy in Korea.

It is further believed that these achievements were dearly bought at the sacrifice of farmers, since the land reform was carried out rather ineffectively in some respects and the resulting changes from the reform have meant the following new challenges and problems:

First, the price of redistributed land at 30 percent of average annual yield over a five year period was a too heavy burden to farmers, considering chronic poverty of tenant-farmers. To make matter worse, very heavy land income tax and various public imposts were levied on the newly-established owner-farmers. These heavy burdens of payments accelerated rural poverty. Thus, the newly-created owner-farmers were inevitably bound to the fetters of usury and became hopeless debtors.

Secondly, the land reform failed to take more effective provisions to mitigate the uneven distribution of tenanted lands among tenant-farmers. The provision that land should also be bought from tenant-farmers and owner-farmers who cultivated more than 3 *chungbo*-ceiling, had little effects upon the equalization, since the number of such a big holding which exceeded the ceiling was very small. The tenant-farmers with big holdings benefited automatically more than those with small holdings and the reform had little effects on economic equality among the cultivators who had less than 3 *chungbo* of land.

Thirdly, the land reform did not dissolve the system of submarginal farming operation. On the contrary, submarginal farming was slightly intensified as a result of the land reform. When we compare the size of farm in 1953 with that of 1947 which was directly before the reform, the proportion of farm-households with less than 0.5 *chungbo* increased from 41.2 percent in 1947 to 44.9 percent in 1953, and those with 0.5-1.0 *chungbo* increased from 33.3 percent to 34.2 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of the farm household with more than 1.0 *chungbo* decreased from 25.5 percent in 1947 to 20.9 percent in 1953. (see Table 12) Thus, those farm household engaged in less than one *chungbo* holding accounted for 79.1 percent of total farm household in 1953 comparing with 74.5 percent in 1947.

Table 12. Farm-households by Size of Holding, 1947 and 1953

Size of land holding	1947		1953	
	No. of Households	%	No. of Households	%
Less than 0.5 <i>chungbo</i>	894,775	41.2	1,011,932	44.9
0.5-1.0	724,167	33.3	768,600	34.2
1.0-2.0	409,204	18.8	370,848	16.5
2.0-3.0	113,194	5.3	95,722	4.3
more than 3.0 <i>chungbo</i>	31,095	1.4	2,930	0.1
Total	2,172,435	100.0	2,249,132	100.0

Source: The Korean Reconstruction Bank

Fourthly, the land reform did not result in immediate increase in agricultural productivity even though it created new incentives for farmers. The land reform failed to provide the supporting services such as land improvement programs, land consolidation, two-crop farming, agricultural credit, research and extension, etc. Thus, agricultural productivity had not increased immediately after the land reform until 1958.

Nevertheless, the effects of the land reform of 1950 should not be underestimated. Because it fundamentally changed the whole structure of Korean rural community and hence the Korean Society. Although farmers paid so high costs and the reform itself was carried out unsatisfactory, it actually abolished the age-long land tenure system and parasitic absentee-landlords. Although some vestiges of tenancy were left illegally, the parasitic absentee-landlordism as a social and economic institution was clearly abolished.

The land reform improved the prospects for raising production and productivity since new incentives for increased work and investment were created as a result of abolishing tenancy and accomplishing more equitable redistribution of lands. It may be safe to say that the land reform of 1950 made a turning point for the modernization of agriculture and of rural community in Korea.

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<國文要約>

一九五〇年の韓國의 農地改革

愼 鏞 夏

한국이 1945년 8월 日帝로부터 解放되자 가장 긴급한 課題의 하나로 대두된 것이 農地改革이었다. 남북이 분단된 후 남한에서의 본격적 農地改革은 온갖 우여곡절을 거친 뒤에 大韓民國政府가 수립된 후 1950년 4월 10일부터 실시되었다. 이 農地改革은 기본적으로 ① 종래의 半封建的 寄生地主制度를 폐지하여 農村社會에 있어서의 社會的 經濟的 平等을 실현하고, ② 高率小作料를 폐지함과 동시에 耕作者를 土地所有者로 만들어 農民들에게 增産의 새 誘引을 창출해줌으로써 農業生産力을 増大시키고 農業近代化의 기초를 닦을 것을 목적으로 한 것이었다.

農地改革의 방법은, 政府가 종래의 不在地主의 小作地와 戶當 3 町步를 초과하는 農地에 대해 地價證券을 사전에 발행지급하여 地主로부터 土地를 買收하고, 이를 다시 小作農과 經營規模가 極小한 農民에게 販賣하는 有償買收·有償分配의 방법을 택하였다. 土地價格은 買入價格과 分配價格을 동일하게 과거 5개년간의 年平均 생산량의 150%를 5년간 分割償還하는 것이었다. 즉 토지를 분배받은 농민은 매년 年平均 생산물의 30%를 5년간 地價로서 政府에 分割償還하고, 政府는 物量으로 표시한 地價證券을 法定價格으로 환산하여 5년간 地主에게 分割報償토록 한 것이었다.

