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Honors Thesis

GAMES AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AMONG KOREAN STUDENTS

by
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Games and Social Organization Among Korean Students

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Abstract

South Korean culture has always negotiated between hierarchy and egalitarianism, and never more so than in the last seventy years after regaining independence. This thesis examines how a class of first grade students navigate between these two seeming opposites through an analysis of the games they played and how they played them. The competition between the students provides insight into how the games between both friends and non-friends create peer groups of shared interests and values in the class. The varied influences of different games are examined, and two specific cases of games creating organizational change are analyzed. This analysis reveals that the South Korean system of hierarchical egalitarianism is not a spectrum along which students move depending on context, but instead a synthesis of the two value systems which creates a complex social network among student peers.

Keywords: South Korea, Games, Elementary Education, Social Grouping

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“As much of America surfaces in a ballpark, on golf links, at a race track, or around a poker table, much of Bali surfaces in a cock ring. For it is only *apparently* cocks that are fighting there. Actually, it is men” (Geertz, 1973, emphasis added). Many of cultures’ complex systems and ideologies can be seen through the activities those cultures repeatedly perform and in the games they commonly play. While the game itself may reflect cultural values, the behavior around games and the types of games played are even more telling. Balinese bets on cockfighting provide a way to leverage kinship and status in economic ways. American consumption of football teams’ merchandise creates community around brands. English football leagues organize citizens into factions based on hometown.

In the same way, the social interactions seen around and in games played between Korean students display cultural values and systems which can be seen throughout Korean society. These students’ games create real social impacts and changes in social organizations. By observing their gameplay, I argue that, in the absence of teacher interference, Korean students naturally form hierarchical friend groups based on valuation of skills which each group values. Students’ relative aptitude in that skill creates hierarchy within the group, and that hierarchy has an effect outside the activities where the relative skill is explicitly measured. However, even in such a system of hierarchy, egalitarian values remain, creating what is frequently seen as a conflict of values. In this paper, egalitarianism is defined as group concern for the welfare and representation of each individual’s opinions and desires¹. Hierarchy is defined as authority being stratified, placing some individuals in a place of decision-making more

than others in a groupⁱⁱ. In short, the social organization of South Korean students is neither purely hierarchical or egalitarian, but rather a uniquely Korean blend of the two which sees a navigation between the two systems in every sphere of life.

Theoretical Considerations

Several concepts must be explored before an analysis of Korean students' gameplay may be successfully pursued: an understanding of games' social impact, inter-student solidarity, experience, and the cultural and educational circumstances of South Korean students in particular.

Games' Influence on Individuals in Culture

Games are a universal aspect of culture (Caillois 2001). As Roberts, Arth, and Bush (1959) state, "It is... evident that most games are models of various cultural activities. Many games of physical skill simulate combat or hunting, as in boxing and competitive trap shooting. Games of strategy may simulate chase, hunt, or war activities, as in backgammon, fox and geese, or chess. The relationship between games of chance and divining (ultimately a religious activity) is well known." (599). This statement points the fact that the skills used in games reflect skills traditionally used in a culture. Those traditional skills can be seen to have clear benefits for their holders in the past, making individuals who have those skills of greater social worth. This is likely why competitive games are so wide spread across various cultures despite differences (David Hayward & Kemmelmeier, 2007), though cultures' attitudes toward competition may vary from people to people (Lee, 2008). However, even if preferred skills change, aptitude in games will continue to have effects on individuals' places in their society (Edwards, 1973). It is in this way that I analyze the games I observed in Ms. Shin's (pseudonyms have been

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used) classroom: despite not directly reflecting practical skills, the games in Ms. Shin's classroom affect players' social standings in the class.

The concept of games, or more specifically sports, having real, observable influences on the societies in which they are played is not new (Miller, 2013). Hill and Clark (2001) provide strong argument for the first chiefdom government in ancient meso-America arising out of community loyalty based in games. Before the building and expansion of a sports complex in the Mazatan region in Southern Mexico, egalitarianism was the common political organization, but after the construction of the sports complex, increased competition provided opportunities for widening wealth differences and, in time, competition between villages with connected feasts, creating community competition on larger and larger stages. It is argued that this increased wealth inequality and social influence differential led to the adoption of heredity-based government (approximately 1600 B.C) and can be seen in later archaeological records (e.g. Olmec leaders depicted in ball gear in 1200 B.C.). This is an extreme example of the impact sports can have on society, changing political systems from "big man" egalitarianism to hierarchy based on wealth which carried on over generations. The scope of this paper is not so large as a historical shift in political systems, but rather provides a suggestion for how school children are encultured into the complex systems of hierarchy and egalitarian virtues found throughout South Korean culture by virtue of game-playing.

In addition to changing social status, games can demonstrate cultural values, such as responsibility, achievement, or obedience. Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1959) found this to be the case when they found that cultures who played certain games promoted certain values in their children when disciplining. Overall, they found that games of "strategy

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[are] associated with obedience and not with responsibility or achievement, [games of] chance with responsibility and not with obedience, and [games of] physical skill with achievement and not with obedience and responsibility” (271). This becomes of particular importance when the various types of games seen in Ms. Shin’s classroom are described later in this paper.

Solidarity Between Students

Some are prone to see students, adolescents, and children as something less than an active participant in creating and enacting culture. This, however, is oversimplification and bias. Children specifically provide fascinating opportunities to see culture in formation and the specifics of how culture is enforced (Hirschfield, 2008). Thus, observation of children can provide a clear window into the values of a culture by seeing how they are made habit. Durkheim’s structural-functionalist theory of societies views cultures as structures of mechanical or organic solidarity, organized around each culture’s values (Durkheim, 1893). The similarity of students’ abilities and offerings to friend groups points to the friend group being based in mechanical solidarity. The mechanism for creating such solidarity is ritual, according to Durkheim, and the ritual I observed among the students, playing games together, is an example of mechanical solidarity. The specific method of creating unity through these games will be covered later.

Korean Education and Cultural Terms

For several decades, South Korean education has been widely known as one of the most effective systems in the world. The primary reason for this has been attributed to Korea’s cultural appreciation of education and learning in general (Seth, 2002). In addition to this fever or drive, however, many scholars have pointed out the resulting

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multiplication of anxieties Korean students feel as they go through the education system. These include the pressure to take after-school classes at academies (학원 *hagwon*) for various academic and extracurricular subjects, the national college application test (수능 *sunŭng*), high levels of competition in the work place after graduation, and little time for personal development (Kim, 2008).

In response to these modern challenges as well as generations of overly structured, factory-like education and an increased drive to Westernize, recent years have seen Korean parents pushing for greater focus on creativity and individualism in the classroom instead of the more traditional focus on egalitarian community (Ethos, n.d.). In response, Korean teachers have been working toward this, at times being forced to work against those traditional values. Some teachers have encouraged individuality by pushing students to be more individually creative while others have been focused on making students more competitive among themselves, essentially encouraging hierarchy rather than egalitarian values (Son, n.d.; Lee & Lee, n.d.; Triandis, 2018).

In addition to these structural challenges for South Korean students, there are multiple cultural forces which influence their actions and social organization. These factors include *chŏng* (정), *nunch'i* (눈치), and *paeryŏ* (배려). While difficult to translate, they roughly equate to “kin-like emotional bond”, “concern for social superiors’ judgment”, and “concern for social inferiors’ welfare”. These cultural values behave as leveling mechanisms within a peer group as they organize peers as equal inferiors to their shared superiors, caring superiors to their shared inferiors, and strong allies among themselves. They can be seen in peer-influenced decision-making where those in power will direct others on what to do, and those others will look to those in authority when

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making a decision before doing it themselves. These are common examples of *paeryŏ* and *nunch'i* respectively. *Chŏng* is more difficult to observe directly, as it can be thought of as the connective tissue keeping other social values operational—an overt expression of Durkheim's mechanical solidarity.

These social values and systems influence behavior in a measurable way. Specifically, all these cultural systems create in South Korean students multi-layered and multi-directional bonds of responsibility and loyalty. I argue that the methods I observed students using to form friendships reflect the Korean ideologies of egalitarianism and hierarchy. These methods, while not identical nor exclusive, can provide a simple model for understanding the methods adult Koreans use to form similarly egalitarian and hierarchical friendships.

Historical Education Policy in South Korea

Historically, South Korea has had a complex relationship with both democracy and individualism. Japan's surrender in WWII ended the Japanese colonial period of Korean history (1910-1945). Following this, South Korea had a series of dictatorial presidents who were brought down through pro-democracy protests (1960, 1988) or assassination (1979) until fully democratic elections were implemented in 1988 (Lee et al., 2014). This points to a desire in the South Korean nation for democracy, however, even under dictatorial regimes, certain governmental policies were implemented which bolstered egalitarian values among the people. This included the standardization and making mandatory of elementary and middle school, educational systems implemented under Japanese rule (Seth, 2002; Yuh, 2010). Included in these changes was the national

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university entrance exam, which has brought with it new concerns and stresses which are explained further below.

All these changes, though, point to the fact that, more than democracy, egalitarianism is a central South Korean value, particularly in education. However, this flies in the face of the greater push in this century among South Korean parents for more individualism, especially the creative sort, in the classroom. This has led to an adoption of a greater emphasis on South Korea's "village collectivism" and a subtle shift away from the traditional focus on "familial collectivism" (Jung, n.d.). Jung describes the familial model as one of hierarchy, especially where the teacher is concerned, where respect is due to those of a higher social status (father, grandfather, teacher, etc.) and those in such positions are expected to protect, care for, and guide those of lower status (wives, children, students, etc.). In stark contrast, the village model is one of egalitarian equality, particularly as seen among students during class time, where all voices are given the same weight in discussion and decision, usually under the leadership of the teacher, though at times including the teacher as a peer as well.

Teachers, especially those teaching in the recent "reform (혁신 hyökshin)" movement focus a great deal more on this second type of collectivism. This can be seen in several researchers' recent fieldwork (Son, n.d.; Lee & Lee, n.d.) when teachers have struggled to apply strategies of village style egalitarianism in the classroom due to traditional values being prevalent in student behavior and social organization. Thus, there is an inherent conflict in South Korean education, and this has a direct impact on the educational experiences of South Korean students.

Context

Chǒngnŭng Elementary School

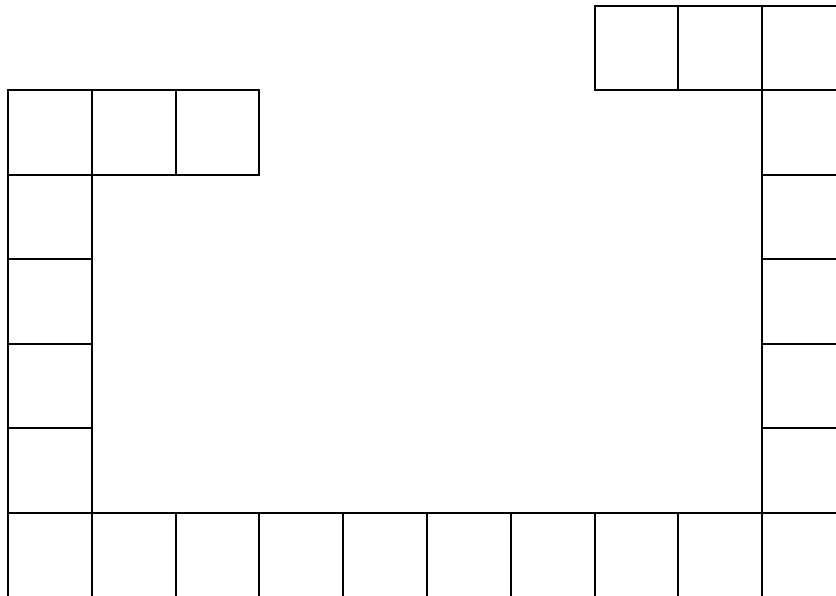
Chǒngnŭng Elementary is situated in north-central Seoul, South Korea. The neighborhood feeding into the school is largely made up of apartments- completely normal for this city- though some older residents maintain family homes here and there, mostly near the Buddhist monastery at the base of the mountain, next to a large stream. The school itself is situated near the top of the cluster of buildings climbing the side of Puk’ansan, one of the city’s famous mountains. While there is a bus that drives to the school from the base of the mountain every day, many students still make the difficult climb up hundreds of stairs leading from mountain base to hill-top campus every school day. Representative names of the students in the class I observed can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