이 방법에 의거하여 政府는 1950년 4월을 기하여 一般農地 331,766町步, 歸屬農地 235,554町步, 合計 577,320町步를 1,646,180 농가에 분배하였다. 그러나 농림부 통계에 의하면 이 농지개혁실적은 해방직후인 1945년 12월의 小作地面積의 39.3%에 불과한 것이었으며, 농지개혁 직전에 조사한 농지개혁의 목표인 分配豫定地面積의 69.2%에 불과한 것이었다.

農地改革의 實績이 해방직후인 1945년 12월의 40%에도 미달한 이유는 해방후 農地改革의 實施가 하나의 既定事實로서 예견되었기 때문에, 農地改革의 立法에 지나치게 長期間을 소요하는 동안에 地主가 小作人들에게 여러가지 방법과 형태로 小作地를 轉賣하여 버렸기 때문이었다. 또한 농지개혁의 실적이 농지개혁 목표의 70%에도 未達한 이유는 土地改革法이 너무나 많은 例外를 설정하여 ① 戶當 500 坪의 菜田, ② 果樹園·種苗圃·桑田 기타 多年性植物을 재배하는 農地, ③ 政府·公共

團體·教育機關 등에서 사용 목적을 變更할 필요가 있다고 政府가 인정하는 農地, ④ 公認하는 學校·宗教團體 및 厚生機關의 自耕하는 農地, ⑤ 位土로서 墳墓를 관리하기 위하여 위탁경영하는 墓 1位當 0.2町步이내의 農地, ⑥ 未完成된 開墾干拓地, ⑦ 地主로서 歸農할 의사가 있으며 農地委員會가 이를 認定하는 者의 戶當 3町步이내의 農地 등은 政府의 買收에서 제외하도록 하였다. 다수의 地主들은 이 例外規定을 이용하여 地方有志로 구성되어 있는 農地委員會의 同意를 얻어서 農地改革을 실질적으로 크게 회피할 수 있었다.

또한 농지개혁의 地價는 당시의 小作農의 만성적 貧困을 고려하면 高價이었다고 볼 수 있다. 이 위에 土地收得稅가 年 생산물의 3%~25% 부과되었으며, 6·25 動亂 중에 각종 公課가 농민에 부과되어 농민의 부담은 가중되었다. 예컨대 1町步의 農地를 分配받은 농민은 土地償還費 30%, 土地收得稅 23%, 合計 年 생산물의 53%와 각종 公課·雜賦金을 토지상환이 끝날 때까지 부담하지 않으면 안되었다. 이러한 過重한 負擔은 다수의 農民을 負債農으로 만든 중요한 원인이 되었다.

농지개혁은 또한 地主를 產業資本家로 전환시키고 土地資本을 產業資本化하기 위하여 地價證券을 歸屬財產拂下에 현금보다 우선적으로 使用할 수 있도록 하고 地價證券을 담보로 할 때는 政府가 金融機關의 融資에 보증을 서도록 의무화하는 특혜를 주었다. 그러나 農地改革직후 뒤따른 韓國動亂으로 말미암아 極度로 貧困하게 된 대부분의 地主들은 地價證券의 報償期間을 기다리지 못하고 그것을 액면 가격의 30~60%로 증권부로부터 판매하여 生計資金으로 消費해 버리고 말았다. 오직 극소수의 大地主를 제외하고는 地主의 產業資本家化는 이루어지지 않았으며, 地價證券은 投機的 新興資本家들의 歸屬財產拂下에 이용되고 말았을 뿐이었다.

농지개혁은 또한 土地分配와 함께 農業生産性增大를 위한 經營規模의 확대, 土地의 交換分合·耕地整理·水利灌溉施設供給, 金融支援·技術支援등을 병행하지 못하였다. 이 때문에 農地改革직후 經營規模의 零細性은 농지개혁 이전보다 오히려 약간 심화되었으며, 農業生産力의 增大도 1958년까지에는 이루어지지 않았다.

1950년의 韓國의 農地改革은 이와같이 불철저하게 수행되고 土地分配의 代價로 농민에게 過重한 負擔을 주기는 하였으나, 그것이 이룬 큰 成果는 결코 過小評價할 수 없을 것이다. 농지개혁은 무엇보다도 먼저 수백년간 지속되어온 고질적 寄生地主制度를 철폐하여 農村社會의 不平等 要素를 배제시키고 農村의 社會構造를 근본적으로 變化시켰으며, 그 후 農業生産力의 增大와 農村近代化를 위한 기초조건을 형성시킨 것이었다.