	Female		Male
윤지현	Yun Chihyŏn	신승호	Shin Sŭngho
배효지	Pae Hyoji	박연우	Park Yŏnu
박연이	Park Yŏna	박주한	Park Chuhan
남하울	Nam Hayul	박도혜	Park Tohye
김시윤	Kim Shiyun	김동울	Kim Tongyul
김서영	Kim Sŏyŏng	김도훈	Kim Tohun
허윤지	Hŏ Yunji	김경률	Kim Kyŏngnyul
최하현	Ch'oe Hahyŏn	허겸	Hŏ Kyŏm
이예은	Yi Yeŭn	한채민	Han Ch'aemin
이다원	Yi Tawŏn	한승우	Han Sŭngu
이규현	Yi Kyuhyŏn	조주훈	Cho Chuhun
		이기완	Yi Kiwan
		이건	Yi Kŏn
		오지호	O Chiho
		양재희	Yang Chaehee

Class 1-3 or Grade 1-Class 3 . Ms. Shin’s classroom had 26 students who sat in desks arranged in an incomplete square, the side closest to the front chalkboard having a gap (see Figure 1). This opening allowed anyone to enter or exit from the middle of the classroom. Ms. Shin did this usually for individual teaching moments with students. Students usually did so in order to use the available space for games and activities. While the space could be used for other things, these were the space’s two primary uses. They were also the two purposes for the seating arrangement as Ms. Shin pointed out when she was later interviewed. It served these purposes well as far as I observed, however, I observed some unintended consequences arising out of this seat formation.

Figure 1



When an American teacher visited the classroom with me one day for observations, she told me that the first outcome she expected when she saw the different layout, and the outcome she subsequently saw, was that of putting all students in the class in the eyeline of every other one of their classmates. This was a helpful insight as I went on with observations. The eye contact and visibility afforded the students by the social

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space in the center of the room allowed a great amount of student interaction as well as constant group-based decision making, frequently through nothing more than glances. The constant communication between friends separated by space afforded by this seat arrangement demonstrates the importance of friends and students' social networks in decision-making.

This centrally-located open space was the first of many aspects of the classroom I saw which encouraged a very social and community-oriented class. Ms. Shin, though one for encouraging individuality, also took great care to also foster community and co-responsibility for the class and room among all the students. The results of Ms. Shin's two-pronged teaching efforts can be seen in the students' behavior when Ms. Shin is not watching so closely. This is most common during play time when the students are allowed to play games with one another. These will be further explained in the next section. The games played by the students and the results of those games point to a rich social life for each of the students with multiple configurations of social organization in the classroom, each with different social structures themselves. Students' social groups can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Early	→	Late
Ch'oi Hahyŏn, Yi Kiwan, Hŏ Yunji, Park Chuhan, Shin Sŭngho		Ch'oi Hahyŏn, Yi Kiwan, Hŏ Yunji, Park Chuhan
Kim Tohun, Kim Tongyul, Yang Chaehee, Park Tohye, Kim Kyŏngnyul, O Chiho		Kim Tohun, Kim Tongyul, Kim Gyŏngnyul, O Chiho
Cho Chuhun, Han Sŭngu, Hŏ Kyŏm, Han Ch'aemin, Park Yŏnu		Cho Chuhun, Han Sŭngu
Yun Chihyŏn, Pae Hyoji, Park Yŏna, Yi Yeŭn, Yi Kyuhyŏn, Yi Tawŏn		Yun Chihyŏn, Pae Hyoji, Park Yŏna, Yi Yeŭn, Park Yŏnu
		Hŏ Kyŏm, Park Tohye, Yang Chaehee, Han Ch'aemin, Yi Tawŏn
Nam Hayul, Kim Shiyun, Kim Sŏyŏng		Nam Hayul, Kim Shiyun, Kim Sŏyŏng, Yi Kyuhyŏn
Yi Kŏn	Outliers	Yi Kŏn, Shin Sŭngho

Teacher-led Competition in the Classroom. The strategy I observed Ms. Shin using most frequently with students was one of encouraging competition among them. She prepared class activities in the form of relay races or group challenges where she pitted boys against girls, or team against team in an effort to make students work harder to beat their peers. However, there were also some activities which were more focused on fostering creativity, such as picture-drawing activities. Though, these, too were turned into competition, whether through having classmates judge relative quality or by using such projects in a competitive capacity in an unrelated activity like using a paper folded into 16 parts with a picture in each square as a board for a dice game, bringing the individual project into a competitive sphere). However, whether working toward

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fostering more creative skills or pushing students into circumstances of competition, both are meant to produce students with greater skill and ability in accomplishing tasks.

This is an interesting stroke of irony in the classroom of a teacher who taught in reform schools for many years before being moved to Chōngnŭng Elementary. As previously stated, traditional reform schools focus on fostering the village style collectivism where students work together towards greater creativity, sometimes going so far as to include teachers as peers instead of authorities. And it is this conflict which is the center of this research-- the social organizations and values among students resulting from multi-faceted teaching. Both individualist and collectivist values can be seen in the socialization of students in the classroom during play. This points to the existence of a nuanced social value system among the students.

Data and Analysis

Report of Data

As shown in the introductory quote, Geertz views gaming as useful windows into culture. His analysis of Balinese culture through cockfighting remains one of the foundational texts in social theory. This paper works to use games seen in a Korean elementary school as a window on naturally occurring social structures in Korean society. The following sections describes the games I observed over the course of my field work. After a summary of the games I observed, a dissection of the social organizations in Ms. Shin's classroom will be provided.

Games in the Classroom. Games were a regular event in Ms. Shin's classroom. As is common in South Korean schools,ⁱⁱⁱ students get a ten-minute break (쉬는 시간 shwinŭn shigan, lit. "rest time") after every forty-minute study period.^{iv} While not

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every student plays every game during every free play break, a majority of the students in the class (70% or more) are involved with at least two of the games (primarily *ttakji* or “Candyland”) listed below every day. The games’ consistent popularity leads to effects beyond simple recreational enjoyment. The most common example of such results is the construction and reconstruction or reinforcement of student relationships. Reconstruction and reinforcement will be explored fully in the analysis section. The games played by students fall into three categories: strategy, luck, and skill. Strategy games included rock-paper-scissors, and DoodleGod. Luck games include *yutnori* (윷놀이), and a Candyland-like board game. Skill games include *ttakji* and cup stacking. Table 3 shows the format and context of the various games while Table 4 shows the social aspects of the games.

Table 3

	Number of Players	Most Common Gender of Players	Learned as a Class?	Natural Opponent	Frequency
Rock-paper-scissors	2	All	No	Yes	Daily
DoodleGod	Any	Female	No	No	Almost Daily
Yutnori	2 (or more with teams)	All	Yes	Yes	Irregularly
"Candyland"	2	Female	Yes	Yes	Irregularly
Ttakji	2-6	Male	Yes	Yes	Daily
Cup Stacking	2	All	Yes	No	Very Irregularly

Male students were significantly more likely to play games instead of other activities during rest times. An example of play that I did not analyze in this paper is

drawing in groups and make-believe. This is not to say that these activities were any less impactful on student friend groups or relationships as a whole. However, I was unable to get as much detailed data from female students as I could from the male students.

Ironically, this was due to a greater interaction between the girls and me than between the boys and me. The successful interactions I had with the female students will be analyzed in the “DoodleGod” section, but this was the only type of interaction from which I was able to retrieve game-related data due to the female students avoiding me when not using my computer and becoming extremely shy, to the point of freezing in place, if they found me observing them. Thus, this data is largely focused on the male students who continued their regular behavior with or without me, and as such, the results of this analysis reflect more on the males than the females of Ms. Shin’s class, though, I suggest that the principles of this research have analogs in female students’ behavior.

Games of Strategy.

Rock-paper-scissors. Rock-paper-scissors in its general form needs no explanation to understand its mechanics.^v What is necessary, though, is acknowledging that the game is understood as one of strategy by students. Rock-paper-scissors was used to settle ties or as a supplementary component of specific class activities, but never as a game in and of itself the students chose to play during free time.

An example of this game being used outside its supplementary capacity was in a Physical Education activity done in the school gym during exercise time. The activity consisted of the students running around challenging their grade-mates to a single game of rock-paper-scissors. The loser of the game spent the rest of the game holding onto the shoulders of the winner as they continued running around challenging other students to

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more games. When two of these groups met, past losers trailing behind winners in a conga line, the two front students, the teams' undefeated players, played against one another. When one student won, the other line, then considered a collective loser, would connect to the back of the winner's line, and the new longer line went on to battle other lines and straggling individuals.

In general, though, rock-paper-scissors was simply used to provide order or structure to other activities through more egalitarian means. Almost without exception, when students needed to decide who would do something or who would do something first, a round of rock-paper-scissors would be used to decide. This use of a game of strategy reflects previous findings in strategy games being correlated with cultures which place a value on order (Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1962).

DoodleGod-Strategy. DoodleGod is a game I downloaded onto my iPad in response to student rushes to my computer. Several female students and one male student would run over to my desk when rest time was announced and take my iPad and/or Bluetooth keyboard and begin typing on it with no warning, let alone requests for permission. Because my field notes were saved to that computer, I installed a simple game that these students could play instead of possibly destroying my notes or causing software damage to my only field computer.

I chose DoodleGod because it was nonviolent, creativity-oriented, and child-friendly. Gameplay can be summarized as taking fundamental elements (earth, water, air, etc.) and dragging and dropping their icons to other elements to get new elements which can then be combined iteratively to create more and more complex elements and concepts. For a basic example, if someone combined "water" and "fire" the result would

be steam. For a more complex example, were one to combine “light” and “human,” the result would be “angel.”

While the game is meant to be one of trying to figure out all the possible combinations through reason rather than repetitive brute repetition, the strategy of going through every element and combining them systematically to find every possibility works well. Toward the end of my time observing, the students were less likely to take my computer, but when they did, they had begun to work through this rote system because they had stalled after their discovery of the “ent” (“human” plus “tree”).

This systematic method was the final form of the strategy students used in the game. New discoveries prompted less excitement than before, becoming similar to the lackluster reaction to a win in rock-paper-scissors. In addition, students slowly stopped coming over to play at all after the group collectively stopped finding new elements. This suggests that the strategy-based game that DoodleGod became was not played with the same level of excitement as its original skill-based gameplay. However, the initial way students went about playing this game will be covered in the “DoodleGod-Skill” section.

Games of Luck.

Yutnori. *Yutnori*, unlike rock-paper-scissors, is a game of near pure chance, similar to the US game *Sorry*, but usually played without the antagonistic element of capturing other players. The game is normally played between two individuals, though more players may be incorporated by splitting into two teams. Players move their pieces (*mal*) by throwing lots whose historical precedence lies in ancient fortunetelling shells (Yi & Lee, 2006). Once the *changjak yut* have been thrown, the player or team who threw move their piece the number of spaces indicated by various combinations of face-up or

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face-down sticks (1, 2, 3, 4 [and another turn], 5 [and another turn], or backwards one space). The goal is to reach the center of the board before any other player. The only possible strategy comes when there is a fork in the path to the center, though this is not always the case for every board and made no difference numerically on the specialized boards in Ms. Shin's classroom.

The randomization and lack of any strategy in *yutnori* makes it the ultimate collective game, as the only way to enjoy the game is by enjoying the experience of playing with a classmate. There is no way to gain lasting superiority over others as nothing a player does (without cheating) makes any difference to the outcome.

Strengthening this argument is the fact that Ms. Shin and the students would all celebrate when either team made it to the end in the class-wide matches, irrespective of team loyalty on the part of the students, despite team loyalty being of the utmost importance during gameplay. While teams would cheer loudly for their members when it was their turn and jeer the opposite team on theirs, both teams celebrated when either team made it to the end, marking *yutnori* as an egalitarian game of equals. This pattern continued into the students' playing of the game outside of class-wide activity and educational contexts.

“Candyland.” Played with several boards the students made in multiple instructional periods, this game was generally played during rest time as a carry-over from class activities rather than being a game that students naturally gravitated toward when the opportunities presented themselves. The boards were pieces of paper folded into sixteenths with various words or pictures in each square connected by a common theme (e.g. “thoughts about your mother”, “summer activities”, etc.). The students would use almost anything as their place marker as they moved around the board by rolling dice

every student had for some class activities. While there were sometimes winners, victory was never celebrated, but only briefly acknowledged before beginning another round.

These games were played between students who generally belonged to the same friend groups, but toward the end of my observations, there were some rare games played between students of different friend groups, though this did not result in any longer-lasting changes in behavior or grouping, or even in patterns of repeated play with the same opponents. This points to the wider idea that games of chance do not have hierarchy or friend group informing influences. Instead, these games focus on creating positive group experiences in which anyone can participate. These games, highly recommended by Ms. Shin, follow in the *hyökshin* tradition of encouraging students to be egalitarian and communally supportive.

Games of Skill.

Cup Stacking. This game was only played twice during my observations, but it was a very involved game when it came to student energy and participation. The version of cup stacking popular across the world, and especially in East Asia, consists of stacking cups into and out of specific patterns, working toward a faster and faster time. This is not what the students of Ms. Shin's class did, however. Instead, the students simply worked together to make taller and taller stacks of cups, sometimes getting the stacks taller than themselves. The classroom had several kits of cups purchased from sports manufacturers, but used for students' play. They picked up the kits in the front of the room and would then play in the center of the room. The students doing these cup stacking activities were always students from the same friend group. The difference between this game and *ttakji*, though, is the fact that cup stacking had no natural opponent. This aspect of cup stacking

is similar to DoodleGod, but, unlike that game, this never became competitive. Rather, cup stacking remained an activity of working together. It appears that this may have been due to Ms. Shin's using it as a class activity previously. However, it may also be that the ability to have multiple players at once provided opportunities for collaboration rather than the competition that arises out of being required to take turns.

Ttakji. *Ttakji* (딱지) is a combination of luck and skill, but the students all see it as a game of pure skill. I saw this attitude when students practiced their *ttakji* throwing even when not playing. The name of the game is derived from the playing pieces. Though a detailed history of this game's use does not exist, *ttakji* is similar to the 90's fad/game, POG, whose Hawaiian heritage has a likely origin in an 18th century Japanese game (Yi & Lee, 2006). However, there are some practical differences.

Ttakji is played using squares made by the students before the beginning of the game from some papery substance (in Ms. Shin's class the students almost always used milk cartons^{vi}). These folded pieces of paper are called *ttakji*. The game is initiated when a student approaches another student and they create an arena of sorts by kneeling or crouching in the same space. From two to four players per game is normal, though I have seen up to six at a time. Any additional players join the first two initiating students. When an arena has been made between the players,^{vii} one student will be chosen to begin (frequently through rock-paper-scissors) and all other students will throw a *ttakji* per student into the arena. Any additional *ttakji* are held in the respective students' hands. Students have played with a wide variation in number of *ttakji*. Some games have been played with only one *ttakji* per student while others have seen students with more than ten. What is consistent is the policing of players' *ttakji* count; no game will happen where

the student with the least number of available *ttakji* plays against a student with more simply because they have more available. Put another way, the maximum number of *ttakji* any player can bring to a game is equal to the number of *ttakji* the player with the least *ttakji* has at their disposal.

The chosen student will begin the game by slapping down his or her own *ttakji* in an attempt to flip one of the other *ttakjis* in play. As opposed to POG, every *ttakji* is identical in shape and size; there is no “slammer.” The only differences between the *ttakji* are the designs the students draw on them. In any given turn, the attacking student normally has a number of attempts equal to the number of opponents. When a player successfully flips an opponent’s *ttakji* they take it and add it to their stack of reserve *ttakji*. If one’s *ttakji* is taken, a replacement is taken out of the losing player’s reserve pile and thrown in the arena. This goes on until all the *ttakji* have been taken by one player, or more frequently when play time runs out. At this point, the *ttakjis* are returned to their original owners and the game can be played again the next rest period or, if the game was short enough, right then.

It should be stated that the gameplay seen in Ms. Shin’s classroom had some significant differences from more widely played *ttakji*. The students in Ms. Shin’s class almost always used more than one *ttakji*. Looking into other instances of this game, practitioners regularly use a single *ttakji* per player with the game ending when one player takes the lot. Also, many other players make *ttakji* out of two pieces of paper folded to intertwine with one another, but the students of Ms. Shin’s class simply used their empty and rinsed milk cartons.^{viii}

DoodleGod-Skill. While there is no natural opponent in DoodleGod, like cup stacking, the students took the opportunity to challenge each other to find the most creative things, or the largest number of things. This unofficial “score-keeping” made the game competitive like *ttakji*. When any individual found a new element, they would yelp and point excitedly at the screen to show their friends their achievement. This level of excitement was only seen in one other game, that being *ttakji*. This suggests that the game was seen as similarly difficult for the player, meaning victory in this game (discovery of new elements) could be similarly used as a point of pride to peers. This is the definitive characteristic of games of skill: being able to point to a victory as an accomplishment which only come about through the practice individuals put into overcoming the game’s challenges.^{ix} This can be seen as a reflection of the correlation between games of skill and cultural desire for achievement (Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1962). That ability to claim accomplishment gives games of skill their particular social salience which can affect students’ social organization.

	Competition (1-5)	Skill (1-5)	Strategy (1-5)	Luck (1-5)	Social Outcome
Rock-paper-scissors	5	1	5	2	Order
DoodleGod	4	4→1	1→5	3→1	Hierarchy→Fun
Yutnori	5	1	2	5	Fun
"Candyland"	5	1	1	5	Fun
Ttakji	5	5	2	2	Hierarchy
Cup Stacking	1	5	1	1	Bonding

Table 4

Social Organization

There were multiple results of students playing games, but the most visible and socially influential effect was that of reinforcing or changing friend groups. Different types of games had different influences on group organization in the classroom, just as different value-based discipline correlated with different games in various cultures (Roberts & Sutton-Smith, 1962). Table 4 shows the social aspects of games and players' focus while playing them. The influences of such differences will be examined in the analysis section.

Social Grouping. Ms. Shin's classroom had several friend groups spread amongst its twenty-six students. Each group had one or two particularly charismatic student at its head with two to four students who were more passive in group decision making. This doesn't mean the "followers" didn't make decisions or that the leaders never listened to the others. However, it was common for students not at the head of these groups to look to those students who had social power for direction. Most groups had both male and female students as members, though two groups are notable exceptions being composed entirely of boys. This is understandable, as the class was unbalanced in gendered make-up (there were four more boys than girls in the class).

The means of recognizing a friend group fell into two primary methods. First, students would consistently play with the same friends at rest time unless there were extenuating circumstances, like a friend being absent. This points to the students who would consistently play together seeing themselves as a group. The second method of identifying groups consists of seeing to whom students would listen and by whom they would be heard when giving suggestions.

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At the beginning of each day, Ms. Shin directed the class in singing five songs from their class song book. The songs were about topics ranging from friendship, to weather, to living happily in one's neighborhood. Each day Ms. Shin indicated five students who would choose a song the class would sing together. How each student chose a song fell into two categories. Either the student would immediately choose a song or look to their peers and select a song they were told to choose by other students. The students who fell into each category followed a strong pattern: the students who chose songs without hesitation (or hesitated until they got attention or laughs at which point they quickly chose) were those of higher ranks in friend groups while those who looked to their peers were those who held lower social positions in their friend groups.

To use the vocabulary of Korean systems, when choosing songs those with less social power looked to those with whom they have *chǒng* and gave them *nunch'i* by taking their direction in making their decision. On the other hand, those in a position of social power chose whatever song they liked because they knew what songs are popular, thus practicing *paeryǒ* by giving other students the popular songs they wanted. It can be argued that these charismatic students' own preferences led to the popularity of the songs, but the songs' popularity cannot be denied. Specific examples of this can be seen with Sǔng'u and Tohun. Every time Sǔng'u was asked to choose a song, he would immediately look to Chuhun, expressing *nunch'i*, and pick whichever song Chuhun would yell out. In contrast, when Tohun was chosen to pick a song, he would either choose a song immediately, or hem and haw as he flipped through the song book until Ms. Shin threatened to move on without him, at which point he would promptly choose a song. This song would inevitably be one the class enjoyed singing most, demonstrating

paeryō. Similarly, when certain other students were called on to pick a song, Tohun would shout at them the song he wanted to sing (at which point these certain other students would promptly pick the song or ask Tohun for a different song, an navigation between *nunch'i* and *paeryō*).^x

Sŭng'u's consistent respect for Chuhun's desires marked him as a subordinate part of Chuhun's group. On the other hand, Tohun's direction to others marked him as the leader of his friend group. Other than observing behavior during and toward games, this was my primary means of finding the hierarchy of the various friend groups in the class. In addition, toward the end of my observations, Ms. Shin had the class make new lyrics for a class song where all the students gave each other nicknames based on what they did well. The students who always played together during rest time and who looked to each other when chosen to pick a song for singing time were the loudest when recommending each others' nicknames. All these factors came together to form my understanding of the friend groupings in Ms. Shin's class.

The groups were quite consistent throughout the time of my observations. I suggest this is due to the ability of the most common games to reinforce social configurations and allow for social experiences outside the friend group without lasting consequences. For example, cup stacking, though a game of skill, was a collaborative rather than competitive game. This provided opportunities for students of the same friend group to strengthen their existing social bonds (*chōng*). Other games, like *yutnori* and the Candyland imitation, with their basis in chance, allowed students to interact with those outside their friend group without any social consequences as the skill-less games did not mark anything intrinsic about the players. This opportunity for non-committal play

allowed social groups added stability as members could experiment with other students before returning to their regular friend groups for lasting relationships. The variety minimized the feeling of being pigeonholed into a single friend group despite the students' behavior in general being very group-based.

Despite the overwhelming consistency over time, some small changes in social organization did occur. These events are the greatest source of evidence for the games' reflection of Korean values. For context, the student friend groups as they were constituted at the beginning and end of my observations are depicted in charts in Table 2. As explained before, these friend groups were characterized by a greater amount of play together at free time and displays of *chǒng*, *nunch'i*, and *paeryǒ*. As the friend groups changed, these displays changed in direction, though not in substance. These cultural behaviors followed lines of loyalty, and these lines changed when friend groups were reorganized or reconstituted.

The boys' groups were much more likely to participate in *ttakji* when I observed, though the girls would occasionally participate as well.^{xi} The student participation in DoodleGod, on the other hand, was largely female, though two boys would occasionally take part. In the large majority of cases, students would play games within the security of their groups, rarely expecting to beat the group leader, but having fun.^{xii} There was not too much conflict between or within the various friend groups for the period I observed the class, but the dynamics between and within the different groups did change from time to time.^{xiii}

Examples of changes in social structure. Two primary examples of real social outcomes originating in games are provided here. The first example demonstrates friend

group restructuring arising out of a game of skill played between members of two different friend groups. The second example is one of group hierarchy being changed by a group finding a new skill-based game to compete through.

Tohun's ttakji challenge. During a morning break following a long instructional period and individual study in the class workbook, Tohun went to the middle of the class and challenged Kyöm to a *ttakji* match. This was out of the ordinary, as Kyöm was in a different friend group. However, it doesn't seem out of the blue, as Kyöm had recently been receiving more praise from Ms. Shin than Tohun. This was likely the impetus for Tohun's *ttakji* challenge.

While both boys were clearly intelligent and performed effectively in the classroom (they were frequently the first two to finish workbook assignments and were rarely held back during teacher reviews for corrections), Kyöm had begun to be verbally praised by Ms. Shin for his work more frequently over the course of my observations. On the other hand, Tohun had begun to be praised less frequently. Over time Tohun had begun acting up in class and causing problems for the class, likely causing the decrease in praise and increase in discipline for his misbehavior.

Tohun and Kyöm played through several turns of *ttakji*, Tohun briefly taking the lead early on. However, in the end, Kyöm won handily, only losing one *ttakji* over the course of the whole game. He took every last one of Tohun's *ttakji*, the first student I saw manage to defeat Tohun in a one-on-one match. Not only was this dramatic for Tohun, but it had significant ramifications for several other students as well.

The two friend groups involved in this dramatic match were those of Tohun and Chuhun. At that time, Kyöm was a member of Chuhun's social group, not a leader of his

own group. This friend group was not as strict as some others in its in-group/out-group differentiation. Kyöm had several friends outside the group. However, the group was still a structured organization; Kyöm only played with this group during the school day. Only when school got out would he play with the others.^{xiv}

Tohun's social group was significantly larger than Chuhun's, including Tong'yul, Tohye, and Chaehee among its several members (see Table 5). Where Chuhun was a bit of a goof-off, Tohun was a strict task master over his friend group. He frequently used subordinating speech levels^{xv} when speaking with his friends to reinforce their group's hierarchy. So, while Chuhun's group was essentially a group of boys that played the games Chuhun wanted to play together, Tohun's group was composed of his followers who did what he said.

Following this match and Tohun's defeat, Kyöm behaved less like a member of Chuhun's friend group than before, going on to play with other students during the day. Not only did he play fewer games with Chuhun during breaks from that point on, but some of his other friends began to form a new friend group based around him. Tohun's group lost Chaehee and Tohye while Chuhun's group lost Chaemin (see Figure 6). From this game on, these boys played together as a group instead of with their former friends. While Kyöm didn't go around bragging about his victory over Tohun,^{xvi} his performance certainly impacted the way he was viewed by his classmates. The game made Kyöm the leader of his own group and weakened the relative social position of Tohun and Chuhun.^{xvii} Undoubtedly, the publicity of playing *ttakji* in the center of the room in the view of all the students who were not actively getting teacher review had an impact on the wide-reaching effects of this single game.

Table 2

Tohun's	Chuhun's	→	Tohun's	Chuhun's	Kyöm's
Tohun	Chuhun		Tohun	Chuhun	Kyöm
Tong'yul	Süng'u		Tong'yul	Süng'u	Tohye
Chaehee	Kyöm				Chaehee
Tohye	Chaemin				Chaemin

Chihyön's loss in DoodleGod. Two girls were the class's primary DoodleGod players, and both belonged to Chihyön's group. One was Chihyön herself, and the other was Hyoji. In the friend group, Hyoji's role amounted to something like a second-in-command to Chihyön within their group of mostly girls. When Chihyön was gone, Hyoji would take control of decision-making during play time. These two students did almost everything together from games, to lunch, to walking in the hall between activities. There was almost nothing the two did separately, but in every case, Chihyön maintained the position of primary decision maker. However, DoodleGod would come to change this.

Because I only had one computer, I encouraged the students to take turns when making guesses of new elements in the game. Early on, Chihyön took most of the screen's time, holding the computer and taking other students' shouted ideas saying "이제 알겠다! (*Ijae algessda!* I've got it now!)" and trying the combination. Eventually I made a system where other students would also get opportunities to play for certain amounts of time.^{xviii} At this point the game was largely dominated by Chihyön and Hyoji, though Yöna would frequently play when she got a chance. Chuhun would also barge in from time to time, but none of the girls interacted with him, other than to tell him he was messing things up or that it wasn't his turn, so his impact on the girls is limited.

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The impact of DoodleGod on the friend group didn't come all at once as it had in the match between Tohun and Kyöm. Instead, the change was gradual. Chihyön, despite taking other students' ideas and monopolizing the iPad every chance she got, was not finding many new elements in the game. Hyoji, on the other hand, had found several new elements including lava, sand, and (with my subtle help) bacteria. All the students gathered around the screen while the game was played saw this happen, and everyone was happy to see new elements after some stagnation under Chihyön's monopoly. This demonstration of Hyoji's ability coincided with a shift in the friend hierarchy where Hyoji became equal with Chihyön for a time (this caused some conflict when they disagreed on activities for rest time), and then passed her, becoming the new group leader and reducing Chihyön's position (See Table 6).

Table 3

Social Power	Before	After
High	Chihyön	Hyoji
	Hyoji	Yöna
Low	Yöna	Chihyön

As I was not present for the beginning of the school year, I can't tell precisely what put Chihyön in the original seat of power, but her group of friends were far more interested in drawing than in games when I first arrived. This suggests that the hierarchy may have been based on perceived relative drawing skill. While I personally think Yöna was the best artist of the bunch, when I asked the group whose pictures they liked the most early on in my observations, they said they liked Chihyön's the most. Yöna was the most emphatic about her admiration. This all points to the group's structure originally

being influenced by perceived skill in a different area, but when a game was introduced that they became interested in, the structure realigned to reflect relative skill in that game. It would be interesting to go back again to see if the group hierarchy reverted to one based on artistic ability after I removed the game from the classroom.

Analysis

The games I observed in the classroom demonstrated a strong connection with the social structures I saw influencing behavior. The games the students played, primarily games of skill, provided ongoing opportunities to compare various abilities and skills. This created a cycle among the students of making and remaking relations based on their observations of each other's skills as exercised through games. Experiences playing with one another created opportunities for students to observe and create shared interests. This creates friend groups which, in turn, create social responsibilities among the students. Those with greater social power expect loyalty, while they are expected to care for their social subordinates (giving *paeryō*). Those not in a leadership capacity are expected to follow directions (giving *nunch'i*) but can also expect favors (receiving *paeryō*).

When more games are played among or within groups, those groups can be restructured or reinforced. Any changes among the groups not only influence who plays games with whom, but also who looks to whom for guidance and help. New game winners could alter hierarchy within the groups. This change in hierarchy, just like group restructuring, affects relations outside of games and play. Such changes are then maintained until a new victor arises and takes social control. The maintenance of these groups occurred through the other games students played (chance and strategy) as well as games of skill whose victors were students who normally won. Expected outcomes like

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this reinforced existing organizations, and other types of games allowed more groups to maintain positive social relations between each other and within themselves. Like oil in an engine, these skill-less games didn't do much in and of themselves, but they kept abrasive elements separated when necessary for social cohesion.

These changes manifested themselves the most obviously during singing time. However, this ability to choose popular songs and the desire to listen to others' opinions did not appear in a vacuum. These patterns of song choice changed when games influenced friend groups into restructuring. For example, after Chihyŏn's fall from power, she was no longer looked to by Hyoji when she was called on to pick a song. Rather, Hyoji chose the song herself without hesitation. When called on to choose a song, Chihyŏn looked to Hyoji briefly before ultimately deciding to pass on the opportunity.

It is interesting to note that the games with the most influence on social organization during my observations were games which have accompanied the Westernization of Korea. *Ttakji* originated in Japan and was likely introduced to Korea during the colonial occupation by Japan when Westernization was forced upon Koreans. DoodleGod is obviously a game from the West, coming from the games app on an American iPad. While I do not claim these games are neo-liberal propaganda, it is interesting to see the friend group changing impact of such foreign games while traditional games (*yutnori* and rock-paper-scissors) do not have such an altering impact. This suggests that many of the more traditional games focus more on egalitarian values while newer additions to students' play may have arrived around the same time competition was being added as part of the education system. However, any firm conclusion about this would require further research and a broader sample size.

Conclusion

The example of Kyöm's victory over Tohun in *ttakji* and Hyoji's success at DoodleGod over Chihyön demonstrate the real effects games have on the social lives of students in Ms. Shin's classroom. The fact that both these games were seen as games of skill is also significant. Other games were played, as I described above, but none of them resulted in any shift in friend group or group-specific hierarchy. Some of the other games may be used to lubricate social interactions by allowing breaks from the structure of friend groups and relations with other students, but these are not nearly as explicit and clear as the real social changes seen arising from the games of skill. This phenomenon of social change following game results points to a valuing of the perceived skill and ability demonstrated in a *ttakji* victory or multiple discoveries in DoodleGod. It also suggests that students respect skill in their peers and respect those students as a result.

The friendship groups and leadership changes that followed these games also reflect a loyalty among students that is intertwined with respect of other students' skills. The fact that students largely played such skill-based games almost solely within their own groups but didn't worry about crossing boundaries with other types of games points to the fact that the social effects of these games of skill were already understood by the students: a loss could result in negative consequences. Groups were all made up of leaders that excelled in the groups' activities of choice and, as stated before, followers who did not expect to surpass them. However, when they did, as in the case of Chihyön and Hyoji, the groups' structures changed. So, the influence of perceived skill on group organization is clear, and games were the primary method of finding the students with the greatest skill. Though, I am sure other mediums of skill, such as drawing or Taekwondo,

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were also influential when they were not eclipsed by games. This focus on skill-based activities, such as games, resulted in a merit-based hierarchy along skill lines and a loyalty web along lines of respect among the students of Ms. Shin's classroom.

I suggest the changes in social relations based on observations of peer's skills that I observed in Ms. Shin's Chōngnūng classroom, while originating in a specific context, can be seen in the larger South Korean context. The fact that students change their relationships based on their evaluations of others' skills points to a pattern of South Koreans using relative ability as a measuring stick against which they may assess themselves and their peers to find a single hierarchy within the group. This hierarchy then extends outside the original arena for the testing of the skill into other aspects of life. While conclusively proving this would require further research, the observations, data, and analysis arising out of my time in Chōngnūng Elementary School suggest that Korean hierarchy is not solely based in age with all those of the same age being treated as equals, as Asian stereotypes suggest, but in skill measured against peers.

I suggest the hierarchical structuring seen among South Korean peers is mirrored in the games I observed in Ms. Shin's classroom and that a similar skill-based gradation among peers can arise through similar processes. This provides explanation for the formation of peer group hierarchy seen in later years among students in higher grades and university (Son, n.d.; Yun, n.d.). The ubiquity of hierarchy among equals, an oxymoronic concept, can be seen in these and many other writings about South Korean culture. The system of forming hierarchy through competition provides a solution to what is a complex and contradictive social organization among South Korean friends.

In particular, the system of forming real hierarchy through activities with non-real stakes (in this research, games of skill) mirrors the Korean value of order and respect for ability while also highlighting the culturally central value of equal opportunity. This mirrors the real experiences of students taking university entrance exams (the *sunǔng*), a test statistically known to have no real value in and of itself due to its nature of testing only a student's ability to take the *sunǔng*.^{xix} In just the same way as *ttakji* in Ms. Shin's classroom, the *sunǔng* provides society an opportunity to judge ability and reward it with prestige. This test arose out of a dictatorial government but provides (ostensibly) equal opportunity to all students for bright futures regardless of background. This may seem contradictory from an outsider's perspective, but it is banal in Korean culture.

The research and analysis in this paper points to Korean children being exposed to these complex value systems and putting them into practice even in first grade. The fact that such enculturation was encouraged in the classroom points to the order of hierarchy and the fairness of egalitarianism being guiding principles in Korean society. That mixture of egalitarian values and hierarchy in Ms. Shin's classroom seen through students blending the effects of each through use of *nunch'i* and *paeryǒ* points to the complex relationship between such values. Both games representative of hierarchical and those representative of egalitarian values are common and enjoyed. In Korean culture, both hierarchy and egalitarianism have influence on relationships and society. Through this research, I suggest that rather than being conflicting systems, one from the West and one from Korean tradition, hierarchy and egalitarianism are coexistent and create the unique value system seen in contemporary South Korea, and that the games seen among

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children provide a possible explanation for how such mixed values have been encultured into individuals.

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ⁱ Dictionary.com defines egalitarian as “asserting, resulting from, or characterized by belief in the equality of all people, especially in political, economic, or social life.”

ⁱⁱ Dictionary.com defines hierarchy as “any system of persons or things ranked one above another.”

ⁱⁱⁱ According to informal interviews with Ms. Han and Chōngnūng’s Principal Chōng

^{iv} There is some variation, such as students only having four study periods on Mondays and Wednesdays. On these days, most students remain at school, but do activities in clubs rather than classes. These are optional, but heavily attended by diligent students. When I left the school at the same time as the students, many of the classrooms were full of students doing various musical or artistic programs, but the vast majority of students, both male and female, left in shuttle vans for various taekwondo academies around the town.

^v While there are more specialized versions of rock-paper-scissors to be found in South Korea, they were not observed in the classroom. The most important variation is *mukjjibba* and makes rock-paper-scissors a multiple-round and multi-strategy game

^{vi} There was one instance of the students making a giant *ttakji* out of a newspaper, but it was quickly retired when it was found to be ineffectual.

^{vii} There is no literal arena, but an agreed upon area of play from which if *ttakji* leave, they will be scooped back into, and thus back into play.

^{viii} Every morning the students in the class were given a pint of milk in a carton. The reason Ms. Han gave for this was that the students do not get enough milk (read: calcium) in their home lives, so the government helps fund student milk. Students are not required to drink the milk (many don’t like it, and lactose intolerance is common in South Korea), but if they chose to take a carton, they are required to finish it, because wasting it would be disrespectful.

^{ix} While there may be natural talent in games of skill, these games are characterized by the ability to improve skill through practice.

^x Toward the end of my observations, Tohun would shout his choices at his friends less frequently and instead sit back apathetically as his friends would look at him and then choose one of the songs he had frequently chosen for them in the past.

^{xi} The girls were frequently encouraged to play by boys, but one example to be brought up later shifted this for the remainder of my observations.

^{xii} This could be seen later in my observations when the students came up with nicknames for one another and the group leaders would be called “the best” at something (*ttakji* for Kyōngnūl, running for Tohun, “king of taekwondo” for Ch’aemin and Sūngho, etc.). The fun is seen in the laughter, back patting, and short-lived disappointment at a loss.

^{xiii} An example of a dynamic change could be seen when in the first week during Hahoe’s absence, the group which would come to be dominated by her and Kiwan is almost nonexistent, but upon her return, these two and a couple followers did almost everything together for the rest of my observations.

^{xiv} This could be seen when they would all rush out of the classroom together and play on the school field or walk home together.

^{xv} The Korean language has a number of speech levels used at the end of a sentence to communicate the relative social positions of the speaker and listener. Some levels demonstrate respect but social distance while others communicate closeness and/or superiority. Tohun’s speech toward many of his friends was of this second type, at times being labelled as “violent” or “strong.”

^{xvi} I took special care to observe him in the aftermath of this battle. Not only did he not brag, but he was nearly dismissive of the game when other boys (they were inevitably boys) asked him about it. He would just say he did win and then move on to the next activity.

^{xvii} While Ms. Han's complements to Kyōm tried to place him in a position of respect, the behavior of the other students didn't change until this game was resolved.

^{xviii} I would set a timer on my phone based on how many students wanted to play (longer for fewer students, shorter for more) and then take the iPad from the current player if they didn't abdicate in an appropriate time.

^{xix} This information comes from a professor teaching at a South Korean university who has worked as a test maker and has done research on the test itself.